

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WATERFRONTS FOR WORK AND PLAY:  
MYTHSCAPES OF HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN  
CONTEMPORARY RHODE ISLAND

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My dissertation examines the relationship between heritage sites, urban culture, and civic life in present-day Rhode Island, evaluating how residents' identities and patterns of civic engagement are informed by site-specific tourist narratives of eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth-century labor histories. Considering the adaptive reuse of former places of maritime trade and industry as contemporary sites of leisure, I analyze the role that historic tourism plays in local and regional economic urban redevelopment. I argue that the mythscapes of exceptionalism mobilized at Rhode Island's heritage sites create usable pasts in the present for current residents and visitors alike, alternatively foregrounding and obscuring intersectional categories of difference according to contemporaneous political climates at the local, national and transnational levels.

This study is divided into two parts, organized chronologically and geographically. While Part I examines the dominant tourist narratives associated with Newport County, located in the southeast of the state and including Aquidneck Island (also known as Rhode Island), Part II takes the historic tourism associated with mainland

Providence Plantations as its case study and focuses exclusively on Providence County, covering the middle and northern ends of the state. In each of these sections, I explore, challenge, and re-contextualize the politics of narratives which reference the earliest Anglophone settlers of Rhode Island as religious refugees and members of what scholar Robin Cohen refers to as a “victim diaspora” against the rich co-constitutive histories of im/migrant groups that, either by force or choice, relocated to Rhode Island for work and thus constitute a “labour diaspora.” The existence of these two or more populations living in close proximity to each other in areas of Newport and Providence, I argue, produced what Denis Byrne calls a “nervous landscape” fraught with cultural, economic and political tensions which exists even as narratives of the pasts associated with each group are mobilized in the contemporary urban environs of each city and its tourist attractions.

WATERFRONTS FOR WORK AND PLAY: MYTHSCAPES OF HERITAGE AND  
IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY RHODE ISLAND

by

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**Preface: In Search of the Back Roads:  
Mobilizing Dominant and Alternative Historical Narratives for Economic  
Redevelopment**

Tourist narratives exist to promote a given place as a “destination”—a site that is attractive, noteworthy and offers services that will keep visitors satisfied as they explore and learn. If tourism promotes pride of place, it also boosts local economies, so it is not surprising that most narratives associated with tourist destinations are positive and upbeat, often celebratory of events, populations, and structures. But cultural and historic tourisms pose some particular challenges to this dominant model. In cultural tourism, narratives are complicated by who is telling the story, and which perspectives are included. Historical tourism, the particular subject of this dissertation, is perhaps even more vexed, involving not only the nuances of multiple and complex cultural perspectives, but also the near-constant influx of new information, the result of ongoing and often controversial new research. As cultural and historical tourism narratives evolve, they often shift, forced to integrate new ideas in ways that visitors will still find palatable and accessible. Accordingly, even dominant tourist narratives prove exceedingly flexible as they absorb, integrate or, in some cases, co-opt and transform alternative narratives.

Alternative tourist narratives are developed in opposition to dominant narratives (though they are not necessarily reactionary), and pose questions such as: What might a past or present resident have to say about a walking tour of their neighborhood? What sites would they include that a mainstream tourist narrative might eschew or obscure for the purpose of saving time or emphasizing architectural or historical significance? Though answering these questions can be a difficult proposition for visitors to an area, residents or those familiar with a particular location have a unique perspective: they often

know how their home is marketed, but they also know their everyday experience of that place as they work, play and dwell. Accordingly, I have chosen my own home state as a case study for this dissertation, in the hopes of presenting a critical academic perspective that is informed by the more intimate feelings of genuine attachment inspired by the places people call home. Uniting these two perspectives, I believe, establishes a much-needed and valuable balance between extant cultural landscape scholarship and more popular studies of the relationship people have with the spaces, places and structures where they earn and spend money, meet and interact with friends and loved ones, experience pain and joy, and, perhaps most significantly, gain the knowledge which, for better or worse, informs their personal and collective navigation of their worlds.

Like many Rhode Islanders, my family has always been quite provincial. Traveling from Warwick, located in the central part of the smallest state in the union, to Woonsocket, located on the northern border of Massachusetts, is a trip that takes roughly 45 minutes of highway travel, and for us this has always constituted a “long drive.” Yet we have an unabashed love of back roads, and will happily extend any trip if it means avoiding the highways in favor of more scenic terrain. Since you never know what you might find along the back roads, my family reasons, drivers should never take Interstate Route 95 from Warwick to the capitol city of Providence if they can help it. Why bother? Once traffic is considered, traveling along Warwick Avenue to Narragansett Boulevard, the same route as the number 3 RIPTA bus<sup>1</sup>, ends up being quicker. And this route guarantees views of maritime and industrial landscapes that are steadily eroding and may one day disappear altogether. Along Narragansett Boulevard there are long-established neighborhoods featuring relatively recent additions such as Johnson and Wales Culinary

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<sup>1</sup> RIPTA is the abbreviation for the Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority.

Institute and Harborside Campus. If you make the trip in the morning, you will see the chefs-in-training on their way to classes, replete with sparkling white smocks and cream puff hats.

You will also see empty industrial fields, abandoned factories, gas stations, auto repair shops, several strip clubs and adult video stores as your car trips along the train tracks that are no longer in use but have never been removed from the center of the road. Some of the historic buildings on the left as you make your way toward the state's capital city have been demolished to build the new ramp to I-195 from Providence to the East Bay (a plan conceived in the 1980s and finally implemented more than 20 years later), but the old Port of Providence is still there on your right. This is where many Mediterranean immigrants arrived from 1880-1921, when a French steamship company called the Fabre Line offered trips directly from Mediterranean ports to Providence, Rhode Island, allowing immigrants to bypass Ellis Island and keep their family names and, some have suggested, their health and dignity as well. Years after new immigration laws forced the Fabre Company to abandon their lucrative business and closed the port to immigrants this spot enjoyed a brief tenure as a container port before effectively retiring as a brown field and an eye sore, closed to public access, with only a handful of still-operating marine businesses. Now the port seems to have a shiny new future ahead: as the home of a luxury residential and entertainment complex imagined by Rhode Island constitutional scholar and real estate magnate Patrick Conley, who has already purchased and refurbished the old tire factory at the edge of the lot and established a private wharf with a ferry service carrying tourists from Providence to Newport.

If you skip the highways, then, you see a microcosm of urban, work-a-day Rhode Island before being blinded by the glittering redesign of downtown Providence, with its water park, miles of river walks, “festival marketplace” shopping mall, luxury hotels and convention center. The back roads (which until the mid twentieth century were the only roads) take you from the predominantly white middle-class suburbs of Warwick to ethnic working class sections of Cranston to the increasingly urban and predominantly Latino and Black neighborhoods transitioning into Providence, and you see where Rhode Islanders from these neighborhoods used to work but do not anymore. If you pass Solitto’s liquors on Narragansett Boulevard heading north into Providence during business hours, you will also see their mascot. This enormous plastic chicken is reason enough to skip the highways that have allowed suburbanites to circumvent residential Providence since the 1950s.

Despite the admittedly provincial perspective I cultivated from living in Rhode Island for twenty-one uninterrupted years, my travels for enjoyment, exploration and, of course, higher education, have taken me elsewhere for many years since, and I have been able to explore first hand a number of urban areas in Canada, the United States, Australia and even Russia, as well as benefitting from plenty of secondary reading. The time I have spent living in Toronto, the DC metro area (within which I include Baltimore), traveling frequently to New York City and its various boroughs and driving the back roads of the northeastern, mid-Atlantic and Midwestern states have resulted in several main ideas regarding cultural landscapes in the United States. First, every place is special to the people who call it home, and those residents all have their own tales to tell about the individuals and events who made those locations unique. Second, these places all have

their own back roads that chart the development of the cultural and economic landscapes of their towns, cities, states and regions. Third, the stories these back roads tell is one that exists for individuals and groups in what I refer to as the “monumental present”—a present constructed largely from stories of the usable past that people believe and in which they are invested, albeit for a variety of reasons.

When these sites are not adopted by the mainstream tourist narratives of the city, state or region, as the old tire factories, strip joints and brown fields along Narragansett Boulevard have not been, they remain vernacular cultural landscapes, used daily by residents or workers to whom they have significant meaning. But when such locations are selected, preserved, stabilized and/or rehabilitated and re-integrated into extant tourist narratives, they become heritage sites, and are used to maintain and circulate the stories of certain people and events that have helped to make a given place special and significant. Every place has both types of sites, and this project aims to offer insight regarding the ways historic elements of urban built environments that have transitioned first from maritime to industrial, then from industrial to post-industrial service economies are being recreated as tourism spectacles and used to construct narratives of local and global relevance for residents who live in these areas and the visitors who tour them. While there is no lack of literature on either heritage tourism or the value of vernacular cultural landscapes, the methodologies I employ in my own research bring these discourses into conversation with each other, especially as cultural tourism advocates and managers continue to obscure the traditional boundaries between these categories, increasingly advocating the cultural significance of entire neighborhoods and streetscapes rather than privileging individual historic structures. This project also seeks to complicate

traditional approaches to heritage tourism as well as studies of vernacular cultural landscapes by examining not only the re-creation and representation of historic places in the present, but also the human practices which have constituted those places and established them as symbolic or significant. Additionally, I consider how the present uses of heritage sites have created new patterns of mobility and travel, not only for visitors, but also for residents.

Having studied and observed the reinvention and marketing of maritime and industrial heritage sites in areas such as Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; Syracuse, NY; Boston, MA; Portland, ME; and even several areas in Sydney, Australia, I have chosen to work with a location exhibiting traits demonstrated at all the locations listed above and one with which I am extraordinarily familiar. Accordingly, this dissertation takes as its case study the development and marketing of heritage sites in the state of Rhode Island, most of which have been created from long-since-abandoned eighteenth century mercantile port areas and the nineteenth century industrial structures (such as textile mills and factories) that line the coastal and inland waterways of the Ocean State. Whether maritime or industrial, these locations and structures serve as sites of heritage because they testify to the relationship that once existed between various forms of commerce and the water routes that made it possible, laying bare the undeniable connections between the built environment and the natural elements (such as coves, waterways, hills and valleys) from which the oldest American towns and cities have developed. An analysis of the interconnections of the natural and built environments also draws attention to the role a variety of populations have played in the development of such sites in the past and present.

Once sites of work these locations experienced at least three adaptive stages before entering the postindustrial cultural economy as heritage sites. They have been identified as valuable artifacts and *preserved* as monuments to bustling colonial commerce and early industrial development, respectively; thus stabilized and maintained by preservation organizations, these sites have been *re-imagined for tourism* as heritage attractions, or sites of post-industrial leisure that celebrate accepted myths and memories of Rhode Island as a colonial center of commerce and trade, as well as the most industrialized state in the nation during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Additionally, these sites have been put to work as *engines of economic redevelopment*, with local and state associations hoping to allocate potential tourist dollars to the stabilization of neighborhoods and funding of social services for residents. In this view, tourist dollars, particularly when they represent the influx of capital from other surrounding northeastern and mid Atlantic states, can help to establish the types of “livable” communities with organically developed cultural assets that will eventually attract the “creative class” championed by contemporary regional economist Richard Florida.<sup>2</sup> This schema of regional development relies on the notion that the educated and at least relatively affluent creative class will take up residence in a given area and circulate even more external capital, since “creative” workers, while more likely to exhibit place-based attachments and identities, are less likely to rely on that particular place for their income. Instead, these workers receive paychecks from corporations and institutions located elsewhere. In the post-industrial cultural economy, the middle- and affluent classes are place-based, not place-bound.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002): 8. This text and Florida's theories are explored in detail in chapter 1.

This plan for economic development—attract tourism, use tourist dollars to create a more organic and vibrant community, thus attracting younger, more educated and affluent residents who will in turn create still more organic cultural attractions—is one that has been applied or attempted recently in many areas said to have experienced “urban renaissance” including Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Boston, San Antonio, and even Providence. Yet the core of this plan often relies on a spurious taxonomy of cultural asset identification and management. Developing a historical asset into an engine of economic development (or at least a part of that engine) is not (and likely never has been) a neat linear progression that starts with historic preservation (the identification and “saving” of a historical asset such as a location, structure or artifact), develops into tourism (the marketing and consumption of that asset), and ends with economic redevelopment (the effect that historical asset has on the surrounding area’s symbolic capital and/or economic growth). In truth, scholars of preservation have observed that the connection between preservation, tourism and economic development is much more complicated and dynamic, and is seldom so teleologically organized. Indeed, with increasing frequency, identification and preservation, tourism and economic development are being effectively collapsed into one moment.

Scholars of heritage who apply the critical theories of race, ethnicity, gender and other categories of identitarian difference have demonstrated persuasively that the politics of preservation are almost always complicated by concerns regarding which places, structures and artifacts matter to which populations, and why. What should be preserved, these scholars ask, and what pushed aside? What artifacts are deemed “valuable” enough to be put into a museum; which areas should be showcased on walking tours or otherwise

exhibited, and which histories are hidden away, for how long, and why? What are the criteria applied to determine the “stakeholders” whose voices should be heard in a given preservation battle? What *should* those criteria be? These ethical questions and many others are entertained on theoretical as well as practical levels (themselves hardly mutually exclusive categories of thought) by scholars such as Andreas Huyssen, Cathy Stanton, Linda Hutcheon, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Kimblett and scores of others located in disparate academic disciplines concerned with the politics of preservation and display.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, these issues are so pervasive that they constitute discursive subfields in areas as divergent as performance studies, cultural anthropology, American studies and geography.

The preservation of historical assets, which scholars consider primarily a cultural phenomenon, must also be understood as significantly interconnected with financial and political concerns. Since the capital required to identify, preserve and/or stabilize, operate and market many heritage sites is generated by private organizations and their memberships, it is important to recognize that decisions about which assets are the most valuable will likely have much to do with their potential marketability and self-sustainability. It is unlikely, for example, that a particular site or artifact will be preserved if it cannot be made (through creative and well-financed interpretation and marketing) to yield a significant economic or cultural “profit” for the sponsoring organization or

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<sup>3</sup> Each of these authors work on the politics of display, and are particularly concerned with the issues related to displaying the “other.” See Andreas Huyssen’s *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also Linda Hutcheon’s *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) and *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994). For a comprehensive study of the preservation and marketing of a heritage site, see Cathy Stanton’s recent work on Lowell National Park, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). Finally, see performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett’s powerful analysis of the displaying “other” cultures. Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

surrounding area. Accordingly, it is not merely “history” or “the past” that is at stake when heritage attractions including house museums, special exhibits, public art, visitor’s centers and historic sites are designated and designed for the consumption of tourists, but also the ways the events and personages of the past are remembered and mythologized, by whom, and why. How have specific elements of the built environment, with or without the traditionally “monumental” markings inscribed into stone structures, become “placeholders” which not only gesture to the people and events of the past but also act as symbolic capital themselves in their role as what Pierre Nora has referred to as *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory? Indeed, this study examines this and other questions, particularly considering how “place” is mobilized by specific individuals and organizations in specific contexts, bringing together the rich intertexts of history and memory to establish the significance of local places, populations and economies to regional, national and even transnational issues, events and cultural patterns.

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## Chapter 1

### Mythscapes, Place-making and Identity:

#### Problematizing the Tourist Narratives of a Postindustrial City-State

The primary goal of this dissertation is to re-evaluate the ways in which layers of locals and globals interact in the cultural history narratives presented at Rhode Island's myriad contemporary heritage sites, as well as how and why those narratives have evolved over time. Accordingly, the primary question I pose here is: How has the flow of diasporic human bodies into (and between) specific temporal and geographic locations resulted in exchanges of cultural practices and financial capital that has provided the raw materials from which contemporary public historians, museum curators and private citizens craft "usable pasts" to give their lives and identities cultural meaning in the present?<sup>4</sup>

Providing answers to this multifaceted question however, requires the simultaneous examination of the official and vernacular practices of place which have constituted those temporal and geographic sites historically and in the present, as well as turning a critical eye on the rhetoric used to frame such cultural practices; how that rhetoric has (or not) shifted over time in response to local, regional, national and transnational political, economic and social phenomena; and who benefits financially and culturally from the application/presentation of the rhetoric. Too often viewed as a

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<sup>4</sup> The term "usable past" has become almost colloquial in public history, but I first encountered it in Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

contemporary effect of globalization, the transnational flow of bodies and capital (as well as bodies-as-capital) is actually an ancient practice, long undertaken for human survival as well as profit at local, national and transnational levels. A discussion of maritime trade and slave trafficking as they were practiced in Rhode Island, for example, reveals that although the mainstream tourist narratives associated with colonial-era Newport, Bristol and Providence, Rhode Island may emphasize the patriotic rhetoric of religious tolerance and the separation of church and state, the underside of the same narrative reveals that the community could not thrive and explore these ideas without the capital accrued through international trade of goods, as well as the bodies and cultures of a sizable segment of the population referred to contemporary academic parlance as the African diaspora. Indeed, Newport Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Keith Stokes speaks explicitly in what I refer to as “diaspora language” when he describes the goals of public history organizations in and around Newport County. Referencing the slave trade and its role in the contemporary tourist economy of Newport, Stokes emphasizes:

...it’s not about the trade. In fact [the Newport Chamber and collaborating organizations] are actually creating a whole new vernacular on African American history and slavery. We’re not calling it slavery, we’re calling it forced immigration. They were forced immigrants. And we’re calling their lives not just slavery but creative survival.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing in this vein, Stokes argues that speaking in terms of diaspora and mobility allows tourists greater access to ideas of interconnectivity between peoples and histories, and encourages visitors and residents to contextualize local historical narratives against a backdrop of national issues and discourse. According to Stokes:

Today you have this great debate on immigration in America and quite frankly, and I had to say this last night at a program—what’s going on today isn’t much different than any time in American history except the names, the ethnicity, and

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Stokes interview with author October 16, 2008.

such. There's no change in percentage of immigrants coming in, as far as they're being documented. And in most cases, in the good old days nobody was documented. Nobody came with papers. And in fact I had to read a presentation where we think we have here in Rhode Island the first government statement on immigration in 1684. It's June 24, 1684. A group of Sephardic Jews that had come from Brazil and arrived in Newport asked the Rhode Island General Assembly in Newport, "can we remain as non-Christians" and they said as long as you abide by the laws of his majesty's kingdom, you can stay here free and be active participants in our colony... The [Rhode Island] Charter though, excludes non-Christians so that's why these Jews had to ask the question... So what's remarkable about Rhode Island is that we've always been a beacon and it's this immigrant workforce that has created our industrial revolution or colonial maritime economy.<sup>6</sup>

Just as Stokes asserts that the local can have an impact on the national (and vice versa), I argue here that studying the ways in which local heritage tourism narratives are crafted can reveal much about the composition of local, regional and national identities. Rather than looking only at national heritage narratives and analyzing their potential impact on the constitution of American national identity, it is important to understand how locally and regionally-based narratives inform and contextualize the rhetoric unfolding in the spheres of American domestic and foreign policy debates.

Accordingly, this project examines the relationship between historic tourism and economic redevelopment in present-day Rhode Island, evaluating how cultural heritage narratives are informed by eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth-century labor histories and subsequently presented to both residents and visitors for the purposes of education and cultural enrichment. Considering the adaptive reuse of former places of industry as tourist attractions, traditionally understood as contemporary sites of leisure, I argue that local tourist narratives have both transnational origins and transnational impacts on the flows of capital and human bodies (particularly those of peripheral or traditionally marginalized populations) within the increasingly de-industrialized economy

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of the global West. Additionally, I argue that the development of urban and suburban postindustrial cultural economies (based on the consumption of products and experiences as opposed to the acts of production that have traditionally been gendered male and/or associated with male bodies) is developed largely on the backs of working diasporic and demographically marginalized bodies. At stake here is the development of a new body of theory that explicitly seeks to combine the types of examination traditionally undertaken by regional economists and tourism experts in the professional (and often governmental sectors) with more academic and philosophical analyses of the ties between people, identity, and place that emerge and shift in the wake of both subtle and seismic cultural shifts resulting from globalized processes such as trade and corporate globalization, local and international militarization, natural disasters and other environmental changes.

While focusing in on the narratives and practices circulated within one industry (heritage tourism) in one small state (Rhode Island) allows for a close and detailed examination of such issues, even this study does not pretend to be exhaustive regarding its topic. The heritage sites of Rhode Island present the state according to five governing mythologies:

1. “otherwise-mindedness,” and the rise of civil libertarian discourse in the United States;
2. early and wholesale industrialization and an accompanying wave of international immigration;
3. wealth, the performance of leisure, and the rise of resort culture;
4. rural agrarianism;
5. the continuing presence of a thriving American Indian culture.

Of these five major mythologies, this study examines only the histories, narratives and practices associated with the first three, since it is these three which are mobilized in the state's two most significant tourist locations, Newport and Providence Counties. The final two mythologies associated with Rhode Island are predominantly evidenced in the southernmost section of the state's mainland, Washington County, the location of eighteenth and early nineteenth century plantations and the contemporary Narragansett Indian Reservation. While many tourists certainly visit the beaches of Rhode's Island's southern coast and state residents enjoy the annual Washington County Fair, with its 4H events and exhibits, log-rolling contests, live musical entertainment and animal auctions, this area does not yet feature a large number of tourist attractions, one coherent interpretive tourist narrative or an organized network of heritage tourism management. Additionally, Washington County has not experienced the same planning and development trends as its more urban counterparts and, as a predominantly rural and suburban area does not rely on heritage tourism as an engine of economic re/development as extensively as either Newport or Providence. Finally, since these southern areas of the state never experienced either industrialization or urbanization on the scale of that which either occurred or was attempted in Newport and Providence Counties, the cities of Washington County have also never experienced the dereliction or degradation of their built environments, and have little need of the economic redevelopment so desperately pursued in the state's more urban centers.

Because historical tourism is in fact the dominant form of tourism in Rhode Island (as opposed to eco-tourism or the recreational tourism associated with amusement parks, casinos, beaches, etc.), I pose two sets of related questions. The first set of inquiries deals

explicitly with the cultural production and circulation of historical myths through heritage sites via technologies of reiteration and representation:<sup>7</sup>

1. Which mythologies of Rhode Island's rich histories have been distilled into and mobilized by the state's heritage sites and other elements of the built environment?
2. When and why have certain mythologies been foregrounded as others have receded to the periphery or disappeared altogether, particularly in relation to contemporaneous sociopolitical events and debates?
3. Which individuals and groups (including agencies or governing bodies) have created these heritage sites? How have they done so, when and why?
4. Finally, who benefits and/or profits from these site-specific heritage performances and their use values?

The second set of questions deals with the theoretical and practical implications of the production and consumption of heritage sites and the *use* that is made of the histories these sites make public:

1. How do the stories told about Rhode Island's past(s) in brochures, on guided tours, in specific cultural landscapes, and during commemorative events organize and contextualize local, national and transnational histories for both producers and consumers of the sites?

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<sup>7</sup> While representation has to do with the cultural symbolism of a given thing and has been extensively theorized by cultural critics including Stuart Hall, reiteration is an idea largely associated with performance theory and cultural anthropology. Reiteration in this sense refers to what Richard Schechner calls "twice-behaved behavior," or the repeated commitment of an act in a similar or exactly replicated fashion, as seen in live performance and rituals. For more on representation as a technology of meaning, see *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publications, 1997). For more on reiteration and restored behavior, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

2. How/does heritage tourism and/or the adaptive reuse of abandoned mercantile and/or industrial sites in Rhode Island tell (and sell) narratives of postindustrial America? How are the stories of Rhode Island, as told through the heritage sites of the state's built environment, similar to those of other eastern rust belt cities such as Syracuse, Worcester, Detroit and Baltimore?

### **The Methodology and Philosophy for Analyzing Tourist Narratives as Cultural Products**

To answer these questions, and to understand the dominant tourist narratives mobilized around particular subjects and ideas in particular places and times, a comprehensive methodological approach is needed. Accordingly, I draw on the research methods, theories and intellectual genealogies of a variety of academic disciplines and discursive sub-fields in the humanities and social sciences, including those traditionally associated with Sociology and Urban Studies, History and Museum Studies, Geography, Architecture and Historic Preservation. To analyze the tourist sites and narratives generated within and by the state of Rhode Island, I conducted interviews with directors of local chambers of commerce, researchers at city planning offices and local historical societies, museum curators and development associates, historic preservation experts, real estate developers, and community activists, as well as informally surveying local residents.

I undertook archival research at several offices of the City Halls of Providence and Newport, as well as at the Newport Historical Society and the Rhode Island Historical Society (which also contains the collections on Providence), the Providence

Public Library and the Providence Historic Preservation Commission in the office of city planning. In these locations, I explored extant vertical files, historical newspapers and industry-specific publications, as well as the complete collection of mayoral and gubernatorial speeches, to discover the dominant narratives associated with city and state-wide tourism over time.

Additionally, I drew on the fields of architecture and geography for my methods of studying and analyzing historic maps and city plans, as well as for documenting elements of the natural and built environments associated with the heritage sites and mythscapes of Rhode Island's tourist economy. Using photography, taking measurements where necessary and/or appropriate, and comparing architectural elements and terminology enabled me to accurately document not only already noteworthy historic properties, but also vernacular sites. These methods were also useful as they were applied across a number of different times and a variety of dates to learn vernacular as well as official uses of sites, since the types of materials used to construct and control the natural and built environments over time reveal much about the cultural practice(s) of place, including what a site was used for, when, how, why and for how long.

From local non-profits such as the Providence Plan and online governmental resources, I generated maps depicting the demographics of specific maritime and post-industrial locations over time. These maps helped me understand land use and development from the eighteenth century forward into the present, particularly as they cross-referenced data regarding age, sex, race and color, educational level, primary language, home ownership status and individual as well as family income level within

specific neighborhoods with more general demographic information about the cities of Newport and Providence and even county-wide demographics.

If a rich interdisciplinary critical perspective has informed my practical methodological approach to the study of heritage sites, tourism narratives and the associated mythscapes of contemporary Rhode Island, then an equally comprehensive body of theory is needed to resolve or reconcile the questions I have raised. Accordingly, I employ an explicitly transdisciplinary approach, drawing on the research methods, theories and intellectual genealogies of a variety of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. While many cultural theorists champion interdisciplinarity, or the collaboration between discrete academic disciplines, a transdisciplinary perspective allows me to challenge the sovereignty of each field and instead suggest that their archives, queries, and methodologies have long been co-constitutive. Combining elements of a variety of academic fields thematically, across (and, at times, in spite of) disciplinary boundaries, not only makes it possible to examine and articulate extant cultural phenomena and knowledge formations in new ways (i.e. to pose new problems and complicate what we believe we already know), but also to formulate strategies for resolving existing situations and imagining futures that are both sustainable and equitable.

The major theoretical framework I employ attempts to resolve the questions posed above regarding the scope and potential impact of the study. Accordingly, the theoretical intervention I make with this project involves several elements:

1. Distinguishing between history, an organizational and academic discourse, and “the past,” a temporal location and phenomenon defined loosely by events which have already happened;
2. Understanding how historical narratives are constructed and used at heritage sites (and other locations of a given built environment) to serve a public pedagogical function;
3. Examining the ways in which these sites teach about and shape relationships between people, place, and identity generally; and
4. Finally, analyzing how the mythscapes mobilized by heritage sites inform the relationships that exist between local and national bodies politic and hegemonic structures such as states and nations even as notions of transnationality increasingly enter popular public discourse and challenge the sovereignty of such entities.

At the very foundation of this intellectual framework, then, is a tenet central to the discourse known as performance theory—that all bodies, animate or inanimate, have the power to perform. I argue here that heritage sites and elements of urban built environments perform the past in the present, sometimes explicitly taking part in the economy of theatricality and the art of “make believe,” and other times engaging in a more subtle but equally persuasive attempt to “make belief,” or shape public opinion about events, people, or other subjects. Though theatre director and theorist Richard Schechner articulates these two processes as distinct, he also acknowledges that they can hardly be understood as static binaries or oppositional processes. Instead, many cultural products use technologies of “make believe” for the express purposes of making belief.

Working from this foundation, I argue that such sites of past commerce and industry create what historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen refer to as “usable pasts.” These pasts are “usable” because they help everyday Americans contextualize themselves against a historical backdrop, providing a sense of continuity in an ever-changing cultural landscape that is increasingly conceptualized in public discourse as global in scale. Additionally, heritage sites encourage pride of place and culture by integrating the types of official historical narratives often found in textbooks with oral histories and memories attached to material sites, artifacts, and practices. Often working outside the parameters of traditional history museums, with their glass cases, security guards and careful legislation of tourist mobility and interaction, heritage sites mobilize historical narratives in preserved (and often recreated or restored) elements of the vernacular landscape such as private residences, streetscapes, waterfronts and wharfs, warehouses and factories, and town squares. Getting tourists outside traditional museums and into active communities teeming with local, unofficial and sub-cultural narratives and experiences, heritage sites serve as powerful contemporary engines of economic redevelopment in the postindustrial service economy of the new Gilded Age, defined by a cache of journalists and economic theorists as the period between roughly 1970 and 2007 which saw an ever-widening gap between the über-wealthy and the achingly poor reminiscent of the one which occurred between 1880 and the institution of income tax in the early twentieth century. These sites, I argue, are created by tourism officials, politicians, public historians, and others in their capacities as cultural elites to stimulate depressed economies by appealing to people’s individual and/or collective senses of patriotism, local and ethnic pride, and identities as citizen-workers and citizen-

consumers. Among the practical and philosophical approaches drawn on by these elites are public pedagogy and the construction of a “usable past” from the powerful technologies of myth and memory as well as from both historic and contemporary cultural practices of place.

***Public Pedagogy, Heritage Sites and the Construction of a “Usable Past”***

In her 1997 text, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant draws explicitly on Jürgen Habermas’s notion of the public sphere when she makes a case for the salience of “reading” popular cultural material including print advertisements, feature films and animated television programs to explore specific conceptions of American citizenship. Accordingly, I argue that doing a similarly intertextual “reading” of the narratives and discourses produced by and through heritage sites and historic tourism in Rhode Island not only reflects historical, but also contemporary attitudes about American citizenship.<sup>8</sup> Berlant helpfully acknowledges the limits of Habermas and Antonio Gramsci’s theoretical analyses insofar as they fail to account for human agency (i.e. the fact that, as feminist film scholars such as Laura Mulvey and bell hooks have suggested, individual viewers will pick and choose from the images presented to them via the “culture industry” to best make meaning in their own

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<sup>8</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). I include the word reading in quotes here to emphasize the fact (explored below) that I rely on the broad notion of “text” as articulated by Foucault. Many performance theorists reject the idea that an ephemeral performance, even of something as apparently stable as a “place” can be read in the same way as a monograph. I agree that the same type of reading practice is not applicable, but maintain that performances can be “read” using a mix of performance, literary and cultural theories.

lives).<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, I suggest that any worthwhile analysis of the ways in which sites of public pedagogy actually fulfill (or not) their meaning-making potential must draw on Walter Benjamin's influential essay "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," one of only a few theoretical sources referenced in popular culture studies which explicitly seeks to reconcile the pedagogical power of aesthetics (i.e. art and performance) and the agency maintained by individuals in the face of that power.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Benjamin's work, when brought together with Frederic Jameson's study of architecture and its cultural impact, contributes largely to what I refer to as the "monumental present." This present-tense performance of the past (extrapolated broadly to apply to the performance of a person as much as a stone structure standing in the middle of the National Mall of Washington, D.C.) is not only referential of previous temporalities, people and events, but also a re-enactment of the pasts to which it gestures.<sup>11</sup> The word "monument," then, is meant to describe not only the type of stone structures that decorate and define the National Mall in Washington, D.C., but also cultural products such as films, political speeches, plays, festivals, and other actions,

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<sup>9</sup> For valuable feminist critique of the assumed male gaze and the agency of viewers, see Laura Mulvey's *Visual and other Pleasures*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> I define the monumental broadly and not only in terms of the weight of its cultural significance, but also within the context of its materiality. The word "monument," then, is meant to describe not only the type of stone monuments that decorate and define the National Mall in Washington, D.C., but also cultural products such as films, political speeches, plays, festivals, and other actions, events, people and performances which stand in the present tense to remind Americans of their shared and individual national pasts. The monumental present, then, not only *references* the past but also uses what political theorist Murray Edelman refers to as "condensation symbols" to stand as a constantly performing re-enactment of not only the multiple meanings of the absent, forgotten, lost or displaced, but also of the feelings and emotions (as opposed to the factual materiality) associated with and constitutive of events, places and people of the past. Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964). For more on Jameson's discussion of architecture and its cultural meaning-making potential, see *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

events, people, performances and, of course, specific tourist attractions, which stand as symbols in the present to remind Americans of their shared and individual local and national pasts. The monumental present not only relies on elements of heritage sites that explicitly reference the past, such as artifacts, but also on the feelings and ideas those artifacts inspire.<sup>12</sup>

It is the integration of the official and unofficial, the mix of particular places and artifacts with the power of memories and experience, historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen suggest, that contributes to the overwhelming popularity of heritage tourism as a means of learning about the past in the United States. In their book *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Rosenzweig and Thelen analyze the results of a national survey they conducted during the 1980s which examined how and why Americans interact with their past(s) the ways they do.<sup>13</sup> What Rosenzweig and Thelen found is that Americans are not the passive consumers of historical narrative (as generated by museums, monuments, television and film) that they are often made out to be. Instead, they argue, Americans take an active approach to their interaction with discourses, performances and rhetorics of the past, but also to their role as agents who can create history through their treatment and interpretation of the past.<sup>14</sup> Ranking first among the list of trusted sources for accurate historical information were museums,

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<sup>12</sup> Edelman 11. Edelman dedicate an entire chapter of his text to the significance of such symbols and their related meanings, taking as his case study "political settings," or the *mise en scène* used to contextualize and communicate meaning for political events and personas. He offers the example of the Supreme Court and its visual and psychological association with symbols such as robes, law books, dark colors, oak paneling, scholarship and the judicial bench, all of which combine to create an air of political "seriousness" as well as an economy of political decorum. These dramaturgical symbols and others like them, Edelman argues, contribute to the symbolic stature of the Court as not only part of the American political system, but also as itself a performative sign which references the overarching signified discourses of, among other entities, notions of truth, equality and justice. See Edelman, 99

<sup>13</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 3.

followed by first-person accounts from relatives or conversations with witnesses, educators including college professors and high school teachers, popular nonfiction books, and movies and television, in that order.<sup>15</sup> According to the study, Americans trust emotional, first person responses much more than mediated, supposedly unbiased academic sources. Interestingly, it could be for this reason that Americans “put more trust in museums and historic sites than in any other sources for exploring the past.” According to Rosenzweig and Thelen, “[t]he people who talked with us trusted history museums and historic sites because they transported visitors straight back to the times when people had used the artifacts on display or occupied the places where “history” had been made.” Not surprisingly, then, Americans also enjoyed learning about the past through historic reenactments. In contrast, respondents felt disconnected and not represented by the curriculum of the history classes they had taken in school.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, while Rosenzweig and Thelen note the varying technologies used to circulate information about the past, they categorize all of these methods as forms of “history,” while communications scholar Bruce Gronbeck articulates a difference between history and “the past.” According to Gronbeck, “history” is a field of study and an organizational narrative discourse that must be understood as informed by, but nevertheless distinct from notions of the “the past” or the temporal space and events of times gone by.<sup>17</sup> For Gronbeck, history is the *story* of the past—a narrative organized to serve a purpose in the present.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid 91.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 111-113.

<sup>17</sup> See Bruce Gronbeck, “The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, Kathleen J. Turner, ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998): 47-60.

But if “the past” can be distinguished from “history,” differences also exist between types of historical narratives. In his 1998 text *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, historian David Lowenthal distinguishes between heritage and history, noting that heritage is “apt to be labeled as false, deceitful, sleazy, presentist, chauvinist, [and] self-serving...” but he asserts that this claim holds little or no merit since heritage is actually not a form of history at all. Instead, Lowenthal argues, “while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes.”<sup>18</sup> According to Lowenthal:

The historian, however blinkered and presentist and self-deceived, seeks to convey a past consensually known, open to inspection and proof, continually revised and eroded as time and hindsight outdate its truths. The heritage fashioner, however historically scrupulous, seeks to design a past that will fix the identity and enhance the well-being of some chosen individual or folk.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, while Rosenzweig and Thelen include heritage sites alongside other technologies by which Americans accrue historical knowledge including reading, taking academic classes, scrapbooking, conducting genealogical research, photography, the collecting of oral histories and artifacts, museum-visiting and restoration projects, they too recognize that some historical narratives, such as those generated for and circulated by history texts and museums, are considered “official” while others, particularly those generated informally by individuals or private groups, are categorized as vernacular. Though Rosenzweig and Thelen recognize all of these technologies as contributory to a “usable past,” Lowenthal makes a distinction between history and heritage based on

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<sup>18</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage and the Spoils of History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998): x.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* xi.

intent. While history, for Lowenthal, denotes research as a means of learning about the past for its own sake, heritage is a decidedly more approachable realm for most people, as it is dedicated explicitly to constructing a version of the past that can be useful in the present. According to Lowenthal, history complicates the past, while heritage simplifies it for easier consumption and greater palatability. According to these definitions, any type of “usable past” must be defined as heritage, not history:

Legends of origin and endurance, of victory or calamity, project the present back, the past forward; they align us with forbears whose virtues we share and whose vices we shun. We are apt to call such communion history, but it is actually heritage. The distinction is vital. History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.<sup>20</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that most Americans polled by Rosenzweig and Thelen preferred forms of history-learning that Lowenthal would categorize as heritage, including historic sites, reenactments, oral histories, and interactive exhibits in museums. Indeed, according to Rhode Island Historical Society Educational Director C. Morgan Grefe, “People like heritage. They feel comfortable with it. They think it’s about them” whereas “history is often seen as the less friendly, less warm version, the academic older brother of heritage.”<sup>21</sup> Although Grefe maintains “I think you can call it heritage and still accomplish the same goal,” heritage is generally still associated with celebratory narratives, making controversial issues and events, especially those explicitly political or economic in nature, more challenging to incorporate into such a narrative.

Thus characterized as informal, family-friendly, and rooted in personal feelings and experiences, heritage is a feminized version of history that relies on the decidedly

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid xv.

<sup>21</sup> Grefe interview with author June 19, 2008.

subjective and fallible archives of personal and collective memory.<sup>22</sup> Heritage thus enters into the realm of mythology, providing origin stories that encourage a sense of social belonging and allow people to believe they share a bond with others based on similar values, traits, experiences and even a shared ancestry. Indeed, just as Lowenthal references the term “usable past” to unpack the differences between not only history and the events and personages of earlier times, but also different categories of historical knowledge and narratives, French historian and philosopher Pierre Nora makes a similar distinction between memory and history. According to Nora:

Memory and History, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.<sup>23</sup>

Nora continues on to demarcate the discrete topographies and functions of memory and history, eventually suggesting that the two are theoretically reconciled only through *place*, or the “*lieu de memoire*,” since memory, he argues, “attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events.” The purpose of sites of memory, claims Nora, is “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to

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<sup>22</sup> While history (“his story”) has often been understood as a traditionally authoritative, masculine discourse by feminist scholars, Rosenzweig and Thelen’s survey makes clear that women often take on the role of memory-keeper for their families. Women are more likely to collect artifacts, take and keep photos, and pass stories down orally from one generation to another. Feminist scholar of nationalism Nira Yuval-Davis makes a similar point when she argues in her work that women are generally responsible for the maintenance of house and home, as well as the rearing of children and the passing on of family histories, practices, and cultures. See Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Press, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations* 26 [Spring 1989] special issue: Memory and Counter-Memory: 8. Similarly, historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen distinguish between history as a retelling of events of the past and the past, or a temporal location in which events occurred. For more on their distinction, see *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs.”<sup>24</sup> While Nora privileges memory as authentic and primordial by setting it in opposition to history, as essentially constructed by and resulting from modernity, such an interpretation falls back on notions of memory as the province of the always-already marginalized and/or colonized, a notion which has made it all too easy to dismiss non-western and indeed non-literate cultures as “backwards” or lacking in historical legacy.<sup>25</sup> In her work on performance in the Americas, performance theorist Diana Taylor argues against the notion of memory as the terrain of the disenfranchised, stating “[p]erformance belongs to the strong as well as the weak.” Taylor suggests a different cartography for the relationship between history and memory which takes into account the overlap and co-constitution of the two terms.

Unlike Pierre Nora, who is probably best described as a philosopher or philosophical historian, Diana Taylor is a Professor of Performance Studies and Spanish at New York University. Her text *The Archive and the Repertoire* deals explicitly with the performance of cultural memory through the means of theatricality and the live performance of bodies in space. According to Taylor and other performance studies theorists, Nora’s thesis regarding *lieux de memoire* supports the notion that performance, conceptualized broadly as the behavior of a body, animate or inanimate, within the context of space and time, is a significant site of cultural memory since it requires what Nora refers to as a “material site,” or a physical location in which to produce and present

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid 19-22. Clearly, Nora’s ideas regarding sites of memory are inextricably bound up with technologies of semiotic meaning-making, explicitly drawing on the theoretical work of semioticians including Roland Barthes. For one representative work, see Barthes’ *Mythologies*; Annette Lavers, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang: 1972).

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, theories of nationalism have attempted to shift away from notions of ethnic communities as “primordial.” For more on current theories that critique this approach see Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Press, 1981).

the performance to an audience; additionally, performance functions by either *using* symbols or establishing itself *as* a symbol. Indeed, particularly strong examples of the fluidity of site-specific performance are provided in Taylor's work on the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose political demonstrations with signs and white headscarves were meant to draw attention to the disappeared victims of Argentina's Dirty War, and in cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen's study of the Memorial Park at the Plaza de Mayo where the mothers first held their silent protests.<sup>26</sup> Both Taylor's work on embodied performance and Huyssen's explication of architectural and landscape performance draw attention to the theatrical dynamics occurring between the performing body (human or otherwise), the site/location, and the audience/observer. It is this interplay between performer, content, space, and observer, both scholars suggest, which creates and establishes meaning/s by disrupting false binaries. While Nora, engaged in a philosophical project, insists on a split between history and memory, Taylor interprets the relationship between performer, performed content and audience as imperfectly divided between the "archive," or the organizational discourse of past events and ideas manifested in collectible artifacts (such as "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films [and] CDs") and the "repertoire," which "enacts embodied memory" via "performances, gestures, movement, dance [and/or] singing."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For more on these studies, see Taylor, "Performing Gender: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo" *Negotiating Performance*, Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas, eds. See also, Andreas Huyssen "Memory Sites in an Expanded Field: the Memory Park in Buenos Aires" *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003): 94-109.

<sup>27</sup> See Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2003) 19-20.

Though Nora acknowledges that memory and history may also come together in the more fluid theoretical space of “portable lieux” such as texts, exhibits and transportable, tangible assets and artifacts, it seems important to note that heritage sites are also constituted by a carefully orchestrated mixture of memory and history. If memory is primarily attached to specific materials and sites, public history narratives are often mobilized via these elements, since even events, performative and ephemeral, unfold in specific locations. If, as David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig’s surveys suggest, Americans traditionally prefer to visit historic sites rather than read a history text, then I suggest here that it is the ability of the physical environment to embrace *both* memory and history in a performative way which makes these sites appear attractive and trustworthy representations of a relevant, usable past. Heritage sites present the past using performative technologies that allow observers to feel included, and/or to claim the materials and stories presented as their own.

### ***Myth, Memory, and the Performance of the Past***

Though he does not reference or discuss performance theory in his work, David Lowenthal does observe that critics of heritage often cringe at the types of performative technologies relied upon at heritage sites, including reenactments and interactive exhibits. And such negative associations with theatre, performance and theatricality are hardly new. Indeed, historians and other scholars have long bemoaned the postmodern era as rife with inauthentic, inaccurate technologies of mediated representation which obscure, negate or indeed obliterate concepts including “truth,” “fact,” and objectivity.<sup>28</sup> Yet despite their apparent dislike and distrust of theatre and theatricality, there exists a long

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<sup>28</sup> For an exemplary and influential critic of what Guy deBord called the “society of the spectacle,” see Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

tradition of scholars fairly peppering their discourse with theatricalisms. They refer generically to performance, performativity, and the “theatre” of everyday life, reducing the complex economy of theatricality and performativity and obscuring the significant role performance plays in the production and circulation of memory and history at historical tourist attractions.

Performance theorist and queer theatre scholar Mark Franko differentiates between theatricality and performativity in his article “Majestic Drag: Monarchical Performativity and the King’s Body Theatrical.” Franko maintains that there exists a dynamic relationship between text-based or discursive approaches to performance (performativity) and those approaches which attempt to account for the self-conscious movement and physical presence of the material body in time and space (theatricality).<sup>29</sup> These two discourses of performance have also been summarized succinctly by Richard Schechner in his text *Performance Studies: An Introduction* where he articulates the difference between “as performance” (the interpretation of a given event or situation as a performance) and “is performance” (the idea that “something becomes a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is”).<sup>30</sup>

These two conceptions of performance theory—one rooted in the discursive text-based tradition of Hegel, J.L Austin and Judith Butler and the other in the theatrical

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<sup>29</sup> Mark Franko, “Monarchical Performativity and the King’s Body Theatrical” *The Drama Review* 47.2 [Summer 2003]: 71-87. Performance theory, broadly conceived, has two major origins. The one most frequently referenced by performance studies scholars is the collaboration between Richard Schechner, a theatre theorist and director, and cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, whose work focuses on the performance of religious rituals in a variety of non-western locations. The competing origin story of performance story draws on the traditions of Hegelian phenomenology (what cultural landscape theorist Nigel Thrift refers to as non-representational theory) and J.L. Austin’s speech/act theory of literary discourse, both of which have most recently been referenced by Judith Butler’s work on gender performance.

<sup>30</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 30. For more on the differences between “as performance” and “is performance” see 30-32.

tradition first documented by director Richard Schechner and cultural anthropologist Victor Turner —also illustrate an overarching tension between discourse analysis and cultural materialist thought. While the Austin/Butler approach to performance theory is well-equipped to interpret text-as-performance, the Schechnerian model (also developed by performance theorists Diana Taylor and Peggy Phelan) may indeed better account for embodied physiological activities of a given subject or object in a particular socio-historical context. Seeking to combine these two approaches to performance theory under the rubric of a more inclusive academic location called Performance Studies, Diana Taylor has developed the notion of performance that acknowledges both the “archive,” or the text/discourse-based aspect of performance (usually related to content), and the “repertoire,” the embodied and historically situated element of performance (the technologies enabling the content of the performance). While archival memory “exists as documents, maps, literary texts...all those items resistant to change,” the repertoire “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality...all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. The repertoire,” she concludes, “requires presence.”<sup>31</sup>

Drawing on this more inclusive notion of Performance Studies as a field, which seeks to incorporate both discourse-based and embodied notions of performance, the work of both theatre scholars and cultural critics whose work is influenced by phenomenology, provide valuable insight to my own work on historical tourism in Rhode Island, which involves the analysis of performative living history sites as well as local

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<sup>31</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 19-20.

walking tours involving “performers” (tour guides) and “audience members” (tourists).<sup>32</sup> The application of performance theory to heritage sites thus aids in my interpretation and analysis of the relationship between contemporary Americans and the local and national narratives of the past(s) presented as historical tourist spectacle, as well as the ways in which those relationships are forged through site-specific performances (such as reenactments and the interpretation of vernacular and elite landscapes). These relationships, I argue, are co-constitutive of conceptions and performances of citizenship on a local, regional and national level and enabled by the experience of a particular place.

### *Practicing Place and Space: People, Identity, and the Politics of Heritage*

#### *Tourism*

While the term “cultural landscape” has a variety of meanings derived from scholars in fields as diverse as anthropology, geography, planning and architectural history, I am using the term here in a way that I hope will allow me to bring to bear a number of the methodologies associated with these fields. For the purposes of this analysis, then, a cultural landscape will be defined as a material or imagined site that was or has been formed, shaped, determined, and/or influenced by the use of a given body politic. A cultural landscape, thus conceived, can therefore never be understood as separate from the politics of the place in which it was produced, or from the bodies whose actions have produced it. This definition is intentionally broad and malleable, meant to be clarified and delimited in each application depending on the case analyzed,

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<sup>32</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive, as residents of a given area may play both roles at the same time. They not only observe tours and tourists, but they are themselves part of the environment being toured.

the methods applied, and the philosophical, political and personal dispositions of the researcher undertaking the investigation.

There exists no shortage of academic literature related to the study of cultural landscapes, with much of it self-consciously dedicated to the definition of key terms involved in the study itself. While the word “landscape” defies one coherent meaning, most scholars agree that it unites concepts of location (be it temporal, physical, imaginary or remembered) with symbolic meaning imbued by practice and, more often than not, organized by some form of narrative. Indeed, while French theorist Michel de Certeau defines space as a practiced place, others have reversed this order, citing “space” as the more general of the terms, with “place” as the more particular locational reference. While scholars as varied as Yi Fi Tuan, Lucy Lippard, and Certeau explicitly engage and attempt to differentiate between these terms, it is Lippard, an art historian, who offers a definition of “place” which connects academic literatures to more popular monographs written by politicians, journalists and essayists about the politics of vernacular landscapes and about that elusive entity known as “pride of place” so often discussed by urban theorists. Lippard writes,

Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.<sup>33</sup>

As Lippard’s definition makes clear, she is explicitly concerned with the sensory and emotional experience of place. Much more than simply a geographical location, place is about memory and meaning, and the power of narrative to shape lives; it is about loyalty

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<sup>33</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997): 7.

to local community, and the relationship of people to natural and built ecologies.<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, while literary theorist Scott Russell Sanders emphasizes the interplay of people and the earth, journalist James Howard Kunstler focuses on the identities crafted from (and in synch with) the built environment. Finally, J.B. Jackson, the first and most famous theorist of cultural landscapes, makes an explicit connection between cultural landscape studies, theories of space and place, and tourism.

Like American Studies, cultural landscape studies had its official start in New England, at Harvard University, where Jackson taught the first courses concerned with American vernacular landscapes. He admits in his collection of essays, *The Necessity for Ruins* that he was initially concerned whether or not he actually had anything of practical or theoretical value to teach his students, and so focused on churning out “alert and enthusiastic tourists.” Given that Jackson unabashedly makes this connection between tourism and the study of vernacular landscapes as an academic undertaking, it is not surprising that he also attempts to rehabilitate tourism as a concept and a practice. He argues that the main activities of tourists, observing and collecting, have value:

I would say that the inspiration of tourism is a desire to know more about the world in order to know more about ourselves. If we offend public taste, that is only incidental in our search; the Swiss cuckoo clock, the bumper-sticker from Carlsbad Caverns is a type of diploma—proof that we have at least tried to improve.<sup>35</sup>

Studying landscapes for Jackson, then, is about studying the self, as learning about a new place also helps the tourist learn about their own place or places. Landscapes and people’s experiences of them and in them, much like the stories circulated through print culture, also serve the purpose of binding people together, as the practices and

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<sup>34</sup> For more on “rooted citizenship” see Scott Russell Sanders. *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980): 3

activities which inform identity and define communities are almost always site-specific.<sup>36</sup>

According to Jackson, landscapes have at once public and private significance:

This is how we should think of landscapes: not merely how they look, how they conform to an esthetic ideal, but how they satisfy elementary needs: the need for sharing some of those sensory experiences in a familiar place: popular songs, popular dishes, a special kind of sport or game, played only here in this spot. These things remind us that we belong—or used to belong—to a specific place: a country, a town, a neighborhood. A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters such experiences and relationships; spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them. These are some of the characteristics that give a landscape its uniqueness, that give it style. These are what make us recall it with emotion.<sup>37</sup>

While the feelings Jackson and Lippard describe when discussing place and people's relation to it may seem far removed from linkages between place, political life and practices of citizenship, tourism scholar and practitioner Dan Shilling has combined these notions into the discourse of "civic tourism," a concept as well as a practice which focuses on re/creating places as "destinations" not only for tourists, but also to provide the pride of place and economic infrastructure needed to make such locations destinations for long-term residents.

In an extended essay and practical guide toward using civic tourism to create livable, well-balanced residential communities, Shilling explicitly connects the economic goals of tourism to more idealistic goals of establishing the often-elusive investment in local communities known as "pride of place." The goal of pursuing a civic tourism strategy, he states, is "[t]o reframe tourism's purpose, from an *end* to a *means*—that is, from a market-driven growth goal to a tool that can help the public preserve and enhance

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<sup>36</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> Jackson 16-17.

what they love about their place, while revitalizing the local economy.”<sup>38</sup> To achieve this mission, Shilling identifies three strategies that must be undertaken for civic tourism to work correctly. First, stewards of tourism need to “rethink economics” and connect tourism planning to restorative, place-based market policies; second, tourism must be developed with the input of the local community, and must gain the support of that community; finally, Shilling argues, for a truly sustainable tourism to flourish in a given place, there must be “investment in the story” of that particular place. Perhaps the most emphasized of these three practical steps toward healthy tourism practice, this final strategy establishes the enduring value of narrative in local, national and global contexts. The particularities of a place, its histories and its inhabitants must be at the heart of any tourist narrative for that narrative to be both conceptually and economically successful over time.

Yet the most significant argument made by Shilling in his work on civic tourism, for my purposes here, is the idea that tourism can and should be recontextualized as a public good, valued as a public responsibility and “practiced as a public art.” While Shilling notes that civic tourism is hardly the only form of tourism, he does make clear that this approach is more applicable to areas lacking in traditional attractions such as beaches and large-scale amusement parks. While a civic approach to tourism may not be needed (or desired) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Shilling notes, it may be just what the doctor ordered for smaller places that are historically, culturally and/or ecologically significant, yet suffering though difficult economic times. Postindustrial cities more famous for what they were than what they are now, for example, suffer not only

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Shilling, *Civic Tourism: The Poetry and Politics of Place: Four Community Conversations About Belonging in and to “Place.”* (Prescott, AZ: Sharlot Hall Museum Press, 2007).

economic crises but also identity crises and crises of confidence. The way to bring these places back from the dead is not to attempt a quick fix by opening a shopping mall or trying to effect an urban renaissance, Shilling argues, but rather to work with the local community to discover what makes that place unique or valuable and then to market the place responsibly, attracting only the type and number of visitors that the place/site can reasonably accommodate. For Shilling, then, the bottom line of tourism is not the singular financial one that is traditionally emphasized, but instead a holy trinity of ecology, economy and equity. Healthy place-making must look to each of these bottom lines *in turn* before determining the most effective strategies to be applied in a particular location. There is no template for civic tourism, Shilling makes clear. It must be reformulated by each community for each place, creating a dynamic interplay between tourist and resident in which all tourists are actually temporary residents and all residents are also encouraged to think and act as tourists, appreciating, exploring and celebrating their place so that their place will, in turn, support their residency and community. According to this vision, tourism and heritage industries are not attractions located *in* the community but instead valuable constitutive parts *of* the community: receptacles and keepers of all that is special and valuable about a given place and its inhabitants over time.

While Shillings approach to sustainable tourism has not been applied widely across the United States, or in Rhode Island's major tourist locations Newport and Providence, it has become a cornerstone of the work undertaken in northern Rhode Island and other small economically depressed locations. A major element of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's marketing approach, civic tourism is a decidedly nontraditional approach in comparison to mainstream tourism practice as it has been

studied and documented by academics and practitioners. Indeed, civic tourism should be considered a subset of cultural tourism as it is defined by Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros in their text *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management*.

While McKercher and du Cros define “cultural tourism” as a field and object of inquiry, they also explore the possible relationships between the tourism and heritage management industries, carefully explicating the goals of each. Additionally, G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Turnbridge, in their collaborative effort *The Tourist-Historic City: Retrospect and Prospect of Managing the Heritage City*, define the tourist-historic city as a global phenomenon with a variety of forms and functions, providing a broad explanation of the key concepts related to developing and managing such a city and its artifacts. These scholars provide valuable insight regarding the practical implications of tourism trends and policies as accounting for the role played by regional, national and international legislation in historic preservation and heritage management.<sup>39</sup>

What these texts do not attempt to account for, however, is the role played by publicly funded tourism, heritage management, urban planning and historic preservation in shaping historical narratives which may support regionalist and nationalist projects. In my application of mainstream tourism studies, then, I examine not only the tourist narratives associated with specific historic sites, but also the administrative and organizational origins of those narratives to discover how and why they have been crafted, and whom they serve, both culturally and economically.

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<sup>39</sup> Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, *Cultural Tourism* and G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Turnbridge, *The Tourist-Historic City: Retrospect and Prospect of Managing the Heritage City* (New York: Pergamon Press, 2000).

## **The New Gilded Age and the Politics of the Postindustrial Cultural Economy, or What's at Stake?**

My study elucidates the emerging politics of labor associated with the postindustrial cultural economy of the global West, making clear that sites once associated with working people have been transformed into landscapes of leisure which now exclude or render invisible the very workers whose efforts led to the financial and cultural economies required to develop and maintain these sites as tourist attractions. But just as the dynamics of historic preservation are fluid and dynamic, so too are the operations and implications of heritage sites and/or cultural landscapes, which are never as simple or vertically organized as they might initially appear. Instead, while the post-industrial service and cultural economies and the demands of tourism have transformed former sites of work such as wharves, warehouses, mills and factories into sites of leisure, I argue here that sites of leisure too are always already sites of work, even if that work has become increasingly (and often intentionally) difficult to detect. If the “magic” of leisure and conspicuous consumption is expensive to maintain, as asserted on tours of Newport’s Gilded Age mansions, then it is important to note which populations provide the infrastructure undergirding this costly performance of affluence—what is the price paid, by whom, and in what manner?<sup>40</sup>

Clearly then, this study draws on the work of cultural theorists, tourism professionals, economists, and political scientists who have argued persuasively that the United States has, since the 1960s and 1970s, largely transformed from a productive to a consumptive economy. Labeled “postindustrial,” this economy is one in which “service

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<sup>40</sup> John Tchirsch, “Rooftop and Behind-the-Scenes Tour of the Elms” (Unpublished narrative courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County).

industries” prevail and tourism is not only viewed as a desirable “clean” industry requiring a substantial administrative and physical infrastructure (and is thus productive of a large number of jobs) but also figures largely as a metaphor for the consumption of culture in a decidedly postmodern world characterized by the alienation of people from the means of production as well as from each other by communication and transportation technologies ranging from telephones and cars to live online chats and express airplanes and Acela trains shuttling hourly between cities including Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C.<sup>41</sup> While the new postindustrial economy of the global west has deep roots in well-documented histories of nineteenth century European and North American imperialism and their resulting cultures of display, it has been argued by editors of popular magazines as well as academics that there is a new politics and practice of apparently rootless affluence afoot. Indeed, journalist David Remnick produced an edited collection entitled *The New Gilded Age* in 2000 that makes use of a number of independent articles published in *The New Yorker* since 1991 to document the culture of affluence that has gradually taken shape in the last few decades of the twentieth century, the period marking the shift from U.S.-based productive economies toward de-centered global capital and the displacement of manufacturing to the developing world.

Political economists too have taken note of the changes occasioned by this postindustrial economy, observing the ever-widening gap between the über-wealthy and the achingly poor, even in one of the wealthiest nations in the global West. In 2008, Larry

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<sup>41</sup> The idea of tourism as a “clean” postindustrial industry is not one found exclusively in literature on tourism, but is also supported in texts on urban development. For a comprehensive discussion of this trope, see Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management* (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2002). For a valuable critique of the implications of tourism on both the environment and local cultural landscapes, see anthropologist James Clifford, “Identity in Mashpee,” *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 277-346. See also Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995):1.

M. Bartels published *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* and examines the ways in which wealth does (or not) translate into political agency. Progressive news sources including *Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, Radio Free America and others make explicit connections between the initial Gilded Age of the 1880s, with its legacy of extraordinary wealth, conspicuous consumption, capitalist monopolies and political corruption to this “new Gilded Age” and argue that there is a contemporary postindustrial cultural economy afoot which relies on tourism as a metaphor for physical and social mobility as well a material economic engine. Though he does not speak in these terms, I would argue that economist Richard Florida, too, in his texts on regional economic growth and the rise of a “new” creative class, actually documents this form of domestically practiced but transnationally-derived commercial and cultural imperialism. Indeed, the postindustrial cultural economy is effectively what I refer to as a “lifestyle economy,” as Florida and others note that middle-class and affluent populations increasingly view the daily practice of their lives as entangled with, but not necessarily determined exclusively by an exchange of increasingly de-centered forms of capital.

According to Florida, who explicitly references nineteenth century cultural theorist Thorstein Veblen’s work on the first Gilded Age and coined the term “conspicuous consumption,” there is a new class rising since the 1970s known as the creative class. This class of people, Florida observes,

Include[s] people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content. Around the core, the Creative Class also includes a broader group of *creative professionals* in business and finance, law, health care and related fields. These people engage in complex problem

solving that involves a great deal of independent judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital.<sup>42</sup>

And these creative people, he continues, see an explicit tie between quality of life and place, even as “place” and “the local” seem to become increasingly outmoded concepts in the wake of expanding globalization. But Florida is an advocate for the continuing relevance of place, especially among the rising creative class, asserting that no matter how transnational capital becomes, people are becoming more, not less, dependent on place for their contexts than they ever have been, an idea expressed by a number of other contemporary cultural theorists of place, space and mobility as well.<sup>43</sup> Rather than moving to specific jobs, Florida argues throughout his 2002 text, people choose where they want to live based on the quality of life available there:

But today corporations are far less committed to their employees and people change jobs frequently, making the employment contract more contingent. In this environment, it is geographic place rather than the corporation that provides the organizational matrix for matching people and jobs. Access to talented and creative people is to modern business what access to coal and iron ore was to steelmaking. It determines where companies will choose to locate and grow. And this in turn changes the ways cities must compete.<sup>44</sup>

Creative workers, Florida reports, are willing to work at jobs they like for longer hours and less pay rather than becoming “working stiffs” confined to a cubicle from which they have no view of the impact of their labors. The creative class is tied to and productive of an “experience economy” predicated on the notion that people are growing less interested in traditional goods and services and more interested in “authentic” experiences they have produced or taken part in themselves (i.e. rather than going to a

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002): 8.

<sup>43</sup> While there is no shortage of literature on issues of mobility and the decentering of place in the postmodern world, particularly helpful are geographer Tim Cresswell's *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Florida 6.

museum on local history, people will instead observe local history through the contemporary environment/streetscape), such as walking tours, museum and visitor's center exhibits, and daily activities featured at art venues and community centers.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, Florida's analysis of data collected via polls and surveys also reveals that these same workers will pay more to live in environments with character, history, and "charm" rather than standardized urban high-rises. In their off hours, these young urbanites seek recreation by bike-riding, and kayaking, viewing the body itself as a project.<sup>46</sup>

While Florida's comprehensive analysis demonstrates that "fit places" are also "creative places," and notes the role the creative class play in developing "organic" and spatially-specific practices, his later work, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, published in 2005, complicates some of the more sanguine conclusions of his earlier text. When he wrote the first book, he was a professor of regional economic development at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, a city, like Providence, Rhode Island, often celebrated as having overcome its eroded industrial landscape to experience an urban "renaissance." After the publication of his 2002 text, however, Florida relocated to the DC Metro area, one of the epicenters of the creative class as he has defined it. Having moved to this new location to become a professor at George Mason University, Florida seems to have acknowledged some of the problems (inequalities, gentrification, etc.) that plague areas in which the creative class has effectively taken over, such as the national capital.

Accordingly, *The Flight of the Creative Class* considers what happens when this upwardly mobile, well-educated and relatively affluent group first colonizes, then

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 176.

evacuates a given area, since mobility remains one of the constitutive characteristics of this “new” class. Indeed, speedy and wholesale gentrification is often followed by disinvestment and relocation as the creative workers pursue new jobs and cultural landscapes, producing what Florida refers to as a site-specific “Creative Class War.”

This class war results not only from spatial politics, of course, but from the economic forces undergirding those politics. Like other contemporary economists, Florida notes, “As a nation, the United States now faces levels of income inequality unseen since the 1920s.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, David Remnick and others were right when they proclaimed that the late 1990s signaled the beginning of a new Gilded Age in America, in which the richest and poorest are more divided than ever before. The creative economy itself perpetuates this, Florida admits, with even the most creative, experience-driven individuals relying on “a veritable army of service workers” to keep them in the lives to which they have become accustomed.<sup>48</sup> He observes:

But the increasing economic disparity between the creative class and the other classes is not simply the result of tax cuts, welfare reform, or any other conservative agenda. Nor is it a consequence of loose immigration policies or liberal handouts. It’s built into the very fabric of the unmitigated rise of the creative economy, a direct if harsh reflection of the kind of work that generates wealth in our global economy. The market alone cannot alleviate the situation. Neither can a welfare state single-handedly solve all our woes. The sheer power of creativity as an economic force means that wealth accumulates very unevenly and that those who are left behind not only become worse off but find it harder to attach themselves to the new socioeconomic system.<sup>49</sup>

While he readily identifies the problems arising from the development of the postindustrial cultural economy associated with the creative class, Florida remains critical of the quick fix, particularly as enacted in and through space instead of culture. He asks,

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2005):186.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 187.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 205.

“Where is the devotion to rebuilding our communities, economies, and culture around [universities] in any kind of meaningful or authentic way, when it is so much easier to build a stadium, downtown mall, industrial park, or business incubator?”<sup>50</sup>

The roots of this “new” Gilded Age, a dynamic phenomenon which has arguably both produced *and* ameliorated urban blight and neighborhood disinvestment, of course, run deep, and certainly stretch back to the original period of conspicuous consumption observed by Veblen between 1880 and the stock market crash of 1920. Indeed, the intertwined spatial, cultural and financial politics of this relationship is well explicated in recent works by cultural theorist Anne McClintock and geographer Grey Brechin. Particularly helpful in providing me useful frameworks for accounting for the ways particular mythscapes are developed in local, national and global contexts have been *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* by Anne McClintock and *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*, by environmental geographer and journalist Gray Brechin.<sup>51</sup> While these works differ a great deal in their scope, content and methodologies, both maintain a narrow focus on their respective topics while presenting conclusions that are global in their meaning and effect. While McClintock examines the politics of imperial cartography and the raced and gendered creation of commodity culture under the auspices of British imperialism during the nineteenth century, Gray Brechin considers the growth of San Francisco as illustrative of the larger “imperial” development of American cities and the impact of such built environments on surrounding natural resources and landscapes. Though their archives

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid 253.

<sup>51</sup> Grey Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999). Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

differ considerably, each of these works makes significant contributions to their own academic traditions as well as offering templates for other works of cultural theory which seek to understand the global and transnational via local cultures and histories, closely “reading” local and regional cultural landscapes as a means of understanding meta-historical socio-political phenomena. Just as McClintock reads print ads, maps and photography to understand the narrative structures constitutive and representative of nineteenth century British imperialism, so too do I closely consider the travel literature and tourist brochures associated with Rhode Island’s many contemporary heritage sites (as well as touring and documenting the sites themselves) which, when read alongside the more peripheral narratives of Rhode Island’s past(s), suggest a history of the state and its bodies politic that is not only complex and constantly-evolving, but also global in scope. Similarly, just as Gray Brechin explores the environmental and social consequences of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century urbanization using San Francisco as a case study, I argue that contemporary cultural reinterpretations of Rhode Island’s industrial and economic histories, and the performance of these histories on and through the state’s urban landscapes, can shed much needed light on the alleged cultural bankruptcy of similar post-industrial cities across America’s rust belt (itself a transnational phenomenon since the deindustrialization of the United States cannot be separated from narratives of corporate outsourcing of jobs and an influx of immigrants supposedly in contest with American citizens for employment).

It is my contention that any valuable study of the role that tourist, heritage and preservation industries play in the formulation of local, regional, national and transnational citizenships must not only account for the past and present cultural lives of

Rhode Island's two major cities, Newport and Providence, but must also involve a careful consideration the areas cultural geographer Gray Brechin would refer to as these cities' *contados*.<sup>52</sup> Drawing on classical (and neo-classical) Italian conceptions of urban space, Brechin conceptualizes cities not as independent geographical entities, but as vortexes of culture and commerce which draw on the resources of nearby territories to support an urban infrastructure. In return, Brechin argues, the people of the *contado*—known as the *contadini*—receive a nearby marketplace. Understanding the cities of Newport and Providence as contextualized within the surrounding and related geographies of Rhode Island (or Aquidneck Island) and Providence Plantations, then, can reveal a significantly more complex and decidedly more transnational history than is suggested in the portraits of these locations in contemporary travel and tourist literatures. Put another way, this geographic contextualization also makes possible a broader analysis of historical and contemporary circulations of capital and populations not only into and out of Rhode Island, but also within/throughout the state itself.

**Rhode Island-as-Refugee Camp and the Legacies of Southern New England's  
“Cit[ies] by the Mill”:**

Although Rhode Island is post-industrial, the majority of its mills and factories sitting dormant and dilapidated, it remains the seat of several multi-national corporations, including Taco, Textron, Stanley Bostich, G-Tech, and Ratheon (as well as national retail chains and food franchises such as CVS Pharmacy and Dunkin' Donuts). In addition to these types of commerce, the state also recognizes its draw as a tourist location, with its

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<sup>52</sup>Brechin, xxiii. It is the relationship between the city and its *contado*, Brechin argues, that constitutes what he refers to as the “imperial city,” since the imperial American city follows the Roman example of the city-state insofar as it takes on a regional sovereignty which mirrors that of the modern nation-state in miniature.

miles of protected coastline and glittering ocean views conveniently located between Boston and New York. Taking advantage of tourism as a “clean” postindustrial industry, then, the state’s travel literature cultivates the memory of Newport and Providence as burgeoning metropolitan areas rife with icons and experiences of the past that can offer insight into what it means to be a Rhode Islander, a New Englander, and an American.

According to historian Joseph Conforti, who has written extensively on the myths and symbols associated with New England, exploring the types of heritage narratives mobilized at historic sites (as well as in traditional textbooks, museums, and televisual artistic products), can help a person form and transform identity based on the meanings derived from and at such sites. A native New Englander, Conforti grew up in the factory town of Fall River, Massachusetts and attended higher educational institutions in Rhode Island. This background, he argues, ensured that he had a very different experience of New England than the picturesque and pastoral version depicted in *Yankee* magazine. For Conforti, as for many southern New Englanders, “My New England, then, was a gray ethnic city of mills, hills, and dinner pails.”<sup>53</sup>

As an example of the ways in which New England defies one coherent regional identity, Conforti, a Massachusetts native, offers the case study of Rhode Island and its noted tradition of truculence and “otherwise-mindedness”:

From its emergence as a kind of refugee camp from Puritanism, to the national coercion that was required to end its three-year resistance to joining the Union, to its turn-of-the-twentieth-century distinction as America’s most ethnic state, Rhode Island has resided beyond the cultural borders or at the periphery of the “real” New England. In retaliation, Rhode Islanders sometimes have spun their own narratives of regional origins. Taking exception to the nineteenth-century epic account of the Pilgrims and Plymouth, for instance, Rhode Islanders held up the persecuted Roger Williams and the founding of Providence as marking the birth

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<sup>53</sup> Conforti xi.

of American civic and religious liberty that then spread to the rest of the American republic, including New England.<sup>54</sup>

Often framing itself as separate and apart from the rest of New England, with its iconic landscape of sprawling farms and white picket fences, Rhode Island has long been seen as different by those officials who have documented the northeastern region. Indeed, geographer Jedediah Morse, a native of the Connecticut River Valley who went on to author several foundational American geography textbooks including *The American Geography* in 1789 and *The American Universal Geography* in 1793, effectively excised Rhode Island from New England because its culture and practices did not quite fit the image Morse was trying to craft. When he concluded that its specific and relatively uniform regional identity made New England the most truly American location in the United States of America, he explicitly identified Rhode Island as the “anti-New England” for its failure (and even refusal) to conform to this accepted identity.<sup>55</sup> And according to Conforti, Morse was hardly alone in drawing this conclusion:

Rhode Island acquired notoriety as the anti-image of the orderly Christian republic that Morse’s geographies venerated. Rhode Island only ratified the Constitution, under duress, in 1790. It was perceived in other corners of New England as a licentious republic where feeble or nonexistent institutions allowed liberty to degenerate into unbridled individualism and disorder. Rhode Island distressed Morse as an “unhappy state,” where “all religious institutions have been more neglected...than[in] any other of the New England states.” Outside of Providence and Newport, Morse complained, “The bulk of the inhabitants...are involved in greater ignorance perhaps than in any other part of New England.” ...Rhode Islanders inhabited a world beyond the cultural borders of New England’s republic of steady habits. In its religious pluralism, secularism, individualism, and faction-based politics, the state remained a scandal to New England. It seemed to be culturally aligned not with its neighbors but with the social order and ethos that Morse observed in the Mid-Atlantic states...Symptomatic of its historically attenuated communalism, Rhode Island

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>55</sup> Conforti 96.

largely failed to develop the white nucleated towns and villages that created a distinctive regional landscape from Connecticut to Maine.<sup>56</sup>

The antebellum reinvention of New England-as-idea and region was, of course, resisted by Rhode Island:

Contrarian Rhode Island...continued to trace its beginnings to Puritan persecution in ways that undermined the new Pilgrim narrative of the New England origins of American civil and religious liberty. As Rhode Island historians Samuel Greene Arnold put it in 1853, "The cause of the Pilgrim emigration was...the desire, not of religious freedom, but of freedom to enjoy their own religion." The American "spirit of liberty" was born in Rhode Island, Arnold insisted. "The influence of our example has extended far beyond our narrow borders and has already made the American Union one vast Rhode Island in principle and feeling." Plymouth Rock abided as primarily a gravestone of the Puritan past, whereas Rhode Island served as the New England reliquary of authentic republican origins."<sup>57</sup>

Assuming a defensive posture about its republican credentials, Rhode Island was quick to draw attention to its own legacy of "soul liberty" and the considerable role played by early Anglo settlers Anne Hutchinson, John Clarke, Samuel Gorton and, of course, the most iconic of them all, Roger Williams, asserting that these settler histories of religious and civic persecution at the hands of Massachusetts Bay Colony clearly established Rhode Island as a bastion of the republican values and natural rights that would later be considered foundational tenets of civil libertarianism. Indeed, Rhode Islanders have even gone so far as to argue that the example, experiences, and efforts of its state's earliest Anglo settlers effectively established the values and ideologies undergirding the Bill of Rights.

While there has been no dearth of literature on Roger Williams since his life and work were taken up in the mid-twentieth century by some of the foundational scholars of American Studies, including Vernon Louis Parrington and Perry Miller, there exists little

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid 100.

<sup>57</sup> Arnold quoted in Conforti 197.

consensus among scholars regarding Williams' historical significance. Religious scholars and theologians, constitutional scholars, political scientists, historians and cultural theorists continue to differ in their opinions regarding Williams' legacy. Some interpret Williams as a primarily religious figure who insisted on the freedom of individual conscience and religious observance, while others view him as an uncompromising secular humanist and political maverick who would settle for nothing less than a total and absolute separation between church and state. For those emphasizing Williams' role as a minister and advocate of religious tolerance, his national and international political influence is largely an accident of convenience, the result of later movements and individuals adapting Williams' ideas for use in their own causes. But scholars advocating a view of Williams as a secular figure see the founder of Providence Plantations as a civic leader at the helm of a "lively experiment" in political and religious tolerance and assert that Williams' writings and practices directly influenced European Enlightenment philosopher John Locke as well as America's "founding fathers" and advocates of divergent schools of political rhetoric Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The one interpretation of Williams that both these views seem to embrace, however, is that of Williams-as-exile. There exists no doubt that, whether for his religious or political beliefs, Williams remains one of the first and most significant of the individuals whose relocation to what would later become the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations helped establish Providence's reputation as a safe space for refugees, exiles, immigrants, diasporic populations and other displaced peoples. This rhetoric remains alive and well today, as the city continues to promote itself as a "diverse" location and a haven for recent immigrants.

Facing religious persecution in England, Williams pursued “soul liberty” in Massachusetts, but his profession as a minister required him to obey “calls” from disparate congregations within the colony as well. Accordingly, it was not only his controversial religious and civic beliefs that had him shuttling back and forth between the early Massachusetts settlements of Boston, Plymouth and Salem, but also the nature of his chosen profession. Finally exiled from Massachusetts after facing deportation back to his native England, Williams traveled south to the land immediately east of the Seekonk River in what is now Rhode Island, but was forced to travel yet further west to be safely out of the grasp of the civil authority of Massachusetts. Even when he was finally settled in what would later become the colony of Rhode Island, he remained a bit of a nomad. As one of the chief founders of the state, Williams traveled frequently between the Providence Plantations mainland and Aquidneck Island, stopping in between frequently to broker compromises over land use and ownership between the local American Indian groups and European settlers, particularly the followers of Samuel Gorton, located just south of Providence in Shawomet, later named Warwick. Along with Aquidneck Island settler John Clarke, Williams also made several transatlantic journeys back to England to secure charters for Rhode Island—charters which not only ensured Rhode Island’s independence from Massachusetts Bay but also continue to influence contemporary political issues in the state, from human rights and religious freedom to land use and zoning laws. In short, then, Williams led a nomadic existence, but while his later peregrinations within and on behalf of Rhode Island could be seen as executed by choice, his removal from Massachusetts was of such a nature as to render Williams, at least

rhetorically, a member of the population Robin Cohen, in his 2007 text *Global Diasporas*, refers to as the “victim diaspora,” a group moved against their will.

Traditionally associated with African and Jewish populations, the concept of diaspora is one that Cohen’s work explicitly seeks to broaden in attempts to account for the mobility of people across the human-made borders that demarcate nation-states and other territories. Attempting to account for push/pull factors including war, famine, political and (often identity-based) physical violence, economic necessity as well as other forces that cause people to move from place to place, Cohen not only expands the traditional definitions of diaspora, but also develops a typology of this term that identifies as distinct 5 specific diasporic populations: victim, labor, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas. While this typology is spurious insofar as most populations could likely fit into multiple categories depending on their specific geographic, cultural and temporal contexts, it nevertheless draws attention to the ways in which the rhetoric of exile has been mobilized around historical figures like Williams.

According to Cohen, a diaspora is more than a group of people displaced from a geographically-specific location or homeland, and has much more to do with the identity and the ability and desire to construct what Benedict Anderson has famously referred to as an “imagined community” from the shared experience of displacement, exclusion and/or loss. Cohen argues, “. . . a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of the same background.”<sup>58</sup> Given that such a link between people must not only be felt, experienced or perceived, but also demonstrated (or enacted through bodily practice), Cohen’s definition implies that there can be no

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<sup>58</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997): ix.

diaspora without the performance of such an identity in relation to others. This position assumes that a diaspora must be identified and constituted by its members, and not by an outside source which may, across the boundaries of time or space, see connections between individuals and groups to which the people involved do not ascribe.<sup>59</sup>

While it is unlikely that the first European settlers of Rhode Island saw themselves as constituting an explicitly diasporic population, a number of scholars have persuasively argued that early New Englanders did identify, particularly during the colonial period, more as ex-patriated subjects of the British crown than as Americans.<sup>60</sup> Only over time, and in response to mounting tensions over the politics of trade, taxation, and governmental representation, such scholars assert, did the early colonists begin to construct explicitly “American” identities as agents in the New World, rather than as subjects of the Old. Indeed, such historical emphasis on Rhode Island’s humble beginnings as the troublesome younger sibling of Massachusetts Bay in which Anglo-Saxon religious dissidence and the experience of exile gradually developed into a specific conception and practice of state sovereignty, is clearly referenced through Rhode Island’s most famous material artifact: the statue known as the “Independent Man” which stands

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<sup>59</sup> This is an important distinction, as geographer Tim Cresswell makes clear in his 2006 text *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. In the epilogue to this text, Cresswell reflects on the use of the term “refugee” to describe the individuals who fled New Orleans during and immediately after Hurricane Katrina. While many sources, including the *New York Times*, were comfortable applying this word to these displaced people, many community activists, including Jesse Jackson and Reverend Al Sharpton, objected to its use, as did many New Orleans residents thus labeled. Jackson and Sharpton cited the traditional connotation of the term in relation to displaced people from outside the Americas who are usually members of a racial or ethnic minority. They argued that the term was therefore racist and stripped U.S. citizens of dignity. Cresswell disagrees for the same reason I imagine Cohen would, and argues that the term refugee should be freed from its vexed history and instead considered an appropriate term for any person denied the security of a home due to force or natural disaster. See Cresswell 2006.

<sup>60</sup> See Rogers Smith on White Anglo Saxon Protestants sharing an identity as expatriated British subjects as opposed to “Americans.” Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

watch over Providence from the dome of the Rhode Island State House.<sup>61</sup> Though the Independent Man bears no resemblance to the colonial figure of Roger Williams, it is perhaps the most representative monument to his contributions and his secular value as a symbol of individualism and civic dissent.

In fact, the statue that now watches over Providence from atop the dome of the State House was originally intended to be a likeness of Williams, though the plan to depict the minister as the guardian of the capitol city was abandoned by October of 1899.<sup>62</sup> Charles McKim, the chief architect of the Rhode Island State House and partner in the nationally-recognized firm of McKim, Mead and White, it was rumored, preferred a symbol that could more broadly serve as a signifier of “freedom and sovereignty” atop the Neo-Classically-styled State House than the pantaloons-bedecked figure of the state’s founder.<sup>63</sup> Only a few months after the decision was reported, a fourteen-foot, 500-pound bronze statue appeared on top of the capitol dome with spear in hand; and although sculptor George Brewster knew his creation as “Hope” (also the state’s motto and textual insignia) the statue is still known both officially and unofficially as the Independent Man.<sup>64</sup>

Despite its neoclassical countenance, the “Independent Man” nevertheless remains haunted in both historical monographs and local lore by the complicated story of the statue-that-almost-was and the displaced colonial figure of Roger Williams. The

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<sup>61</sup> It should also be noted that due to the small size of Rhode Island, the state house and its statue loom large on the Providence skyline and can be seen from high ground in many parts of the state, making it both recognizable and omnipresent.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the independent man statue and its genesis, see the Rhode Island Secretary of state’s website <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/library/riinfo/know-rhode-island/?searchterm=Independent%20Man>, accessed 11 December 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> This statue also inspired the title of Kellner and Lemons’ authoritative history of Rhode Island, published with the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Independent Man is arguably the product of Williams' legacy distilled and mixed with McKim's Gilded Age, pro-Renaissance aesthetic sensibilities. Once again the sentiments of Williams' religious and civic ideas were adapted for utility in changing times, securing Providence and the state as a whole a lasting legacy based on exile, dissent, and "otherwise-mindedness" which lagged in the years after the nation's one-hundredth birthday but enjoyed renewed celebration and secured national significance by the time the bicentennial was observed in 1976.

Whether Rhode Island was successful or not in framing itself as somehow more faithful to the rugged individualism supposedly characteristic of the earliest Puritan settlers of the region, Conforti makes clear that the industrialization and corresponding waves of Irish, French-Canadian and Mediterranean immigration of southern New England (particularly Rhode Island and the area of Massachusetts south of Boston) created a very different New England than the one that has traditionally been chronicled in history books and tourist brochures alike. The erasure of race, ethnicity and class from cultural histories and representations of New England is particularly problematic, he argues, and provides demographic evidence that contradicts the mythic depiction of New England as an Anglo-Saxon stronghold of rugged individualism and folksy pastoral charm and suggests, "[t]he ethnic transformation of New England should be positioned at the center of a new narrative of regional distinctiveness."<sup>65</sup> Undertaking such a revisionist approach to Rhode Island here, I explicitly account for the ways in which official discourse has traditionally depicted the smallest state in the union as decidedly different from the quaint, peaceful and picturesque settlements that have supposedly populated New England since the area's earliest founding by Anglo settlers. I argue that

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<sup>65</sup> Conforti 313-315.

exceptionalism, or the idea that a unique past (and potentially a pre-ordained and providential future) sets apart a specific geographic or imagined community (such as the United States or, in this case, one particular state) plays a large role in the creation of heritage tourism discourses. Attempting to reify or establish a sense of collectivity, official heritage tourism narratives seek to mobilize shared memories as well as conceptions and practices of citizenship to establish an interdependent politics of identity and place.

*The Manipulation of Memory: Nationalism and other Discourses of State Sovereignty*

Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor's work again provides an important example here. Taylor complicates the connection between history, memory, place and performance by considering the role played by the sponsor or steward of the performing body. Although Taylor uses the example of the mothers of Argentina's disappeared, whose protest signals their own political agency, Taylor's work also acknowledges that performance need not always be resistant. Indeed, as Andreas Huyssen's exploration of the Plazo de Mayo notes, performance is constituted by context, allowing a place to be created for one purpose but used for another. If the Memorial Park at which the mothers of the Plazo de Mayo perform their protest was created to encourage silence, mourning and political quiescence then when it is unoccupied it may be successful in that performance. But when complicated by the presence and practice of additional vernacular "performers" (in this case, the political protestors), the space takes on new meaning—possibly even one that negates its intended meaning. Similarly, a heritage attraction may be created with the intention of presenting a particular perspective or version of the past,

but that narrative will necessarily be complicated by the audience, depending on the knowledge its members possess or their willingness to accept the symbolic meaning mobilized by the dominant narratives associated with a specific site or artifact.

The flexibility of the symbolic meaning of the past as it is represented and transmitted at heritage sites, then, has not only to do with the distinctions between history and memory, but also the types of memory that are relied upon in contemporary practices of place. Indeed, sociologist Duncan Bell argues that a number of scholars use terms like “myth” and “memory” too broadly, assuming that a given group shares one coherent identity and set of beliefs and eschewing the possibility that significant differences based on identity and/or experience might exist.<sup>66</sup> Bringing Pierre Nora’s philosophical work into conversation with scholars of nationalism and globalization, Bell makes clear that memory is always already ideologically charged, sometimes used to subvert dominant power structures, but more often used hegemonically in the service of the state in a modern world carved up into territories not according to cultural affinity, but national interest.

Working from a theory which assumes that “the modern nation-state has always had economic actors and practices that were transnational” feminist globalization theorist Saskia Sassen insists on the significance of cities as case studies illustrative of the effects of transnational economic practices. “A focus on cities,” she argues, “decomposes the national economy into a variety of subnational components...It also signals the declining significance of the national economy as a unitary political category.” According to Sassen, a study of local economic situations and practices can offer new insight into the

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<sup>66</sup> See Duncan Bell, “Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity” *British Journal of Sociology* 54.1 [March 2003]: 63-81.

multidirectional flow and co-constitutive nature of transnational forces such as immigration patterns and the development of global capital in smaller, more localized areas once thought tangential to even the national sociopolitical economy. Such a shift toward the local in the discourse on globalization, Sassen argues, also makes visible the disenfranchisement of specific individuals and groups in the wake of the flow of global capital. Noting that women, immigrants and people of color often comprise the workforce on which a global economic infrastructure depends, Sassen suggests that the city can provide an available field for agency, and function as a site of resistance for both individuals and groups.<sup>67</sup>

Sassen's recent work linking cities to the global economy is complemented by the theories advanced by scholar of globalization Arjun Appadurai. His work on the "cultural styles of advanced capitalism" complicates Sassen's theories by positing the existence of various imagined landscapes within which individuals as well as institutions define themselves according to their engagement in local and national Andersonian imagined communities.<sup>68</sup> In his text *Modernity At Large*, Appadurai notes the interdependent nature of the "ethnoscapes," "mediascapes," "financescapes," "technoscapes," and "ideoscapes" manifested in local configurations of global practices and governed largely by nexuses of power organized horizontally rather than vertically or according to older models of margin and center.<sup>69</sup> While he defines these imaginary landscapes individually, Appadurai notes the functional interdependency of each of these "scapes" in the definitions he provides for each one. An ethnoscape is the "landscape of

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<sup>67</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: New Press, 1999): xix, xxi Ibid. xxi.

<sup>68</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 31.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 33-36.

persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live;” a “mediascape,” references “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information;” “financescapes,” connote the “complex fiscal and investment flows” linking two or more economies; “technoscapes,” relate to the “global configuration...of technology” that accounts for the flow of that technology across previously unsurpassable borders; and finally, “ideoscapes,” are the “concatenations of images [which] are often directly political and frequently have to do with ideologies of states.”

If Sassen’s work on the global city largely accounts for the co-constitutive causes and effects of what Appadurai refers to as financescapes, or localized scenarios involving the flow of global capital, sociologist Duncan Bell draws on Appadurai’s model of these interconnected imagined landscapes to suggest that the impact of the various “scapes” are manifested through cultural practice and must be interpreted with a critical eye trained on the technologies of representation and power used to mobilize those landscapes.

Dovetailing with literary theorist Roland Barthes’ work on mythologies, Bell articulates the presence of what he refers to as “mythscape,” or the representational interplay of memory, mythology and national identity formation in everyday life and popular culture.<sup>70</sup> Arguing that notions of “collective memory” are often too broadly defined and applied, Bell advocates distinguishing between the inter-related domains of memory and mythology. According to his model, memory should be understood as drawing on experience, while mythology is necessarily tied to representational technologies (i.e. the performative articulation of memory/remembrance akin to those site-specific examples proffered by Taylor and Huyssen regarding the protests in Argentina). Further elucidating his Bartsian approach to the interplay of myth and memory, Bell defines “mythscape:”

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<sup>70</sup> Bell 63-81.

[A mythscape is] the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of people's memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly...it is the perpetually mutating repository for the representation of the past for the purposes of the present.<sup>71</sup>

If Barthes' mythologies are the *discourses* resulting from the interplay of myth and memory, Bell's mythscapes are the *locations*, whether discursive or spatial, via which such mythologies are mobilized. Like Appadurai, then, Bell articulates a connection between imagined communities and landscapes, and hegemonic nationalist discourses as they operate in a global context to mark spatially defined territories and populations as discrete, if interdependent entities. Defining their own theories as part of the discourse of globalization which attempts to explain, explore and possibly even subvert such nationalist structures, Bell, Sassen and Appadurai can be brought together in the hopes of formulating and articulating the ways in which local heritage sites perform either hegemonically and/or subversively depending on the context in which they are used, and by whom, as well as drawing attention to the transnational origins of many such sites. Accordingly, this study explicitly interrogates the politics of specific heritage sites as forms of public pedagogy which influence individual and collective performances of citizenship and contribute to the formation of bodies politic and Andersonian imagined communities by connecting people to each other via particular places and the mythscapes they constitute

***Rooted Citizenship: Hegemony, Agency and the Politics of Identity and Place***

While many theorists of place and space bring together fields including anthropology, cultural studies and geography to argue that human senses of belonging are

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 65, 66.

site specific, former Mayor of Missoula, Montana Daniel Kemmis draws inspiration from the Greek city-states to connect place to the practice of healthy democratic politics.

According to Kemmis, one cannot be a citizen without having a place to call home and “inhabiting” that place in very specific ways. To “inhabit” a space fully, he argues “is to dwell there in a practiced way, in a way which relies upon certain regular, trusted habits of behavior.”<sup>72</sup> Without such patterns of behavior (also referred to by Robert Bellah as “practices of commitment”) “the people” can never be made “public.” To become a viable body politic, Kemmis argues, citizens must be willing and able to act in public spaces that are also “real, identifiable places,” producing what cultural theorist Jurgen Habermas has famously referred to as the “public sphere.”<sup>73</sup>

This connection Kemmis makes between place and the practice of citizenship is particularly significant to my own project. While historical sites are often privately maintained and/or funded, they nevertheless serve as sites of public pedagogy, and have been invested with particular symbolic meanings. Just as residents of a given location look to that area to help inform their political, social, and other forms of identity, so too do tourists visit places to contextualize themselves and their experiences, as well as to learn about their pasts and those of others. Additionally, tourists often have little choice but to experience these places as part of a larger group of visitors with whom they may have nothing in common other than their shared interest in a particular site or narrative. Accordingly, heritage sites function much in the same way that Benedict Anderson suggests of print capitalism: they create narratives which establish and encourage a sense of connection between populations.

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<sup>72</sup>Daniel Kemmis, *Community and Politics of Place* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid 6.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, originally published in 1981 and revised in 1991, is one of the most oft-cited of the recent works on nationalism and the creation of community, taking a social constructionist view that communities and nations can be imagined into being through the minds, beliefs/values, and practices of potential and present members. Anderson argues that newspapers, for example, play an extraordinarily significant role not only in defining a community in relation to its own constitutive parts (its own citizens/members), but also in relation to other nations and communities, as newspapers often feature articles on foreign and domestic developments in relatively close proximity to each other.

While Anderson argues that disparate peoples learn to understand themselves as connected through a web of print media and capitalism, British scholar T.H. Marshall's key contribution to the debate on the constitution of nationalism has been via the notion of "social citizenship" as explicated in his now-canonical essay "Citizenship and Social Class," originally published in 1950.<sup>74</sup> In this essay, Marshall argues that citizenship has to do with *feelings of belonging*, or the belief that one is seen and understood as equal to his/her fellow citizen precisely because of the existence of the democratizing trope of citizenship, which is supposedly available to everyone equally, if differentially (i.e. within Marshall's rubric no one can be *more* of a citizen than anyone else). This interpretation is extensively analyzed and critiqued by Derek Heater in his 1999 book aptly entitled *What is Citizenship?*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London, Pluto Press, 1992).

<sup>75</sup> Derek Heater, *What Is Citizenship?* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1999).

Even as Heater offers a corrective approach to Marshall's interpretation, he draws heavily on his predecessor's respected theories and body of work, refusing to limit his own discourse on citizenship to legal and juridical methods of classification but not quite extending his notions of citizenship as far as Anderson's imaginary dimension. Beginning with the origins of the word "citizen," which he locates in the republican rhetoric of the French Revolution, Heater traces two main traditions under and within which notions of citizenship have been produced in the global west: the liberal tradition and the civic republican tradition. Within the liberal construction of citizenship, Heater argues, an individual always remains an individual, and the private and public spheres remain distinctly separate.<sup>76</sup> All citizens are supposedly equal, with no duties owed either to each other or, generally speaking, to the nation. Heater acknowledges that citizens of course pay taxes, at least in contemporary society, but concludes that within the liberal context, citizenship "largely means the pursuit of one's private life and interests more comfortably because that private life is ensured by state-protected rights."<sup>77</sup> Within this conception of citizenship, citizens are predominantly private individuals and the government is supposed to have very little impact on their daily lives.

Within the civic republican tradition of citizenship, however, "the purpose of citizenship is to connect the individual and the state in a symbiotic relationship so that a just and stable republican polity can be created and sustained and the individual citizen can enjoy freedom." Based on this definition, Heater extrapolates that "the individual can

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<sup>76</sup> Heater is obviously speaking broadly regarding the conception, and not the reality, of the liberal construction, since a number of historians and theorists have made clear the interdependence of the private and public spheres. Ibid 6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid 6-7.

only be truly free in a republic” and that “a republic can exist only through the support of its citizens.”<sup>78</sup>

Even within the civic republican tradition, though, Heater argues that citizenship has primarily been associated with the ownership of land or with wealth, thus tied to not only cultural landscapes, but also material artifacts as well as built and natural environments. Similar to Marshall’s liberal understanding, then, proponents of civic republicanism too believed (as some continue to) that it is possible to have equality established *through the category of citizenship without a corresponding economic equality*, or even equality of economic opportunity.<sup>79</sup> Also interesting to note here is that Heater pays attention to the fact that the word “virtue” is taken from the root “vir,” meaning “man” and signifying manliness, or an itinerant gender performance of masculinity. Among the appropriately manly virtues of civic republicanism, Heater argues, the Greeks included temperance, justice, courage, rationality, and wisdom.<sup>80</sup>

After explicating each of these traditions and their implications, Heater attempts to account for individuals who either do not meet traditional requirements of citizenship for specific locations and/or who have chosen to maintain dual national membership or citizenships. This approach is similar to that taken by David Ricci in his 2004 text *Good*

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid 53.

<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, only class (and the attendant notions of consumerism and capitalism) is accounted for as an obstacle or complication to the notion of citizenship as an equalizing trope. Heater is in the minority when he attends, later in his work, to issues regarding race and gender.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 60. Two other scholars whose work I’ve explored in my investigation of the major issues attendant to nation, nationalism and citizenship(s), has been that of feminist historians Nancy Isenberg and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, both of whom interrogate the implications of nineteenth century laws and cultural politics legislating women’s performances of American citizenship. Their work not only fills a gap in traditional historical treatments of this subject and time period, but also provides an important model for scholarship which attempts to account for the ways in which American citizenship has traditionally been understood explicitly as a classification largely reserved for and performed by white males. See Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Smith-Rosenberg, “Political Camp or the Ambiguous Engender of the American Republic,” in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

*Citizenship in America* in that Heater, like Ricci, is attempting to account not only for what citizenship is *supposed* to mean and the way it is *supposed* to be defined and function in relation to both the state and the nation, but also to the ways in which citizenship is actually *performed* in and by the body politic in daily life.<sup>81</sup>

As the title of his book implies, Ricci is less interested in what makes and establishes notions of citizenship than in what constitutes a “good” or acceptable/appropriate performance of citizenship in America. His approach is split along partisan political lines (Republican/ Democratic) rather than Heater’s liberal/civic republican paradigm, but his most significant contribution to my own project is his accounting for of the system of decorum implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) governing individual citizens’ performances of their American citizenship. Unlike Heater, who seeks to explore citizenship generally, Ricci really is more concerned with the ways Americans *conceive of* and then *act as* “good” citizens, or citizens who can and do fulfill the duties and obligations of the categories of citizenship Ricci delineates. *Citizenship I*, according to Ricci’s paradigm, “refers to a person’s legal status, to whether or not, for example, one is entitled to reside in a specific country and, in modern times, carry its passport.” *Citizenship II* is more akin to Marshall’s idea of social belonging and community membership via “citizen” as a unifying and (supposedly) equalizing semantic trope, while *Citizenship III* is nebulously defined by Ricci as having to do with participation in the body politic, and with “virtuous behavior.”

Ricci goes on, however, to openly acknowledge the trouble that can result from interpretations of *Citizenship III* and its “virtuous behavior,” as he recognizes that “the role of good citizen (who sustains law, order, and security) and the role of good person

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<sup>81</sup> Ricci, *Good Citizenship in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

(who pursues curiosity, knowledge, and virtue) may point toward different ends and call for different kinds of behavior.”<sup>82</sup> In short, there may exist for some individuals or entire groups a confusing, contradictory or even paradoxical relationship between being morally good and civically good. Implicit in such an admission, of course, is the fact that there exist varying criteria for “goodness” and for decorous, appropriate citizenship which are defined, in turn, by a given nation, state and local community within a specific temporal location. Unfortunately Ricci does not discuss the existence of those implied rules/social mores and laws, instead seeming to understand the citizen as an independent agent simultaneously serving as the writer, star, director and producer of his/her own performative production of citizenship. Such a perspective, then, does not allow Ricci to consider the fact that citizenship is, to some extent, necessarily *a group performance* in that it is regulated on a collective level by the laws and social norms established by and through both the state as well as through the cultural institutions Louis Althusser famously refers to as Ideological State Apparatuses such as schools, television, and other cultural elements of public life.<sup>83</sup> Although Ricci limits his approach to the abstract contemplation of various types of practicable American citizenship, scholar of sociology and communication Michael Schudson has provided a fairly comprehensive history of civic life in America, accounting for how (and why) certain expectations of citizenship performances have been shaped in particular locations and time periods.<sup>84</sup>

While abstract theories of citizenship such as Ricci’s are instrumental to an understanding of the origins of tropes of citizenship and the ways in which those tropes

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 7-9.

<sup>83</sup> See Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

<sup>84</sup> Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

operate to suggest or preclude possibilities of/for civic participation, the political constitution and material performance of American citizenship (what Americans actually do when they “do” citizenship) must be accounted for somewhat differently, particularly when considering the different ways in which specific groups are able to legally become citizens.

Accounting for such differences, even against the backdrop of comparatively revisionist theories of nationhood such as those advanced by Benedict Anderson, has proven a difficult task for scholars and theorists of a variety of discourses and academic locations. In her text *Gender and Nation*, feminist sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis argues that neither Anderson nor fellow scholar of nationalism Anthony Smith adequately account for the implications of constituting the nation (and its attendant nationalist ideologies) through the bodies of individuals which are not necessarily understood to be equally imbued with those biological or socially constructed characteristics that have come to be associated with or considered desirable by a given nation/community. In attempting to account for the different ways in which “othered” bodies are willing or able to perform citizenship, I use the example of gender as a category of difference since gender is itself a category, like all identitarian categories, mitigated and mediated by a host of other differences such as sexuality, dis/ability, color, ethnicity, etc. My use of this category is not to suggest that constructions of sexual difference are the *only* constructions which alter conceptions of the relationship between individuals, groups and nation-states, but because the feminist scholars on whom I draw to complicate theories of nationalism also do the difficult work of troubling the category of “woman” as well as the scope of women’s and gender studies. In addition to the work of Nira Yuval-Davis, I also

draw on a number of self-described third world feminist scholars who argue persuasively that feminist projects must move beyond the interrogation of patriarchy that has been so foundational to feminist political movements in the global west to establish an approach which simultaneously critiques colonial practices and all socio-political projects which move to exclude or totalize the experiences of marginalized individuals.

One of the first scholars to offer a critique of recent literature on nations and nationalism, Yuval-Davis offers her work explicitly as a corrective to the theories of Anderson and Smith. In *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis argues for an understanding of nationalism as a contingent process which is necessarily influenced and shaped by a heterogeneous body politic whose members are not only not the same, but also not constructed as equals. Yuval-Davis persuasively suggests that women have been and continue to be used in nationalist discourse as representatives and icons of the nation because of their traditional societal role as collectors and preservers of culture, an argument whose relevance to my work is certainly supported by the efforts of historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen in their completion and analysis of a study which found that women tend to use and practice “the past” through professional and volunteer preservation and historical commemoration projects much more often than do men.<sup>85</sup>

Yuval-Davis’s work is also well-supported by the scholarship of a significant number of feminist intellectuals who define their projects as aligned with

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<sup>85</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, in their efforts to discover how and why contemporary Americans study, use and apply the past in everyday life, conducted a survey and published not only the results of that survey, but also their analysis regarding those results. Within their analysis, they look particularly at categories of difference such as gender and race to understand why certain individuals answered questions in particular ways. They do not suggest, for example, that women are “naturally” more interested in the past, but instead contend that women have been socialized as preservers of both familial and national histories.

transnationalism, postcoloniality, and self-described “third world” studies.<sup>86</sup> Also providing structural support to Yuval-Davis’s argument that the performance of citizenship is heavily regulated (and limited) by extant societal/cultural mores, state laws, and national customs are the scholarly undertakings of performance theorist May Joseph in her book *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*, as well as a series of articles published in collections which take as their subject the intersection of gender, nation-building and nationalism.<sup>87</sup> Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon and Mino Moallem’s introduction to *Between Women and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* is extraordinarily helpful in providing a discursive and critical theoretical interpretation of the ways in which women act as representatives and icons of the nation.<sup>88</sup> Also useful are essays by Geoff Eley, Ruth Roach Pierson, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Silke Welk in the collection *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, all of which account for the role collective memory and the Andersonian notion of national imaginings played in the construction of nations and the mobilization of nationalisms during the long nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup> Finally, essays by Zillah Eisenstein, V. Spike Peterson, Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tetreault, published in the edited collection *Women, States, and Nationalism: At*

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<sup>86</sup> The category “third world women” has been re-appropriated from feminist theories of the global west by scholars including Chandra Mohanty. Mohanty argues that patriarchal oppression should not be understood as a universal global phenomenon affecting all “women” the same way. Instead, she complicates this category by suggesting that “third world” as a descriptor needs to connote not a group of women sharing biological sex and a location outside the industrialized global north and west, but instead a political category complicated by specific locations and temporalities. See Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminism Without Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 17-42.

<sup>87</sup> May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Mino Moallem, “Introduction,” *Between Woman and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>89</sup> *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Ida Blom, Karen Hagemon and Catherine Hall, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

*Home in the Nation?*, explore the rhetorical use of women to mobilize national agendas regarding the increasing localization and privatization of performances of citizenship (Eisenstein) as well as the establishment of the nation as an imaginary trope based in and built on not only established gender roles but also heteronormative sexual performance (Peterson).<sup>90</sup>

These essays, and the collections in which they appear, all take as their focus the role of women in making and performing the nation and its attendant nationalist discourses and suggest a model for the interpretation of citizenship more as a *potential performance* than as a clearly defined individualist classification conferred simply by being a member of a nation or community. Particularly important in both Yuval-Davis's work and the articles referenced above, then, is the scholarly insistence on a *distinction between nation and state*. This distinction has been particularly important to feminists and other scholars accounting for differential experiences and possible performances of citizenship because it is more often than not the state, or the bureaucratic structural system of the nation, which determines an individual's eligibility for citizenship. Yuval-Davis argues that such a distinction between state and nation is necessary when accounting for the role women play in nation-building and nationalist performances primarily because it is often the state rather than the nation from which women are excluded (i.e. women are usually counted among the members of the nation/imagined community but are often left far behind when it comes to classifying such members as "citizens" or endowing them with the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts). Additionally, Yuval-Davis draws on Anderson's interpretation of nations

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<sup>90</sup> *Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?* Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tetreault, editors (New York: Routledge, 2000).

as imagined communities when she argues that it is possible to be a member of one nation while residing (temporarily or permanently) within the geographic confines of another nation. In considering American performances of citizenship, then, it is also important to examine the ways in which a variety of cultural practices can and do figure in the styles of citizenship enacted by specific refugee, diasporic, or “alien” populations (who may or not have come to a new location by choice), as May Joseph attempts to account for in her work on the shaping of nomadic identities through and by popular culture and the forms of spectatorship and participation such a culture engenders.

While a number of definitions of transnationalism have appeared throughout the scholarly discourse surrounding globalization, anthropologist Aihwa Ong provides a useful definition of the term in her book *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. According to Ong, transnationalism is a politics that moves beyond the confines and internal logics of the nation-state and involves the movement of capital, ideas and cultures across and between territories traditionally interpreted as discrete entities.<sup>91</sup> Ong’s definition marks transnationalism as a politics which recognizes the vertical and horizontal organization and flow of power as well as connoting a spirit of global mobility that is not necessarily undertaken on behalf of (or in the interest of) the nation-state.

What marks the theoretical contributions of Sassen, Appadurai, Bell and Ong as so useful to my discussion of the transnationalism of local heritage sites, however, is the attention paid by each scholar to the flow of not only capital but also people and their ideas across and between geographically distinct territories and cultures. Often framed in

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<sup>91</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999): 3-4.

contemporary political rhetoric as a “problem,” immigrants (and immigration) have at various times throughout American history been considered the most valuable economic and cultural resource available to the United States. Indeed, if Americans are not born but made, as suggested by presidents including Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, then immigrants serve not only to rejuvenate the economic life of a given community, but also the community’s cultural life as well.<sup>92</sup>

### ***Chapter Breakdown***

This study is divided into two parts, organized chronologically and geographically. While Part I examines the dominant tourist narratives associated with Newport County, located in the southeast of the state and including Aquidneck Island (also known as Rhode Island), Part II takes the historic tourism associated with mainland Providence Plantations as its case study and focuses exclusively on Providence County, covering the middle and northern ends of the state. Each of these sections contains three chapters, the first focusing on the construction of the dominant colonial and early-American maritime narratives, the second re-contextualizing those narratives against the contemporary demographics and suggesting alternative approaches to tourism, and the third examining the ways in which mainstream and alternative historical narratives are put to work in the vernacular landscapes associated with Gilded Age tourism and city planning in Newport and Providence. In each of these sections, I explore, challenge, and

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<sup>92</sup> For more on Theodore Roosevelt’s disturbing rhetoric on immigration and the “making” of Americans, see Leroy G. Dorsey and Rachel M. Harlow, “‘We Want Americans Pure and Simple’: Theodore Roosevelt and the Myth of Americanism” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6.1 [2003]: 55-78. For more on Woodrow Wilson and his pro-immigration rhetoric, see his speech “Americanism and the Foreign-Born” delivered 10 May 1915. Accessed online at [http://douglassarchives.org/wils\\_b02.html](http://douglassarchives.org/wils_b02.html), 4 September 2003. Finally, for a survey of the rhetoric of United States presidents regarding immigration and discourses of citizenship, see Vanessa Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

re-contextualize the politics of narratives which reference the earliest Anglophone settlers of Rhode Island as religious refugees and members of what scholar Robin Cohen refers to as a “victim diaspora” against the rich co-constitutive histories of im/migrant groups that, either by force or choice, relocated to Rhode Island for work and thus constitute a “labour diaspora.” The existence of these two populations living in close proximity to each other in areas of Newport and Providence, I argue, produced what Denis Byrne calls a “nervous landscape” fraught with cultural, economic and political tensions which exists even as narratives of the pasts associated with each group are mobilized in the contemporary urban environs of each city and its tourist attractions.<sup>93</sup>

In Chapter 2, “City by the Sea and “Imperial Entrepot”: The Colonial Constitution of Newport,” I re-examine the historical narratives of eighteenth-century Newport through the lens of the tours and programs currently offered by the Newport Historical Society, including walking tours of several neighborhoods and the guided tours available of the homes owned by the Newport Historical Society, such as the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House and the Quaker Friends Meetinghouse. This chapter focuses particularly on these tours’ emphasis on colonial-era maritime cultural landscapes and their romanticization in the eighteenth-century public sphere and its politics of participation. The questions I pose include: How is eighteenth-century Newport imagined as an icon of religious liberty, and what purpose does such an interpretation of the past serve? How do the narratives constructed around Newport’s private homes and public spaces support or defy this conception of colonial civic life? Which elements of Newport’s past have been included on these tours, which obscured, and why?

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<sup>93</sup> See Denis Byrne, “Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3:2 (2003): 169-193.

In chapter 3, "Traces of the Trade: Alternative Tourist Narratives and the Legacies of Slave Trafficking in Rhode Island," I consider the financial, cultural and political implications of the African slave trade colonial-era Newport and its neighboring town of Bristol, also located in Newport County. How do such stories of eighteenth-century Newport obscure Rhode Island's influential role of the slave trade in the local economy of even middle-class mercantile life? Finally, how do contemporary narratives regarding colonial Newport privilege public life and civic involvement by making connections between visits of national and international figures (including George Washington and other Revolutionary-era international military personas) and how does such a foregrounding of the public over the private suggest a teleological narrative which naturalizes the national(ist) neoliberal projects which cultural studies scholars argue have gradually privatized and/or effectively eliminated the public sphere since the 1970s, the period when most of Newport's preservation efforts were organized?

In chapter 4, "Magic Is Expensive: Marketing the Domestic Leisurescapes of Gilded Age Newport," I examine the development of Newport as a resort community. I complicate Robin Cohen's continuum of diaspora by chronicling the rise of an American leisure diaspora: the increasing numbers of middle and upper-class individuals and families that traveled domestically for recreational purposes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Considering the long history of Newport as a well-established and sought-after tourist destination, I take as my case study the recently-introduced "Behind the Scenes" tour of the Elms, one of the grandest and latest architectural products of Newport's Gilded Age building boom as well as one of the few that remained in full operation until the late 1960s. As part of my study of the narratives presented on this tour,

I consider the traditional narratives told regarding Newport's Gilded Age and examine the ways in which this tour challenges those narratives by including information about the population of hostesses and servants whose labor kept Newport's social scene running smoothly. Though often invisible both during its time and in historical narratives of the Gilded Age, why is this labor now brought to light and made part of Newport's tourist narrative? What new markets are Newport's historical tourism managers hoping to attract by exploring the city's long-observed labor histories? What effects, if any, does this connection between work and leisure now made at the Gilded Age mansions have on Newport's contemporary working population, which, like their Gilded Age counterparts, still primarily exist to serve the tourists that flock to Newport seasonally.

Paralleling these chapters on contemporary depictions of colonial and Gilded Age Newport, Part II consists of chapters 5, 6 and 7, which focus on Providence County. In chapter 5, "The Spatial Politics of Restorative Nostalgia: Vernacular Architecture and the Civic Cultural Landscape of Benefit Street," I present a case study of the "Mile of History" walking tour of historic Benefit Street, located on the city's oft-celebrated East Side, the site of the first colonial European settlement in Rhode Island and now the home of nationally recognized educational institutions including the Rhode Island School of Design and Brown University. This chapter revisits the preservation history of the East Side, and contextualizes the mythologies of religious exile and "otherwise-mindedness" associated with Roger Williams and the settling of Providence against a backdrop of nineteenth and twentieth-century politics and patterns of immigration in the state's capitol city, which gained official designation as a "majority minority" location in 2000.

Accounting for the appearance of a “labour diaspora” in Providence challenges the mythscapes associated with the state’s founding European settlers and with the urban residential enclave of the East Side. Indeed, it is the years of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, when southern Italians and Portuguese immigrants boarded boats departing Mediterranean ports for Providence in record numbers and struggling French-Canadians left the farming communities of Montreal for work in the textile mills of the Blackstone River Valley, that earned Rhode Island its reputation as “the Polyglot state.”<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, I argue that significant social and economic tensions exist between the contemporary east and west sides of Providence and suggest that tourist narratives meant to attract visitors by emphasizing the mythscape of religious diaspora not only misrepresent the city of Providence, but also continue to marginalize a significant portion of the workers who keep the city running each day.

Chapter 6, “My Boat Landed in Providence: Performing Histories of Industry and Immigration in the Blackstone Valley,” considers the patterns of “forced” and “chosen migration” to the state, and the later displacement of immigrant populations which supported the growth of Providence and its surrounding cities during the nineteenth century. To contextualize these patterns of immigration and their effects on the cultural geography of Providence County and the state of Rhode Island as a whole, I look closely

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<sup>94</sup> According to Kellner and Lemons, “By the 1920s Rhode Island had the highest percentage of immigrants in the nation, Catholics outnumbered Protestants, a cacophony of foreign tongues drowned out English, and signs of ethnic diversity were everywhere.” See Kellner and Lemons 75. While the Irish came largely as a result of the failure of potato crops to work on the construction of the Blackstone Canal, French-Canadians gradually moved the Irish out of the area as textile mills were constructed and the Blackstone Valley shifted to an industrial economy. In 1865, 65% of immigrants coming to Rhode were Irish, but French-Canadians gradually overwhelmed that population, making the Blackstone River Valley of Rhode Island host to the largest French-Canadian population anywhere in the world outside of Montreal. See Kellner and Lemons 76. By the 1890s, the largest influx of immigrants was from the Mediterranean, particularly southern Italy. According to Kellner and Lemons, “[the Fabre steamship line] brought thousands of Italians and smaller numbers of Portuguese, Greeks, Armenians, and Russian Jews..[and] [i]n 1914 over 18,000 immigrants disembarked at Providence, making the city the fifth largest port-of-entry in the United States.” Kellner and Lemons 76.

at the dominant tourist narratives associated with the white ethnic cultures of northern Rhode Island's industrial heyday, from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1990s, and take as my case study the permanent exhibits of the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket. Besides functioning as a museum of industrial heritage with a substantial local following, the museum is also a designated visitor's center for the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor, a nationally-recognized park land encompassing the 9 northern Rhode Island cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, Glocester, Burrillville, North Smithfield, Smithfield, and Woonsocket as well as several cities in southern Massachusetts. Considering the narrative content of the exhibits as well as their organization, form and style, I argue that the current tourist narrative governing the Blackstone Valley both adheres to the tenets of heritage tourism, one of the newest and most popular forms of cultural tourism currently applied in the United States, and expands them.

Chapter 7, "From Shipping to Shopping: The Urban Waterfront as Spectacle of Postmodern Leisure" explicitly considers the role of historical tourism in local and regional economic redevelopment. Here I provide a critical analysis of Waterplace Park, Providence Place Mall, and the surrounding riverwalks that have supposedly recreated a postindustrial city while gesturing to its maritime and industrial pasts. My analysis turns a critical eye on the ways in which contemporary city planning continues to draw on the mythologies of colonial, Progressive-era and Gilded Age Newport and Providence to "sell" Rhode Island and stimulate economic growth by taking as a case study the "renaissance" undertaken in downtown Providence.

Though Waterplace Park was not officially opened until 1994, the redevelopment of the city that made it possible has been underway since the 1960s, when leading politicians managed to secure federal funding to move the train tracks and re-route the Providence River. Eventually, the park was designed, replete with a festival marketplace, riverwalk, boathouse, outdoor restaurant and amphitheatre, and gondola rides. My inquiry poses the following questions about this cultural landscape: First, what are the politics of transforming water routes that once bustled with domestic and international trade and both enabled and made lucrative the mobility of immigrant and/or refugee populations into a contemporary site of urban leisure? Second, what does this landscape of leisure, which finds new commercial uses for a derelict urban waterfront, signify about contemporary American urban culture and the populations which visit these types of sites and/or call them home?

Finally, I offer several closing observations regarding heritage tourism, urban planning and economic development in a conclusion entitled, “The Ultimate Recycling Program”: *Living (in) Labor History at Rhode Island’s Rehabbed Textile Mills.*” Here I provide a brief overview of several mill rehabilitation projects undertaken in Rhode Island by the nationally-renowned Baltimore-based real estate developer Struever Brothers, Eccles and Rouse. I assess the cultural politics of the means and methods used to adapt former sites of industry into luxury domestic structures via the mobilization of mythologies of ethnicity, manual labor, and local production, and I argue that the types of narratives traditionally associated with historic tourism are now being used in the corporate sector to attract prospective tenants to newly rehabbed and privatized industrial structures, demonstrating the increasing application of traditional tourism principles (used

to market museums, theatres, and other similar sites of cultural interest) to neighborhood-based economic development. Additionally, I consider the ways these heritage technologies are being used in new ways in the public, non-profit sector by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council of northern Rhode Island.

Ending my text with a comparative consideration of the contemporary public and private application of the technologies traditionally associated with heritage tourism (including the construction of contextual historical narratives and site-specific displays and exhibits) help to reframe, support and highlight the goals of this dissertation as a whole. This conclusion draws attention to the ways in which domestic and transnational issues relate to local cultural landscapes and geographies, the political and fiscal effects of gentrification and resulting political re/districting, and the construction of both “usable pasts” and “monumental presents” via heritage and tourist narratives to stimulate or reinvigorate “pride of place” in an increasingly de-centered global cultural landscape.

## Chapter 2

### City by the Sea and “Imperial Entrepot”:

#### The Colonial Constitution of Newport

The harbor of Newport is one of the best in every respect. The roads are well planted with acacias and planetrees. There are abundant springs everywhere. The fields are rich, the meadows afford good pasturage, and houses are singularly neat and convenient. The head of the island toward the sea offers a singular mixture of the picturesque rocks, pleasant bays, and rough cliffs. A man can farm with one hand and fish with the other. Here is the best blood in America, and the beauty of the women, the hospitality of the inhabitants, the sweet society, and the simplicity of their amusements have always prolonged my stay.<sup>95</sup>

Officially established in 1639 by European religious dissidents such as William Coddington and John Coggeshall, Newport, Rhode Island exists today as a fully incorporated city located on Aquidneck Island off the coast of the Providence Plantations mainland, and is often described in tourist literatures as a kind of mythic “city by the sea.”<sup>96</sup> Though romantic descriptions of Newport as a “sea-kissed bride of the Ocean” abound in the nineteenth century guidebooks published and updated as Newport gradually recovered from the Revolutionary occupation of British troops, eighteenth-century Newport was known more for its bustling wharves and maritime trade than for its dazzling ocean vistas.<sup>97</sup> Although the lengthy period of British occupation is considered responsible for both the significant depletion of Newport’s population and the economic depression that persisted until the mid-nineteenth century, contemporary Newport is once

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<sup>95</sup> Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981).

<sup>96</sup> Alan Schumacher’s work on Newport guidebooks has provided a valuable synthesis of their contents and overarching characteristics. See Schumacher, “Nineteenth Century Newport Guidebooks,” *Newport History* 51.4 [1978]: 73-94. The particular guidebook from which this quote is extracted is a descendent of those original guidebooks edited by Earl Washburn and entitled simply *Newport Historic Guide (revised)*. The book is dated circa 1960 by the Newport Historical Society (NHS).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

again a thriving metropolis, with year-round attractions including Christmas displays at the famous Gilded Age mansions that stretch between the Cliff Walk and Bellevue Avenue, the springtime kite flying festivals at area parks and the annual Newport Jazz Festival.<sup>98</sup> Summer and early fall remain the city's busiest tourist times, with the Bellevue Avenue mansions alone attracting well over 750,000 visitors yearly and the cities located on Aquidneck Island (Middletown, Newport and Portsmouth) receiving more than 35 percent of the state's total reported tax revenues from lodging.<sup>99</sup>

While Newport's tourism clearly depends heavily on the awe-inspiring "summer cottages" built during the late nineteenth century by nouveau riches families such as the Belmonts, Astors, and Vanderbilts, steady streams of visitors are also drawn to downtown Newport. Thames Street, the heart of downtown, currently features colonial wharves and an extensive collection of eighteenth-century domestic and ecclesiastical architecture alongside luxury hotels, quaint bed and breakfasts, and ample retail shopping. During the peak summer season from May to September, visitors also flock to the walking tours of colonial Newport and to the Museum of Newport History, located in the Brick Marketplace at the foot of Washington Square Park in the neighborhood known as the "historic hill."

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<sup>98</sup> While the economic decline of Newport is understood to have much to do with the switch from foreign to domestic trade, rendering Providence a more lucrative port due to its central location, Newport also suffered greatly at the hands of the British troops stationed there during the Revolution. British presence proved destructive to not only Newport architecture (as hundreds of colonial houses were destroyed and used for firewood) but also its population. As economic opportunities gradually declined, Newport residents moved to the mainland in record numbers, with the city's population dropping from over 9,000 to just over 5,500. For more on the decline of Newport in the wake of the British occupation and the decline of foreign trade, see George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The Independent State* (Windsor Publications, 1982): 38 and Peter J. Coleman's *The Transformation of Rhode Island: 1790-1860* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963): 66-68.

<sup>99</sup> While mansion tourism reached a recent record high in 2001, with 912,423 visitors touring one or more mansions, the number of visitors has dropped steadily since, with 762,229 recorded visitors in 2004, the lowest number in a decade. Timothy J. Tyrrell, *Rhode Island Travel and Tourism Report* Volume 22.1 [April 2005] (South Kingstown, RI: University of Rhode Island, 2005): 27, 39.

Accordingly, this chapter is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the dominant and alternative historical narratives associated in contemporary contexts with eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Newport. It suggests that the colonial constitution of the city necessarily involved a network of international trade as well as an intricate web of relations between the merchant classes of Newport, Bristol, and Providence, Rhode Island. Providing contextual information regarding the histories of the related families and industries associated with the contemporary tourist sites and spatial performances of colonial-era Newport as well as about the stewards responsible for the preservation of those spatial performances, I argue that the dominant tourist narratives associated with colonial-era Newport rely heavily on mythic interpretations of the biographies, practices and beliefs of the state's first white settlers in an effort to construct the city of Newport as an icon of civil libertarian values, particularly freedom of religion.

While this colonial narrative remains securely in place today, the interpretation of Newport's Golden Age of trade, stretching roughly from 1680 to the Revolution, has shifted in recent years to incorporate previously marginalized and more controversial aspects of Newport's successful commercial development. The role of the African slave trade, for example, was infrequently discussed throughout the 1980s and 1990s but has recently entered the tourist narrative, as have stories and statistics related to slave ownership in the city.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, partnerships between the Newport Historical Society and

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<sup>100</sup> Important to note here is the distinction made by colonial Newport's merchant class between slave trafficking and slave ownership. While the buying and selling of African people increasingly fell out of favor during the late eighteenth century, slave ownership, often defended as a benevolent institution in the north, was considered quite a separate thing. One of the earliest groups to take an official position against slave trafficking and slave ownership in Newport was the Society of Friends. The Quakers officially censured both trafficking and ownership of slaves in 1727, requiring all members maintaining slave labor after that time to resign their membership. The town as a whole, however, made manumitting slaves expensive. To keep white residents from freeing old or infirm slaves, the town passed a law in 1728 that required owners manumitting such slaves to pay a fee of 110 pounds to the local treasury for the support of

historians in Rhode Island's contemporary black community have resulted in the "Buried History: Slavery and Freedom" tour of eighteenth-century Newport, introduced in the summer season of 2008. Drawing on research by Newport Historical Society curators as well as local historian and educator Theresa Guzman Stokes and her husband, executive director of the Newport Chamber of Commerce Keith Stokes, this tour introduces visitors to artifacts documenting slave life at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House and includes a walk through Newport's Common Burying Ground. The front portion of this cemetery features the grave markers of slaves and free black Americans, but it remained obscured and overgrown until Guzman and her husband undertook responsibility for its rehabilitation in the mid-1980s.<sup>101</sup>

Since tourism has long been Newport's most significant industry and the economic lifeblood of the city, the question I pose in this chapter is: how do the stories and spatial performances of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Newport at once present and obscure the contemporary legacy of slave-trading and slavery in Rhode Island? Finally and more broadly, how do such dominant tourist narratives conceptualize work and the co-constitutive natures of labor and leisure both historically and within a contemporary context?

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newly freed blacks. See Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, RI in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985): 81-83.

<sup>101</sup> For more on Newport's African Burying ground, see Paul Davis, "Saving the Past: God's Little Acre." Part of the *Providence Journal's* 2006 series "The Unrighteous Traffick: Rhode Island's Slave History" this article documents Guzman Stokes' working on a book about the burying ground, where roughly 280 Africans and African-Americans are buried. So far she has located information on 85 slaves and free blacks. Accessed online 10 November 2007 at <http://www.projo.com/extra/2006/slavery/text/day3-side1.htm>.

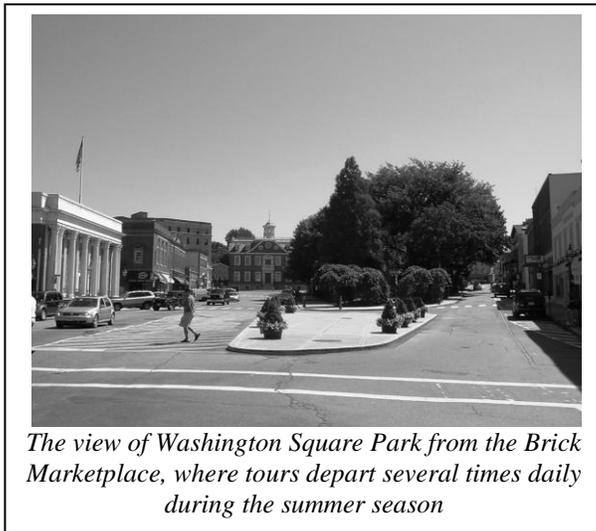
### *Colonial Newport as Spectacle for Middle-Class Tourism*

Under the direction of three dominant preservation and heritage organizations, the Newport Historical Society (NHS), the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) and the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF), Newport's historical narratives regarding the culture, economy, and commerce of the colonial period are served up annually to hundreds of thousands of tourists. An important element of this tourism product is the complement of walking tours run by the NHS. Conducted almost hourly from the Museum of Newport History during the peak tourist season, these tours include interior access to the architectural holdings of the Historical Society and the State of Rhode Island, as well as streetscapes constituted by the domestic colonial structures owned and leased by the Newport Restoration Foundation. Departing from the front door of the Museum of Newport History on Thames Street, where guests arriving early may peruse merchandise including books on Newport's social and architectural histories as well as the museum's current exhibits, each tour of colonial Newport begins with the same question. As visitors gaze across Washington Square (so named for a visit from the United States' esteemed first president) they are asked to identify what is missing from this picture of an otherwise iconic colonial-era New England town center.<sup>102</sup> The answer, as the tour guide will reveal if no one else guesses correctly, is a centrally located church.

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<sup>102</sup> Although Washington Square has officially been renamed Eisenhower Square in honor of a visit from the 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States, local residents and tour guides alike continue to refer to the area as Washington Square. Indeed, Washington spent a fair amount of time in colonial Newport, planning the battles of the American Revolution with French General Rochambeau in a house located on Vernon Street. The house, which still stands as a privately owned historical landmark, is the model (both in name and structure) for the home Washington went on to build on his Virginia plantation. Nevertheless, the desire to maintain the name "Washington Square" likely has much to do with Newport's claims to significance in the national narrative of colonial and early American histories. For more on Washington's early visits to Rhode Island, see Stephen Lucas's "George Washington and the Rhetoric of Presidential Leadership," *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*, Leroy G. Dorsey, editor (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002): 42-72.

While Newport suffers from no shortage of places of religious worship, including Touro Synagogue (the first Jewish temple constructed in the United States), the Great Friends Meetinghouse, home to Newport’s Quaker population from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Trinity Episcopal Church and even St. Mary’s, the Catholic church at which John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier recited their marriage vows, the city remains unique among New England colonial villages for its lack of a centrally-



located ecclesiastical structure. Instead of a church, the focal point of historic Newport is a civic structure known as the Colony House, which served as the seat of the state government throughout Newport’s “golden age” of maritime commerce.

Characterized by successful domestic trade with Boston and New York as well as with international locations as diverse and far-flung as the West Indies and Russia, this “golden age” stretched from 1680 to the eve of the American Revolution. Accordingly, the guided and independent walking tours of the City of Newport’s “historic hill” trace the social, political and economic roots of Newport’s overwhelming commercial success via stops at sites emphasizing various themes of downtown Newport’s development. While unguided tours do not include access to the interiors of these architectural treasures, groups accompanied by Newport Historical Society docents do allow visitors inside the Great Friends Meeting

House, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, and the Colony House during the one-and-a-half hour tour that promises to help visitors “Discover Colonial Newport Inside & Out.”

The Historical Society offers a full complement of tours throughout the summer and fall seasons, including shorter tours of the individual historic sites as well as the “History Detective Tour,” described as “[a]n interactive journey” during which visitors hear about the mysteries of Newport, and the “Lantern Tour of Colonial Newport,” via which guests are “transported through time on a lantern-lit tour of exquisitely preserved neighborhoods” of a city claiming to maintain the largest inventory of colonial-era structures in the nation.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, there is a Holiday Lantern Tour, offered in celebration of the winter festival season, and a “Rum and Revolution” tour that runs during the fall months and provides a history of drinking in Newport and other colonial American villages.

While the narratives provided on these tours of colonial Newport have understandably evolved over time as new information is uncovered and documented by the Newport Historical Society and the state’s broad spectrum of educational institutions and scholars, the themes of the tours have remained largely the same. The individual sites are imbued with particular symbolic significance by the accompanying narrative, with Washington Square Park (and its absence of a church), the Great Friends Meetinghouse and Touro Synagogue standing as icons of the separation between church and state and

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<sup>103</sup> In addition to the eighteenth-century structures owned and maintained by the Preservation Society of Newport County, the Newport Historical Society and the State of Rhode Island, the Newport Restoration Foundation alone claims an inventory of more than 80 preserved colonial and early American structures. Besides being “one of the largest collections of period architecture owned by a single organization anywhere in the country,” this aggregate of colonial structures places Newport well ahead of other towns settled at roughly the same time, including Annapolis, Maryland, which boasts just over 60 eighteenth-century structures. For more on the NRF’s collection and efforts, see “A Brief History of the Newport Restoration Foundation,” Accessed online at [www.newportrestoration.org](http://www.newportrestoration.org) 6 November 2008. For more on Annapolis’s inventory of colonial and early American architecture, see the town’s website, <http://www.ci.annapolis.md.us/info.asp?page=1426> accessed 19 October 2009.

religious freedom, respectively. The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house, so named for the succession of families to take up residence there, is an example of classic domestic colonial architecture of the affluent merchant class. Finally, the Colony House represents the seat of Rhode Island's secular colonial government.

If these structures represent the skeleton of Newport's colonial body, then the paths leading from one to the next are the sinews which connect them, as docents pause on narrow tree-lined cobblestone streets giving visitors time to read the historic placards posted on the restored colonials surrounding them and to impart contextual historical information. Guides explain the founding of the City of Newport, how it developed from a seaside village of religious exiles into what Rhode Island historian William G. McLoughlin refers to as "an imperial Entrepot."<sup>104</sup> They also take care to note the historical significance of the city in local, national and international contexts. Dressed in business casual attire, the guides are often college or graduate students who are serving as summer interns at the Historical Society. All are trained by the Newport Historical Society's professional staff of administrators and archivists, and the story they tell visitors is divided into themes of religious freedom (encompassing both freedom *of* religion and freedom *from* religion) and the commercial activities that funded the domestic architecture of the merchant class.

***"The Heretick Colony": Religious Liberty in the City by the Sea***

Beginning at the Brick Marketplace, looking across the church-less town square toward the Colony House, each guide quickly joins the continuum of historians who have argued that to trace the story of religious liberty in the United States is to begin with the

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<sup>104</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978).

cities of Providence and Newport and the biographies of the earliest European founders of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. While Roger Williams, whose exploits on the mainland are discussed in detail in chapters 1 and 5, settled further north along the Seekonk River in what is now Providence, Rhode Island, several other religious exiles of Massachusetts Bay chose to remain on Aquidneck Island, now renamed Rhode Island, officially dating their settlement to 1639. This island (heretofore referred to by its Narragansett Indian name, Aquidneck Island, to avoid confusion between the island and the state as a whole) is home not only to the city of Newport, but also Middletown and Portsmouth, and is the location where Anne Hutchinson, William Coddington, William Arnold and Samuel Gorton first settled before dispersing over the island and, eventually, throughout Providence Plantations.<sup>105</sup>

A guide especially familiar with the spatial politics of Rhode Island might even provide an introduction to a theme that will recur later, when discussing the end of Newport's commercial reign: the extant socio-political and economic tensions between the mainland, particularly the city of Providence, and the islands of the state. Though often considered a "citystate" dominated both historically and in contemporary contexts by Providence, the state capital, Rhode Island is actually a series of land masses located on the northeastern coastline to the south of Massachusetts and the northeast of Connecticut. Though the official state name references only two of these landmasses, a series of small islands are spread throughout Narragansett Bay between the state's southeastern coastline and Aquidneck Island. Hog Island, Dyer Island, Gould Island,

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<sup>105</sup> The earliest European settlers of Rhode Island first landed at Aquidneck Island in the area then known as Pocasset (now Portsmouth). Eventually, religious differences split the party into factions. While Anne Hutchinson and her followers remained in Portsmouth, William Coddington and his followers resettled in Newport. Roger Williams and his group traveled on to Providence; William Arnold led a party to Pawtuxet (now Pawtucket); and Samuel Gorton established a settlement in Shawomet (now Warwick). Ibid 3.

Dutch Island, Coaster's Harbor Island, Goat Island, Patience Island, and Rose Island are small and little known, even by many of the state's residents, though Conanicut Island is home to historic Jamestown; Prudence Island plays host to a number of small summer homes of Rhode Island residents and a new generation of the state's "summer colonists"; and Block Island supports a substantial town (New Shoreham) and remains a frequently profiled tourist destination for its miles of pristine sandy beaches and rocky cliffs.

Though Providence may be the contemporary seat of government power, the home of the majority of the state's socio-political nonprofit organizations, and the second largest city in New England, the stewards of Newport history are quick to remind visitors that it was indeed Aquidneck island, and not the state's mainland, on which several of the state's first towns were founded in 1639.<sup>106</sup>

As historian Carl Bridenbaugh makes clear in his work on the early Rhode Island settlements and the personages associated therewith, the story of these settlers has been well-recorded, distilled into myth and circulated among school-aged children, tourists and academics. According to a number of prominent historians, it was the early presence of these peaceful religious dissidents who desired only the liberty to exercise their religious beliefs which gained Rhode Island its reputation as the "heretick colony" and an "asylum to evildoers."<sup>107</sup> According to historian Sydney V. James, each of these exiles had their own particular religious axes to grind. While Anne Hutchinson was driven from Massachusetts Bay for insisting that she received divine inspiration directly from the Holy Spirit and arguing that faith alone, rather than good works, led to salvation, Roger

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<sup>106</sup> Though Roger Williams landed in Providence in 1636, top billing in the state's official moniker goes to Aquidneck Island, renamed Rhode Island. Sydney James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1975): 1.

<sup>107</sup> George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The Independent State* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc. in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1982): 11.

Williams raised the ire of his neighbors by calling for an absolute and total separation between religious and civil societies. Finally, Samuel Gorton, a maverick even by Rhode Island standards, “rejected any notion of establishing a church separate from the rest of animate nature” and rejected “all theology but his own.”<sup>108</sup>

Relocation from Massachusetts Bay did not put an end to these settlers’ religious disputes, however, as even these “hereticks” had little in common and quickly established disparate settlements throughout the state’s island and mainland territories. Indeed, according to official state chroniclers George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, Rhode Island’s founding personages were “stiff-necked individualists, runaways, and exiled heretics from religious and political authority, who agreed on little more than religious liberty for everyone.”<sup>109</sup>

Though this romantic narrative of the state’s principled founders dominated Rhode Island history until the 1980s and continues to inform the opening moments of the Newport Historical Society’s series of walking tours, more recent scholars have begun to complicate its exceptionalist premise, allowing the economic motivations of the state’s founding Europeans to enter into the picture and support their conclusions that even the most self-righteous and “otherwise-minded” of Rhode Island’s colonial population had their pragmatic moments.<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, more recent tours of Newport’s downtown “historic hill,” including one I took in 2006 and again in 2008, have begun to integrate the more mercenary portrait of colonial life in Newport presented by historian

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<sup>108</sup> James, *Colonial Rhode Island*: 101-102.

<sup>109</sup> Kellner and Lemons 11.

<sup>110</sup> Sydney V. James, “Where People Thought Otherwise, Rhode Island Before 1776,” *Newport History* 57.4 [1984]: 97-121. In his oft-cited claim that Anglophone Rhode Islanders before the Revolution were fractious and rebellious, particularly in response to the authority of Massachusetts Bay Colony, James is careful to make clear that this reputation was also born out in the European settlers’ relations with each other as they settled throughout Rhode Island.

Bridenbaugh in his 1974 text *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience*, the primary argument of which is that Rhode Island's reputation as a settlement of fiercely independent, unrepentantly contrary, and self-righteous religious cranks has been grossly exaggerated by scholars of Rhode Island history. Like historian Joanne Pope Melish, Bridenbaugh notes that such scholars, bent on crafting an exceptionalist rhetoric of the state's founding (possibly as a means of increasing Rhode Island's national significance or simply to tell a "better story") effectively sever the state from the overarching context of the social and economic trends of America's other British colonies.<sup>111</sup>

Bridenbaugh notes that Williams and his cohort were likely initially welcomed by the Wamponaug and Narragansett American Indian populations as a potential buffer between their territory and hostile Massachusetts Bay, and argues that Williams and the other religious exiles were hardly less politically savvy in their own decisions to relocate.<sup>112</sup> These religious dissidents did not flee to Rhode Island indiscriminately or in haste, Bridenbaugh concludes, but instead methodically planned their removal from the religiously restrictive Massachusetts to the more temperate climate and ample natural resources of Rhode Island. While religious liberty has traditionally been cited as the cause for English settlers' initial migration to and throughout the New England region during the American colonial period, Bridenbaugh notes that Williams, Hutchinson, Coddington, and other early European settlers planned their relocation as much for the availability of arable land and portly indigenous livestock ("fat mutton") as for the "liberty of conscience" so celebrated in the dominant narratives of the state's colonial

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<sup>111</sup> Joanne Pope Melish, "Reconsidering Rhode Island History," *Rhode Island History* 64.2 [Summer 2006]: 49-60.

<sup>112</sup> It has also been suggested that the appearance of the European settlers helped to further separate and otherwise resolve disputes between the eastern and western Wampanoag tribes.

history.<sup>113</sup> While some religious leaders in other colonies understood Rhode Island as “a chaos of all Religions” and a “receptacle of all sorts of riff-raff people,” these settlers saw the open land, welcoming Wampanoag, Massasoit, Narragansett, and Niantic Indian tribes, and access to the sea as desirable, and potential economic boons.<sup>114</sup> In the final contemporary analysis, then, many historians acknowledge that Newport’s early settlers were interested in not only freedom *of* religion (that each might practice according to his/her will), but also freedom *from* religion, enabling economic opportunity unfettered by restrictive moral ideologies of any kind.

Despite this more recent (and many historians might add, more balanced) portrait of the economic motivations of Newport’s early settlers, the religious structures of Newport are the site-specific icons of material culture which occasion the retelling of the city’s founding and help to reify the powerful myth of religious freedom as the conceptual foundation of colonial Newport. Indeed, it is by design, and not by accident, Newport County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Keith Stokes asserts, that the three earliest religious structures of the town form a semicircle circle around the major commercial section of Thames Street, with each structure located equidistantly to the town center at Washington Square.<sup>115</sup> While Trinity Church, designed by Richard Munday and built in 1725, is located on the southern end of Thames Street, the Great Friends Meetinghouse, constructed a quarter century earlier in 1699, stands just north of Washington Square on Farewell Street.<sup>116</sup> Finally, Touro Synagogue is tucked behind the

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<sup>113</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636-1690*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1974).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid* 3-4. For more on the specific American Indian tribes and their location throughout Rhode Island, see James, “Where People Thought Otherwise, Rhode Island Before 1776”: 97-99.

<sup>115</sup> Stokes interview with author.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

current NHS headquarters on Touro Street, located east of Washington Square in a quiet, primarily residential neighborhood.

Trinity Church, credited by NRF (Newport Restoration Foundation) Executive Director Pieter Roos as “one of the earliest basilica-style churches in America” is a multi-steepled structure and its architecture, argues Keith Stokes, still



testifies to the religious freedom championed in Newport.<sup>117</sup> According to Stokes, a longtime member of the church’s Anglican congregation, the stained windows, often associated with religious structures, were not installed in this church until the nineteenth century, and the spire still features a whale rather than a cross, demonstrating a commitment to maritime commerce and community rather than an exclusively Christian religious performance.<sup>118</sup>

Referenced as a testimony to the thriving religious freedom of Newport as well as the town’s religious diversity, the Great Friends Meeting House, constructed in 1699, well before either Trinity Church or Touro Synagogue, has lived several lives in its three-hundred year long tenure, serving as a meeting house for the local Quaker population in Newport as well as hosting the annual meeting of the New England Society of Friends

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<sup>117</sup> Pieter Roos, “Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List: Colonial Newport and the Lively Experiment,” submitted to the National Park Service: 8.

<sup>118</sup> Stokes interview with author October 16, 2008.

until 1905. When the annual New England meeting moved to Providence, the building remained in use by the local gathering of friends, but the structure was eventually deemed too large to suit their needs and was put up for sale in 1919. The Newport Community Center Association purchased the building in 1922 for use as a recreational facility for local children, and the structure was modified to accommodate public meetings and athletic events. The building was known as the *Great Friends Meeting House* and Mrs. Sydney Wright with the goal of restoring the structure to its mid-nineteenth century appearance.<sup>119</sup> Considered undesirable by the American colonies for their belief that God resided in each individual as well as for their commitment to the notion of equality for all in the eyes of God (Quakers were one of the earliest groups to call for the equal status of their female members), the Quakers were able to exist unmolested in Newport and developed into a significant constituency in the town, hosting lectures, building and maintaining a civic gathering place.<sup>120</sup> By 1727, the Society of Friends also served as a locus of anti-slavery sentiment in a town whose commercial success was essentially founded and supported by the traffick in enslaved Africans.

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<sup>119</sup> Roos 14.

<sup>120</sup> By 1720, Quakers constituted more than 50 percent of Newport's population. Indeed, according to Roos, while Pennsylvania is most closely associated with Quakerism, Newport was a site of Quaker resettlement 25 years before William Penn arrived in North America, and Newport enjoyed a higher per capita Quaker population than did Pennsylvania. See Pieter Roos, "Description of the Setting," 7 and 18.

The final religious structure along the tour route is Touro Synagogue, which is currently



undergoing a redesign that will feature a visitor's center. Built between 1759 and 1763, it appeared as though the synagogue might have outlived its usefulness as an operational religious structure by the early nineteenth century. By 1822, the congregation had largely dispersed as a result of the British

occupation of Newport during the Revolution, and the title to the property shifted to a New York-based group, the Congregation Shearith Israel. According to historian David Chase, who documents the Colonial Revival in Newport, the *Rhode Island American and General Advertiser* proposed in 1822 that the property might best be used as an example of “ancient architecture.”<sup>121</sup> Though it serves this purpose as a contemporary tourist attraction, the Synagogue in which George Washington once addressed a congregation about the role of religious liberty in the new nation was left an endowment of \$10,000 by Abraham Touro for the care and upkeep of the building. The Town of Newport accepted the endowment and reopened the building for tours and services. Today, Touro Synagogue once again houses a vibrant congregation of Newport



residents and visitors, and its proposed visitor’s center will feature murals depicting the interconnection between Newport’s Jewish population and the diverse community of colonial Newport as a whole.<sup>122</sup>

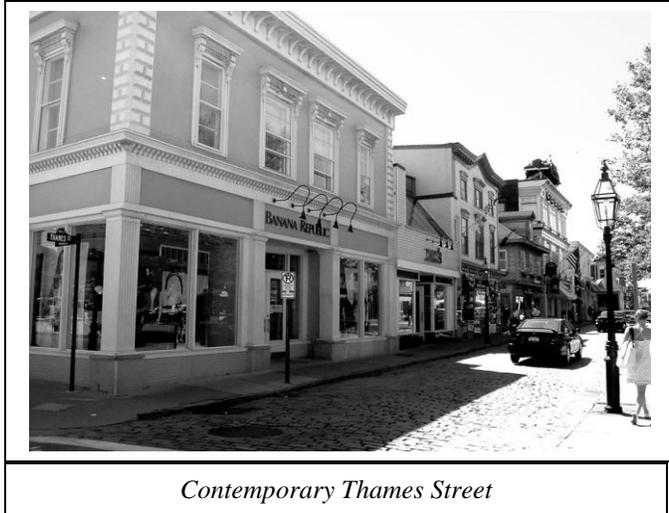
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<sup>121</sup> David Chase “Notes on the Colonial Revival in Newport; Escaping the ‘Vandalism of Civilization.’” *Newport History* 55.2 [1982]: 40.

<sup>122</sup> Stokes interview with author.

*The Sea Trade and the Rise of the Merchant Class*

While religious life in colonial Newport was thriving and doubtless contributed to the transformation of private people into public citizens of the town,



*Contemporary Thames Street*

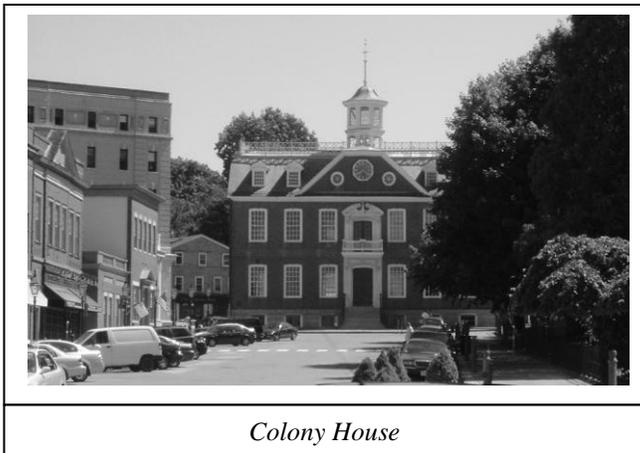
civic life in Newport was officially structured around a small section of what is now the lower Thames Street neighborhood. Once lined with shops and wharves, lower Thames has been significantly restructured as a tourist destination. The Brick Market, an eighteenth century clearinghouse for merchants, center of trade and the home of the Newport town government for the second half of the nineteenth century, now serves as the historic anchor of several shopping plazas mixing upscale national chains including Pier 1 Imports, J. Crew, the Gap, and Banana Republic, with local stores specializing in homemade fudge, ice cream and candy as well as tee shirts, scrimshaw magnets and postcards.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, the wharves of Newport Harbor have been transformed from the center of thriving domestic and international trade into a marina housing private yachts, commercial touring boats, and the occasional historic tall ship. Situated at the intersection of Thames and Touro Streets, the Brick Marketplace itself now houses the Museum of Newport History (managed by the NHS) and serves as the starting point for the historic

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<sup>123</sup> Primarily associated with seaside towns throughout New England, scrimshaw art is usually crafted from bones or other biological artifacts of sea mammals, particularly whales. Sailors on whaling vessels would fill free time by carving or engraving onto the bones and then lining the engravings with mineral-based pigments to highlight the lines drawn. This practice became common during the early nineteenth century. Contemporary tourist products like magnets are crafted from plastic or other synthetic substances and printed with line-drawn ships and other elements associated with maritime trade.

walking tours. It is from this point that guides try to conjure a view of colonial Newport as a “mercantile metropolis” for twenty-first century tourists.<sup>124</sup> The narrative here draws on information from sources such as Elaine Forman Crane’s portrait of colonial Newport on the cusp of its golden age of trade. In her text *A Dependent People: Newport, RI in the Revolutionary Era*, Crane describes the spatial dimensions of this small but bustling mercantile center:

The word “compact” describes Newport best; the town did not sprawl very far from the waterfront, which was the hub of activity. Wharves stretched for about a mile along the marvelously protected harbor. Sometimes if the warehouses were filled to capacity, the tall ships, their billowy sails now semi-furled, would wend their way in and out of the old wooden piers searching for a likely spot to unload merchandise. The sea gulls, attracted by the smell of fish and spilled rum, screeched their delight, adding to the cacophony of the waterfront.<sup>125</sup>



Though the view to Newport’s colonial wharves from the Colony House across Washington Square is now largely obstructed by shopping plazas and pricey hotels, the upper level of this structure, which houses the old legislative chamber,

still features a view of Newport harbor, suggesting the strong connection between Newport’s commercial success and the sea not only during the city’s golden age of trade, but also in the present tense, during its golden age of tourism. Construction on the building began in 1739, one hundred years after the original settlement of Europeans on Aquidneck Island, and was completed in 1743. Although the Colony House originally

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<sup>124</sup> Crane 48.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid 49.

served as the seat of Rhode Island government (and remains the third oldest state house still standing the United States), a copy of the building was erected in Providence in 1760, initiating a competition between the two locations for civic significance in the colony that still endures into the twenty-first century.<sup>126</sup> The Colony House continued to serve in an increasingly limited capacity as the home of Rhode Island government until 1901, when the state's administrative affairs were officially shifted to a new state house in Providence, despite Newport's truculent resistance to this relocation.<sup>127</sup> Decrying plans for the new State House in Providence, an 1872 article in *The Newport Mercury* defended the preservation credentials of Newport and its citizens:

The old capital is now in good repair and will probably for another century answer all the purposes for which it was built, for we are different from our friends at the North part of the state; they are for wiping out (their) old State House and putting in its place an expensive building of modern architecture, while we delight in retaining (our) old building that has had within its walls WASHINGTON, LAFAYETTE, ROCHAMBEAU, GREEN, [sic] and a number of other Revolutionary Patriots, the Perrys, and nine of the Presidents of the United States.<sup>128</sup>

The Colony House is now the only structure in Newport owned and operated by the state of Rhode Island (as opposed to the three dominant preservation agencies of Newport) and it stands as a monument to the events that once unfolded within its walls, including the nineteenth century trial of Rhode Island constitutional reformer Thomas Dorr, whose attempt to secure voting rights for all white male citizens regardless of property ownership was thwarted during the 1840s.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Chase 45. For more on the architectural significance of the Colony House, see Pieter Roos 5-8.

<sup>127</sup> Chase.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>129</sup> For a brief overview of the Dorr rebellion and its significance in the national crisis surrounding voting rights and constitutionality, see Kellner and Lemons 43-51.

Despite the presence of two portraits of Dorr which figure prominently in the building's legislative chamber, and the significance of the Colony House to both state and national histories (particularly since the Dorr War over voting rights and representation was reflective of the general constitutional crises experienced in every state in the union from the period of 1830 to 1860), when contemporary visitors arrive in the legislative chamber of the Colony House these days they might better recognize the location from Steven Spielberg's feature-length film *Amistad*.<sup>130</sup> Based on a court case resulting from the 1839 rebellion of a group of illegally captured Africans aboard the Spanish ship *La Amistad*, Spielberg's film made use of several locations in Providence and Newport, relying on Rhode Island's State House as a stand-in for the U.S. Capitol Building and filming some of the most famous courtroom scenes in the legislative chamber of Newport's Colony House.<sup>131</sup>

While Newport has been featured in a number of films throughout the years, including *Meet Joe Black*, *The Great Gatsby*, *True Lies* and the BBC adaptation of Edith Wharton's last unfinished novel *The Buccaneers*, these films have traditionally drawn on the ornate interiors and lavish grounds of the city's Gilded Age mansions, which signal Newport's rebirth during the mid-nineteenth century as a playground for America's elite social class of wealthy industrial "robber barons." But *Amistad*, filmed in 1997, breaks

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<sup>130</sup> Feminist historian Nancy Isenberg notes that between the years 1830 and 1860 every state held one or more constitutional conventions for the purposes of revision and/or amendment. See Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 16. Similarly, scholar of communication and sociology Michael Schudson argues that the period from 1801-1865 was a significant one in defining citizenship in legal language, while conceptions of that legally-binding language were transformed from 1865-1920. See Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>131</sup> Though the actual events on which *Amistad* is based occurred in New Haven, Connecticut, Spielberg filmed much of the movie in Newport and on the extensive grounds of the Rhode Island State House in Providence. For more on Spielberg's filming locations, see the "Behind the Scenes Featurette" available on the 1999 DVD release of Spielberg's 1997 film.

this Hollywood tradition, instead drawing attention to the city's eighteenth century economic heyday of international trade. Indeed, Spielberg's use of the Colony House for the interior courtroom settings of a film about illegally enslaved Africans on trial not only for their freedom but also their lives seems especially appropriate given colonial Newport's role in the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>132</sup>

While economic and social historians whose work concerns colonial Newport and/or the role of North American ports in the triangle trade agree that no Rhode Island fortunes were made exclusively from the slave trade, the diversified financial portfolios of several prominent families including the Vernons of Newport, the Browns of Providence and the DeWolfs of Bristol clearly included "the Guinea trade" between Rhode Island, the West Indies and Africa.<sup>133</sup> Though it was once believed unusual for the slave ships outfitted in Newport, Bristol or Providence to bring their human cargo back to Rhode Island (acquired in Africa, the mythos of the trade suggests that slaves were usually sold or traded for molasses, rum or other goods in various areas throughout the Caribbean, the ships returning to Rhode Island ports with only the profits of those sales), it is now recognized that Rhode Island did indeed rely extensively on slave labor, particularly in the largely agrarian town of Narragansett. Additionally, it was not unusual for individuals of the upper or merchant classes of both Newport and Providence to list among their property at least four or five enslaved Africans responsible for overseeing

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<sup>132</sup> Important to note is the fact that by 1839, when the *Amistad* case came to light, slave trading had long been prohibited. Rhode Island outlawed the traffick in 1787. A federal prohibition followed in 1790 and reauthorized the ban in 1807. See journalist Charles Rappleye's *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006): 248, 299.

<sup>133</sup> Although no significant historical work has been published as yet on the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island or the Vernons of Newport, several works do chronicle the representative exploits of the Brown family. See Rappleye's *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution*. See also James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952) and Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Nineteenth Century* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1968).

work in the house, grounds and livery.<sup>134</sup> In an interview given to the *Providence Journal* in 2006, Keith Stokes, Executive Director of the Newport County Chamber of Commerce, went so far as to claim, “Anyone who was a merchant or a craftsman owned a slave...By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century [in Newport], Africans are the entire workforce.”<sup>135</sup>

Despite the publication of a number of scholarly articles and full length texts, however, the role of the slave trade, and indeed, of both enslaved and free blacks in the social, moral and financial economies of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Newport has remained largely unremarked-upon during tours of the historic city until very recently, and the area as a whole bears little explicit evidence of the notorious triangle trade. While this omission is likely related to the shame attached to Rhode Island’s role in the slave trade, one of the effects of that negligence is the almost total erasure of the presence of both enslaved and free blacks from the dominant tourist narrative of the state’s colonial and early American histories. Glossing over the role of Rhode Island merchants in the triangle trade also makes possible the contemporary excuse of participation in the trade as in accordance with the activities of other similar North American port cities during the colonial period, rendering Newport, Providence, Bristol and Rhode Island as a whole no more or less guilty than any other area engaging in the trade of human cargo. In fact, though, recent work reveals that Rhode Island’s

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<sup>134</sup> In his work on the Brown family’s forays into the slave trade, Charles Rappleye cites a note from family patriarch James Brown, who advised his ship’s captain that he should bring home to Rhode Island any slaves that failed to sell abroad. See Rappleye, 17. Subsequent chapters on the relationship between future abolitionist Moses Brown and his slaves also reveal the number of slaves relied on in the domestic lives of the Providence merchant class. See Rappleye, 127-149. For more on the slave labor used in Narragansett, Rhode Island, see Robert Fitts, *Inventing New England’s Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth-Century Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>135</sup> Paul Davis, “Strangers in a Strange Land: Newport’s Slaves” March 14, 2006. Accessed online at <http://www.projo.com/extra/2006/salvery/text/day3.htm> 10 November 2007.

involvement in slave trafficking was decidedly more extensive than most other ports in the New World, and not limited to the elite class, as was originally believed.

As early as 1981, historian Jay Coughtry's text *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade 1700-1807* makes clear that "the Rhode Island slave trade and the American slave trade are virtually synonymous," a contention that is borne out by later scholars, including Charles Rappleye, who provides evidence in the form of numbers of slave-ship departures that "[b]y the time of the French and Indian War, vessels from Newport carried more than 70 percent of the American traffic in slaves."<sup>136</sup> Though Coughtry is less willing to set a specific percentage, that number (and some larger figures) is supported by historians working later and with the benefits of new sources.<sup>137</sup> While they may not agree on the specific numbers or profiles of individuals and institutions involved, however, all the scholars of Rhode Island's participation in the slave trade agree that the dubious honor of the longest period of engagement in the trade of any colonial holding in North America goes unreservedly to the smallest state in the union. Indeed, while historian Rachel Chernos Lin's article on slavery in Rhode Island makes clear that the structure of funding slave voyages enabled small-scale merchants to invest in the traffic of Africans to the Caribbean and North America with little significant financial risk, Coughtry's and Rappleye's texts offer significant evidence that the wealthiest Rhode Island traders, such as the DeWolfs and the Browns, participated in the

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<sup>136</sup> Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle Trade: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981): xi. Rappleye 55.

<sup>137</sup> Besides Rappleye's recent work on the specific personages involved in the trade, several other articles working with new materials have been published since Coughtry's authoritative study. Following quickly after Coughtry is Sarah Deutsch's "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735-1774," *The New England Quarterly* 55.2 [June 1982]: 229-253. Also helpful is Rachel Chernos Lin's "The Rhode Island Slave-Traders: Butchers, Bakers and Candlestick-Makers" *Slavery and Abolition* 23.3 [December 2002]: 21-38, which makes use of the newly compiled Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom and argues that it was not only Rhode Island's elites who participated in the slave trade.

trade well after it was made illegal in Rhode Island in March of 1794.<sup>138</sup> While the penalties of violating the Rhode Island legislation were relatively stiff (including the forfeiture of the captured ship's cargo, all profits made on the voyage, and even the outfitted ship itself), slaving was so lucrative that it remained a worthwhile enterprise for investors, particularly after the leading families succeeded in securing a new customs district in Bristol and engaging an agent who would turn a blind eye to illegal "Guinea" voyages.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, both Coughtry and Rappleye note that the heaviest number of slaving voyages departing from Newport and Bristol were recorded between 1805 and 1808, when the banning of the trade was finally enforced by federal law.<sup>140</sup>

### *Signs of Success: Domestic Architecture as Legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*

Though the slave ships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have long been removed from Rhode Island's ports, the cultural and material artifacts of their cargo continue to haunt the landscapes of Newport, Bristol, and Providence albeit subtly. From numerous slaving ventures came not only captured Africans, but also the granite that now lines the sides of warehouses and other structures in Newport and Bristol. Additionally, profits made from the triangle trade were not only privately reinvested (often in the industrial projects undertaken during the nineteenth century in the central and northern

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<sup>138</sup> Rappleye 248.

<sup>139</sup> For more on the funding of slave voyages and how small-scale businessmen (and some women) could afford to participate, see Lin 24-25. Coughtry notes that in 1807, the year when slaving (though not slave ownership) officially became illegal, "Newport and Bristol merchants owned two of every three" slave ships and Rappleye demonstrates through information regarding illegal slaving voyages made by John Brown that the wealthiest of merchants involved had no intention of giving up the trade. See Coughtry 6-7, 34) and Rappleye 338. For more on the penalties assigned by the Rhode Island anti-slave traffic legislation, see Rappleye 299.

<sup>140</sup> The first federal anti-slave-trafficking legislation was passed in March 1794. Yet, according to Rappleye 50 slave ships departed Rhode Island in 1805, the highest number ever recorded in one year. Rappleye also cites Herbert S. Klein's text *The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1999) when he states that the pattern of growth and decline in the slave trade simply mirrored labor demands, and concludes that legislation had little effect on the actual practice of the trade at all. See Rappleye 338-339.

parts of the state's mainland), but also used to fund civic projects. Historians of the period note that the built environs of Newport, Bristol and Providence, including the paved streets and fine stock of colonial domestic architecture, were financed by the substantial sums accrued from trafficking voyages.

Indeed, the dominant narratives of domestic colonial architecture of the merchant classes of all three cities have lately begun to feature information about the role of slave trafficking and slavery in the construction, financing and everyday activities associated with such households. While the homes that are owned and leased by the Newport Restoration Foundation are noted with prominently placed placards stating the original owner and date of the house's construction, only two colonial homes in Newport are open for public tours on an extensive basis by Newport's preservation community. The Historical Society operates the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House while the Preservation Society oversees the Hunter House.

Included on the "Discover Newport Inside and Out" tour run by the NHS, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house is located to the west of the Colony House, at 17



*Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House*

Broadway. Built in 1697, this house is introduced as a typical two-story, four-room wooden colonial structure of the type frequently built and maintained by the merchant class of sea-faring New England towns. As the name of the house indicates, the property changed hands a number of times both before and after the British occupation; it also underwent significant additions in 1725, 1765, and 1785 and has recently been the site of

archeological digs sponsored by the NHS which have significantly altered the tourist narrative associated with the site.<sup>141</sup> Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this house stood primarily as a symbol of typical merchant class domestic architecture, as well as the occasion for interesting anecdotes about its various owners, one of whom was a British Loyalist.<sup>142</sup> More recently, however, archeologists and other analysts working on the property have discovered what they believe to be African artifacts that would likely have belonged to slaves. These artifacts include pouches of herbs as well as pieces of earthenware pottery, some of which were discovered in the attic, suggesting that the slaves were domiciled in the house's cramped upper chambers, as well as occupying sites of work including the kitchen and rear yard. Such artifacts have recently been presented to disprove the earlier thesis that Newport residents trafficked in slaves but did not own them. If slaves were present in this house, the more recent narrative suggests, then other domestic colonial structures in Newport might also contain evidence of the "peculiar institution" as it was conducted in Rhode Island.

These archaeological discoveries are valuable for several reasons. Besides providing "ocular proof" to Newport tourists that slavery (and not only the traffick in slaves) was practiced by elite Newport families, these artifacts also provide some sense of connection to the enslaved people living and working in Newport during the colonial and early American periods. Additionally, these artifacts are valuable evidence supporting the conclusion of scholars working almost exclusively from written tax records revealing

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<sup>141</sup> Roos 40.

<sup>142</sup> British Loyalist Martin Howard, Jr. purchased the house in 1757 but got into trouble with his neighbors when he published a pamphlet in 1765 supporting the king's right to tax the colonies. While many Newporters responded in writing, a mob appeared at Howard's home during the Stamp Act crisis and burned Howard in effigy, as well as damaging the house before chasing Howard and several of his supporters to the safety of a ship departing for London. See Roos 41.

which families owned slaves, how many they owned, and the taxes they paid for them. Despite their extraordinary value, however, the presence of such artifacts is hardly shocking, as most scholars documenting the slave trade in Newport are careful to include lists of prominent slave-traders, and all such lists include several members of the Wanton family. In a list developed by Elaine Forman Crane, Joseph and William Wanton are recorded as owning 6 slaves in 1774. In the same year, Gideon Wanton reported owning 4, Joseph G. Wanton 3, and Philip Wanton 2.<sup>143</sup> According to Elaine Forman Crane, Newport's late eighteenth century population included a surprisingly high percentage of slaves for a mercantile (as opposed to agrarian) area in New England:

Newport's participation in the slave trade made it relatively easy for the local population to acquire slaves. In 1774 the census takers reported 1,084 bond servants in a total population of 9,209—an unusually high proportion of blacks for a New England community. Although slaveholding was widespread among the affluent, those trading slaves monopolized the domestic market. In other words, the merchant-owners... held more slaves than people engaged in other pursuits. Distillers also seem to have made good use of slave labor, as did people with large landholdings.<sup>144</sup>

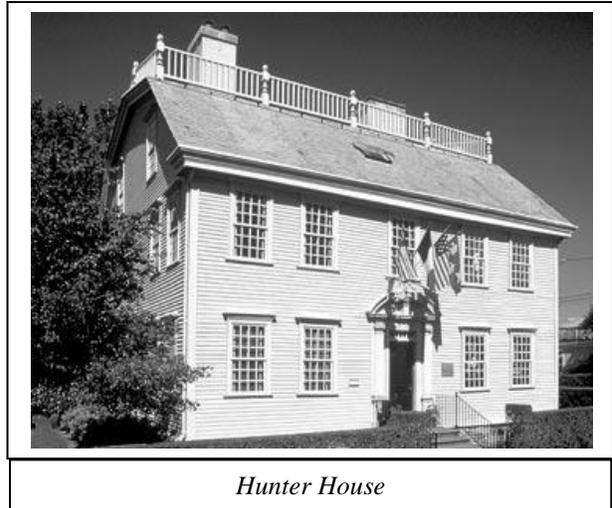
While the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House testifies to the presence of slave ownership in Newport, the William Hunter House acts as a more subtle form of evidence of the fortunes made from slave trafficking. Also located on Washington Street, the Hunter House is the only other colonial home open for public tours in Newport, and is operated by the Preservation Society. Built on land originally purchased by slave trader Jonathon Nichols, Jr. in 1748, William Hunter, a doctor by trade, purchased the house for \$5,000 in 1805. While tours do not reveal whether slaves ever lived and worked in this home, tax lists make clear that Hunter owned 3 slaves in 1774, well before he purchased

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<sup>143</sup> Crane 25-29.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid 24.

the house.<sup>145</sup> The home now serves as an example of elite domestic architecture and as a repository for a collection of fine furnishings made by Rhode Island's renowned woodworking families the Goddards and Townsends.



***The Stewards of Newport's Pasts: The Preservation Community of Newport County***

The three-pronged dominant narrative of colonial Newport that accounts for the city's histories of religious liberty, the sea trade and the rise of the merchant class, and spectacular architecture of the elite class of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries have been carefully curated and maintained by Newport's well-established preservation community. Indeed, without the work of the Newport Historical Society (NHS), the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) and the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF), as well as the several smaller organizations and associations which pre-dated these three dominant organizations, Newport may well have remained the down-at-heels economic dead zone it had become first when the British occupation ended in 1793 and then again by the mid-twentieth century. Completing much of their most notable work in the 1960s and 1970s, when the last of the Gilded Age mansions were shuttered and the military industrial complex relocated elsewhere, taking all its jobs with it, these organizations have long and distinguished histories, and are credited with setting significant precedents for historic preservation practices and policies

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid 25-29.

for the United States as a whole. As mentioned in the opening chapters, historical tourism must experience at least three stages: identification, preservation/stabilization and finally the marketing of specific historical assets. Without the well-documented efforts of these three organizations, Newport would never have developed into a contemporary vacation spot and a major locus of historic tourism.

While the Newport Conference and Visitors Bureau (CVB) markets the city as an assemblage of attractions available for tourist consumption (working to bring together a large number of cultural heritage management professionals and organizations), the individual tourist products of Newport County have preservation histories stretching back to the Colonial Revival period of the mid- to late nineteenth century, during which affluent and civic-minded Newporters (and Newport-loving summer residents) undertook the restoration projects that have prolonged the lives of commercial, domestic and civic colonial-era structures. While the Colonial Revival movement predates by over a century the interest in historic preservation that took hold and spread throughout the United States in the 1960s and 1970s on the eve of America's bicentennial celebrations, both periods were characterized by a romantic view of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the rise of urban tourism from 1850 to 1915, well-documented by historian Catherine Cocks, reflects the increasing interest in regional and national heritage that also inspired the preservation movement. According to Cocks, Americans' increasing interest in touring the built environment of U.S. urban centers had everything to do with crafting a coherent and celebratory national past. This argument rings particularly true if applied to the post-bellum period, during which visiting American cities in lieu of European destinations not only testified to Americans' growing interest in domestic landscapes, but

also amounts to popular attempts at reunification of the once-divided and discrete regions of the U.S. As railroads began to surpass other overland methods of travel, including wagons and stagecoaches, affluent Americans suddenly had at their disposal the technology and time to indulge their new inclination for domestic exploration of the commonalities linking areas of the country once believed to be permanently divided by sectional interests. Instead of contextualizing themselves according to specific regions, such as the North, the South or the West, then, Americans during this period developed identities that were national in scope, and required historical evidence to construct a shared past that could be of service in the present. Supporting this interpretation, Cocks states,

The notion of a specifically American “heritage” required a new conception of history. Instead of a well-thumbed, eternally timely primer in morality and politics, history had to be understood as the product of a linear, forward movement of time, making the past quite distinct from the present. Rather than a source of universal insight into the human condition, this past had to be reconceived as belonging to one, unique people and illuminating their peculiar genius. Once such a perspective emerged, the collection and preservation of “historical” materials and edifices would become something more than antiquarianism. It would be an essential element of cultural nationalism.”<sup>146</sup>

For both affluent Victorians and nostalgic bicentennial celebrants, then, the colonial period was a time when civic culture fairly crackled with the revolutionary rhetoric of freedom and liberty that would eventually vanquish the British troops and result in American independence and a fully democratic society. It was a time characterized, they believed, by “a social order in which prosperity, erudition and

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<sup>146</sup> Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 177. For more on the idea of the post-bellum period as one of national reunification and a chance to construct not only a national identity, but also a strong centralized federal government, see

refinement were the rule.”<sup>147</sup> In the hopes of staving off the encroaching industrialization and urbanization that had, by the 1870s, spread throughout much of the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, then, Newport’s earliest preservation community made a conscious choice to “keep [the city’s] public facilities and image decidedly antique” and in the managing hands of the civic elite, a strategy well in keeping with the steadily developing preservation movement afoot in the post-bellum period.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, according to Cocks, even as a coherent national past encouraged assimilation and unity among the United States body politic (and in smaller regional locations where historic preservation was encouraged expressly for this purpose), “historical commemoration also encouraged well-to-do Americans to reassert their authority in the city by claiming cultural ownership of it.”<sup>149</sup>

Given the wealth of centennial events and the formation of historical societies that characterized the 1860s and 1870s, Cocks’ argument regarding these first official preservation efforts is persuasive, particularly in the case of Newport, since its colonial past was Newport’s most enduring claim to national significance by the late nineteenth century. Indeed, while there is evidence that manufacturing was attempted in Newport during the mid-1800s in attempts to keep up with mainland cities including Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket, all of these ventures had either failed or finally relocated to the mainland by the 1870s, leaving Newport no choice but to cultivate its historic maritime heritage as a tourist attraction—a landscape that both emphasizes and performs domesticity and leisure. As contemporary cultural theorists and scholars of tourism will note, however, leisure, too is hard work to maintain, and reliant on a solid municipal

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<sup>147</sup> Chase 38.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Cocks 182.

infrastructure and service economy, both of which developed in Newport during the latter half of the nineteenth century as affluent residents eschewed active engagement in politics in favor of more genteel civic activities such as historic preservation and the development of cultural resources including the Newport Historical Society (NHS), founded in 1854.<sup>150</sup>

The NHS is now the steward of several historic properties, including the Great Friends Meeting House and the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, as well as the Sabbatarian Meeting House, which accommodates the NHS library and administrative offices, and the Brick Marketplace, which now serves as the Museum of Newport History. The NHS is also acknowledged as the major repository of Newport social, genealogical and architectural history by the state-wide preservation community. Indeed, Executive Director and CEO of the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) Trudy Coxe openly acknowledges the dominance of the NHS in maintaining the historical narratives of Newport County. In an interview conducted July 10, 2008, Coxe notes that her organization does maintain a limited library of relevant materials, but stated unequivocally, “if you want to do research on Newport, [the NHS] is where you go.”<sup>151</sup>

Indeed, the Historical Society not only acts as a storehouse for archival materials and other special collections, but is explicitly engaged in historical tourism, distilling their collected artifacts and accounts into exhibits, tours and narratives which in turn

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<sup>150</sup> Harold Hurst’s unpublished dissertation, “The Elite Class of Newport, RI, 1830-1860” details the city’s attempts to cultivate industry as well as providing a portrait of the civic activities of Newport’s financial and social elite. Drawing on tax assessment lists and will as well as noting institutional affiliations, Hurst notes that the city’s elites included both residents and summer visitors. He defines this class of people as possessing “estates assessed at between \$10,000 and \$20,000” as well as power and social standing as determined by their engagement with voluntary associations. For more on the early attempts made by Newport elites to cultivate industry (particularly manufacturing), see Hurst, “The Elite Class of Newport, RI, 1830-1860,” Ph.D. dissertation (New York University 1976): 10-17. For more on his definition of “elite” see Hurst 23-49.

<sup>151</sup> Trudy Coxe, interview with author July 10, 2008.

circulate as cultural products to Newport tourists, museum visitors and subscribers to the Society's quarterly publication *Newport History*. Newport preservationist Esther Fisher Benson also traces the official start of Newport's colonial restoration to 1928, when the NHS received the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House as a gift from Peyton Hazard and set about the restoration of that 1699 domestic structure. According to Fisher Benson, this restoration was both "conscientious and serious" and helped set a national standard for historic preservation, as well as encouraging a more organized approach to managing the city's colonial resources. The early preservation efforts of the NHS, she argues, led to the development of the original Oldport Association, acknowledged as one of the first modern preservation organizations to help foster a sense of pride in Newport's colonial heritage.<sup>152</sup>

The Oldport Association flourished between roughly 1930 and 1945, organizing summer fairs to raise civic awareness of Newport's architectural treasures, as well as the funds needed to restore them. The Association was officially formed in 1929 to save a summer boarding house once known as "the Faisneau" and continued its work restoring (and often relocating) individual colonial-era structures throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, when it eventually made way for another, longer-lasting organization known as the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC).

Though more commonly associated these days with the opulent domestic architecture of the mid to late nineteenth century, the Preservation Society was originally formed in 1945 to save a colonial home known as the Hunter House. Built in the 1740s, the Hunter House is so named for William Hunter, the patriarch of the family that

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<sup>152</sup> Esther Fisher Benson, "The Restoration Movement in Newport, Rhode Island from 1963-1976," *Newport History* 57.2 [1984]: 38.

occupied the house for nearly 50 years. During Hunter's tenure, the house was allowed to fall into disrepair, and after his death it passed to a Boston family named the Storers before being donated to St. Joseph's Church for use as a convent.<sup>153</sup> When even the church no longer had a use for the house, it was rumored that the interior paneling was going to be removed to a mansion in New York. Chafing at this potential threat to Newport's architectural heritage, several women of Newport's elite class, including Mrs. George Henry Warren and Countess Laszlo Szechenyi (nee Gladys Vanderbilt, daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt II) raised money to purchase the home. According to Preservation Society CEO Trudy Coxe, while the Warren family itself made a private donation toward the \$15,000 purchase price, the Countess, still the owner of her parents' Bellevue Avenue estate The Breakers, agreed to open her home for tours at the price of \$1 per visitor, the proceeds of which would go toward saving the Hunter House, as well as setting a precedent for opening the mansions of Bellevue Avenue as tourist attractions.<sup>154</sup> Their efforts were overwhelmingly successful, and the Preservation Society was officially formed from that inaugural effort, spurring several private citizens to similarly purchase and restore a number of colonial structures between 1946 and 1961.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the fact that it was founded to save a domestic structure dating to the 1740s, the Preservation Society is now primarily associated with the stewardship of the Gilded Age mansions lining Bellevue Avenue and the Cliff Walk, most of which were erected between 1850 and 1901. Indeed, the organization's website,

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<sup>153</sup> *A Guidebook to Newport Mansions*, Preservation Society of Newport County and Fort Church Publishers (Little Compton, RI: 1984): 6-7.

<sup>154</sup> Trudy Coxe, interview with author, July 10, 2008.

<sup>155</sup> Between 1946 and 1961, the captain Phillips House at 42 Elm Street was restored by John Perkins Brown; the John Steven House at Thames and North Baptist was restored by Graham and Nancy Carey; the Claggett House at 22 Bridge Street was restored by Esther Bates; and the Peter Simon house was restored by John P. Brown. See Benson 39.

www.newportmansions.org, acknowledges this reputation, and provides information about the more than 13 properties currently owned and maintained by the Preservation Society, including The Breakers and Marble House, Rosecliff, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Kingscote, and Portsmouth's Green Animals.<sup>156</sup> Explored in much greater detail in chapter 4, the Preservation Society is the sole steward of Victorian and Gilded Age cultural, economic and architectural histories in Newport, a role resulting from a change in focus after the organization's successful preservation of the Hunter House. Though the Preservation Society continued to assist with other colonial restorations throughout the 1940s, it soon turned its attention to the great houses lining "the Avenue," across town from the original colonial settlement at the wharves of Newport harbor. In an interview conducted in 1984 as part of an oral history project sponsored by the Newport Historical Society, Esther Fisher Benson states:

The Preservation Society was its own self and they didn't want to...see they went off to [Bellevue Avenue]. They didn't want to get mixed up with anything else. ...[O]f course in the beginning when they did the Hunter House they were in colonial houses and they put up the money for Tom [Benson, first full-time staff member of the Oldport Association] to take photographs of historic Newport the year of Operation Clapboard [1963] when so much was happening... They were so busy with their own responsibility that it was pretty hard to get them to help out with ours... Raising the money to take care of those mansion houses was an enormous proposition... You have to realize that. Those were the houses that they loved and they're the ones they wanted to preserve. I don't have any trouble understanding that, not a bit.<sup>157</sup>

This shift in the Preservation Society's focus, while perhaps understandable within the preservation community, nevertheless left the Historical Society, with its limited

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<sup>156</sup> For illustrated and pictorial histories of the Newport mansions, see *A Guidebook to Newport Mansions*, Preservation Society of Newport County and Fort Church Publishers (Little Compton, RI: 1984) and Thomas Gannon's *Newport Mansions: The Gilded Age*, with photography by Richard Cheek (Fort Church Publishers Little Compton, RI): 1996. See also James Yarnall's *Newport Through its Architecture: A History of Styles from Postmedieval to Postmodern* (Salve Regina Press: Newport, RI): 2005.

<sup>157</sup> Benson, interview with Sue Madden, interviewer from Newport Historical Society, April 16, 1984 at Fisher's home, 62 Washington Street. Transcription accessed in the Newport Historical Society archives July 2008.

resources, as the only major steward of Newport's colonial architecture. Though many of the significant religious and civic structures, including Touro Synagogue, the Great Friends Meeting House, and the Colony House had long since been restored during the mid-nineteenth century, a great percentage of Newport's eighteenth and early nineteenth century domestic structures remained in disrepair, owned or rented in the 1950s and 1960s by members of Newport's sizable community of working poor residents, who could afford neither to stabilize nor restore these houses to their "golden age" glory.

Though the Gilded Age had effectively ended with the 1913 institution of the federal income tax, members of some of America's most prominent families still summered in Newport throughout the 1960s, and President John F. Kennedy frequented his wife's estate, Hammersmith Farm, so often that it became known colloquially as the "summer White House." Accordingly, while Newport may have lacked an effective municipal infrastructure, a self-supporting economy, and a uniformly affluent residential population, it was not at a loss for civic boosters among its wealthiest summer residents, one of whom was North Carolina tobacco heiress Doris Duke, whose interest in restoring Newport's domestic colonial structures eventually led to the organization of the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF) in 1968.

The last of the three major contemporary organizations concerning itself with the preservation of Newport's historical heritage, the NRF was organized to rescue colonial houses from decay or the threat of demolition, move them out of harm's way, and restore them. While smaller grassroots organizations such as the reconstituted Oldport Association and Operation Clapboard (a short-lived organization which saved a number of colonial houses during 1963 and 1964), the expenses associated with restoration were

mounting, leaving individuals or small groups unable to shoulder the financial burden.

According to the NRF:

The initial cost of old buildings available was rising, as was the cost of restoration, while the stock of buildings available were in poorer condition and possessed less period fabric. This created a third factor-the successful efforts of Operation Clapboard and Oldport Association had placed the best houses with new owners, leaving only those houses that were out of the range of the average person to finance or justify. Many of the houses, which the NRF undertook as projects coast as much as \$20,000 to purchase. Subsequent restoration work could and frequently did cost as much as \$70-\$80,000 in the housing market of the day. It was not an equation that anybody but Doris Duke could contemplate.<sup>158</sup>

A summer resident of Newport since her father, James B. Duke, had purchased a palatial estate at the end of Bellevue Avenue known as Rough Point in 1922, Duke did more than contemplate this endeavor. Deeply invested in Newport, Duke herself had taken up residence at the family estate in the 1950s (where she summered with a menagerie of dogs and giraffes until her death in the 1990s) and she came to colonial Newport's rescue during a period of enormous economic change.

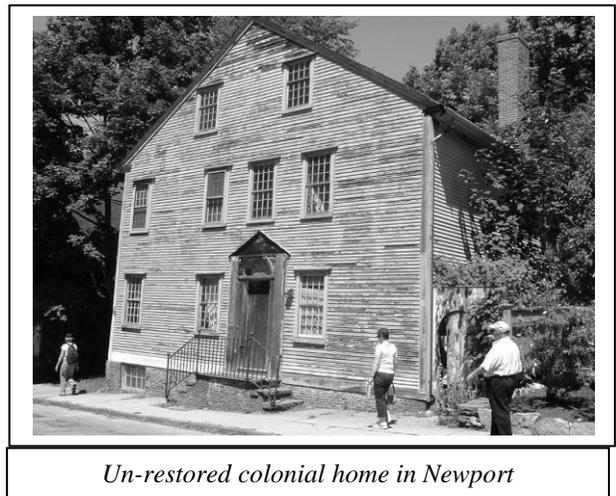
Newport during the 1950s and 1960s was facing significantly depressed economic circumstances, as the formerly extravagant lifestyles of the summer colonists were abandoned or scaled back, and contemporary middle-class tourism had not yet taken root. Even the presence of both the Coast Guard and the Navy could not make up for the near-total loss of commerce and industry in Newport. From the Depression onward, many of the city's neighborhoods had turned into slums, with the un-restored colonial homes broken up into "cold water flats" and occupied by the poorest year-round residents of the

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<sup>158</sup> "A Brief History of the Newport Restoration Foundation." Accessed online 20 September 2008 at <http://www.newportrestoration.com/pr/nrfhistory.html>. For more information on the homes restored by the NRF see *Prescott Farm, Whitehorne House & 57 Restored Houses in Newport, RI*, a booklet published in 1977 by the Newport Restoration Foundation detailing their acquisition and restoration (to date) of a number of colonial homes. While this booklet is kept on file at the Newport Historical Society, a contemporary list of the organization's holding and a statement of its goals are available online at <http://www.nrf.org>.

city.<sup>159</sup> Newport was not yet connected to the mainland by a bridge (which would not come until 1969, under the protests of many locals), and notions of “redevelopment” throughout the 1950s mirrored those suggested or acted on in more urban areas throughout the U.S., revolving mostly around the proposed demolition of entire neighborhoods.<sup>160</sup> By the early 1970s, Newport experienced another significant setback as the Navy, formerly a significant employer of the city’s year-round residents, abandoned operations, eliminating thousands of jobs. During this long period of

economic decline, living in old houses was hardly the class or cultural signifier it has since become. According to Newport resident Gladys Bolhouse, who lived in “the Point,” one of the oldest sections of the city, “[residents] lived in old houses all the time. It wasn’t a status



symbol then—everybody lived in an old house.”<sup>161</sup> Instead, it was an economic necessity, and one that was not usually accompanied by the updated facades, retro-fitted modern windows and plumbing improvements that now accompany NRF-restored homes.

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with Esther Fisher Benson, conducted by the Newport Historical Society, April 16, 1984. Transcription available at the Newport History Society.

<sup>160</sup> John A. Jakle and David Wilson, *Derelict Landscapes: The Wasting of America’s Built Environment* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.): 1992.

<sup>161</sup> Daniel Snyder, “The Neighborhoods of Newport; and Oral History Project” *Newport History* 58:1: 33.

According to the small preservation community pre-dating the founding of the NRF, a real threat was posed by the plans of the Newport Redevelopment Agency, among which, of course, was the building of the Newport Bridge and new overland routes to increase access to the island city from the Providence Plantations mainland. Facing these imminent threats to Newport's colonial heritage and its insular community with no major financial resources on which to draw, the preservation community welcomed Doris Duke's commitment and unique approach to the relocation, restoration



*NRF-restored colonial*



*NRF plaque*

and eventual leasing of Newport's eighteenth century homes. Novel for its inclusion of a rental program, the NRF purchased colonial homes (often relocating them and thus reconstituting the built environment of downtown Newport), restored them, updated them with modern conveniences, and then leased them to residents under the agreement that no structural changes be made to the homes. The final significant contribution made by the NRF to Newport's architectural heritage was the opening of Duke's own home, Rough Point, with its magnificent collection of furniture and artifacts from around the world and its extensive grounds, as a museum and tourist attraction after Duke's death in 1993. The NRF continues to operate the mansion today, as well as maintaining the organizational

leasing operations associated with their extensive inventory of colonial-era residential structures.

### **Contemporary Newport and the Politics of Historic Tourism as Economic Renewal**

Thanks to the direct fundraising efforts and political lobbying of the three major preservation organizations of Newport Country, visitors to contemporary downtown Newport will now find a carefully preserved and curated colonial maritime seaport at Thames Street, the major artery of the original settlement; charming salt box style architecture lining the crooked cobblestone streets of the historic hill; and stately religious structures punctuating an equidistant semi-circle around Washington Square Park, where walking tours depart daily from the front doors of the Museum of Newport History. This performance of the past, which helps attract nearly a million visitors to Newport during its peak tourist season each year, was a long time coming and has effectively reconstituted the cultural economy of Newport since the mid-twentieth century. No longer a site of maritime trade, inchoate industry or military installations, contemporary Newport unabashedly makes its money from tourism. Widely considered a clean postindustrial industry with kinder and gentler effects on the natural environment than the textile and metal-working factories of the mainland, tourism is also associated with a decidedly different class of people than is heavy industry. Requiring an excess of both time and money, tourism is generally understood as the province of the middle and upper classes. Indeed, cultural tourism, of which historical tourism remains a constitutive part, particularly in Newport, attracts an even more specific clientele. Tourists visiting Newport's cultural attractions are not there accidentally, nor are they usually on their way

someplace else. Instead, Newport is by now a well-established tourist destination, servicing business and professional conferences, cruise ships and individuals who have arrived especially to see what Newport has to offer. This clientele is usually affluent, well-educated, middle-aged, and overwhelmingly white, a fact well-known to local residents.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, ask a Rhode Islander about Newport and they will cite it as the state's foremost tourist location, specifically noting popular attractions including the Bellevue Avenue mansions; the island's beaches and craggy, picturesque Cliff Walk; its pristine golf courses; and the sparkling hotels located along wharves lined with privately-owned pleasure crafts and yachts. But the backbone of these attractions, all of which were developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is the central colonial cityscape around which they are organized, both spatially and in the city's governing tourist narrative. Organized around the original seventeenth-century settlement of the lower Thames and "historic hill" neighborhoods, these more contemporary tourist spectacles are linked to an earlier maritime past, and provided not only a chronological context in the historical continuum of Newport's more than 300-year history, but also an added sense of authenticity.

Newport's dominant tourist narrative contains anecdotal twists and turns as it navigates through material accumulated from well-thumbed biographies of Rhode Island's founding Anglo settlers and site-specific architectural information. Indeed, though many tours now augment the traditional narrative of religious freedom and maritime trade with revisionist material related to slave-trafficking and ownership on Aquidneck Island, the teleology of the narrative remains, charting the story of Newport

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<sup>162</sup> For more on the demographics of cultural tourism in Newport, see John Rodman, marketing director of the Preservation Society of Newport County. Interview with author September 27, 2008.

across an ever-advancing 300+ year chronology of events, places and personages that have combined to bring the city through several rough patches to become the successful tourist spectacle and residential community it is today. Crafted explicitly to promote the city of Newport and its attractions, of course, the dominant historical tourism narrative is intended to provide a coherent, meaningful spectacle for visitors. But as many scholars of tourism have persuasively argued, the image promoted by a given place reveals much not only about what local civic elites want others to believe about that location, but also about what local residents come to understand about their homes and, by extension, about themselves in relation to it. Examining the potential effects of the dominant historical tourist narrative of Newport County is instructive then, for any scholars of place-making and place-marketing, as such a study not only evaluates which stories are told, how, by whom and why, but also attempts to account for the effects those stories have on the given residential community that stages itself daily for the spectacular pleasure of visitors who come from “away” to learn about a place, its history and its people. Accordingly, I offer below a concluding analysis of the effects of the dominant historical tourist narrative available for consumption in contemporary Newport, arguing that the narrative presents a portrait of Newport as predominantly Anglo and affluent both historically and in the present even as it seeks to redefine the historic city as a transnational location. Additionally, I conclude that even as revisionist information is appended or integrated into this narrative (largely in support of this new interpretation of Newport as explicitly transnational), new information does little to acknowledge or change the current living conditions of the long-established working class that supports Newport’s tourism economy, many of whom are from non-Anglo ethnic backgrounds.

Initiated by local elites during the colonial revival period of the nineteenth century, Newport's lengthy preservation history has had an enormous impact on the dominant historical tourism narrative now in play in the contemporary city. Carefully preserving civic and religious structures early on, the Boston Brahmin and New York elites who summered at Newport made a calculated investment in a specific type of history focused heavily on what museum studies scholars refer to as the decorative arts tradition. Emphasizing architectural histories and styles, methods of decoration and maintenance, and the acquisition of complementary period artifacts, the earliest preservation efforts were led largely by affluent married couples and by women becoming active in the public sphere for the first time. The properties preserved were identified as valuable based largely on their combination of architectural merit and their significance to a historical narrative that was explicitly national in scope. Accordingly, the first structures recognized as historical assets and potential tourist attractions were largely civic and religious structures in homage to Newport's long-established role in establishing the basic principles of freedom of religion in the new world. Only after this initial period of investment in the mid- to late-nineteenth century was an interest in the vernacular streetscapes of downtown Newport's "historic hill" cultivated as America approached its bicentennial and contemporary historians became increasingly interested in a more holistic and inclusive "history from below." Yet even as the scope of Newport's history has broadened and produced tourist narratives that attempt to tell both the heroic story of religious freedom and the more mercenary histories of the sea trade that turned Newport into a thriving early American town and a significant international port of call along the eastern seaboard of the United States, the story told about the city

still frames work, labor and trade as elements of a carefully preserved past, not as active and constitutive parts of the contemporary city.

According to the tourist narrative presented on the historic hill, by both guides and brochures, the most important people associated with Newport are both white/Anglo-American and dead, and those who remain are engaged in cultural tourism and/or the retail and municipal activities providing the infrastructure for that postindustrial industry. In promotional DVDs, brochures and other print advertisements, Newport is packaged and sold as a location of leisure, marking contemporary tourist practices as similar to those of the mid-nineteenth century, when Newport was promoted as a luxurious location for bathing (i.e., swimming), bicycling, strolling, driving (in a horse-drawn carriage), and hosting garden parties and costume balls, all while being serviced by Irish house maids and butlers.<sup>163</sup> Focusing on Newport's resplendent beaches and fresh air, the availability of Narragansett Bay for sailing, the city's history of sport (i.e., the presence of International Tennis Hall of Fame and the legacies of horse-racing and America's Cup sailing competitions), and the architectural wonders of the Gilded Age mansions of Bellevue Avenue, local tourism simultaneously relies on Newport's colonial heritage (since the availability of local history appeals to tourists even if they never actually visit the historic locations or understand their significance) and ignores it. Indeed, America's Cup Avenue, the main street connecting eighteenth-century colonial Newport with nineteenth-century Gilded Age Newport now attracts visitors to at least view sites

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<sup>163</sup> There is no shortage of travel literature and scholarly prose written about nineteenth century Newport, the development of that area's tourist industry and the individuals who populated the fashionable location. For just a sampling of the material available on Gilded Age Newport, see Alan Schumacher, "Nineteenth Century Newport Guidebook," and "Newport's Real Estate King" as well as the Newport Historical Society staff article, "The Business of Leisure: The Gilded Age in Newport," *Newport History* (62.3 [1989]: 97-126. Newport's Gilded age has also been the subject of a number of unpublished dissertations. For one example, see Mary Murphy-Schlicting's "A Summer Salon: Literary and Cultural Circles in Newport, Rhode Island 1850-1890," New York University, 1992.

including the Colony House and the Quaker Friends Meetinghouse due to their proximity to movie theatres, cafes, specialty shops, and the upscale chain retailers like Banana Republic and J. Crew, now housed in the brick buildings at the edge of Washington Square Park.

Additionally, if the promotional organizations of Newport have traditionally done little to connect the city's colonial maritime history and its explicitly transnational characteristics to its contemporary life, the State of Rhode Island also supports contemporary interpretations of itself as diverse and welcoming to immigrant populations based almost exclusively on histories related to the urbanized cities of mainland Providence County during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century (see chapter 6), effectively severing island and mainland histories one from the other. Indeed, this period is identified as Rhode Island's golden age of industry, when immigrants served as the bulk of the workforce in textile factories, jewelry manufacturing, and iron forging, but very little effort is made by either Newport or the state to connect these maritime and industrial traditions.<sup>164</sup> Though the island locations are considered the focus of Rhode Island tourism, with cities such as Newport and Bristol still figuring predominantly (as they did during the nineteenth century) as vacation oases for America's elite class, these locations are left out of the state's overarching narrative which connects immigration and

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<sup>164</sup> There exists a large survey of scholarly work on urban and industrial tourism and the development of urban space during the nineteenth century. According to scholars such as Daphne Spain and Catherine Cocks, cities were becoming tourist attractions during this period due not only to the increasingly sanitary conditions found there, but also because Americans began to look to cities during the mid- to late nineteenth century as sites of valuable cultural difference, offering social interactions largely mediated by commercial ventures that could not be found elsewhere. For more on the increasing safety of cities as sites of tourism, see Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). For more on the development of urban tourism, its specific socio-economic causes, and the role of the tourist/visitor as a voluntary exile from domestic life of the nineteenth century, see Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

industry because they acknowledge inadequately (if at all) the transnational flow of global capital which has always been a part of the island cities' cultural practices. Additionally, the island cities do little to write themselves back into either local or transnational histories by emphasizing colonial architecture and decorative arts over the social and economic histories whose overarching themes of religious liberty and transnational trade have as much to do with Rhode Island's role in national politics as do the state's more centrally-located industrial areas. Dividing the tourist narratives of the islands and the state's mainland effectively divides Rhode Island's histories and erases the presence of not only the "victim diasporas" whose bodies were sold to finance the building of entire regions and future industries, but also the contributions of the descendents of those diasporic populations, who established communities and cultural practices in the first settled regions of Rhode Island long before steamships from Europe delivered what Robin Cohen might refer to as Rhode Island's first "labour diasporas."

While Newport and other island locations serve as the main draw of vacationers and wealthy summer residents to Rhode Island's shores, they also provide significant economic boons for the state as a whole. Besides drawing in a significant amount of tourism-related spending from out-of-state visitors and business travelers alike, Newport's rich architectural heritage is also made available for use to Hollywood directors such as Steven Spielberg by the Rhode Island Film Commission, providing work to local actors, increasing the national profile of the state, and bringing in much-needed funding to develop and sustain not only the local, but also the state-wide economies. Ironically, then, the monies made in Newport from the production of films such as *Amistad* and from tourism practices which effectively erase not only the

controversial aspects of the state's history but also the minority and diasporic populations associated with that history may just hold the key to the future economic development of Providence and other urban areas the "newest" immigrants to Rhode Island call home.

A second and closely related critique of the effects of Newport's dominant historical tourist narrative has to do with the potential or intended impact of revisionist aspects recently appended to extant touring narratives of the city. Though new information regarding slave-trafficking and slave ownership do expand the dominant tourist narrative, even this new research does little to acknowledge or ameliorate the existence of the poor population still on the island. Newport's contemporary population of working poor is not so much obscured as rendered invisible by a touring narrative that accounts only for the colonial downtown and the coastal avenues lined with Gilded Aged dwellings. Other areas of Newport are more well-known for their multi-family dwellings and pockets of minority populations.

While the tourist narrative draws noticeable parallels between Newport's Anglo histories and its present, the histories of minority and peripheral populations remain contextualized as elements of the city's *past*, as if these populations have simply disappeared from the body politic thriving on the island *now*. Indeed, the revisionist stories mobilized by the domestic architecture of Newport's merchant and elite classes that now make clear the connection between slave trafficking and slave ownership which has traditionally been overlooked or simply denied in historical narratives of New England are largely a product of a shift in academic and public historical discourse away from the elite and toward the vernacular. A new cultural mandate for diversity, the corresponding increased availability of funding for new archaeological and archival

research, and the reassessment of local family and institutional legacies have all played a significant role in the crafting of more inclusive dominant tourist narratives in Newport as well as in other tourist cities.

Although these recent developments make clear that the stewards of Newport's colonial narrative are dedicated to reshaping the city's dominant tourist narrative to reflect contemporary research, even current tours fail to recognize or account for the degree to which the legacies of colonial Newport's more unsavory commercial ventures remain present in the city's thriving contemporary life. While the goal of these updated tourist narratives may be to raise social awareness regarding Rhode Island's historic role in the slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such narratives primarily result in new tourist products (i.e., new tours on which visitors can get the "real" story of colonial Newport), putting even the most unpalatable aspects of Newport's past to work in the contemporary tourism grist to accrue more tourist dollars. In short, even Newport's slave-trading past is put to work supporting the city's contemporary tourist industry, with none of the funds going directly to locally-based communities of color or their related organizations.

Additionally, while these newer, more self-conscious narratives provide information about the black population of colonial-era Newport, they nevertheless leave largely undocumented the free black communities that have continued to thrive in the city and its immediate environs from the post-Revolutionary period to the present. While walking tours of colonial Newport now tell stories of the triangle trade and slavery and recognize the often mercenary motivations of Rhode Island's early white settlers, little attention is devoted to connecting that narrative to later periods or to contemporary life in

Newport County, now a lucrative tourist destination associated more with leisure and luxury than with trade or manufacturing. While narratives of colonial-era slave trading and ownership ask visitors to reconsider the heady Revolutionary rhetoric of freedom and liberty that echoed throughout the city, the state, and, eventually, the nation on the eve of the American Revolution, visitors are not pressed to interrogate how Newport, once home to a significant number of enslaved and free black people, has yet emerged in the twenty-first century as an overwhelmingly white and upscale community.

While popular conceptions of Newport see the area as white and affluent, the county actually has a sizable racial minority. The 2000 census reports that out of a total population of 85,433 in Newport County (encompassing all the cities on the island), 78,136 people identified themselves as white, with the second largest racial majority (at just over 3,000 people) being that of African-Americans. Interestingly, though, the white population sizably decreases when Latino/Hispanics are counted separately. 2,409 individuals identified as Latino/Hispanic in 2000, bringing the white population down to just under 77,000. The City of Newport, however, reports a different picture. This most urban of all the cities on the island houses just over 2,000 of the county's 3,184 blacks/African-Americans and 1,467 of the county's 2,409 Hispanic/Latino population. While Newport County is 90% white, then, the City of Newport, the island's primary tourist area, is just over 80% white. While the black/African-American population of the county is only about 4%, that of the city is double that at 8%. These numbers reveal that the City of Newport, while far from Providence's reputation as majority minority,

nevertheless houses significant communities of non-white residents whose origins remain largely undocumented and whose contemporary experiences remain largely obscured.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> See the U.S. Census Bureau, "Table DP-1: Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000: 11, 52.

### Chapter 3:

#### Traces of the Trade: Alternative Tourist Narratives and the Legacies of Slave

##### Trafficking in Rhode Island

With a street plan laid out in 1680, Bristol has outstanding examples of architecture spanning three centuries—from Federal and Greek Revival homes to 19<sup>th</sup> century country garden estates. And no visit to Bristol would be complete without a visit to a few of the town’s ten fine museums and historical sites. Often billed as America’s most patriotic town, Bristol is home to the country’s oldest Fourth of July parade. Every summer, this event draws participants and spectators from across the country and around the globe.<sup>166</sup>

The city of Bristol, originally known as the Mount Hope Lands, is located on the strip of land known as the East Bay, between Providence (to its west) and Portsmouth (to its South, located on Aquidneck Island). Connected to Providence Plantations by the city of Pawtucket and several bridges, the East Bay juts eastward and connects to Aquidneck Island (home of the cities of Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport) via ferry and the Mount Hope Bridge. Like Newport, its neighbor to the south, Bristol enjoyed its own golden age of trade in the early years of the nineteenth century, after Thomas Jefferson established a permissive customs district in the town that afforded Newport merchants a new outlet for their slave-trading vessels. Contemporary Bristol also has much in common demographically and commercially with the neighboring towns of Aquidneck Island, as it enjoys a reputation as a predominantly white and affluent location and does a thriving business in historical tourism and antiques.<sup>167</sup>

Accordingly, in this chapter I examine two alternative touring narratives which attempt to disrupt this traditional narrative and account for Rhode Island’s widespread

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<sup>166</sup> “Bristol: Discover the Secret, Discover the Charm” Guide: Downtown Bristol Merchants Association, Bristol Museum Association, Mosaico CDC, and the Town of Bristol: 2006.

<sup>167</sup> In 2006 the median housing price in Bristol was \$354,500. See *Discover Bristol: the 2006 Official Guide*.

and long-term investment in slave-trafficking as well as the subsequent presence of a significant population of free blacks in the eighteenth-century East Bay neighborhood known as New Goree. I examine who has crafted these narratives and why, as well as evaluating the potential impact on both the resident population and the town's reputation as a destination for historical tourism.

### ***A Walking Tour Through Bristol's African-American History***

While the 2006 official tourist brochure of Bristol, RI, entitled, "Discover the Secret, Discover the Charm" includes eco-tourist sites such as Blithewold Mansion and Arboretum, Mount Hope Farm, Coggeshall Farm Museum, and Colt State Park, and cultural attractions such as the Bristol Art Museum, the local Preservation and Historical Society, the Bristol County Courthouse, and Linden Place, an early nineteenth century mansion, it makes no mention of the sites included on an alternative walking tour of Bristol which, since I accessed it in 2006, has since been removed from the town's official website.

This tour, entitled "A Walking Tour through Bristol's African-American History" is accessible to visitors now only if prior knowledge has alerted them to the existence of a black and white printed brochure available upon request through the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society. Created in 1997 by the fourth grade class of Room 101, Andrews School in Bristol in collaboration with the Architectural Preservation Society of Roger Williams University and R. Battcher III, librarian of the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, the tour route was once accessible online at the Bristol Town website. By the time I took the self-guided tour on a blustery day in March 2006,

however, the Visitor's Center staff had never heard of it and no official brochures were available any longer. Nevertheless, the tour is both well-researched and historically accurate, as later conversations with the staff of the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society authenticated all the material included therein.

The sites documented along this African-American history walking tour of Bristol include banks, schools, civic structures, and domestic architecture, most of which were funded (directly or indirectly) by slave-trafficking. Almost all of these structures, including the Commercial Bank of Bristol, the Freeman's Bank and Customs House, the DeWolf Warehouse, the Bank of Bristol and the Counting House, were built between 1790 and 1820, the period during which Bristol became a chief slave-trafficking port.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Important to note here is Bristol's importance in slave trafficking during the nineteenth century. While Bristol merchants originally sent ships from Newport, passage of anti-slave-trafficking legislation by the state legislature in 1787 and the federal legislation that followed in 1794 substantially increased the policing of vessels traveling to and from Rhode Island's principle international port. To circumvent these bans, Providence merchant John Brown used his influence as a member of the federal congress to push through a bill establishing a second customs district in Rhode Island: this one at the port of Bristol. The custom's district was officially established by Thomas Jefferson in 1801. This new district enabled Newport and Bristol's slave-trading vessels to enter and exit in a customs district run by the hand-picked cousin of slave-trading dynasty the DeWolf family and enabled some of the largest and most lucrative slave-trafficking voyages in Rhode Island's long history in the trade. For more on the politics of establishing the new custom's district, see Charles Rappleye's *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006): 329-330. For more on the fifty lucrative ventures that occurred in Rhode Island after the federal legislation was passed, see Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981): 6.

The brochure for the walking tour features a hand-drawn map of downtown Bristol as well as the suggested tour route, with clearly labeled street names as well as numbers which correlate to the sites included. The tour begins at the town



*Linden Place*

center on Hope Street at the Commercial Bank of Bristol, established in 1814 as the largest of 6 banks created between the late 1770s and 1825, the period during which Newport's ports were occupied or intensely regulated by the British.<sup>169</sup> The bank's establishment testifies not only to the wealth already accrued by Bristol residents during the early years of the nineteenth century, but also to the town's need for investment capital for further commercial ventures.<sup>170</sup> Currently housing a local pizza restaurant, the building also served as the location of the town's Customs House between 1845 and 1857 before accommodating a succession of later occupants, including the YMCA, Town Clerk's Office, a telephone company, a dentist's office and a candy shop.<sup>171</sup>

From this chief financial structure, located at 565-567 Hope Street, the tour moves to the DeWolf family estate known as Linden Place, constructed in 1810 by General George DeWolf (1779-1844), nineteenth century patriarch of the famous slave-trading dynasty that had its roots in the eighteenth century ventures of Mark Antony DeWolf and

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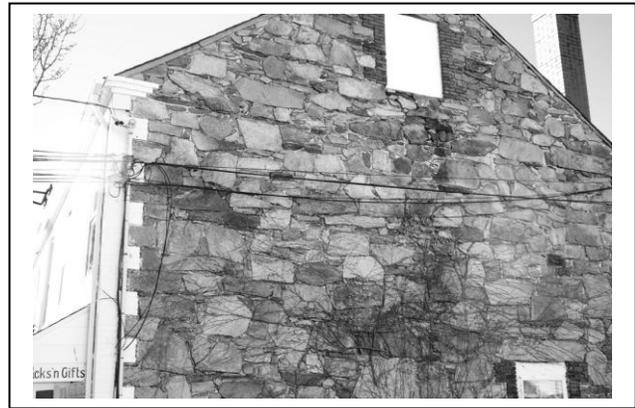
<sup>169</sup> Kevin Mendes and Joe Serra, "A Walking Tour of Bristol's African American History," (Bristol Historic and Preservation Society, Bristol, RI: 1997).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

Simeon Potter, a DeWolf relative and fellow slave-trafficker.<sup>172</sup> According to historians, this unofficial tour, and even contemporary DeWolf family members, “the DeWolfs were well-known for bringing more slaves into this country and making more money from the slave trade than any other family of their era,” a dubious legacy apparent even now in the opulence of their Bristol home.<sup>173</sup> This three-story Federal style structure features a skylight, spiral staircase and extensive, manicured gardens, and remained in the DeWolf family even after 1825, when George DeWolf went bankrupt and the house was

purchased first by his son William Henry, then by Christopher Colt in 1865. Colt, the brother of firearms magnate Samuel Pomeroy Colt, immediately transferred the house to their mother, Theodora DeWolf (1820-1901) who had lived at house



*Customs House, sided with African granite*

with her father until the original sale of 1825. It was Theodora DeWolf who planted the linden trees for which the property is named. Her son Samuel P. Colt would later use the house to create Colt School. The property was finally acquired by the Friends of Linden Place in 1986 and has since been restored, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and opened for public tours.

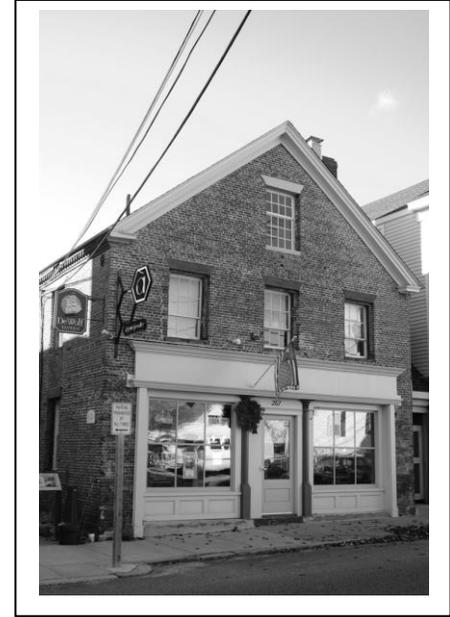
Additional sites on the walking tour, which wends its way down Hope Street to State and Thames Streets before venturing back into the Franklin and Wood Street

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<sup>172</sup> An abbreviated DeWolf family tree charting the birth, marriages and deaths of DeWolf relatives from 1695 to the present is available in Thomas Norman DeWolf’s *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

<sup>173</sup> John Krushnowski, Katelin Aguiar, and Vanessa Reiman “Linden Place,” “A Walking Tour of Bristol’s African-American History.”

neighborhood, include several other banks, such as the Freeman's Bank/Customs House, built in 1811 and located at 37-39 State Street. Established in 1801 as its own customs district, then placed under the direction of DeWolf relative (and former slave-ship captain) Charles Collins in 1804, the ports of Bristol and nearby Warren, RI were the site of most slaving ventures occurring after the traffick was outlawed by



*Street-front view of the DeWolf Warehouse*

the state in 1787.<sup>174</sup> This building served as the Customs House between 1817 and 1845, and its sides, lined in African granite carried to Bristol's shores as ballast on DeWolf slave ships, continues to testify to the town's indelible connection to the local sea trade as a whole and to slave trafficking in particular. When the building also housed the Freeman's Bank, established in 1817, customs agent Charles Collins was appointed its first president.<sup>175</sup>

Besides these financial and commercial institutions which demonstrate the powerful role slave-trading played in Bristol's eighteenth and nineteenth century economic development, this tour also includes stops at locations where slaves were held in bondage prior to transport elsewhere or sale into service at homes and commercial enterprises in Bristol itself. One such location is the DeWolf Warehouse at 267 Thames Street. Still directly abutting the water, the warehouse is a long, two-story structure built in 1818 (also constructed from African granite) to hold lumber and other trade goods as

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<sup>174</sup> Though the slave trade was outlawed in Rhode Island in 1787, the law was not widely enforced until it was reaffirmed in 1807. See Charles Rappleye 248, 338.

<sup>175</sup> Tara Otis, Marnie Jenkins, "A Walking Tour of Bristol's African-American History."

well as enslaved Africans. At the time of the creation of the walking tour in 1997, the building stood vacant after having housed coal and lumber yards from the 1860s to 1950s. Since then, however, it has been converted into an upscale restaurant and tavern, offering an intimate, early American ambiance and waterfront views.

Also located along the tour route are other institutions with financial connections to the slave trade, including a counting house and distillery, but perhaps the most intriguing part of this tour comes from what has been hidden in plain view for so many years: the homes of a free black population that existed in Bristol as early as the 1770s but “was only a memory among the older citizens of Bristol” a little over 100 years later in the 1880s.<sup>176</sup> As the tour

returns to a corner of Hope Street before moving into the smaller, vertical roadways making up the grid that is historic Bristol, visitors are



*Side view of DeWolf warehouse, stretching back to the old port*

introduced to the Carrington-Palmer-Munroe House, built

in the early 1850s by a free black cooper (barrelmaker) named Munroe who had purchased the property for \$1 when it was left with a mortgage by Thomas Diman. Munroe had two daughters, both of whom attended school in Baltimore. The house is now privately owned, but remained in the Munroe family until 1945.

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<sup>176</sup> “A Walking Tour of Bristol’s African-American History.”

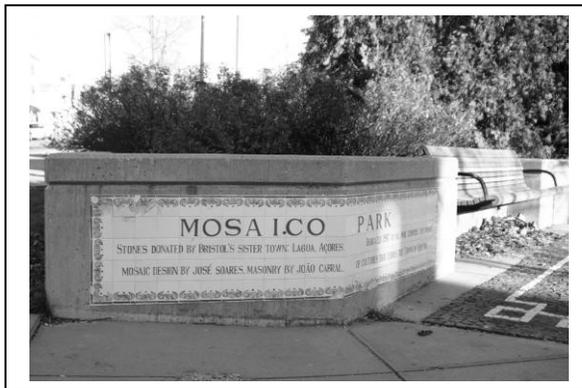
Several more private homes, including the “Song” Haskell House (1809), the York Usher House (1805) and the Marie Hazzard House are included on the tour, each owned by free Africans, African-Americans or those of mixed race (referred to as “mullatto” in town census records) during the nineteenth century. In addition, the lost neighborhood known as “New Goree” is noted as having been located along Wood Street. According to the 1774 town census, this community consisted of 114 black people out of a total town population of 1209. The story of this community, which disappeared in the late nineteenth century, is told in the brochure:

Initially, slaves and former slaves lived scattered on the lands of the white land owners. However, with the move towards abolishing slavery after the American Revolution, Bristol’s slaves began collecting in an area of town that was called New Goree. It was named after an island off the coast of Africa that was a major shipping port for Africans into the slave systems of the New World. The exact dimensions are unclear, but [the community] fronted on Wood Street from Crooked Lane (currently Bay View Ave.) to the north and Jack Barney’s Lane (currently Shaw’s Lane) to the south. The 1851 map of Bristol shows the African Church on Wood Street and a number of names (Usher, Clarke, Haskell, Spooner, Munroe, and Hazzard) of members of this thriving black community.<sup>177</sup>

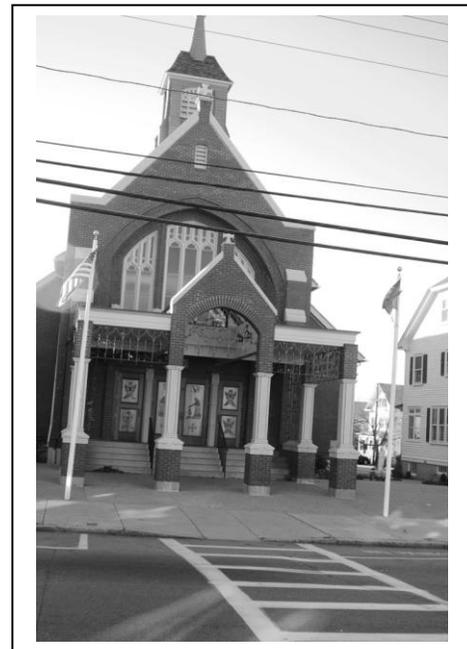
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<sup>177</sup> Elizabeth Palazzo, Amelia Cabral, and Colleen Meagher, “African-American Walking Tour of Bristol”

Today, a tour of this same neighborhood offers a snapshot of the effects of immigration in Rhode Island generally, as the path leading from Bristol’s Hope Street, up Franklin Street and toward the nineteenth century rubber factory on Wood Street reveals ornately decorated Catholic churches, houses whose front yards feature altars and religious icons, Portuguese bakery trucks and convenience stores. Today, several homes belonging to free blacks such as the “Song” Haskell House and the York Usher House sit on the back end of two-home residential lots, their view from the street obscured by the larger, newer homes of white/European residents.



*Stone monument crafted from materials donated by Bristol’s “sister city,” Lagua, Azores. This monument testifies to Portuguese immigration into Bristol. At right: Catholic Church in what used to be the New Goree neighborhood.*



### ***Reconciling the Legacies of Slavery and Slave***

#### ***Trafficking in Bristol and Newport***

Glimpses of the past are everywhere in Bristol. St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, founded in 1718, and Linden Place, built in 1810, loom high above Hope Street, as does Colt Memorial High School, built of marble and bronze in 1906. I’ve walked along streets and past homes that are older than [my home state] state of Oregon. Standing on the dock, looking out over the harbor from the end of what is

known as DeWolf Wharf on Thames Street, it is easy to imagine the long, colorful history of this place.<sup>178</sup>

While the built environment of Bristol gives voice to its slave-trafficking past only through the unofficial walking tour of African-American history discussed above, several descendents of the powerful slave-trading DeWolf family have come forward to tell the story of their ancestors in the hopes of fostering a more open dialogue regarding the history of slavery and slave-trafficking in the New World generally, but particularly in Rhode Island, where religious tolerance and ethnic diversity have frequently been cited as the state's most enduring legacies. The year 2008 saw the release of both a book and a documentary about the DeWolf family and its role in the African slave trade, with both film and text seeking to make connections between the activities and business practices of their authors' forebears and the contemporary cultural landscapes and built environments of each of the ports of call constituting a point on the notorious triangular path from the east coast of North America to the west coast of Africa, and finally to Cuba.

Initially screened in the early months of 2007 in Rhode Island, the documentary, *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, was written by Katrina Browne and Alla Kovgan and produced by Browne, Jude Ray, Elizabeth Delude-Dix and Juanita Brown and is actually a culmination of a project undertaken in the late 1990s by several living DeWolf descendents who came to identify themselves as the Family of Ten. According to the narrative of the film, the composition of this "family," which includes Thomas Norman DeWolf, James DeWolf Perry V and his son James DeWolf Perry VI, Dain Perry, Edith Howe Fulton, Holly Marshall Fulton, Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin, Jr., Ellen

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<sup>178</sup> DeWolf 30.

deWolfe Hale, Elizabeth Banford Sturges and Katrina Colston Browne, was the result of the dedicated canvassing of living DeWolf relatives conducted by Katrina Browne in the late 1990s.

As the subtitle of the documentary suggests, Browne's plan was to tell the story of the DeWolf family in order to revise the narrative of the antebellum North in relation to slave trafficking and slavery. According to the narrative of the film, she wanted to confront the legacy of slavery in contemporary race relations by exploring the role her own ancestors had played in the "unrighteous traffick," interrupting the comfortable and well-worn narrative of a decidedly pro-abolition New England, with its supposedly homogenous white Anglo-Saxon Protestant population and correspondingly white picket fences. And she wanted to do so from an explicitly transAtlantic perspective, documenting the journey of her contemporary family from Bristol, Rhode Island, the port from which the DeWolf ships departed, to Cape Coast, Ghana, where DeWolf crews exchanged rum and dry goods for a cargo of African men, women and children, and finally to Havana, Cuba, where the enslaved Africans were sold at auction, the profits used to purchase the molasses and sugars needed to produce more rum upon the ships' successful return to the familiar waters of Narragansett Bay. In each location, the group would meet with local experts and panels of residents to discuss the legacy of the DeWolf family trade, particularly the effects of that legacy on contemporary race relations not only in the United States, but also in a global context.

Through they were not officially released until 2008, both Thomas Norman DeWolfe's text *Inheriting the Trade* and Browne's documentary were widely promoted throughout 2007, enabling the DeWolfs to mark the anniversary of the Federal anti-slave-

trafficking legislation issued in 1807. Both products observe that slave trafficking continued well past this date, however, as did slave ownership in North America and on the plantations in Cuba owned and operated by the DeWolf family.

The prologue of the film features DeWolf family videos of the regionally noted Bristol Fourth of July parade, which Katrina Browne, the narrator, remembers watching as a little girl from the front yard of Linden Place, the DeWolf family estate. She talks about growing up idealizing the “fairy tale world of Old New England” with its white picket fences, cozy clapboard homes and ocean vistas. Clearly seeking to problematize the pervasive silence and/or quick dismissal of discussions of slavery and slave-trafficking in the northern colonies as well as the maritime mythologies celebrated in seafaring villages like Bristol and Newport, the title of the film is superscribed over an image of the restless waters bordering coastal New England.

From here the film returns to images of Bristol’s Fourth of July Parade, but this time it is 2001, when the Family of Ten first get together to discuss the goals of their journey and the project’s potential outcome. Expressing the questions on her own mind regarding the family’s impending journey and discussions, Browne wonders aloud, “How would we have to rethink our sense of home and who we are today? But more importantly, what could we do as DeWolf descendants to help repair the enormous harm our ancestors caused?”

As the narrative of the film makes clear, these questions became central not only to the content of the film, but also to its production, as some DeWolfe ancestors, as well as a number of Bristol residents, were uncomfortable with Browne’s project, concerned that the town’s image, and that of its most influential citizens and families, would be

tarnished forever if the significant role played by slave-trafficking in the early commercial success of Bristol was exposed. At the outset of the project, Browne had hoped for the full cooperation of the Friends of Linden Place, the preservation group that now owns and operates Linden Place as a tourist attraction and museum. However, some board members were reluctant to have the home explicitly connected to histories of slavery and slave trafficking and did not permit Browne's film crews inside the house.

The Friends of Linden Place were not the only individuals concerned about creating a connection between one of Bristol's most esteemed families (and the family's former home, a valuable tourist attraction in its own right) to the damning legacies of slavery and slave-trafficking in Rhode Island. According to Newport Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Keith Stokes, who is included in the list of the film's participants, Browne consulted him early on, not only hoping for his help in gaining access to local histories, but also seeking insight into the reasons her project was being greeted with such hostility and suspicion by Bristol residents. Though Stokes was happy to provide some historical context to Browne in support of the film, even an "insider" like him, with close ties to Bristol's leading families, could not open some doors in the community. In a 2008 interview with me, Stokes discussed his role in as a participant in the production of the film:

Katrina came to me early on for two reasons. She said, I really want you to be involved for a sort of historical review, but also the DeWolfs and the Browns won't talk to me about it, and you're close to them, particularly in Bristol. And that was a painful thing because again Katrina was this California girl coming here. That's exactly how [the local residents] termed it: California girl. Well she's not a girl she's a woman, she's a professional, but these were these 70, 80 year old Goddards, Browns, DeWolfs, you know. And Mark DeWolf, who's an Episcopal minister, he's a friend and he said Keith, this is scaring the hell out of me and my family.

According to Stokes, “The trustees at Linden Place were just mortified” and asked him to intercede and try to temper Browne’s analysis of her family’s legacy. Attempting to broker a peace between the parties, Stokes reassured the trustees and other locals of Browne’s good intentions but reminded them, “it is her film and she has every right to present it the way she’d like to present it.” Accordingly, the film’s narration makes note of the reticence Browne and the Family of Ten confronted in Bristol, featuring footage of the outside of Linden Place and noting that the doors of the family mansion remained closed to Browne’s film crew, despite the fact that they had been hired by descendants of the house’s original owners. These closed doors, she seems to suggest, are indicative of the silence that greets frank discussions of slavery and slave-trafficking in the north even 200 years after the practice was outlawed.

Denied access to others’ memories of her ancestors, as well as to the interiors of the family home, Browne’s narration over the scenes taking place in Bristol rely heavily on the stories she was told about the DeWolfs, and with the images of the Dewolfs as upstanding members of Bristol for nearly 300 years. She recalls, “I heard of the DeWolfs as pirates, adventuring on the high seas” and includes historical video footage of her early twentieth century progenitors in grand carriages and automobiles greeting fellow town members at church functions and the annual Independence Day Parade. But Browne also remarks upon the evidence of the origins of the family’s wealth that has remained obscured in plain view. The built environment of the most iconic New England towns, she reports, with their miles of stone walls, actually tell the story of slave labor, since many of those walls were constructed one rock at a time by enslaved Africans, and

indeed some of the granite used in the famous New England “stone-ender” homes and commercial structures was also brought from the west coast of Africa.

While Browne unfolds her version of her family’s role in slave-trafficking briefly in the film, her cousin Thomas Norman DeWolf does so far more comprehensively in his 2008 text, *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History*. Drawing on research conducted by his family at the Bristol Historical Society as well as on secondary histories of Bristol (some of which were written by family relatives), DeWolf provides an abbreviated genealogical chart in his published text, as well as an overview of the DeWolf family lineage in the United States. According to Thomas Norman DeWolf, the family traveled from Connecticut to Rhode Island by way of the Caribbean Islands, where Charles DeWolf’s son Mark Anthony DeWolf was hired by Simeon Potter, a slave-trader from Bristol, in 1744 to work as a clerk.<sup>179</sup> Mark Anthony then sailed to Potter’s coastal hometown and married Potter’s sister, Abigail, officially setting down DeWolf roots in Bristol, Rhode Island that have endured into the twenty-first century.<sup>180</sup>

As was the case with Newport’s maritime community, the DeWolf family business included a diverse range of interests and activities, well beyond slave-trafficking. The family’s numerous ocean-going vessels also conducted other types of trade, and James DeWolf is known as the man in New England to make the most money during the War of 1812, a conflict which effectively shut down the ports of the neighboring city of Newport.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, by 1812, the DeWolf family owned more ships

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<sup>179</sup> DeWolf 42.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid 45.

that the US Navy, according to Howe's history of Mount Hope<sup>182</sup> and by the time he died in 1837 he was supposedly the second wealthiest man in America.<sup>183</sup> Additionally, the family enjoyed extensive connections with other firms in Rhode Island, including the influential Browns of Providence. According to DeWolf, "James DeWolf worked for John Brown—who was twenty-eight years his senior—as a teenager on a privateer, and later on one of Brown's slave ships."<sup>184</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, then, The DeWolf family had essentially become a dynasty, but in 1825, several of the crops of George DeWolf's Cuban plantations failed and he went bankrupt, disappearing to Cuba with his wife and children. Though this ended the family's dominance as a shipping and trading concern, their influence in the town of Bristol was reinvigorated by the later alliance to the Colt family, the most famous of whom was Samuel Pomeroy Colt. While Colt's mother, Theodora DeWolf Colt, maintained the family estate at Linden Place, her son gained fame as the inventor of the repeating fire arm and later donated an extensive amount of land to the town of Bristol, establishing a school and what later became Colt State Park.<sup>185</sup>

Despite the later fame of the Colt family, it is James DeWolf who remains the most famous contributor to the family fortunes, and it is his warehouse that still stands along the water's edge in Bristol. In the company of local preservationist Bonnie Warren, the Family of Ten toured this warehouse (before it was later turned into a tavern) in 2001. According to DeWolf, Warren told the family about "a study documenting business transactions between the DeWolfs and four hundred different people in Bristol"

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>183</sup> *Katrina Browne and Alla Kovgan , Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North* (Ebb Pod Productions, 2008).

<sup>184</sup> DeWolf 58.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid 63-64.

establishing the family's extensive connections, as well as the far-reaching network of people involved, both directly and peripherally in the slave trade.<sup>186</sup>

The family was also able to talk with local professor of preservation Kevin Jordan and even nationally-recognized scholars including Joanne Pope Melish and Ronald Bailey, both of whom appear in the film offering historical context regarding the role of slavery and slave-trafficking in the northern economic and cultural landscapes. The family also visited the Bristol Historical Society and filmed inside, showing the filing cabinet on the second floor in which they found the DeWolf family papers as well as other artifacts including bills of sale, financial records and account books, and even what appears to be leg irons from one of the family ships. A bill of sale from Havana, dated September 11, 1806 states that 121 Africans were sold for a profit of \$36,300, roughly equal to \$553,000 in 2001 currency. According to the family papers, the DeWolfs made their human products available to “more than 40 markets in the West Indies, North and South America”

Lest Browne's critical perspective be seen as the dominant narrative of the film, other family members are also shown going over these materials, and recalling what they were taught about their family history. Elizabeth Banford Sturges states,

Nobody wanted to ever talk about this and it made everybody very uncomfortable. What these people are used to doing is presenting this pretty picture of who the DeWolfs were and taking people through the new place and pointing out the nice portraits and the beautiful chandeliers. Everyone goes, “oh how lovely, what a beautiful home. I wish it was mine. I'd like to have this as my living room.” And that's the extent of it.<sup>187</sup>

The silence and/or obfuscation regarding the family's business transactions, Browne concludes, has helped to produced a comfortable, seductive and decidedly whitewashed

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid 43.

<sup>187</sup> Sturges in *Traces of the Trade*.

portrait of the DeWolf family and the entire northeast. She states, "...Together with the rest of the North [Bristol residents] created an identity as heroic abolitionists and founding patriots. Growing up, I fell in love with that story."

### ***Traveling the Triangle Trade Route***

Arriving in Ghana to confront another aspect of the history of their family's business practices, the Family of Ten were brought face to face with the legacy of those practices: a contemporary black diaspora of overwhelming numbers, only some of whom were gathered in 2001 at Panafest to experience and confront their multiple identities as people of African descent. Hardly able to escape the poignancy of this event, several members of the DeWolf clan reflect on their visit to Ghana by commenting that they felt like intruders due to their status as not only white people, but as the descendents of slave-traders. Upon meeting an African-American woman who refused to shake his hand and commented that she had hoped there would not be any white people at the celebration, Dain Perry admits, "...I also felt a little bit of guilt at having invaded some space that she considered very, very precious and valuable to her." This interaction, as well as the very existence of Panafest makes it clear that slavery and slave-trafficking continue to live in individual as well as collective memories, but also in the landscapes, practices and material realities of the present, connecting populations across the globe which might otherwise see themselves as decidedly discreet.

Finally, at a Cape Coast town hall meeting arranged to include the Family of Ten and a number of local residents (several of whom are also academics and artists), the controversial issue of reparations is mentioned for the first time in the film. Should

reparations be made? If so, what kind could possibly provide restitution for a crime so epic in proportion as the transatlantic traffick in African humans?

Sobered and deeply troubled by their visit to Ghana, by their experience at Panafest, and the interactions with local residents at the town hall meeting, the family then flies to Cuba. Pondering their journey from inside the plane, Browne observes that they are flying in comfortable airplane seats over the waters of the Middle Passage. When they land in Havana, they hope to tour some of the 5 plantations the DeWolfs owned on the small island. In the company of a local historian, the family consults a map showing the DeWolf properties, and Browne notes that map is dated 1875. She wonders aloud if the family still owned land here so long after the slave trade was made illegal. They tour some of the plantations and experience “slave life,” observing that some of the machines used on the DeWolf plantations, including a sugar press, were made in the United States, in Buffalo, New York. Despite this poignant material reminder of the web of commercial and industrial exchange between the United States and the other ports associated with the slave trade, Browne gradually comes to see the family’s tour of “slave life” on the plantation as “absurd,” especially as it culminates with a “slave meal” presented banquet style in five courses. The meal, served on matching dishes and consumed with the aid of modern silverware, is supposedly made up of foods that slaves would have eaten. The experience of this meal, at which they had plenty to eat and were able to consume their food in the dignity befitting a tourist, not a resident slave, seems to cause the family to turn toward each other and wonder about the implications of the trip. Some members are concerned that they are experiencing “a travelogue of slavery” and that they need to talk to each other about what to do when they return home, while another member warns that

discussing race relations with only each other could become self-indulgent. One of the cousins states:

I'm worried about a bunch of white people thinking very hard about their ancestors and what the slave trade meant to them and the danger that in isolation we can start trying to assuage our sense of guilt and shame because we've decided we've dealt with it and feel better about it rather than dealing with the consequences, the living consequences.

The family finally visits the plantation George DeWolf named Arca DeNoa, or Noah's Ark, and Browne notes that she feels closer to the history they are exploring by seeing actual ruins of structures. "These abandoned ruins made history close somehow," Browne observes. But she also goes on to note that it is hardly only the remaining walls of the plantation structures, the machines used there, or even the slave castles the family encountered in Ghana that attest to the impact and legacies of the African slave trade. She notes the complicity of everyday people who turned away from recognizing the processes which made possible the relative (and increasing) comfort of everyday life in the American maritime communities of the late colonial period. Brown quietly reflects, "Fueling this commerce were ordinary consumers: rich, poor and in between, people sitting in their homes in the abolitionist north enjoying coffee and sugar. The suffering was out of sight and out of mind." To complement her own observation, Browne includes a clip of her cousin Elizabeth Banford Sturges, who explicitly connects contemporary consumers and our complicity in present-day processes of global exploitation, remarking on the existence of sweat shops in the United States as well as the considerable manufacturing interests held by U.S. companies in developing nations.

When they return to Bristol, Rhode Island, the family sits down to a dinner that some members worry makes them look too wealthy. They begin to discuss their own

privilege, noting that all of them except Thomas DeWolf (author of *Inheriting the Trade*) have Ivy League educations. From here, the film deals with strategies of repair: including the possible utility of reparations and apologies. The family is aware that by 2001 reparations had been making national news, and that their family's name, along with the Brown family dynasty and educational institution in Providence, had been in the stories that accompanied the headlines. As the film draws to a close, each of the family members identifies his/her own strategies for proceeding as individuals, with several deciding to become more involved in the Episcopalian Church and its own self-study regarding race and the slave trade, particularly an evaluation of the origins of the church's economic stability.

When Dain Perry wonders what Bristol residents will say about the film, local professor Kevin Jordan reports candidly that most will say it has nothing to do with them, as there is now a sizable Portuguese population in Bristol which identifies itself as recent immigrants disconnected from Bristol's colonial-era involvement in the infamous triangle trade. Jordan states that the locals will tell you they were fishermen and immigrants, but notes that many of the earliest Portuguese immigrants were actually brought to Rhode Island aboard slaving vessels. Picked up north of Goree in the Azores, Jordan states, "[m]any of the Portuguese got here not as fishermen, but as crews of slavers."<sup>188</sup>

Though he disagrees with Jordan's origin story of the Portuguese arrival in Rhode Island, Keith Stokes does concur with Jordan's statement that most Bristol and Rhode

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<sup>188</sup> DeWolf 66. Important to note here, however, is that not all local experts agree with Jordan's observation regarding the role of Portuguese immigrants on slave ships. Keith Stokes notes that many early Portuguese immigrants were Jews, and that service on a slave ship would require the abjuration of their religion. Because it is unlikely that simply hiding their religion would be possible, continues Stokes (given the inability of slave ships to provide food that could be consumed by Jews), it also seems unlikely that a significant number of Portuguese immigrants actually arrived via slave ships. Stokes, interview with author October 16, 2008.

Island residents will conclude that the story presented by Browne's documentary and DeWolf's text has little to do with them, either because they are recent immigrants themselves or because their families have never explicitly profited from the wealth accrued from slave-trafficking. Additionally, Stokes admits his own ambivalence regarding the film's potential impact on contemporary debates about race relations in America. While the film certainly contemplates issues surrounding white guilt over slavery, he acknowledges, it provides little reflection that Americans of African descent, among which population he includes himself, will find useful. According to Stokes, he provided this opinion candidly to Browne when she asked him to review the finished product:

...she asked me very candidly what I felt about the film and I said...it's a movie made by white people for white people. It'll have little to no relevance to African Americans and our heritage history. But I said that's okay Katrina because that wasn't your journey...It's a great starting place for one path, but there need to be other paths... it's interesting because most, no, all black folks that I interact with on these issues just won't go see *Traces of the Trade*, and not because they're hostile to it, they just say, nah it's not relevant.

According to Stokes then, *Traces of the Trade*, screened widely in Rhode Island during early 2007, celebrated by a number of the state's non-profit and educational institutions and offered as evidence of Rhode Island's willingness to confront its past head on, is valuable for what it does, but it does not necessarily constitute what he sees as the necessary next step in reconciling the history of slavery and slave-trafficking in Newport and Bristol. Instead, Stokes argues that the emphasis needs to be shifted away from a focus on the crimes committed by the Anglo population against those of African descent and toward a recognition of the vibrant history created by the African diaspora in Rhode Island, particularly in areas such as Newport and Bristol, where they were originally

brought as slaves yet managed through what Stokes and the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society refer to as “creative survival” to establish communities that continue to exist today. In his own public presentations, Stokes, notes, he asks people to consider how much they actually know about these populations:

...last night I had to give a presentation and I read off the names of twenty Africans that lived, worked, worshipped and died in colonial Rhode Island. I said, anyone know these names? I said, your obligation is to forget about John Brown and James DeWolf and John Goddard and Aaron Lopez and William Vernon and learn a little about [Newport’s African and African American individuals] and all their records are intact at the Rhode Island Historical Society...And people came up to me—white folks—and said, wow, I didn’t know that!

***The Buried History of Newport: Tourist Approaches to Legacies of Slavery and Slave-Trafficking***

If Bristol’s tour of African-American history began as an educational project and is available now only to those who know to ask for it at the Bristol Historical Society, Stokes and his wife Theresa Guzman Stokes have played an integral role in the development of an official African-American history tour in Newport. The “Buried History” tour, added to the Newport Historical Society’s complement of walking tours in 2008, promises to tell the stories of people of African descent (both free and enslaved populations) who were living and working in Newport during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as giving a nod to their descendents, many of whom still dwell and thrive in these cities. If Bristol’s African-American history remains largely silenced within its official tourist narratives, then, the NHS seems to be taking steps to make its dominant tourist narrative more inclusive of a variety of historic populations.

Combining information gathered via recent primary research by Stokes and Guzman-Stokes with material published by scholars including Rachel Chernos Lin,

Robert Fitts and Joanne Pope Melish (who cite the comparatively high number of published ads for runaway slaves as evidence that the “peculiar institution” was not practiced widely and no more humanely in the north than it was in the south), the NHS “Buried History” tour makes clear that slavery and slave trafficking were alive and well throughout the north and in Rhode Island.<sup>189</sup> Additionally, it is information provided by these scholars which allow the “Buried History” tour to claim that it was the slave trade, more than any other vocation or maritime enterprise, which allowed Newport and Bristol to grow into commercial successes so quickly. Indeed, though Elaine Forman Crane notes, “intercolonial trade was more prominent than the triangle trade” slave trafficking was yet extraordinarily lucrative and its significance to Newport’s economy has traditionally been grossly underestimated. According to Crane, “[i]f the figures [traditionally referenced by historians] are to be used at all, they should be used, not to deny the importance of the African trade, but to emphasize the disproportionate significance of these comparatively few ventures.”<sup>190</sup> Additionally, Crane, like Coughtry and Rappleye, provides numbers to underscore the cultural as well as economic significance of the slave trade in Rhode Island:

In terms of human merchandise, Jay Coughtry has verified the transportation of over 30,000 slaves between 1760 and 1775 in Newport-owned vessels, while Roger Anstey calculated that the North American colonists together brought as many as 74,000 during those same years. Thus, if Coughtry’s figures are used an absolute minimum, and Anstey’s estimates are anywhere near accurate (and they are based on very convincing evidence), Newport merchants—who transported the largest share by far of this cargo—must be held accountable for the exportation and sale of at least 40,000 slaves in the fifteen years prior to the war.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Robert K. Fitts, *Inventing New England’s Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth-Century Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc: 1998). Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>190</sup> Crane 20-21.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid* 23.

Indeed, besides noting that the slave trade largely financed the civic development of Newport and Bristol (including the early development of much-needed paved overland transportation routes to fellow colonies), Crane also notes that the wealth accrued from that trade allowed merchants to diversify their financial portfolios, enabling a gradually rising standard of living for those who would otherwise be limited to incomes provided by their chief vocations, which included brewing, coopering, blacksmithing, and candle-making. But perhaps the best evidence of the financial impact of the slave trade on locations such as Newport, Bristol and Providence is the sheer volume of merchant-class domestic structures as well as the eighteenth and nineteenth century mansions of Bristol and Providence which remain to testify not only to the wealth accrued through the sea trade, but also the increasingly important role one's home played in one's public image as a citizen and successful merchant. According to Crane, writing of Newport, it was the location as much as the opulence of a merchant's home that signified vocation and relative influence. While distillers lived and worked at the southern end of town, for example, the merchant class built grand homes which looked directly across to the waterfront of wharves and warehouses, watching as their literal and metaphorical ships came in:

These softly colored mansions [of Water (now Washington) and Thames Streets, both of which ran parallel to the harbor for about a mile] faced west to the wharves and water, allowing their merchant-owners to keep a constant vigil over their sources of income. Built on the east side of Thames Street, the large houses often looked across the main thoroughfare to a row of beautiful gardens.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid 50.

According to the Stokes' research, the cargo of these ships included the ancestors of the nearly 300 Africans and Africa-American buried in Newport's colonial-era Common Burying Ground, located on Farewell Street in Newport.<sup>193</sup> A separate section of the graveyard where black slaves were buried is known as "God's Little Acre," and was left in disrepair for years, the slate grave markers eroded by time and exposure or cracked by the city's industrial lawnmowers. The rehabilitation of the cemetery was undertaken by the Stokes and Rowena Stewart in the 1980s, who also worked together to suggest changes to the care of the cemetery while Guzman Stokes began documentation of the individuals buried there, making that information available on a website, [www.colonialcemetery.com](http://www.colonialcemetery.com). The website includes information on the slave trade and slavery in Newport, as well as specific details related to individual grave markers and scanned images of the markers themselves.

Guzman Stokes and her husband have also raised the local profile of the cemetery, providing a 10-foot-tall sign marking the site on Farewell Street and collaborating with the Newport Historical Society, albeit with some reservations, to develop the walking tour of the burying ground. Indeed, Keith Stokes, who claims a long family history in Newport and Jewish as well as black ancestors, was supportive of the goals of the proposed walking tour, but reticent to create a dedicated "African-American" history tour. He states,

If someone asked me would you like to create black history tours I would normally say no, I would rather force it to be a part of the integrated history of the community, but so many people are interested in this aspect of history we should still have them. So that's why my wife and I sat down and helped craft a couple of programs with the Historical Society. When the new docents come in, I come in and do a sensitivity training with them... What do you do if someone's

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<sup>193</sup> Paul Davis, "Saving the Past: God's Little Acre," Providence Journal 14 March, 2006. Accessed 10 November 2007 at <http://www.projo.com/extra/2006/slavery/text/day3-side1.htm>.

uncomfortable—one of your guests, your visitors? How do you interact with that, how do you respond?

If Stokes is hesitant about the singular content of the tour, he is even more vexed by the title:

I didn't like the title "Buried History." I disagree with that...I didn't want to be so overwhelming and such but I just thought that was a horrible title. My presentations, we have one called "American Irony: Religious Freedom and Slavery in Colonial Newport." They're doing a good job and they're moving forward with that. When we finish our visitor's center at Touro Synagogue...we're going to have a series of mural depicting different aspects [of the temple's history]. We had to deal with the fact that slaves participated in building the synagogue—that there were certain Jewish homes that owned slaves...What we do is, we tell it, and here's how: we tell it in the right historic context....

Nevertheless, Stokes supports the tour, which takes visitors a bit off the beaten track of Newport's historic hill and instead travels down Washington Street to Broadway, away from the historic hill and the upscale retail shopping centers of Thames Street, and then to Farewell Street to explore the Common Burying Ground, observing the headstones and inscriptions.

The Common Burying Ground, established by John Clark during the colonial period, has a long and symbolic history in Newport. Despite the years of neglect it suffered in the city's care, Stokes notes that the families whose ancestors are buried there maintained their family plots until Stoke formed a commission dedicated to the cemetery's care in the early 1990s, the goal of which was to rehabilitate the cemetery and celebrate it for its historical significance. According to Stokes,

The Common Burying Ground has 400 surviving markers. It's one of the largest and oldest colonial burying grounds in America. But what makes it even more unique is that John Clarke, along with Anne Hutchinson and others who were the settlers here...[John Clarke] also acquired a lot of property in the center of town where the cemeteries are. That's where he's buried and he has a monument there. He also believed that there were two important elements that should be in

Newport. One: no place of worship should have any outward signs of religion—no crosses, no signs of David, no stained glass window... The other thing he felt strongly about was that at the time of your death, when you meet your maker, we shouldn't be in segregated cemeteries. We shouldn't have Quaker cemeteries, Baptist cemeteries...so he said I will give this land with the requirement that everyone can be buried here commonly and equally. So it's the country's first true common burying ground where, as a policy, everyone's getting buried there....side by side. Including enslaved Africans.

Given this history of the symbolism of the cemetery, it is hardly surprising that the burying ground has enjoyed new life as a tourist attraction. Indeed, my own tour of the burying ground in November 2008 revealed a narrative that not only attended to histories of the lives of Africans and African Americans in Newport, but also complemented the extant mythscapes mobilized by Newport as a tourist attraction, including religious tolerance, diversity, and the city's national significance (with the implication that Newport, as much or more than Providence, influenced the foundational tenets of the new republic).

Beyond the Common Burying Ground, however, the "Buried History" tour loses focus, and seems to lack sufficient grounding in the extant built environment and cultural landscapes of the city. After leaving the cemetery, the tour proceeds through the area of Newport known as The Point, the city's oldest neighborhood, which now borders Navy lands and the city's commercial waterfront while yet remaining enclosed and featuring short, narrow streets. When I took the tour in 2008, I heard stories of the neighborhood's colorful histories as I watched a landscaping crew maneuver its trucks with great difficulty in and out of the small backyards of colonial homes to cut the middle-class residents' grass.

The Point, home to some of Newport's oldest residential dwellings and commercial concerns (including the still-operational John Stevens shop, where the grave markers used in the Common Burying Ground have been manufactured since the colonial period), is now a predominantly white neighborhood, the houses of which all feature historic placards. But it was not always so, as this tour reminds visitors that during the early to mid-twentieth century, when the neighborhood experienced disinvestment and faced the threat of slum clearance, a number of these historic homes were occupied by people of African descent. Unfortunately, the tour provides no clear story of where this population went or when it was dispersed throughout the city and/or mainland Rhode Island, focusing instead almost exclusively on the lives of those individuals buried in God's Little Acre or relying on general statements hinting at the displacement of local residents of racial minorities. The walk through The Point, then, seems to be only a convenient backdrop for the story of the cemetery's renovation and the Historical Society's renewed commitment to the frank discussion of race and class in colonial Newport.

When I took the tour on an admittedly chilly day in October of 2008, I was the only patron, and was informed by the tour guide that the tour had been cancelled most of the times she had been scheduled to conduct it, due to lack of visitor interest. And unfortunately, from my experience of the tour it is not difficult to see why. Despite the careful training noted by Keith Stokes and the official endorsement of the NHS, the tour guide possessed limited knowledge beyond the materials provided her about the individuals buried in the Common Burying Ground and even less about patterns of redevelopment throughout Newport's history that might shed light on where Newport's

black populations lived and worked, and how and why those locations might have shifted over the years, particularly during the period of Newport's post-WWII redevelopment which eventually resulted in the building of the Newport Bridge connecting the popular island city to the Providence Plantations mainland via the island of Jamestown. If Bristol's African-American history walking tour was far more conclusive in its connection between the past and present populations of the locally-based African diaspora, then, it nevertheless remains unofficial and inaccessible to most casual visitors to the town, leaving the "Buried History" tour the only option for those curious about African and African American history in the East Bay and on Aquidneck Island.

***Conclusion: Where do we go from here?***

If the "Buried History" tour and the recent archaeological research conducted at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House are promising signals of the commitment of the stewards of Newport's historical tourist attractions to attend to the more unsavory aspects of Newport's development during the colonial and early American periods, they fail to connect that history with the cultural landscapes, characteristics and demographics of contemporary Newport County. Possibly in recognition of such limitations, Pieter Roos, Executive Director of the Newport Restoration Foundation, and Keith Stokes, the Executive Director of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, worked with a number of local historical experts to craft an "Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List" which would emphasize Newport's role not only in state and regional histories, but also the city's significance in national and transnational histories. Entitled "Colonial Newport and the 'Lively Experiment,'" and submitted in to the National Parks Service (NPS) in 2007, this application nominates a series of

Newport's historic structures and sites for designation as a World Heritage attraction. Interestingly, despite suggestions from NPS advisors that the proposal might enjoy greater success if the application featured only one site (the NPS singled out Touro Synagogue especially), Roos, Stokes and their Newport World Heritage Committee instead submitted the application as originally conceived, arguing that singling out a single site as representation of the "lively experiment" in religious freedom and diversity, maritime commerce, and civic life would be both unfair and inaccurate, given the co-constitutive nature of the sites. In an interview with me, Stokes commented extensively on the decision to submit a serial application, despite its limited chances of success.

According to Stokes:

...we can't tell the story of Touro without telling the story of Quaker Meetinghouse, and the interaction between Baptists and Jews and Quakers. I mean to us it was one story. It was one people who were just wrestling with this thing called civil liberties... But [the World Heritage Application] rallied the community. It created this incredible heightened interest in heritage tourism, cultural tourism, the importance of it, the historic attractions. More Rhode Islanders and New Englanders started to come because of the press we received... I mean at Touro Synagogue we couldn't keep pace. We're building a \$7 million visitor center and we couldn't keep pace with the visitors. You know, Jews and Christians are saying, "I just want to hear the story," so that's the good news.... So the good news is that it helped create a lot of positive identity, particularly on our colonial era and structures. The challenging news is we missed the list.<sup>194</sup>

Indeed, the interest in Newport's many colonial and early American attractions created enough local interest in Newport County's national and global significance that the Newport and Bristol Chambers of Commerce joined forces to produce a program (and supporting tourist brochure) inviting locals to become tourists in their own state, and to "Discover Your American Heritage." This program creates a sense of continuity between the historic tourist attractions of the cities of Newport and Bristol, listing color-

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<sup>194</sup> Stokes interview with author October 16, 2008.

coded attractions according to major historical periods (colonial and Gilded Age), themes (religious tolerance and diversity, military history, and maritime heritage) and genres (museums, parks and historic gardens). Funded by the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority, Destination Bristol, the Attractions Council of Newport County and the Newport County Chamber of Commerce, this program and its accompanying literature are clearly invested in not only creating new national and global contexts for Newport County's historic attractions, but also in encouraging Rhode Islanders to get out and visit the historic sites of their own state, and to see those sites as writing Rhode Island residents and the state as a whole, back into national and international significance. While the program encourages local and regional tourists (a population traditionally underrepresented among the visitor rolls of Newport County's myriad historic tourist attractions) to understand themselves as Americans in an increasingly global context, it also emphasizes heritage, often understood as personal and related to memory as opposed to history, a more formal approach to studying the past. As numerous scholars of museum and historical studies report, Americans admit an overwhelming interest in oral histories and personal accounts of the past as well as family genealogies, but they are much more resistant when it comes to codified approaches to history, especially those presented in museums and texts. Accordingly, the Newport and Bristol Chambers of Commerce have appealed to local interest and suggested that everyone will find some element of their past(s) represented in the attractions of Newport County. These historical attractions, the brochure promoting the program implies, are accessible and relevant to everyone.

Clearly tied to localist and regionalist boosterism and the desire to acquire more tourist dollars, this program still clearly draws on the multi-site approach of the Newport

World Heritage Committee's NPS application, and attempts to shift the tourist narrative from its current emphasis on specific sites and populations toward a more complicated narrative detailing the interconnection of Newport and Bristol's historically diverse populations and the ways in which those populations interacted to create complex and rich cultural landscapes in the past whose legacies continue to haunt the present.

According to Stokes, this approach "gets people to think in terms of that interconnectivity." Speaking specifically of the overlap between African, Quaker and Jewish populations as an example, Stokes states:

...how these people lived, worked, worshipped...is very, very relevant. We have primary source materials on colonial Africans—they're personal diaries and such... And it's quite remarkable because we had so many [Africans and African Americans]—we were like Charleston, in that this was a third of our population at one point. But what makes us more unique than Charleston is that because of the fact that Europeans settled here it was mostly those searching for religious freedom, these Africans almost immediately assimilated into their households, family systems, religious systems. It's quite remarkable. I mean, Quaker slaves have names like Patience and Charity, um, Jewish merchants have slaves named Sarah and Rebecca, so we're able to tell a much richer story but also it becomes more of a story of early America and how people were interdependent across so many different systems and that's what people are really---they're just amazed at this, and they want to interact with it.<sup>195</sup>

The goal of producing these more complex narratives of diversity and emphasizing the myriad types of diasporic populations which found themselves in Newport by force or choice, Stokes continues, is twofold. First, such an approach necessarily acknowledges populations often consigned to the periphery of mainstream historical narratives, producing a sense of belonging in immigrant populations who previously believed they had no stake in the historic cultural landscapes and sites of Rhode Island. More complex, interconnected and inclusive narratives (as opposed to the

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

proliferation of tours and sites dedicated exclusively to one individual or group history)

leads to pride in the past, argues Stokes:

You know, black folks, who get so tired of slavery and the negative and the depression, and they don't want to hear about it. You can't say how exciting it is when you say, well let me talk about several Africans who are artisans and where they worked and where they lived and where they came from in Ghana, and the Ashanti tribe and the language they spoke and the day names they gave their children. All of a sudden, it seems like "this is really relevant to me. This is neat." I mean we take kids from the Dominican Republic through our cemetery and they see all these Spanish names and they say "that's my grandfather's name!" Well, there's a lot of trading going on at that time between what is today the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Barbados, Newport, a lot of trading, a lot of families move back and forth. So it really becomes a relevant history, that's relevant to them and who they are today. And that's what gets people wanting to learn more and return to spend more time and money.<sup>196</sup>

But besides broadening the appeal of the historic attractions of Newport County and encouraging a variety of diverse populations to see themselves as interconnected through a shared past, a more comprehensive and multi-faceted approach can also produce feelings of social membership in the present, since people can turn to historic sites and note that their families too were there, and helped shape the built environment and cultural landscapes of contemporary Rhode Island. Stokes remarks upon this phenomenon, stating:

It's about entitlement. It's about the fact that you walk into a grand mansion and you see all the portraits of the founders. You walk into any of the Ivy League schools, you see all the portraits—they're continuing to tell you the message of "this is my place, my home, my country, mine." You need to do the same for people of color and for women. You need to be able to do the same where we see history as a ticket to entitlement and a ticket to validity: I can be here and do anything I want to because my people were here, they contributed, they were leaders. You see it when the kids connect to this... so I just feel very strongly about the fact that the more we tell this interactive story, this interconnected story that is more from the perspective of "the rest of us", the more we're all going to embrace history and have a sense of entitlement.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

Yet despite the potentially positive outcomes of an inclusive narrative unified by a history of ideas (i.e., the idea of religious tolerance or freedom) rather than one organized by group identity or site-specific architectural significance (two traditionally accepted approaches to historic heritage management), the NPS informed the Newport World Heritage Committee that its application failed to demonstrate “outstanding universal significance” because its claims to such value was based on intangible ideas rather than the more approaches listed above. In their response to the NPS, the Newport World Heritage Committee observed recent trends in academic histories and noted that unifying ideas and themes will become of increasing importance in an increasingly global community. They also note the mutability of architectural significance, since natural disasters and other events can alter or summarily remove/demolish specific sites, while the ideas which created those sites will necessarily remain elements of the usable past. Crafting historical narratives of outstanding universal significance (OUS) out of intangible elements rather than material artifacts can in fact be a safer and more sustainable approach than the emphasis usually assigned to specific sites and places by the NPS.<sup>198</sup>

If the historic narratives presented by the Newport Historical Society (NHS) and the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) have yet to find the most effective ways to correlate the stories of the past with the built environment, cultural landscapes and demographics of contemporary Newport and Bristol, then, perhaps this difficulty is reflective of not only local politics (i.e., mainland v. island), but also a more overarching problem in historic asset management at the national level. Just as academic discourse

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<sup>198</sup> Newport World Heritage Committee Response to the National park Service letter of May 2007.

within the humanities has, since the 1970s, begin to champion more explicitly interdisciplinary approaches in the hopes of broadening the scope of objects of inquiry as well as the methods and strategies used to study them, so too does such an approach need to be taken by the United States government (particularly, in this case, the National Parks Service) in its approach to its own heritage and tourism. Placing ideas and themes on equal footing with specific tangible resources would not only assist Newport and other locations with related but disparate historic sites in linking those sites to produce broader social contexts and implications for visitors and residents alike, but it would also bring the U.S. more in step with the heritage management practices of other nations.

According to the Newport World Heritage Committee, precedent for multi-site world heritage attractions does exist in Weimar, Germany, a town added to the list of World Heritage sites in 1998 on the strength of the argument that an aggregate of dissimilar sites, when considered summarily, represented an important period in the nineteenth century development of German art and culture. Since even the worthiest application cannot be considered by the US ICOMOS until it has been accepted by the National Parks Service, perhaps the NPS needs to get more comfortable with the idea of interpreting landscapes rather than specific sites, an idea discussed extensively in the chapters 5 and 6, which examine the preservation projects associated with entire neighborhoods located along the southeastern tip of Newport and the East Side of Providence respectively.

## Chapter 4: “Magic is Expensive”:

### The Domestic Leisurescapes of Gilded Age Newport

Because of its fine climate and island location, Newport grew from an 18<sup>th</sup> century maritime center into the “Queen of American Resorts.” That growth reflects the broad and varied development of America itself, from colonial times through the Industrial Revolution and the exciting era known as La Belle Epoque when Newport was the summering place for America’s wealthiest and most influential families. Their position and Newport’s island charm led to it being the site for works by America’s greatest architects and most creative designers, many of whom are represented in the buildings maintained by the Preservation Society.<sup>199</sup>

Lined with Gilded Age mansions that once belonged to the most prestigious nouveau-riche American families, including the Astors, the Vanderbilts, and the Berwinds, Bellevue Avenue in Newport is Rhode Island’s single most recognizable and popular tourist attraction. According to Preservation Society of Newport County Director of Museum Experience John Rodman, the perennially high rates of admission to the mansions reached their apex in 2001, with 913,000 paid admissions.<sup>200</sup> And these numbers are hardly surprising, as Bellevue Avenue and the narrow lanes which connect it to the oft-visited Cliff Walk feature some of the grandest architectural testaments to the era social theorist Thorstein Veblen has referred to as the “Age of Conspicuous

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<sup>199</sup> *A Guidebook to Newport Mansions of the Preservation Society of Newport County* (Newport, RI: Preservation Society of Newport County and Fort Church Publishers, Inc., 1984): 2.

<sup>200</sup> The mansions have been popular since they were recreated by the Preservation Society as tourist attractions rather than private residences. Though the Society maintains admission data stretching back to its formation in 1948, admissions never broke 100,000 until 1964, even before the Pell Bridge connected Aquidneck Island to the state’s mainland and increased tourist traffic. By 1968 the number jumped to 173,000, and after the opening of the bridge in 1969, the Society saw a 20% increase in traffic, with admissions in 1970 reaching 200,000. Only three years later in 1973, the number had almost doubled to 366,000 and by 1977, the new high water mark was 694,000 visitors annually, with most of the business conducted during the summer months. Author interview with John Rodman September 27, 2008.

Consumption.”<sup>201</sup> Indeed, the consumption continues to this day, as visitors from all over the United States and from docking international cruise ships flock to Newport to tour mansions with names such as The Breakers, Beechwood, Kingscote, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Marble House and The Elms to learn something of the steel magnates and “robber barons” who spent fortunes building, decorating and maintaining these summer “cottages,” though the houses were only occupied for six or eight weeks during the summer season.

Many of the mansions feature collections including tapestries, china, furniture, sculpture and other art forms, and it is interesting to note the number of these artifacts which were purchased from the British Empire’s leading families during their age of decline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A phenomenon chronicled by American novelist Edith Wharton, a long-time summer resident of Newport, many Americans eager to prove their wealth and place in the tenuous American social hierarchy of the Gilded Age bought up as many European objects d’art as possible on trips abroad.<sup>202</sup> As Wharton notes in a number of her novels and as Thorstein Veblen makes clear, these Americans accumulated all the lineage they would need to take their place in the American social economy via shrewd business deals (some of which included marriages of American heiresses to members of the landed but virtually penniless British peerage) with aristocratic families of Old Europe eager to exchange the artifacts of their dying culture for the potential of continued relevance in a world

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<sup>201</sup> Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Modern Library Paperbacks, 2001). Originally published in 1899.

<sup>202</sup> Important to note here is the fact that many of the most notorious robber barons and industrial magnates of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era began as immigrants themselves. The initial patriarchs of the Carnegie, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and lesser known families all rose to prominence in the US after emigrating from nations including Ireland and Sweden. Besides being captains of industry, these individuals also conformed to the American archetype of “self-made” men.

economy where real estate, stocks and dollars, rather than blue blood, guaranteed prestige and social dominance.<sup>203</sup>

Accordingly, then, this chapter complicates Robin Cohen's extant typology of diasporic populations by adding yet another into the mix. The Gilded Age in the United States, generally understood to span the years between 1880 and 1920, not only saw an influx of immigrant labor diasporas, a population that would support both directly and indirectly the free market capitalist infrastructure undergirding the resort-style Gilded Age summer colony at Newport, but also the rise of a leisure diaspora. Indeed, the original Gilded Age was not only an age of opulence and unbridled capitalist accumulation among the wealthiest Americans, it was also the period during by which domestic American tourism became firmly entrenched. As an increasing number of Americans began to define themselves as middle class, linking this identity to shorter work hours, increased professional specialization, and membership in voluntary and civic associations, they also enjoyed more leisure time, and performed that leisure (and the surplus wealth it connoted) by traveling within the United States. While the "grand tour" of Europe had long been the province of wealthy Americans, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century saw the destigmatization of non-productive time and established a new industry that came to symbolize modernity and progress due to its association with transportation technologies including railroads and steamships. During this period, then, a population of middle and upper class individuals and families that migrated (sometimes as a singular venture, sometimes as a seasonal ritual) for causes other than economic necessity or force was

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<sup>203</sup> For an excellent analysis of the cultural life of the British Empire as competition with American markets and troubles in its colonial holdings weakened both the peerage and the mainland economy, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

established. These domestic migrants, particularly the summer colonists of Newport, Rhode Island, moved by choice, though such choices were still proscribed by the material circumstances in which both individuals and families found themselves, and which they hoped to either raise or maintain via the social engines open to them in resort areas.

Another class of migrants also existed in Gilded Age Newport. Servants of foreign birth, particularly those of Irish extraction, found work in Newport's great hotels and private houses. If recent immigrants to Rhode Island were hired to staff the Bellevue Avenue mansions year round, a small army of servants also traveled with families such as the Vanderbilts, Astors and Berwinds as they made their summer pilgrimage to Newport. Indeed, though the summer season lasted only 6-8 weeks, entire households, from wardrobes to place-settings and china, were transported from New York and Pennsylvania to Rhode Island's exclusive summer colony.

Given this expanded typology of diaspora and migration which includes not only the extraordinarily wealthy (the individuals usually associated with Newport's historical narratives) but also the servants who made the summer colony function smoothly, in this chapter I consider first the dominant tourist narratives associated with Gilded Age Newport. I take as my particular case study the narratives presented by the Preservation Society of Newport County, the preservation and historical asset-management organization in charge of shaping and articulating Newport's Gilded Age history for visitors to the mansions. Traditionally used to mobilize cultural and architectural histories of the wealthiest of Gilded Age families, the homes collectively known as the Bellevue Avenue Mansions, the Preservation Society argues, are meant to testify to the enduring national significance of nineteenth-century Newport. With this goal in mind, I examine

the ways the narratives of Gilded Age Newport have shifted over time from an emphasis on a decorative arts approach to a more integrated historical narrative that also features elements of social/cultural and economic histories as well. Particularly of note here are three major alterations to the dominant narrative that have occurred over time in efforts to maintain visitor interest and cultivate new audiences.

First, the 1980s saw the integration of women's history at the mansions. This addition came on the heels of the reintroduction of a number of memoirs authored by female members of some of America's wealthiest Gilded Age families, including May Van Rensselaer, Elizabeth Drexel Lehr and Consuelo Vanderbilt. Of these three chroniclers of Gilded Age Newport, Consuelo Vanderbilt, the daughter of William K. Vanderbilt and Alva Smith Vanderbilt, is the most famous. Her tell-all memoir *The Glitter and the Gold* remains the most well-known and widely read of the female-authored memoirs of the American Gilded Age, and is credited with exposing the casualties that industrial capitalism occasioned among not only the urban working classes, but also within in the very families whose patriarchs pulled Wall Street's considerable strings. Given the fact that it was largely the women of Newport's affluent summer colony who remained present for the entirety of their 6-8 week stay while their husbands returned only on weekend respites from New York, the 1980s-era expanded focus on women's lives in Newport's Gilded Age summer colony seems appropriate. Indeed, Newport, like many resort towns of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, was essentially an oasis of women, children, and servants in which affluent white women were endowed with (and openly exercised) increased social power and physical

mobility.<sup>204</sup> Additionally, it was not only within the ephemeral social sphere of parties, picnics and fancy-dress balls that women's social power was expressed, but also through the built environment. While many of Newport's most spectacular architectural achievements, most notably the Vanderbilt's Marble House, are often attributed to some of America's leading (male) architects, most were actually designed collaboratively by an architectural firm and the family matriarch. Following the early Vanderbilt example, (which was repeated, much later, by Alva Smith Vanderbilt at the still-privately-owned Belcourt Castle standing at the opposite end of Bellevue Avenue), other influential women of the American Gilded Age also played a significant role in the creation of opulent summer palaces that continue to testify to America's failed attempt to establish an aristocracy akin to the ancient lines of the British peerage. In every aspect of the planning of these great houses, the women of America's nouveau riche played a part, including the selection of building materials, architectural styles, and of course, interior decoration.

The second notable transformation in the Preservation Society's dominant tourist narrative was the introduction, in the 1990s, of self-guided audio tours of the mansions. These tours feature a more flexible narrative which provides visitors with basic architectural and design information about the house and the social history of its owners and occupants, but it also allows each visitor to determine the focus of his/her private tour. If a visitor prefers to skip information about the design elements of a particular room and hear only about the social exploits that occurred in the house, s/he can fast

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<sup>204</sup> This is not to say that the social power of women did not correspond directly to the financial success and reputation of their fathers and husbands, but rather to emphasize that wealthy women operating within the context of nineteenth-century American resort culture did so with a greater degree of social agency and mobility than ever before, allowing for the impression of increased freedom and independent social significance, if not the real article.

forward to the information s/he desires. Additionally, information that might normally have been consigned to a parenthetical comment by a tour guide is now available to visitors at the touch of particular number on the audio tour hand set. Rather than maintaining only one dominant narrative, the Preservation Society of Newport County champions the audio tours specifically because they allow each visitor a personalized experience of the house s/he is touring, in addition to moving more people through the houses as efficiently and quietly as possible.

Finally, another change has occurred in the Preservation Society's dominant narrative in recent years. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which followed the single most successful and lucrative summer season in the Society's history, tourism at the nation's leading cultural history museums in Newport and throughout the nation ground to a near halt as Americans recoiled in collective horror and tourists effectively withdrew into the apparent safety and security of their private homes. In an attempt to woo their visitors back with a new cultural tourism product that would explicitly champion American cultural values, the Preservation Society conducted new research into servant life, seeking out "behind-the-scenes" information about the decidedly unglamorous inner workings of the Bellevue Avenue Mansions. This new research yielded informational reports available on the Society's website, but also resulted in the "rooftop and behind-the-scenes" tour of The Elms, one of the last great houses built on Bellevue Avenue by Philadelphia coal magnate and industrialist Edward Berwind. This new tour, introduced in 2008, discusses the human and material resources it took to run one of the palatial Bellevue Avenue estates during the summer season. Taking visitors well below the main rooms of the house into the basement with its coal-

delivery tunnels and early electrical wiring as well as exploring the roof and the servants' quarters, this new tour emphasizes the labor and economic histories associated with the home, introducing themes, facts and names never before linked to the Newport mansions. More than an integration of the newest of social histories "from below," these tours also represent a desire of the Preservation Society to depict the Bellevue Avenue mansions as essentially American. Traditionally recognized for their structural adherence to European aristocratic architecture, the mansions are often overlooked as locations using the most cutting edge of American technologies—technologies introduced and funded by the robber barons who financed the houses. These captains of American industry were eager to feature the newest technologies in the homes they used most routinely for public entertaining. Accordingly, they installed electricity, telephones and other electronic communication devices, early water purification systems, and cutting edge heating and cooling mechanisms to maintain the comfort of their family members and guests. Focusing on these advancements, rather than the design and decoration of the houses, Preservation Society Executive Director Trudy Coxe and Marketing Director John Rodman recognize, helps the Society maintain interest in their perennially-popular product while also wooing a potentially new clientele interested not in faux-European artistry and aesthetics but in distinctly American industry.

These three major transformations in the dominant tourist narrative crafted by the Preservation Society of Newport County, I argue here, constitute significant revisions undertaken to rewrite the city's historic resort culture, so often seen as tangential or ancillary to the everyday life of working and middle-class America, back into national narratives to support its contemporary tourist profile. Additionally, in 2007, the Newport

World Heritage Committee (which championed the transnational approach to Newport's colonial history discussed in chapter 4) authored an "Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List" written in support of a collection of Gilded Age structures. Just as the Committee has emphasized the global aspects of Newport's eighteenth-century maritime history, so too does it wish to link Gilded Age Newport to a more extensive transnational network. Like its counterpart written in support of Colonial Newport, however, the application for inclusion on the World Heritage list written for Gilded Age Newport was dismissed by the National Parks Service as lacking in universal historical relevance. Accordingly, I argue here that both the Preservation Society of Newport County and the Newport World Heritage Committee (which have a significant overlap in not only personnel but also organizational goals) have attempted to reintegrate Newport and its Gilded Age past into national and transnational narratives respectively. Their combined efforts have shifted the narrative associated with the Bellevue Avenue mansions from one based exclusively on leisure diasporas, the architecture of wealth and domestic decorative arts to one that more explicitly and comprehensively accounts for the financescapes and taskscapes which made the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age possible. To maintain the extraordinary popularity of the Newport mansions and expand its appeal, the Preservation Society of Newport County has altered extant tours, conducted new research and created new interpretations to revise their properties as not only sites of luxury and leisure, but also as sites of labor undertaken by immigrants of European ethnicities. Additionally, the Newport World Heritage Committee has attempted to establish a sense of Gilded Age Newport as a composite cultural landscape, rather than a collection of discrete structures

with individual histories. Accordingly, I work from the narrative presented in the World Heritage Committee's Gilded Age application as the most recent example of the combined efforts of Newport's preservation, tourism and public history stewards to organize my own discussion of the three major transformations undertaken by the Preservation Society of Newport County. Though most tourists will never hear about or be familiar with the World Heritage Application in support of Gilded Age Newport, the document nevertheless represents the most recent narrative efforts to interpret Gilded Age Newport as a multi-site cultural landscape and is clearly derived from the efforts and personnel of the Preservation Society of Newport County.

Finally, I explore the meanings and implications of the enduring popularity of the Newport mansions. What does their popularity reveal about contemporary American culture and its relationship to histories and sites of conspicuous consumption, as well as the attendant politics of labor and leisure which make it possible?

### **The Newport Mansions: An Introduction**

The Newport Mansions, as they are colloquially referred to in tourist literature, are situated along the southeastern coast of Rhode Island, and although the 11 properties owned by the Preservation Society of Newport County collectively constitute the fourth most popular museum in New England, they are surprisingly easy to miss if a tourist does not seek them out. The mansions once owned by some of the most famous entrepreneurial families of the American Gilded Age line both sides of Bellevue Avenue in what used to be an expanse of rural land bounded only by a rocky coast jutting into Rhode Island Sound. The lots on one side of the Avenue stretch east to the Cliff Walk, a natural boundary between land and water, while the lots on the other side are bounded by

Spring Street to the west, a location still populated by eighteenth and nineteenth-century single-family clapboard homes.

The mansions have long been championed by the Preservation Society of Newport County as the architectural testimony to the American cultural Renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is not only their facades and extensive grounds that attract visitors by the busload. The interiors of these houses have been carefully restored with period furniture, some from the collections of the families that once lived there, as well as featuring collections of sculpture, paintings, and other artifacts that would have been exhibited there during the summer seasons when the families were in residence. Accordingly, then, the mansions are not only living archives of late nineteenth century conspicuous consumption, but also the occasions of its contemporary equivalent, as both locals and tourists alike visit the great houses as they do the bones of dinosaurs displayed in museums: to serve not only as the audience for a narrative of excessive wealth and display, but also as witnesses to the remains of America's first Gilded Age. Indeed, these great houses (many of them Americanized copies of Europe's grandest architectural feats), may at first glance seem to testify to the impossibility, the unsustainability, of the accumulation of such wealth in a free market American economy. Indeed, from this perspective, they are glittering architectural spectacles of a temporary American aristocracy, and are uniquely positioned to perform Newport's 19<sup>th</sup> century past daily from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM during the summer season. With special holiday hours and individual gift shops where guests can purchase texts relating to the homes and their occupants, as well as imitations of the materials contained in each mansion, including

delicate china tea cups, embroidered bookmarks, and commemorative spoon collections, the museum is also a mall.

But the houses-in-context, however, provide a much richer tale of Newport, its population and culture—one laid bare by a performance studies approach that combines archival history, cultural geography, and tourism studies and insists on the theoretical salience of identitarian categories of difference such as race/color, ethnicity, sex, class, etc. and the ways in which those categories are constructed and displayed in geography and space.<sup>205</sup> For tourists who venture beyond the ticketed gates of the properties owned and operated by the Preservation Society of Newport County, there are other Newports: one of extreme and enduring wealth displayed on the private, gated lots along the southernmost tip of Bellevue Avenue, the side streets that fade into the Cliff Walk, and the sweeping hills and cliff of Ocean Drive; and working Newport, a town of small business owners and blue-collar workers, multi-family houses and apartment complexes.

### **The Dominant Narrative of Gilded Age Newport**

Of the 11 sites included in the Newport World Heritage Committee's "Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List," 6 are owned and operated by the Preservation Society of Newport County and all are located along Bellevue Avenue (though some of the properties have façades that front on cross streets). These properties, in chronological order of construction, include Kingscote (1839-1841); the Edward King House (1845); Chateau-sur-Mer (1852); the Griswold House (1862); the Newport Casino (1880); the Isaac Bell House (1883); Marble House

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<sup>205</sup> For a careful analysis of the varied meaning of place and space to identity-based communities, see historical preservation scholar Ned Kaufman, "Moving Forward: Futures for a Preservation Movement" *Giving Preservation a History* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

(1892); Rough Point (1893); The Breakers (1895); The Elms (1901); and Bellevue House (1910). The World Heritage Application not only profiles each of these properties, providing a brief overview of the historic significance of each estate, but, in so doing, also constructs and documents the official narrative of Gilded Age Newport that has long been established by the Preservation Society of Newport County. This narrative views each structure as part of a multi-site story and a complex cultural landscape, each property relying on the others for a full interpretation and contextualization of its related financescapes, taskscapes, and overarching mythscape of leisure and conspicuous consumption.

While many historians interpret the Gilded Age as a short and very distinct period during the long nineteenth century, usually identified as spanning the years between 1880 and 1920, The Newport World Heritage Committee identifies the Gilded Age as unfolding in Newport between 1840 and 1914, viewing this period as one of “rebirth” for American architecture and taking the position that this renaissance is best evidenced by the built environment of Newport’s Bellevue Avenue. The families that commissioned the Newport mansions, the city’s World Heritage Committee argues in its application, “were prominent leaders in the economic, social, political, artistic, and cultural life of the nation” and were well aware of their role and their impact on civic life, viewing themselves and the landscape they occupied as “the heirs of Western European values and traditions and as a site for the rebirth of these political, economic, and cultural ideas.”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Pieter Roos, “Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List,” 2007:5.

The World Heritage Committee's listing of the properties, while not encompassing every Gilded Age structure lining Bellevue Avenue, is particularly instructive insofar as it lists the properties according to date of construction, rather than by street number. Such a chronological, rather than spatial organization of the narrative of Gilded Age Newport allows the World Heritage Committee to emphasize not only the architectural attributes of the structures included, but also to contextualize the way the Gilded Age unfolded in Newport. Rather than foregrounding the physical attributes and locations of specific structures along Bellevue Avenue, the Committee instead takes a cultural landscape approach, insisting on the existence of a multi-site cityscape that charts "the evolution of the nation's cultural identity from an agrarian society to a modern industrial state."<sup>207</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the profiles of each property featured in the application include information on the technologies and cultural ideologies which informed and enabled the building of each structure as well as historical data related to the land on which each home, hotel, and entertainment complex rests, and the careful city planning ventures which resulted in the conversion of Newport's far-flung rural expanses into some of the most desired and sought after real estate in post-bellum America. Since my emphasis here is not on the architectural significance of Newport's Gilded Age structures, but rather on the construction of a mainstream tourist narrative of 19<sup>th</sup> century Newport, my own analysis of the Committee's application is split into two chronological periods which allow me to examine the evolution of 19<sup>th</sup> century Newport throughout the entirety of the period suggested by the Committee, but also to clearly differentiate between an American Gilded Age (1880-1920) characterized not only by exceptional wealth and social display but also accompanying political corruption and financial

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

manipulation and the earlier period (1840-1880) which saw the rise of domestic tourism in the United States generally.

*From Town to City: Newport 1840-1880*

The World Heritage Committee begins the story of Newport's transformation from town to city with a domestic structure known as Kingscote. Noteworthy as the earliest remaining private residence associated with Bellevue Avenue and Gilded Age Newport, Kingscote is a shingle-style home commissioned by Southern planter George Noble Jones of Savannah, Georgia and completed in 1839. When Jones purchased the house, only marshes and farms surrounded the picturesque property, and the home quickly earned the reputation as a novelty on the basis of its indoor plumbing.<sup>208</sup> The southern Jones family occupied the house until April of 1863, when tensions between the north and the south made it prudent to sell the property to William Henry Hunter King, a China Trade merchant and native Newporter, for \$35,000.<sup>209</sup>



*Contemporary Kingscote. Photo courtesy the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

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<sup>208</sup> *Guidebook to Newport Mansions* 12.

<sup>209</sup> The home as it exists today looks very different from the original Gothic Revival structure designed for the Jones family by Richard Upjohn, founder of the American Institute of Architects. When David King, William Henry Hunter King's nephew, took over the house in 1875, he hired Newport architect George Champlin Mason to build the first addition, completed in 1878. By 1880 the cottage had become known as Kingscote and the King family had grown, as had King's financial portfolio and social influence. Accordingly, he added another three-story addition in 1881, employing nationally-recognized architectural firm McKim, Mead and White for the design work. This addition was completed by 1882. When David King died in 1894, his widow Ella Rives King lived there with her daughter Maud and son Phillip. William Henry King died in 1897, leaving the house up for sale, but Ella Rives King purchased it for \$75,000, and the family continued to live there until Maud King took over the house in 1915. Despite attempts made by the city government in the 1950s and 1960s to buy the house, demolish it and build a school in its place, Maud King refused, and when she died in 1972, she left the house, its furnishings and a trust fund for its maintenance to the Preservation Society. See *Guidebook to Newport Mansions* 20-22. The

Kingscote, though certainly an impressive residence even by contemporary standards, is clearly from an earlier and less ostentatious period than many of the other private homes commissioned by the families who maintained summer residences on Bellevue Avenue between 1880 and 1920. Indeed, this residence helps mobilize the story of Newport during its rise to prominence as a resort community, when the summer colonists included the Boston Brahmin class of genteel artists, writers, and civic-minded intellectuals, among whose ranks were found Julia Ward Howe, Henry James, artist John Lafarge, and the family of young Edith Wharton (nee Edith Newbold Jones). Indeed, though the rest of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was largely overlooked in geographer Jedediah Morse's 1789 text *The First Geography of the United States*, the town of Newport was yet singled out as the "Eden of America," a moniker that still suited the seaside town well into the nineteenth century. Despite its late-eighteenth-century depressed economy and reduced population, Newport remained an attractive location by the sea, and when its fortunes improved in the 1830s, established members of the Boston elite and southern planter class summered in well-appointed family homes located on the farms and undeveloped meadows far from the bustling and historic colonial center of Newport, entertaining themselves with picnics, informal dances, seafood bakes, literary salons and concerts.<sup>210</sup>

A number of nostalgic memoirs were written about the Newport of the 1830s and 1840s. Among the most noteworthy is Maud Howe Elliott's *This Was My Newport*, published in 1944 as a reminder of the early days of Newport as a summer colony, before the arrival of the "invaders" whose presence (and tax revenue) transformed the rural areas

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house is best known now for its sizable collection of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese porcelain statues and oil paintings which William Henry Hunter King amassed during his travels to Canton and Macao. Ibid 17.

of the seaside town into a luxurious stage on which some of America's most infamous social dramas were enacted. Elliott recalls summer visits to Newport before social expectations and demonstrations of wealth rose to the level they reached during Newport's Gilded Age years. Cannily observing the reputation Newport had gained as the preeminent site of leisure and luxury in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Elliott makes clear that her memoir, like the reminiscences of Henry James, is intended to recall Newport when it was an unassuming summer colony of simple pleasures. Such a narrative reveals the legacies of displacement Newport's various leisure diasporas have experienced, especially since the Boston Brahmin and southern planter classes, those who occupied Newport during the 1840s, could hardly be considered as down-at-heels as Newport's remaining full-time residential population. Themselves the earliest "invaders," these summer colonists nevertheless recall their experience of Newport as the original and most authentic, suggesting that the subsequent development of the town during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century largely destroyed Newport's rural aspect and slow pace of life. Rather than the rural seaside getaway from city life that Newport had been during the 1840s, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the largely undeveloped land along the southern end of the island had been fully integrated into the thriving city of Newport, and many of the homes frequented by the earliest summer colonists were destroyed to make way for new roads and the home lots that would later become the site of palatial Gilded age estates.

Accordingly, almost none of the older residences in which the earliest southern planters or Boston artists and intellectuals spent their summers remain to testify to southern Newport's transition from rural seaside town to a hotbed of nationally-recognized luxurious hotels. Kingscote, however, with its late 19<sup>th</sup> century additions,

remains a valuable artifact of the changes such homes might have seen had they survived.

According to the Newport World Heritage Committee:

The changes made [to Kingscote] by David and Ella Rives King in the 1870s and '80s reflected the evolving social requirements of summer life in Newport. Rural pleasures and simple home entertainments were progressively displaced by more formal events in more opulent settings, as dictated by the aesthetics and expectations of an increasingly affluent and urbane summer colony.<sup>211</sup>

Though the first years of the 1840s saw Kingscote standing alone, a solitary private dwelling on a relatively isolated slope along the southeastern coast of Aquidneck Island, the steady increase of summer visitors to Newport occasioned the construction of nearby hotels that gradually replaced the modest private dwellings earlier summer colonists had owned or rented. The first of these structures, Ocean House, opened in 1844, accommodated 300 guests and cost \$22,000 to build, while the famed Atlantic House opened its doors the following year.<sup>212</sup>

Indeed, the 1840s through the 1860s was an age of hotels in Newport, and signaled the rise of domestic tourism and resort culture in the United States. From urban locations like Boston and New York to seaside oases including Newport and Ocean City, Maryland, expanded rail routes, affordable fares and increased leisure time made vacationing a new middle-class past time, and hotels sprung up all over the U.S. to support the demands occasioned by this new leisure diaspora. According to tourism scholar Catherine Cocks, however, hotel culture of the 1840s would be decidedly unrecognizable to contemporary American tourists. More communitarian than private, even the most sumptuous of Newport's hotels would not have taken reservations, and it was not uncommon for hotels to expect guests to share rooms with strangers, as they

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<sup>211</sup> Roos 3.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid 45-46.

rented by the bed space, not by the room.<sup>213</sup> Only as hotel culture developed throughout the 1850s and 1860s did privacy become increasingly conceptualized as something akin to contemporary expectations, with private rooms, private dinner tables and increased services offered to guests.<sup>214</sup>

If the 1840s and 1850s had been the age of hotels in Newport (and constituted Henry James' quiet resort oasis), the postbellum period saw a decided shift away from hotels and rental properties as summer colonists took privatization to the next level, preferring to design and build seasonal residences rather than stay in hotels for the duration of the summer. The Bellevue and Fillmore hotels closed in the 1860s, while the Atlantic House held on until the 1870s, when it too closed as a hotel but enjoyed a new life as an educational facility for the U.S. Navy, which had relocated its Naval Academy from Annapolis to Newport after the bombardment of Fort Sumter. The closure or adaptive reuse of hotels in Newport even gained national notice, as the *New York Times* ran an article in 1875 under the headline, "The City of Cottages: Decline of Newport Hotel Life."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001): 71-76.

<sup>214</sup> Indeed, the onset of privatization, so well-documented by scholars of gender and space in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is easily seen in the evolution of serving styles employed in hotel dining rooms. While the American Plan featuring one daily rate for room and board and meals served at specific times in a community dining room reigned supreme at hotels during the early years of this period, the European Plan gradually gained favor during the post-bellum years. Characterized by itemized menus that allowed guests to choose their food from a small selection and pay per item, the European Plan eventually replaced the American style of serving entire meals to communally-seated guests who passed food to each other. Finally, even this practice was replaced by the French style, in which the waiters served each guest individually at private tables, as in contemporary restaurants throughout much of the global west.<sup>214</sup> Like the railroad cars in which guests traveled to their destinations, then, hotels became increasingly privatized, hierarchically organized and luxurious as the period progressed. The central symbolic value of hotels during this period was the sale of domestic comfort and the abstraction of domesticity itself. The hotel brought together the private and public, the domestic and the commercial. Cocks 98.

<sup>215</sup> The Navy did not just take over the Atlantic House, but became a year round presence in Newport that helped to stabilize the economy of the city in the off-season. Although the Naval Academy was only located in Newport for four years, the Navy did establish a torpedo station on nearby Goat Island in 1869,

Why the wealthy decided that summering in their own homes was preferable to residing in hotels or rented houses is a matter of some debate, but likely has to do with the increasing significance of private property and the division of social space into private (homes) and public (sites of work and civic engagement) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cultural historian Jon Sterngass also observes that a number of great American thinkers (including Walt Whitman) joined in the belief that to own one's own living space and land was to be self-determined, an idea with roots long established in the agrarian land-owning tradition of elite early America.<sup>216</sup>

Examples of the rise of a privatized resort culture in Newport are noted in the Newport World Heritage Committee's application, and include the Edward King House, completed in 1847, and Chateau-Sur-



*Contemporary Chateau-sur-Mer. Photo courtesy the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

Mer, initially designed in the 1850s. Like Kingscote, the Edward King House of 35

King Street was designed by Richard Upjohn. The home was featured in architectural historian Andrew Jackson Downing's 1850 text *The Architecture of Country Houses*, making a name for Newport as "the place to look for the most innovative designs in domestic architecture" and establishing the city as a site where famous architects could experiment with style and form, executing some of their most memorable and well-

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and then the Naval War College in 1884. Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport and Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001): 183.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid 185.

documented work.<sup>217</sup> Included in the multi-site Gilded Age nomination for its “definitive and formative interpretation of the Italianate villa style,” the home was originally constructed for another China Trade merchant named Edward LeRoy King (William Henry Hunter King’s brother), was completed in 1847 and was located on the parcel of land directly neighboring Kingscote.<sup>218</sup> The house is now owned and maintained by the City of Newport, but is not open for public tours.

Another home that experienced significant architectural transformations over time is Chateau-sur-Mer. This Bellevue Avenue “castle on the sea” is associated with two different architectural periods: the 1850s and 1870s and signifies “a bridge between the human-scale “retreat” architecture of Kingscote and the palatial aspect of Marble House and its Gilded Age successors.”<sup>219</sup> Built for (yet another) China Trade magnate William Shepard Wetmore by local contractor Seth Bradford, the home was completed in 1852 and constructed of Fall River granite from neighboring Massachusetts.<sup>220</sup> Though the Preservation Society has restored the house to its 1870s appearance and offers the estate to tourists as an example of Victorian architecture, the World Heritage Committee also argues that the changes made to the home over the years by world-renowned architects enable the interiors to “provide a window into the transmission of British and European

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<sup>217</sup> Roos 7.

<sup>218</sup> Roos 7.

<sup>219</sup> *Guide to Newport Mansions* 24.

<sup>220</sup> WH application 8. Wetmore owned land and property in Newport as well as in New York, Ohio and Tennessee, but chose to retire to Newport with his family. After Wetmore’s death in 1862, his son George Peabody Wetmore, later Rhode Island Governor and U.S. Senator, employed Richard Morris Hunt to remodel and expand the house. Further changes were made in the early years of the twentieth century, when Peabody Wetmore’s daughters, Edith Malvina Keteltas and Maude Alice Keteltas covered the woodwork and decorated ceilings with oil paint and collaborated with their cousin Ogden Codman, co-author with Edith Wharton of *The Decoration of Houses*, to redecorate the Green Salon in the classical American revival style. Ibid 29.

design trends of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the American social and cultural landscape.”<sup>221</sup>

While new construction in Newport had come to a virtual standstill during the American Revolution and had not altered much since, the increasing and unceasing waves of summer residents made new construction in the 1850s not only possible, but necessary, effectively resuscitating local industry:

Building contractors thrived, while three Newport steam mills sawed and planed year-round turning out doors and windows. Rapid growth after 1850 totally transformed the previously open land that had dominated the West Broadway area. Burnside and Callender Avenues, Davis Court, and Appleby, Covell, Edward, Feke, and White Streets were laid out. By 1870, more than two hundred structures had been built in this “New-town,” twice the number that existed in 1850. On the other side of town, residential and commercial development along Thames and Spring Streets drifted southward, creating new neighborhoods and opportunities for employment.<sup>222</sup>

Tourism had everything to do with Newport’s economic development during this period. Just as the first guidebook of the city was published in 1852, plans were proposed to cut new roads along the southern coast of the town by the early 1850s.<sup>223</sup> Even while guide books and other promotional materials touted Newport as a retreat from the encroaching urbanization of cities such as Boston and New York, the town of Newport was making plans to expand, and the Mayor of Newport noted in 1851 that a significant number of farms had already been broken up and converted into lots for private development.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid 8, 24.

<sup>222</sup> Sterngass 52-53.

<sup>223</sup> Alan Schumacher has written extensively about Newport’s guide books. He sets 1852 as the publication date of the first official guide book, excluding all previous books on the town which could not be easily carried and/or were not explicitly aimed at visitors unfamiliar with the area. Schumacher, “Nineteenth Century Newport Guidebooks,” *Newport History* 51.4 [1978]: 73-94.

A real estate boom began slowly at first, then picked up pace as the desire for private homes spread. As early as 1835, Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor George Eng had purchased a rural estate from the Kay family and subdivided it for seasonal residents, but the single most significant person in Newport real estate during this period was Alfred Smith, an islander by birth (he was born in Middletown) who had been trained as a tailor, he saved up his money by working in New York City for a time, then returned to Newport after having met some of the wealthiest New York City residents and advised them regarding land purchases in his native Rhode Island. Smith himself purchased 300 acres of land to the southeast of Touro Street in the 1840s, just as business in Newport was picking up exponentially during the summer seasons. Smith disposed of his purchased lots almost immediately, and made another similar purchase of 140 acres in 1851. This newest purchase was former farmland. Meanwhile, he worked with the town council to lengthen beach lands, enhancing the value of his lots by their proximity to beaches and to cliff views of the ocean.<sup>224</sup> The summer residents paid significantly higher taxes than year-round residents, and helped to finance the continued expansion of the town.<sup>225</sup>

Smith became a valuable member of public life in Newport, serving on boards and councils all over the town and making the connections necessary to advance the goals of his real estate company. In January of 1852 a plan was hatched to build what would become known as Bellevue Avenue. The road would be 50 feet wide and run from Dixon's Lane all the way to beach, effectively creating a pathway for new home

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<sup>224</sup> Sterngass 186.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid 187.

development.<sup>226</sup> Bellevue Avenue was finished in 1853 and lined with trees. Despite its immediate status as a main thoroughfare, the road was not paved until the early 1920s.<sup>227</sup> Before Bellevue Avenue was cut, only Chateau-sur-Mer existed south of Narragansett Street. As the 1850s progressed, however, the disparate farm houses in the area became hot commodities, purchased for potential enlargement or for the land on which they sat.<sup>228</sup> Accordingly, real estate prices went through the roof in Newport:

As late as October 1851, land in the southern part of the city where Bellevue Avenue terminated sold for \$300 an acre; a few years later, speculators unloaded it for between \$2,500 and \$5,500 an acre. Newport property valued at \$5.8 million in 1854 accrued another \$2 million in fewer than ten years. Between 1849 and 1859, personal and real wealth in Newport increased spectacularly from \$4.5 million to \$10.5 million, mainly as a consequence of the presence of summer guests.<sup>229</sup>

Just as low-income renters were moved from their residences in old dilapidated colonials so that the homes could be restored and rented to an economically select group of full and part time Newport residents in the 1950s and 1960s, so too was Smith careful regarding his clientele during the 1860s and 1870s. He would turn down potential buyers who had plenty of financial capital but lacked the desirable social status or lineage. He was known to let a property stand empty rather than sell to those who he felt would make unsuitable members of the highest echelons of Newport society.<sup>230</sup> Although he wasn't alive when the Gilded Age fortunes moved into Newport and built some of the most opulent structures still standing in the United States, Smith is credited with having developed the economic and social infrastructure that made it possible for families such

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<sup>226</sup> Alan Schumacher, "Newport's Real Estate King," *Newport History* 61.2 [1988]: 44.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Sterngass 51-52.

<sup>230</sup> Schumacher 49.

as the Vanderbilts, Astors, Goelets and others to build their fantastic cottages at the edges of Newport's Atlantic cliffs.

The social value of these homes would become considerable, and many wealthy New Yorkers spent more to build and decorate their Newport homes, where they spent only 6-8 weeks annually, than they did to purchase their year-round dwellings in the city.<sup>231</sup> Still, it is important to note that Newport before the Civil War was a very different place than it became almost immediately after:

Although Newport County ranked as one of the wealthiest counties in the United States according to the 1860 census, the Newport of ostentatious plutocrats did not really exist before the Civil War. No estates exceeded a valuation of \$500,000, and only Edward King's surpassed even \$200,000. The socioeconomic elite consisted of fewer than three hundred families whose social influence gave tone to local society but who lived fairly unpretentiously. The households of the five richest men in Newport County in 1860 averaged five servants apiece, and two millionaires employed only nine servants between them.<sup>232</sup>

This changed when families like the Belmonts came to town. A banker and agent for the Rothschilds, August Belmont married Caroline Perry, Newport resident and daughter of Admiral Matthew Perry of the famous North Pole expedition. Belmont first rented a private home for a summer, then bought the 14-acre lot next door for \$47,000 on which he built a mansion named Bythesea.<sup>233</sup> Newport was steadily becoming fashionable, and prices rose accordingly: "The cost of erecting and laying out the grounds of an elegant villa now ranged from \$50,000 to \$200,000, while furnished cottages rented for as much as \$8,000 a season."<sup>234</sup> *Harper's Monthly* remarked on this change, noting "The time when one could live economically [at Newport], unless in a boarding house, is not likely

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<sup>231</sup> Sterngass 188.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid 188-189.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

to return.”<sup>235</sup> In 1875, George Mason authored what is likely the first text describing the dwellings of Newport. He chronicled 45 main homes, 26 of which were owned by New Yorkers, 6 by Bostonians and 6 by year-round residents of Newport. But fashion had really arrived when Mrs. William Astor (Caroline Schermerhorn) purchased Beechwood in 1880 and expanded it to accommodate her social functions.<sup>236</sup>

From the 1850s to 1860s, as the resort culture truly began to flourish, visitors flocked to the seaside from all over the nation and abroad and some residents and long-time summer visitors worried that “moral decay” had set in at the resort. Others worried that the traditional character of Newport had been destroyed by the city’s increasing popularity.<sup>237</sup> Indeed, historian Jon Sterngass notes that in 1870 Henry James, a longtime summer visitor to Newport and champion of the city’s attributes, wrote a series of articles for *The Nation* magazine in which he described American resorts. While he found Saratoga Springs vulgar and full of spectacle, he complimented Newport as “substantial and civilized.”<sup>238</sup> But when he wrote a series of travel essays published as *The American Scene* many years later, his opinion would change drastically, as he passionately declaimed the “white elephants”—the mansions that the nouveau riche had built and which, he believed, destroyed the original atmosphere of the summer colony.

### ***“The Glitter and the Gold”: 1890-1914***

If the 50 years preceding the highest point of the Gilded Age were spent developing the geographic, municipal and financial infrastructures that would eventually make Newport the “Queen of Resorts” in the United States, the years between 1890 and

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid 188-190.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid 73-74.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid 182.

1914 saw the greatest changes to the upper echelons of Newport society and the spaces associated therewith. In just a little over a decade, 7 of the 11 properties listed on the Newport World Heritage Committee's Application were built along Bellevue Avenue, as were several that are not included on the list but are currently available to the public for tours. Since the summer homes built during this period remain the most opulent of the structures lining Bellevue Avenue, it is not surprising that they have long been the chief focus of the dominant tourist narrative of Gilded Age Newport. Accordingly, these structures have been perennially reinterpreted by several local historical-asset-management and preservation organizations, including the Preservation Society of Newport County, which owns and operates more than half of the properties included in the NWHC's "Application for Inclusion of a Property in the U.S. World Heritage Tentative List." The NWHC, established in 2006 to articulate Newport to the U.S. National Parks Service as a city of national and indeed transnational significance on the basis of its architectural attributes and the collective historic cultural landscapes associated with the city's late nineteenth and early twentieth century structures, was truly a city-wide effort, made up of representatives from the local Conference and Visitor's Bureau (CVB), the Newport/Bristol Chamber of Commerce, and the historic preservation associations listed above. Its mission was primarily associated with the marketing of the city of Newport as a whole, and not with the type of historical asset management conducted by the Preservation Society or the Restoration Foundation. Indeed, the Preservation Society's private collection of Gilded Age estates remains a separate entity, collectively known as the Bellevue Avenue Mansions. This collection of estates has long been the single biggest tourist attraction in Rhode Island and one of the four most

significant historic attractions in New England. Accordingly, it is the Preservation Society of Newport County that has played the largest and most enduring role in interpreting Gilded Age Newport to tourists and residents alike, shifting and revising the dominant tourist narrative associated with the Bellevue Avenue Mansions over time to keep its product current and attract new generations of visitors.

The homes included on the World Heritage application that were constructed between 1890 and 1914, almost all of which are managed and marketed by the Preservation Society, are some of the grandest and most expensive still remaining in southeastern Newport and stand as testaments to the most significant architectural styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additionally, these homes are symbols of the changing architecture and geography of social power not only in Newport, but also nationally. According to the NWHC, “[f]rom the 1890s the monumental scale of new opulent houses in Newport reflected the newly urbanized, industrialized, and self-consciously powerful society the United States had become by the end of the century.”<sup>239</sup> The structures included to represent this period are Marble House, completed in 1892 for William K. Vanderbilt and his wife Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt; Rough Point, completed in 1893 for the family of Frederick Vanderbilt, William Vanderbilt’s younger brother; The Breakers, rebuilt from a destroyed wooden structure between 1892 and 1895 for William K. Vanderbilt’s older brother Cornelius Vanderbilt II; and, finally, The Elms, finished in 1901 for Edward J. Berwind, a Pennsylvania coal magnate. Of these four mansions, hardly the only great estates remaining along present-day Bellevue Avenue, three (Marble House, The Breakers and The Elms) are owned, maintained and operated for tours by the Preservation Society of Newport County, while one (Rough Point) is

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<sup>239</sup> Roos 6.

managed by the Newport Restoration Foundation, an association founded by the estate's last and most notorious owner, Doris Duke, daughter of tobacco baron James Buchanan Duke of North Carolina.

Viewed as a multi-site cultural landscape, these Bellevue Avenue homes hint at the extraordinary summer resort Newport had become by 1890. Carefully chronicled by some of the city's most powerful socialites, Newport was considered the social capital of the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was the city to which America's wealthiest and most successful entrepreneurs and industrialists retired on summer weekends, to play cards and sports, host picnics and extravagant dinners, attend concerts, and expand their social networks. If their opulent residences and activities were funded by business deals undertaken in the nation's booming urban centers, the business of leisure was conducted primarily by the women of the households who maintained full time residency in Newport during the 6-8 week summer sojourn. Governed by a set of specific gender and class expectations every bit as well-regulated as those legislating daily life in their hometowns, the affluent women who populated Newport during the summer season organized themselves into a summer resort community replete with friendships, rivalries, controversies and an intricate social code. Far from simply building grand estates and hosting the occasional clambake, Newport's Gilded Age summer colonists recognized well the performative dimensions of resort life, and in a matter of years had transformed Henry James' quiet seaside oasis into the stage on which America's wealthiest citizens sought to reconcile the spoils of free-market capitalism and American-style democracy with the alluring social performative of the British nobility.

Indeed, for a small seaside community whose most memorable period spanned only 14 years, Gilded Age Newport remains exceptionally well-documented. While writers such as Edith Wharton and Henry James left behind volumes of literature documenting the excesses of the city and its inhabitants during this period, their works were primarily novels of manners that commented poignantly on the legacies of an age of excessive wealth and display. But even as they were being built, the summer mansions, particularly the earliest structures commissioned by the Vanderbilt family, attracted the notice of American architectural observers and historians. As these “white elephants” were erected on the rockiest coastal expanses of Newport, the transformation of Newport’s built environment captured the attention of both domestic and international visitors. In 1893 French novelist and travel writer (as well as friend and contemporary of Edith Wharton) Paul Bourget visited the city and reported on the opulence and variety of styles of the homes he saw there:

Detached villas, very near the street...twenty, thirty, forty different styles of construction...and so on along Bellevue Avenue...which, within a few years, the caprice of millionaires has built upon the cliff...One of these men has spent some time in England, and it has pleased him to build for himself on one of these Rhode Island lawns an English abbey...Another man loves France, and he has seen fit to possess in sight of the Atlantic a chateau in the style of the French Renaissance...a third has built a marble palace precisely like the Trianon with Corinthian pillars as large as those of the Temple of the Sun at Baalbek.<sup>240</sup>

Bourget’s observations, related specifically to mansions such as Chateau-sur-Mer and Marble House, are noted in the World Heritage application of Gilded Age Newport in support of the committee’s contention that the paramount achievement of American architecture—the single family domestic dwelling—was examined, experimented with

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<sup>240</sup> Bourget in Pieter Roos, “Addendum to the Application for Inclusion of Gilded Age Newport in the U.S. World heritage Tentative List,” 2007: 5

and perfected during this period in Newport in not one, but many styles of international origin. Considered by some critics as derivative or imitative of European estates, Newport's mansions, the World Heritage Committee argues, are in fact "expressions and interpretations of world architecture" executed according to a uniquely American point of view and, in some cases, with American materials sourced locally from New England's granite and limestone quarries.<sup>241</sup>

Articulated by the World Heritage Association as a period during which "the Republic of the United States of America took its place as a leader among the nations of the world," the Gilded Age was known as such not only because of the extreme acquisition of wealth that resulted from financial portfolios diversified to include investments in railroads, steam ships and other forms of travel as well as land-based industry including factories, mills and foundries, but also because of the exhibition of such wealth in both private and public spheres.<sup>242</sup> Accordingly, the Newport World Heritage Committee's historical narrative of Gilded Age Newport emphasizes the role played by noted architects and landscape designers including Richard Upjohn; the firm of McKim, Mead and White; Richard Morris Hunt; Frederick Law Olmstead; Horace Trumbauer; and Ogden Codman, Jr., Additionally, the application argues that Newport is culturally significant based almost exclusively on the presence of such a great variety of architectural styles, with an equally various set of temporal and geographical origins, along one short stretch of Bellevue Avenue. Compared to international cities such as Bath, Weimar, Paris and Buenos Aires, the World Heritage Committee argues, "[o]nly Newport offers, in one compact ensemble, an architectural variety that captures the spirit

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<sup>241</sup> Roos "Addendum" 5.

<sup>242</sup> Roos "Application" 10.

and practice of Gilded Age design.”<sup>243</sup> While America’s leading families of the period, including the Vanderbilts, Astors, Dukes, Berwinds, and Rockefellers built a number of country estates in locations such as Long Island, upstate New York and North Carolina in addition to their urban homesteads in Philadelphia and Manhattan, the World Heritage Committee notes that these houses “exist primarily as isolated country estates” while Newport’s Bellevue Avenue represents a thriving resort community in which these families self-consciously competed for social dominance and produced a specific culture at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>244</sup>

The first of the “white elephants” to be completed was Marble House, one of the grandest estates now owned and operated by the Preservation Society of Newport County.

Though William Kissam Vanderbilt, grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, did not commission Marble House until 1888, a year after his brother Frederick William Vanderbilt had begun work on his own mansion, now



*Contemporary Marble House. Photo courtesy the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

known as Rough Point and most famously associated with the Duke family of North Carolina, Marble House was completed a year before Rough Point in 1892, officially establishing the estate as the very first of the nouveau riche palaces of Bellevue Avenue and forcing brother Frederick Vanderbilt’s family to settle for second place in the chronological continuum of Newport’s built environment. Considered extravagant in every aspect of its design, materials, and decoration both now and when it was originally

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<sup>243</sup> Roos “Addendum” 1.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid 3.

built, Marble House is also particularly noteworthy as a collaborative project between renowned architect Richard Morris Hunt and William Kissam Vanderbilt's wife Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt, who is now credited with influencing every aspect of Hunt's design.<sup>245</sup> Considered an exemplar of Gilded Age architecture, this home was inspired by the Petit Trianon, a garden on the estate at Versailles and was the most expensive of all the Newport mansions. Faced entirely in white marble from New York, the interior required roughly 500,000 square feet of various rare marbles, most of which were imported from overseas. Considered by the World Heritage Committee to be of "enduring universal value" for its status as one of the first Beaux Arts homes built in the United States and its influence on future American architecture, Marble House remains the crown jewel of the Newport mansions.

Known informally as "Willie K," William Kissam Vanderbilt had amassed an enormous fortune from his work on the board of directors of the New York Central Railroad, founded by grandfather Cornelius Vanderbilt. Marble House was only occupied for the summer season, but the serving staff was ample during that time, with 36 regular servants, including butlers, maids, laundresses, footmen, coachmen and gardeners.<sup>246</sup> The large basement kitchen tells much about the machinations required to run the house, and was fully restored by the Preservation Society in 1983, including the original oak woodwork and the gaslight fixtures.<sup>247</sup> When Alva Vanderbilt divorced her husband in 1896 and remarried Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont soon after, she made headlines by retaining Marble House and using it to host women's suffrage events until she sold the house in 1932 to Frederick H. Prince of Boston, whose family summered there until the

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<sup>245</sup> *A Guide to the Newport Mansions* 36.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid* 40.

1960s. The Preservation Society was able to buy Marble House in 1963 using money from Harold S. Vanderbilt, provided in memory of his mother. The Prince family Trust then donated the Vanderbilt furnishings that had been purchased with the house in 1932. The teahouse on the property was built for small receptions and parties, and originally stood directly above the Cliff Walk. The deterioration of the cliffs, however, forced the relocation of the teahouse 75 feet east of the original location, and it was moved in 1977.<sup>248</sup> The teahouse was completed restored by 1982.

While Marble House is now considered of universal significance for its prominent position among the first Beaux Arts homes built in America, and for its influence on American architecture, other members of the Vanderbilt clan distinguished themselves by building their domestic palaces in strikingly different styles. Rough Point, completed one year after Marble House in 1893, is a graceful English Tudor of red sandstone and granite set amidst sprawling acreage originally designed



*Contemporary Rough Point, viewed from its cliff side.*

by Frederick Law Olmsted. The home itself, designed by Boston-based architects Robert Swain Peabody and John Goddard Stearns, Jr., was occupied by the family of Frederick Vanderbilt for only one season, after which the family rented the property to various summer residents before finally selling the estate to James Buchanan Duke in 1922.<sup>249</sup> Left to his daughter Doris upon his death in 1925, the home remained a private residence until Duke's death in the 1990s, at which time she left the property to her own Newport

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid 44-45.

<sup>249</sup> Roos, "Application" 22.

Restoration Foundation to be opened for tours. Today the home offers visitors breathtaking views from the very farthest corner of Bellevue Avenue, where the fashionable road turns sharply into Ocean Drive, as well as a chance to view the massive collection of world art accumulated by Doris Duke, including 15<sup>th</sup>-century tapestries, Renoir paintings and Asian and Islamic sculpture.<sup>250</sup>

The third of the Vanderbilt homes to be built along Bellevue Avenue remains the most popular of the Bellevue Avenue mansions. The Breakers, in its current incarnation, was completed in 1895 for Cornelius Vanderbilt II, William Kissam's older brother, and was also designed by Richard Morris Hunt, who collaborated with Alva Vanderbilt to create Marble House. But the estate has a

much longer past. Originally commissioned by Pierre Lorillard and completed in 1877 by Robert Swain Peabody and John Goddard Stearns, Jr., the architects who would

complete Rough Point in the mid-1890s, the

Breakers lived its first life as a relatively

unassuming wood and brick structure and remained in that state when Cornelius

Vanderbilt II bought the home in 1885. When the original home burned down in 1892,

however, the Vanderbilts hired Richard Morris Hunt to surpass the masterpiece Hunt had

already created in Marble House. Also of the Beaux Arts style, The Breakers is

noteworthy for combining an Italian Renaissance aesthetic with the very latest of

American building technologies. From the outside, the structure is a towering



*Contemporary Breakers, The Dining Room.  
Photo courtesy of the Preservation Society of  
Newport County.*

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

achievement in Indiana limestone and features Doric and Ionic columns, while the inside is crafted from French limestone and a variety of European marbles, all of which are supported by interior beams and trusses furnished by the American steel industry.<sup>251</sup> Additionally, a heating plant was installed beneath the caretaker's cottage and connected to the main house by a network of subterranean tunnels, and several hundred tons of coal could be stored in the underground boiler room, marking the home as an achievement in convenience as well as aesthetic luxury.<sup>252</sup> By the time its interior decoration was completed, the house was recognized as the pinnacle of Beaux Arts domestic architecture in the United States.<sup>253</sup>

The first full-scale Gilded Age mansion acquired by the Preservation Society, the home remained in the Vanderbilt family until several years after the death of Gladys Vanderbilt (later Countess Laszlo Szechnyi), daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt II and his wife Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt. Though the Countess had opened her home for tours in 1948 for the financial benefit of the Preservation Society, she maintained the home as a private residence until her death in 1965, when the Society first leased the property and took responsibility for its taxes and maintenance until a final purchase was made possible in 1973.<sup>254</sup>

The last great Bellevue Avenue mansion of this period is The Elms, considered a copy of the French château d'Asnières located just outside of Paris.<sup>255</sup> By the time the home was completed in 1901 after a design by architect Horace Trumbauer, the owner, Edward J. Berwind, had been head of the Berwind-White Coal Company for 11 years and

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<sup>251</sup> Roos "Application" 27.

<sup>252</sup> *A Guide to the Newport Mansions* 49.

<sup>253</sup> Roos "Application" 29.

<sup>254</sup> *A Guide to the Newport Mansions* 49.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid* 60.

managed more than 260,000 acres of coal-producing lands in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. The sheer scale of Berwind's business was enormous, making it the largest of the of the individually-owned coal companies in the United States.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, at the height of its success, Berwind's company supplied 80,000 tons of coal each week to ships harbored in New York, in addition to being the major supplier to the U.S. Navy and the Merchant Marines while maintaining international accounts in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and in Europe.<sup>257</sup> By the time Berwind commissioned his home in 1899, all of the other Bellevue Avenue estates had been built and a social hierarchy established, leaving Berwind with much to surpass.

But surpass the extant architecture of Newport's summer resort he did, commissioning a sprawling three-storey mansion with two ample wings, an enormous and opulent grand staircase and extensive grounds akin to those of Rough Point that include an Italianate sunken garden still much



*Contemporary Elms. Photo courtesy Preservation Society of Newport County.*

sought after for wedding receptions. In addition, The Elms was strikingly different from its Gilded Age predecessors in that it was made of an exceptionally light palate of materials, featuring soaring ceilings and spacious rooms accentuated by white-on-white decoration complemented by ornate glass and wrought iron doors and "Ionic columns of Italian breccia marble with gilt capitals."<sup>258</sup> No less extravagant than the earlier Gilded Age structures of Bellevue Avenue, The Elms set a new standard reflecting the changing

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid 62.

nature of American culture, even among the nouveau riche. Emphasizing openness and lightness over the dark and heavy-handed gilt interiors of Marble House and The Breakers, The 11-acre estate known as The Elms signaled a change in the performance of wealth on Bellevue Avenue. If the mansion was opulent, expensive and inspired by European architecture and the grounds were extensive and well-manicured, the estate was also designed with the newest creature comforts in mind, as The Elms also boasts an enormous underground network of tunnels connecting state-of-the-art heating and cooling systems to kitchens featuring electricity and refrigeration and a basement with a water purification pump. The house also has a roof-level water tank and a concealed third-floor of surprisingly well-appointed servants' quarters. Given its attention to modern convenience and comforts, it is not surprising that this mansion was occupied by the family until the mid-twentieth century. When Edward Berwind's wife Herminie died in 1922, Berwind's sister Julia assumed the role of hostess, which she maintained long after her brother's death in 1936. Indeed, Julia Berwind summered at The Elms until her death at age 96 in 1961. The estate was finally purchased by the Preservation Society a year later when urban redevelopment projects threatened to demolish the home. Now recognized for its "refinement of taste," The Elms is seen as both architecturally and culturally significant.<sup>259</sup> Described in the Newport Herald of July 1, 1901 as an example of "rich simplicity," The Elms was seen even during its own time as an explicit signal that Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman's jointly-authored 1897 call for cleaner, simpler domestic architecture emphasizing form and function over gaudy luxury had been heard not only by architectural firms but also America's wealthiest private citizens. Even the highest echelons of the American nouveau riche scaled back their demonstrations of

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<sup>259</sup> Roos "Application" 30.

wealth, resulting in a subtler, if equally expensive, expression of American social hierarchies.

### **The Costs of Cultural Significance: Curating the Conspicuous Consumption of Gilded Age Newport**

While the narrative authored by Newport Restoration Foundation Executive Director Pieter Roos and the Newport World Heritage Commission focuses almost exclusively on the cultural significance of Gilded Age Newport's architectural and decorative attributes, the Preservation Society of Newport County, the chief interpreter (as well as owner and operator) of the Bellevue Avenue Mansions, has gradually altered its dominant tourist narrative of Gilded Age Newport over the years to integrate cultural and financial histories associated with the properties and the families that commissioned them. While the architectural significance of Newport's Gilded Age built environment is still a main focus of any tour visitors take of a single Newport mansion or a self-guided stroll along the historic placards posted on Bellevue Avenue by the Preservation Society, new historical research and trends in the field of American museum studies and cultural tourism have yielded more flexible narratives and narrative formats. In the 1980s, after its collection of estates was complete, the Preservation Society turned its attention to the inclusion of women's history, then to the introduction of audio tours and flexible narratives meant to appeal to an increasingly diverse audience, and finally to a post-9/11 tourism narrative emphasizing American technology and industry over European aesthetics and cultural decadence.

### ***Introducing the Social History of Women at the Bellevue Avenue Mansions***

As mentioned in brief above, resorts during America's Gilded Age were extraordinarily gendered spaces, with most family patriarchs visiting only on weekends when they could escape the work which enabled them to finance their family's summer season in towns like Newport. In the work-a-day lives of most middle-class or affluent Americans (particularly those living in urban areas), affluent white women were associated with the home, the domestic and private sphere, while their male counterparts were associated with public space. This dynamic shifted when the family moved to the resort areas, however, as women were expected and even socially required to appear in public as a demonstration of their husband's wealth and social status. Increasingly, resort culture was organized and ruled by women. In her 1998 text *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York*, historian Maureen Montgomery provides cultural evidence suggesting that the reason nineteenth-century upper class women viewed locations outside the home as opportunities for transgression was because they were encouraged to do so by the aristocratic practice of social circulation. Montgomery argues that even when attempting to perform only their prescribed roles of wife/lover/mother within the private sphere, married women's duties would nevertheless require public circulation of even the most contented "mother-woman," a phrase novelist Kate Chopin uses throughout her 1893 novel *The Awakening* to describe women whose sole purpose in life is to minister to the needs of their husbands and children. Montgomery's argument effectively rests on the idea that it is actually their function as signifiers which in fact makes married women living within patriarchal cultures a vital part of their economic class; they are, in short, neither "wealth" itself nor "surplus" but in

fact *indispensable* signs of their husbands' prosperity which, to be effective, must also be displayed. Accordingly, women were increasingly responsible for the planning of vacations, but the affluent women associated with Gilded Age Newport carried their roles far beyond this, ordering clothes for the season, planning all the social events, and even designing their summer residences with the help of world-famous architects.

In her memoirs of Newport during the Gilded Age May King Van Rensselaer provides a glimpse into the daily lives of America's wealthiest female summer colonists:

Listless matrons and maidens who have spent the night at a dance are up betimes in the morning to drive their ponies or their electric runabouts "down town," where in the crowded ranks of Thames Street they do their shopping and meet all their friends for the first time during the day. Then they spin down to Easton's beach for a breath of sea air, where the crowds of excursionists afford endless amusement by their antics in the water, while the fair resident in her turn gratifies the gaping throng, who stare at her smart carriage and her vivid dress, that make such a pretty centre for the scene...Partly amused and wholly gratified at the attention she has commanded, the busy creature flies off to the Casino to see who are the latest arrivals and pick up some one for lunch and bridge, stopping by to speak to all chance acquaintances to gather the news of the day. Then out for a run to the golf links, or Bailey's Beach for a dip in the sea at the society bathing-grounds, on which the public are not permitted to trespass. Home to lunch, after which the card-table is set in the "tea-house" or on the piazza...unless there has been a musical matinee to attend, or some morning visits to pay. The afternoon brings its own exciting occupations, - perhaps a polo match or a yacht race, but certainly some sport in the open air that includes a spin along the ocean avenue or a long drive on the inland roads. Then dinner at eight, with a dance or kindred frolic for the evening, so that every hour of the day has been filled with action and pleasure that would be impossible were it not for the bracing climate that endows men and women with incredible energy.<sup>260</sup>

Due in part to the spectacular nature of the resorts, the large role women played in public in these locations, and the association of frivolity and leisure with women, resorts came to be understood as "feminine" places that were "the very antithesis of republican

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<sup>260</sup> May King Van Rensselaer, *Newport: Our Social Capital (reprint of the 1905 edition)*, (Salem, NH: Ayer Publishers, Inc., 1990): 19.

simplicity: frivolous, expensive, overdressed, displaced from the rhythms of commercial life.”<sup>261</sup> Much literature of the time and since has accordingly described resort areas as “playgrounds” for the wealthy in which leisure was not contextualized by the labor that made it possible. A similarly uncomplicated foregrounding of luxury and leisure constituted the touring narratives associated with the Bellevue Avenue mansions during the 1980s, with no shortage of examples of conspicuous consumption to support this theory.

One story repeated particularly often was documented by both Elizabeth Drexel Lehr in her memoirs and by historian Richard O’Connor in his 1974 text *The Golden Summers: An Antic History of Newport*. While tales of lavish theme balls for which guests purchased costly gowns and costumes never worn more than once abound during tours of Newport’s Gilded Age structures, the episode known as the “Dog’s Dinner,” which I first encountered on a tour of the Breakers during the 1980s is probably the most oft-used to illustrate the frivolity of the resort community and the matriarchs who oversaw it. Occurring during the mid-1890s, the dog’s dinner was a luxurious feast for the canines of Bellevue Avenue. Sometimes considered a self-conscious parody of Newport’s other fancy-dress balls, the dinner was hosted by Mamie Stuyvesant Fish, one the “great triumvirate” of Newport’s Gilded Age hostesses, and featured three courses served to formally-dressed dogs seated around a low table. The fact that at least one of the dogs “so overtaxed its capacities that it fell unconscious by its plate and had to be carried home” was offered as evidence of both the success and excess of the event.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Sterngass 145.

<sup>262</sup> Richard O’Connor, *The Golden Summers: An Antic History of Newport* (New York: P.P. Putnam’s and Sons, 1974): 251.

While the tours of the Newport mansions still offered extensive information about the house and grounds of each Bellevue Avenue estate, then, social history had gradually gained a foothold at the mansions by the 1980s, and much of it focused on the lives of the women who constituted the summer colony on a daily basis. But the integration of women's history at the Newport mansions did not mean the corresponding introduction of feminist analysis. Instead, attention was increasingly paid to the role women played in the social and built environments at America's most exclusive summer resort, with tour guides punctuating their assessment of the significance of each room with humorous stories about the decadence that transpired therein.

This celebratory narrative of leisure began to fade, however, as memoirs written by Newport's female Gilded Age colonists were re-published and became widely read. While May Van Renssalaer's warm memories of Newport were published contemporaneously in 1905, during the height of the Gilded Age, *King Lehr and the Gilded Age*, by Elizabeth Drexel Lehr and *The Glitter and the Gold*, by Consuelo Vanderbilt were published in 1935 and 1953 respectively and revealed a far more challenging portrait of Newport society. These narratives, written well after the close of the Gilded Age and the financial crash of 1920, could best be classed as exposés written by women who witnessed firsthand the emotional carnage wreaked by a politics of wealth and display so dedicated to acquisition that even people were reduced to pawns in a financial game of both local and global proportions.

In Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan's *The Glitter and the Gold*, published originally in 1953 but widely read after the popularization of the American feminist movement, Balsan retells the story of her own marriage to the ninth Duke of Marlborough.

Considered the first of the “dollar brides” sacrificed to a loveless marriage with a British aristocrat for the acquisition of a title and a family lineage forever binding America’s nouveau rich industrialists to the cultural traditions of Old Europe, Vanderbilt shreds the thin veneer laid over American high society at the turn of the twentieth century.

Surprisingly empathetic in her characterization of her parents (particularly her mother), who literally placed the girl under house arrest until she consented to the marriage for her family’s sake, Balsan’s narrative is the one that has come to stand in for the untold stories of all of the dollar brides. Forced to abandon a man she loved who possessed both money and social prestige, Consuelo Vanderbilt was married off to the Duke of Marlborough and sent to live at Blenheim Castle, where she produced two sons and heirs in a marriage characterized by discord and ending in a scandalous divorce. So typical was Balsan’s story that Edith Wharton borrowed liberally from it in her fictional epic *The Buccaneers*, which interweaves the stories of four American heiresses, three of whom suffer similarly loveless and/or abusive marriages with esteemed members of the British peerage. Only the least wealthy of the girls escapes this fate, marrying a rising star in the British House of Commons and living a contented life in a mansion acquired from the steadily failing British peerage.

Another memoir authored by a former resident of Gilded Age Newport, Elizabeth’s Drexel Lehr’s oft-reprinted 1935 *King Lehr and the Gilded Age* was also promoted as a “shocking, Gilded Age tell-all that tarnished high society.” Indeed, Drexel Lehr’s memoirs attempt to set the record straight about her husband, Harry Lehr, one of a number of male confidants of the most powerful women of Bellevue Avenue.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, *King Lehr and the Gilded Age with Extracts from the Locked Diary of Harry Lehr* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1935).

Considered an heir to Ward McAllister in his role as a sort of social secretary and all-purpose consultant on matters of dress, activity and manners, Harry Lehr enjoyed the society of Newport's leading ladies, and took a number of opportunities to dress like them as well. Written by his ex-wife long after his death, the narrative reveals that Harry Lehr was in fact a homosexual man forced to marry Elizabeth Drexel Lehr to secure his financial position and maintain the social life of which he had become such an integral part. Not surprisingly, the marriage was a disaster and a humiliation for Elizabeth Lehr, who never rose to her husband's level of esteem in Newport's highest social circles and was often consigned to the periphery of society even as her husband presided over the activities at the center. When the marriage finally ended in divorce, it had cost Elizabeth Lehr her dignity and much of her fortune.

These memoirs have become widely accessible in affordable and attractive paperback editions and are available for purchase at the museum stores located on the premises of most of the Bellevue Avenue Mansions, online at [www.newportmansions.org](http://www.newportmansions.org), and in the tourist shops along downtown Thames Street. Following the popularization of feminist historiography throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the information provided within was gradually integrated into the tours offered by the Preservation Society of Newport County as the narratives governing the mansions moved away from an exclusive focus on the decorative arts. Though CEO of the Preservation Society Trudy Coxe still describes the mansions as house museums rather than museums-within-houses and emphasizes the Newport Historical Society as the chief archive of Newport history of all periods, the mansions have nevertheless been increasingly used to mobilize well-rounded histories of the Gilded Age and its chief social and financial

architects.<sup>264</sup> While much attention throughout the 1980s was still given to the design of the mansions, the materials used in their construction and their architecturally significant elements and decoration, additional information about the people who lived in the homes increasingly moved to the forefront of the narratives governing these great houses as well. Accordingly, since the chief full-time occupants of the homes were in fact women, servants, and children, much of the new information included on tours was dedicated to undercutting the assumption that the extraordinary wealth possessed by Newport's Gilded Age summer residents was necessarily accompanied by extraordinary happiness or contentment.

With the incorporation of material from Vanderbilt-Balsan's and Drexel-Lehr's memoirs, visitors to Marble House and the other Bellevue Avenue mansions were increasingly introduced to tales emphasizing the "Gilded Cage" in which many affluent summer colonists found themselves. Unable to choose her own love match, Vanderbilt-Balsan lived under house arrest in her bedroom at Marble House, and Harry Lehr, one of Newport's most significant social figures, was forced to deny (if not entirely obscure) his homosexuality to secure and maintain his social and financial position within Newport's pseudo-aristocratic hierarchy. Additionally, myriad biographies of some of Newport's most notable personages—not only the "dollar brides" but also the fathers and husbands associated therewith—revealed a legacy of emotional wreckage associated with Gilded Age wealth and particularly its manifestation in Newport, as did novels by Edith Wharton, Henry James and other Newport "insiders"-turned-social-critics. This trend has also continued up until the present, as 2005 saw the publication of Amanda Mackenzie Stuart's in-depth study of the relationship between Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt. In her

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<sup>264</sup> Coxe interview with author July 10, 2008.

text, subtitled *The Story of a Daughter and a Mother in the Gilded Age*, Mackenzie Stuart carefully traces the history of the entire Vanderbilt clan but provides particular insight with regard to the normative gender politics and social mores of the period that locked some of America's most affluent men and women into loveless transatlantic family alliances that a film adaptation of Wharton's *The Buccaneers* would later describe as the kind "that strangle you in the noose when you try to get away from them."<sup>265</sup> Indeed, until Alva Vanderbilt broke the rules and ended her marriage to husband Williams Kissam Vanderbilt with nary a social scratch on her, relationships between friends, lovers, and spouses in Newport were fraught and rule-bound within the topography of even a supposedly liberating summer resort.

Marble House, The Breakers, Rough Point and The Elms, then, are not only symbols of a new and evolving architecture of American power in which the single family home reigned supreme and an American aristocracy was constructed based not on family lineage but on the possession of material wealth accumulated through shrewd (and monopolistic) business practices, but these estates also testify to changing relationships between space, social class and the performance of gender. Accordingly, to keep its product new, the Preservation Society of Newport County revised its narrative of Gilded Age conspicuous consumption to account for some of the social and financial casualties occasioned by the unbridled excess embraced by the American pseudo-aristocracy residing in Newport during the summer. While the robber barons had long been identified as monopolists, union-busters and strike-breakers by the 1980s, what had largely remained untold were the stories of how that very wealth corrupted and ruined the lives of even those who supposedly controlled and mobilized it. Through the integration of

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<sup>265</sup> Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers*, screenplay by Maggie Wadey (BBC Video, 1995).

social history, with a particular emphasis on women's history, the Preservation Society of Newport County was able to bring these stories to tourists for the first time, essentially unveiling a new aspect of Newport's history that had remained unexplored for the first 15 years of the Preservation Society's history. Though this narrative transformation was first instituted through the traditional narrative presented by a tour guide to a collective group of tourists, the Preservation Society soon strengthened their investment in the flexibility and multiplicity of historical narrative by introducing self-guided audio tours in the 1990s.

### ***The Introduction of Audio Tours and a Flexible Historical Narrative***

First used at The Elms and Marble House, audio tours have proven overwhelmingly successful since their introduction in the late 1990s. According to Coxe, the popularity of the audio tours has much to do with their solitary nature, and the fact that they allow patrons to move through the mansions at their own pace. Says Coxe,

The thing people like about the audio tours is that...they get to determine the time that they will spend. John Tschirch, our Academic Affairs Director, says that a [traditional] tour of the Breakers allows you about 45 seconds per room. You probably don't realize that. That's how quickly you're being moved on and you can't stand in the dining room at the Breakers... You have to really stand there and take it in. There's too much. And the same thing for the library, for the music room. Same thing for the great hall. I mean you could stand in the great hall for a long time. You can go back to the great hall on many different occasions and see something new each time. So the benefit of the audio tours is giving people some time...

Another benefit of the audio tours, however, is that they allow visitors to the mansions to essentially create a personalized tour. Besides deciding what areas of the house they will spend the most time exploring, visitors may also choose which information is presented. Someone primarily interested in the architectural and decorative arts history of a given house, for example, can listen to the main tour narrative without

the additional integration of social historical information regarding the specific events which occurred and which people were involved. Conversely, visitors primarily interested in women's history and the role individual family members played in the events that transpired in Newport and in a given home may choose to listen to the extended elements of the tour. While walking through a room at The Elms, for example, the audio tour narrator will note that additional information is available about a specific artifact (a painting, furniture piece, etc) and/or a specific event, and instruct the patron to press a button on the handset to access that information. While such material would likely be offered only as footnote or parenthetical comment, if at all, on a traditional tour, the audio tour allows patrons to shape their own touring narrative as they go, creating a "choose-your-own-adventure" experience that has proven increasingly popular among visitors whose time and financial resources may be increasingly limited.

The final characteristics of the audio tours that should be accounted for are those which explicitly benefit the Preservation Society as a tourism entity. Audio tours have increased the number of visitors able to move through a given house over the course of one business day, eliminated the costs associated with training even unpaid interns or volunteer docents, and standardized the information available to patrons, all while allowing visitors increased access to the homes (including spaces too small to host entire tour groups) and the sense of having created a personalized tour conducted casually at their own pace.

Allowing people to move individually through the homes at their own pace, the audio tours have made it possible to stagger visitors' entrance times. Rather than offering tours that are limited to a certain number of people and only depart according to a

particular pre-determined schedule, more guests can move through the houses in the same amount of time, and they can do so in near-silence, maintaining a museum atmosphere within the homes. The staggered times of the audio-tours also mean that guests are likely to visit the cafes and gift shops located at each house while they wait for their fellow group members to complete their tour.

Self-guided audio tours have also relieved the Preservation Society of some of the costly education burden of training interns and volunteer tour guides, while at the same time standardizing the information offered to tourists. Though tourists can choose which information they will hear, pre-recorded audio tours written and approved by the Preservation Society's well-trained educational staff guarantee the presentation of accurate information and eliminate the possibility of the mistakes or memory lapses to which even the most well-trained and experienced traditional tour guide is prone. For both the Preservation Society and its guests, then, the audio tours seem to be a win-win situation, potentially increasing the profit-margin while ensuring visitors a pleasant, private, and personalized tour on which they need never struggle to hear a guide, crane their necks to see a painting or piece of furniture or stand uncomfortably within a stationary crush of people crowded into a given room for the brief time allotted.

***The Post-9/11 Narrative: Introducing Technology and Industry at the Newport Mansions***

Despite the popularity of the flexible narratives and convenience of the audio tours, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, asserts John Rodman, Director of Museum Experience for the Preservation Society, museum visitation reached record lows throughout the United States, a trend that continued well into 2005. Since the Newport

Mansions had experienced their highest visitor attendance in the summer immediately preceding the attacks, this downturn was keenly felt by the Preservation Society. After conducting demographic research into the phenomenon, the Preservation Society responded with a new thematic emphasis on American technology and industry, conducting historical research into the financial and human resources it took to build and maintain the great houses of Bellevue Avenue. The result of this research was not only a group of reports on servant life at several of the mansions, but also a new “behind-the-scenes” tour at The Elms, one of the most technologically advanced mansions built during the American Gilded Age.

According to John Rodman, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Americans were cautious about traveling, particularly for recreational purposes, but expressed a growing interest in narratives that championed American heritage and fostered a collective sense of nationalist pride and patriotism.<sup>266</sup> In efforts to woo back their already committed clientele and hopefully expand the appeal of the mansions into a new demographic, Rodman notes, the Preservation Society attempted to distance itself from traditional interpretations of the mansion as imitations of European architecture and aristocratic heritage and instead focus on the fruits of American entrepreneurship and labor. But the organization had to make this move carefully. Primarily mobilizing tales of excessive wealth and extravagantly-performed leisure, the traditional narratives governing the mansions was most assuredly one of privilege, available to be marveled at and perhaps envied by contemporary visitors, most of whom would never have first-hand experiences akin to those of either the robber barons who commissioned the houses or the family members who populated them on a daily basis during the summer season. Since it

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<sup>266</sup> John Rodman interview with author September 27, 2008.

was the tension between the elite class of “haves” and the vernacular majority of the “have-nots” cited by detractors of America’s democratically-styled approach to free-market capitalism as the cause of the terrorist attacks and other global sentiments of anti-Americanism, simply emphasizing the “Americanness” of the mansions and their creators would not be enough to transform a narrative of privilege. Instead, what was needed was a narrative that would link these uber-wealthy industrialists to the “bootstraps” mythos of American culture. The humble beginnings of America’s nouveau riche would need to be emphasized, as would the role of the servants working in the great homes built by American industrial fortunes. Accordingly, the Preservation Society produced new placards providing information about Newport’s extensive Gilded Age servant population and crafted a new “behind-the-scenes” tour of the most technologically-advanced home on Bellevue Avenue, The Elms.

This tour takes visitors under the house, to the basement with its sophisticated (for its day) heating and cooling systems, light-bulb-testing station and water purification system and up the steep servants’ staircase to the third floor and the hallway of small rooms where the 42 full time servants slept in the few hours they were not ministering to the needs of residents, guests, and the house itself. The premise of the tour is that The Elms was not only one of the most technologically advanced of the Newport mansions, but also that, as such, it required a small army of carefully organized servants to maintain. These servants and their round-the-clock efforts were meant to be invisible, and this invisibility is made clear not only in the grounds and architecture of the home, but also in the practices developed for its subtle operation and smooth management.

The tour, guided by a trained docent rather than conducted individually according to an audio hand-set, starts with the passage to the laundry room, where the Berwinds' luggage is displayed, bearing the family monogram. These suitcases and trunks would have brought silver place settings and family clothing from New York and Pennsylvania. There are also examples of other period luggage pieces on display in this room which bear the mark of Louis Vuitton, still a notable fashion house today. These additional pieces are meant to provide some context for the elevated social level at which the Berwinds operated.

According to the tour, the text of which is authored by John Tschirch, Director of Academic Programs and Architectural Historian for the Preservation Society of Newport County, the running of the laundry facilities was a 24-hour enterprise:

Laundering the bed linens, table linens, and clothing for a household of two adults (the Berwinds), their guests, and a household staff of about 15 to 25 (house staff, gardeners, stable and carriage house staff) was a full-time job that never stopped. A full-time laundress with one or two helpers kept this area running. The Head Laundress traveled from the Berwinds' house in New York to oversee The Elms laundry for the summer. Second Laundresses were recruited locally.<sup>267</sup>

The laundry was washed in several of the 5 large sinks available, while a nearby room was furnished with racks on which the clean clothes would be set to dry.

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<sup>267</sup> John Tschirch, "Rooftop and Behind-the-Scenes Tour of The Elms" (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 2007), 4.



*To the left and above, the laundry room at the Elms. Photos courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

Though Gilded Age types of entertaining had tapered off by the time Julia Berwind inherited the house from her older brother, Ms. Berwind nevertheless maintained a full staff in livery (uniform) until her death in 1961. The two full time housekeepers at this time were Betty White and Julia Sullivan. On display in this room are a picture of Ms. Sullivan and a letter of reference written for her in 1957 describing her 18 years of excellent service. Betty White, also a long time staffer at The Elms, needed two knee replacement surgeries after spending years on her hands and knees scrubbing the marble floors of the mansion.

In the sub-basement, the mechanisms which ran the house are visible. The house itself is built of brick with iron supports and a foundation of granite-faced brick. The walls are faced in Indiana limestone, arriving via the Vanderbilt-owned New York



*Boiler and furnace room. Photo Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

Central Railroad and a steamship across Newport Harbor. Mr. Berwind was a fan of technological innovation, and since all of the fixtures in the house were electric, he provided a light-bulb testing station so that staff could be sure a light bulb worked before climbing two or three flights of stairs and scaling a 15 foot ladder only to have to come all the way back to back to the basement for a new bulb.

Berwind, like many Newport residents, filtered his water to remove iron deposits. Water would run through a tank with sand in it; the sand filtered the iron and other impurities, then sent the waste in one direction and the purified water to another tank.

Also in this room, there are iron doors in the walls leading to the ash bins for the upper fireplaces. There is one bin for every upstairs fireplace.

The boiler room reveals a sophisticated central heating system run by coal. The house was heated throughout the winter with three boilers. According to Tschirch



*Coal delivery tracks leading to the storage room.  
Photo courtesy of the Preservation Society of  
Newport County.*

Coal was placed in the boilers, which heated water in [the pipes]; the steam generated by this hot water was delivered to radiators (via pipes) in several locations throughout the sub-basement. These radiators were in mixing boxes... where air would run over the steam radiators and rise to the upper floors of the house through heating grates. Even the closets had small grates to allow heat to reach them in the winter months.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid 6.

The next stop is the related Coal Storage Room, a sizable and high-ceilinged chamber where coal would be delivered via a small set of tracks in the floor and dumped into a pile that might at times reach to the ceilings. The room could hold so much coal that Berwind's stash was commandeered during World War I to assist other Newport residents.

The massive amount of coal stored here seems appropriate given Berwind's oversight of a coal dynasty. Edward Berwind worked with his brother Charles to found and operate the largest coal company in the United States:

It owned 260,000 acres of coal lands in central and western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. [The Berwinds] founded company towns, such as Berwind (West Virginia) and Windber (Pennsylvania). These were entirely planned communities with housing, stores, hospitals, parks, and planned farmland... The company produced over 2,500,000 tons of coal annually with revenues of \$8 million.<sup>269</sup>

When Charles died in 1890, Edward Berwind was left President of the company. If his brother had been a genius at developing the machinery that allowed the company to efficiently remove coal from the earth, Edward Berwind focused on maximizing profits by controlling the means of delivery and marketing. Under Edward's leadership, coal traveled from the mines to Berwind-owned steamships and ports in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York and New Jersey. And Berwind coal fueled both the Vanderbilt railroads, the Oelrichs' family's transatlantic steamships, and even the New York subway system. Eventually Berwind expanded his business beyond North America to Italy, France, and South America, producing 4 million tons of coal per year.

The series of rooms involved in the heating of the house are easily the most impressive areas on the tour, emphasizing the sheer power needed to run a house of this

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid 7.

size. Not only were a large number of people needed to serve at table, minister to guests, clean, maintain the grounds, manufacture ice, and staff the kitchen, laundry, and carriage house, but a carefully mechanized infrastructure was also developed at The Elms, joining human and mechanized labor to create an apparently seamless and smoothly functioning complex of organs.

The Ice Making room contains more technical marvels. Large blocks of ice were made here and stored in the adjacent icebox, actually a separate room. Rather than relying on ice cut from local ponds and then stored, Berwind preferred to make his own stash of ice. He installed a motorized unit and ice forms to make sheets of ice and then moved them to the ice box with a pulley system.

The Back Stair Hall was how the servants got from place to place within the house. This is also how they got from the Berwinds' living spaces to their own rooms on the third floor. One of the chief architectural features of The Elms was the fact that from the outside, no third floor was evident. Long windows were divided and a wall was built along the roof to conceal the presence of servant quarters and stairways. Even the side of the house allowed for a lowered area where servants would enter and exit, deliveries would be made and visitors' carriages parked. None of the work or material effects of running the house were meant to be observed.

The third floor housed male and female staff members, while families would be housed elsewhere in town. The third floor has 14 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms, indicating that rooms would have been shared by staff members. Total staff at The Elms was 27 indoor and 16 outdoor, according to 1960s oral histories. In comparison to some of the other mansions, The Elms featured relatively well-appointed accommodations for its

servants. Most mansions at this time would not have provided actual bathrooms with running water, which this mansion did possess, though the staff did need to schedule bathroom times due to the limited number available.

The hours worked by servants were extraordinary by today's standards, often stretching from dawn until well after dark, and sometimes numbering 18 hours a day. Servants would generally have only one afternoon and evening off per week. Not surprisingly, the staff went on strike in 1902, desirous of more time off. When Berwind would not compromise, the butler took the staff on a train back to New York. But strikes were not uncommon at this time in Rhode Island.

Many of the staff members were immigrants, and often members of the same family. While most of the servants came from European countries, particularly Ireland and England, several Newport mansions did have servants from other areas of the world



*A tour visiting the servants' quarters on the roof level of the Elms. Photo courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County.*

that they had met on their cruises or other travels. The Belmonts had a servant named Azar from Egypt and another family had a servant from the Middle East. These “exotic” servants often added to a family's social status and international profile. When

applying for work, servants would be asked about their nationality and ethnicity, as well as about their personal practices such as drinking and smoking. Pay varied according to function and experience. While the chef, butler, housekeeper, and superintendent were

better paid than other staff members, the housekeeper was always a woman and as such, paid less than the other upper servants. Information from Marble House indicates that a chef might earn \$10,000 annually, while a laundress made only \$300 per year.

The servants were always on call, with a bell system to ring them when they were needed. The individual servants' rooms reveal that furnishings were minimal and sometimes handed down from the family. They were kept simple and easy to clean and maintain.

By 1958 the *New York Times* reported that The Elms was one of the only great houses of Newport still operating as it had during its heyday of the Gilded Age. In 1961, after Julia Berwind's death, the Preservation Society acquired the mansion and set about restoring it in the hopes that "we can impart the spirit of that age." According to John Tschirch, the Gilded Age was magic, and "magic is expensive."

### **The Politics of Preserving the Gilded Age**

Though it was established in 1945 to save a colonial structure, the Preservation Society of Newport County has since become synonymous with the Newport mansions and the stories associated with Gilded Age Newport. Indeed, the Society itself acknowledges and legitimates this representation, found online at [www.newportmansions.org](http://www.newportmansions.org). According to its mission statement, the Society aims to "protect, preserve, and present an exceptional collection of house museums and landscapes in one of the most historically intact cities in America." Like the Newport World Heritage Committee, Preservation Society Executive Director Trudy Coxe

identifies the strength of Newport as a tourist destination on the sheer variety of building styles available within walking distance to each other. According to Coxe:

...you can really come to Newport and come to the buildings of the Preservation Society and start with the Hunter House and just take your way through architecture 101 and you will come out with a pretty good sense of how domestic architecture has grown throughout the centuries. I think that's what makes Newport unique—that you have such huge diversity in building styles representing every kind of building style that exists in America except the most modern. We don't have modernist architecture in Newport, but all the others that lead up to that are here.<sup>270</sup>

Despite its dedication to preserving Newport's long and distinguished architectural history, the Preservation Society specializes in the styles associated with the mid- to late-nineteenth century, while other preservation organizations maintain Newport's earlier heritage. Though the Preservation Society maintains a private collection of materials related to the houses and the families that owned them, Coxe is clear that the story mobilized by the Society is primarily one related to architectural history:

Our story, depending upon the house that you go to, is the story of how the house was built, in some cases how the house has been preserved, like the Isaac Bell House. It is the story in some houses about the collections and about the person who built the house and who collected the objects... it's mostly about the people who built the houses, how they made their money, what they collected over the years, why they chose the style of Versailles versus the style of something else.<sup>271</sup>

Given this conception of their collection, it is not surprising that Coxe supports distinguishing between houses-as-museums and museums whose collections are displayed in residential dwellings. She notes that the Preservation Society of Newport County was one of the first collections of house museums to be accredited by the American Association of Museums and emphasizes that the houses themselves, and not

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with author.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

the collections of art or furnishings they contain, are the most important element of the Society's collection.

And the houses have never had trouble attracting visitor attention. Since the opening of the Breakers in the 1960s, tourists have flocked to Bellevue Avenue to explore the grand estates of America's robber barons. According to the Society's Director of Museum Experience John Rodman, the mansions received steady attendance but never broke 100,000 annual visitors until 1964, swelling to 173,000 in 1968, even before the 1969 opening of the Pell Bridge made travel to and from Newport more accessible to automobile traffic. By 1970 there were over 200,000 visitors annually and in 1977, 694,000 people entered the mansions. Rodman is also careful to note that these numbers, impressive by any tourist standard, were reached even before the Society significantly invested in marketing the homes as a tourist attraction. After creating new brochures and developing a comprehensive marketing program, the number of visitors increased dramatically, with the highest recorded admissions at 913,000 in the summer and fall season of 2001.<sup>272</sup>

But even with these impressive admission statistics, the Bellevue Avenue mansions have experienced distinct troughs in attendance. During the Gulf War of the early 1990s, and immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, attendance at all American museums suffered, and the mansions were no exception. Recessions and other economic troubles have also perennially taken their toll on admission levels, causing Rodman, Coxe and a number of other Newport tourist specialists to analyze long-term patterns of attendance as well as the demographics of their tourist base in order to

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<sup>272</sup> John Rodman, interview with author.

effectively market the mansions to attract new visitors while maintain their traditional clientele.

Despite their location at the most southeasterly tip of a small island in the smallest state in the nation, the Newport mansions attract visitors from fairly far-flung locations. Though international visitation is difficult to isolate, Newport is a cruise ship destination, and during the early fall months of September and October the mansions attract roughly 20,000 people annually by marketing directly to cruise ship lines including Carnival. The mansions are also popular as driving destinations for travelers within the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions. Indeed, the prime marketing areas targeted by the Society include New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New York.

Though millions of people flock to Newport annually, not all of them will visit a Bellevue Avenue mansion. Newport features a number of attractions, including annual Jazz and Folk music festivals and a number of outdoor sporting events, all of which attract a very different clientele than do the Newport mansions. Based on data collected on site using surveys and touch screens, 60% of the visitors to the mansions are women, and most visitors have a high level of education, the clientele almost equally split between those who have completed some college with those who have achieved Master's or terminal degrees. Many visitors are between the ages of 45 and 70, though this group is not necessarily the majority. According to Trudy Coxe:

They are mostly above the age of forty-five. The decision-maker is oftentimes the woman in the family. They are better educated. They are people who are making above 100,000, which is a higher level. They are willing to spend money. And they say in the surveying that we've done that they are willing to spend money on us as well as in our stores. They are fairly sophisticated in terms of travel. They've been to a lot of other museums so they know what is good and what is bad and they have expectations. There's a benefit to having a higher end visitor, but there's a

down side to it too, and that is that they are savvy. They want to be treated well.<sup>273</sup>

But despite the incredibly high number of visitors, the Preservation Society, like most non-profit associations, has to keep a close eye on its finances and consistently generate strategies to stimulate interest in their holdings. Indeed, the Society relies substantially on its gate receipts to fund its own projects as well as those it undertakes on behalf of the community of Newport, so keeping their cultural tourism product “new” is a requirement. According to Coxe, strategies include everything from introducing audio tours to developing new tours of extant homes. While the audio tours have proved overwhelmingly popular because they allow visitors to move through the houses at their own pace and include supplementary information that visitors can choose to access or ignore based on their own interests, new “behind the scenes” tours of the Elms and one planned for the Breakers have already demonstrated their potential to attract an entirely new clientele to Newport’s mansions. According to Coxe and Rodman, male visitors generally accompany wives, girlfriends and other women, leading to the truism that they are there under some measure of duress and are not interested in the traditional stories associated with houses, their collections, the private lives of the individuals who owned and lived in them, and the parties held in the ballrooms and on the extensive lawns.

According to Coxe:

We’re banking on the fact that there is a segment of our population that is...not going to be interested in the tapestries, but they might be—we have a tour that is just financial that we’re waiting to introduce at the Breakers, of how the Breakers was built, which is a fascinating story. It was built in 18 months, if you can believe it. And it’s about how it was put together. What is the electrical system? Where does it work and how does it work and how did they first create heat? It’s a wonderful tour and we’re

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with author.

banking on the fact that that's going to be more appealing to men than women maybe. So she can go on the tour of the Breakers and he can go behind the scenes.<sup>274</sup>

These tours explore areas of the houses including kitchens, basements and servants' quarters that were previously off-limits to tourists and help reinterpret the houses as not only sites of leisure, but also sites of labor and high finance. Drawing attention to the human, technological and financial resources these homes consumed (as well as the means by which the owners' fortunes were accrued), the new tours account for the conspicuous consumption of not only the material goods and entertainments usually associated with the Gilded Age, but also the *inconspicuous* consumption of the labor of an interwoven group of populations. The servants who worked at these great estates made the owners' "free" time possible; the money used to build the homes was accrued via business practices that included grueling factory work, strike-breaking, and dangerous working conditions for an underclass of men, women and children in increasingly urban (and often unsanitary) areas; and the contemporary preservation and maintenance of the mansions and their collections has long depended on the labor of immigrant workers ranging from French-Canadian carpenters who fixed and installed roofs on the mansions during the mid-twentieth century to the contemporary Hmong refugees who use their embroidery skills to restore tapestries and other valuable textiles showcased in the collections on display in the homes lining Bellevue Avenue.

This new, nontraditional approach to accounting for the labor undergirding the practices of consumption and site-specific performances of leisure (leisurescapes) associated with the Bellevue Avenue mansions was intended to stimulate new interest in

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<sup>274</sup> Interview with author.

the mansions following the economic downturn in American tourism after September 11, 2001. Following an extraordinarily successful summer tourism season, the terrorist attacks prolonged a recession in cultural tourism that had begun in 1999, causing tourism organizations like the Preservation Society to reconsider their mission, the content of their tours, and the historical narratives mobilized by the great houses on display.

According to John Rodman, the narratives mobilized in and by the houses of Bellevue Avenue changed in the wake of the terrorist attacks, and “behind-the-scenes” tours of the mansions are examples of the Society’s new approach to Newport’s Gilded Age history.

While the governing tales of the Gilded Age mansions to date had traditionally been similar to that mobilized by the World Heritage application, emphasizing American adaptations of European architectural styles against a backdrop of contextual cultural history, after 9/11 the Society wanted to refocus its interpretation around a distinctly American heritage. Accordingly, old tours were updated and new tours, such as the behind the scenes tours of the Elms and the Breakers, were developed to support the Society’s new focus on American industrial capacity and entrepreneurship.

Rodman admits, however, that the Society was concerned about returning to the kind of uncritical celebration of the spoils of unrestrained American free market capitalism that had characterized some of the earliest narratives associated with the mansions. Accordingly, the focus of the new Elms tour became the technologies used to run the house. Additionally, new research conducted on The Breakers revealed much about servant life that had long been consigned to the periphery of mainstream tour narratives. Producing new tours, unveiling previously unseen areas of the homes, and presenting new research on servant life at the Elms and the Breakers, then, seems a

strategy meant to reconnect the Gilded Age mansions and the opulent lifestyles with which they have long been associated to the experiences of everyday working Americans.

Whether the Preservation Society has been successful at making this connection, however, remains to be seen. While the behind-the-scenes tours have proven extraordinarily popular and make significant strides in providing the labor history associated with homes during the Gilded Age, there remains surprisingly little attention paid to gendered history of the work undertaken within the homes. Despite the 1980s-era introduction of women's cultural history in the narratives mobilized along Bellevue Avenue, the contemporary emphasis on labor and technological innovation rather than leisure showcased during the newest behind-the-scenes tours are explicitly intended to attract the interest of male patrons. Not surprisingly, then, the governing narrative of these tours emphasizes much of the work undertaken by male servants who worked underground regulating the heating and cooling mechanisms associated with the homes rather than the army of laundresses, housekeepers, butlers, and other serving staff whose roles kept them in the house and garden for much of their 18-plus hour shifts. In their attempts to shift the narratives associated with the Gilded Age mansions to appeal to contemporary American male tourists (many of whom are educated, heterosexual, white, and between the ages of 30 and 60), the Preservation Society has focused overwhelmingly on spheres of work traditionally associated with the demanding physical labor associated with heavy industry and dirty subterranean environs, rather than with the more "domestic" housework requiring interaction between servants, host family, and guests. In other words, to appeal to a male demographic for whom industrial labor still symbolizes the pinnacle of modern-era American masculine achievement, the

Preservation Society has attempted to reclaim American industrial heritage and offer a “masculinized” narrative of a place and time traditionally associated with the decorative arts, summer societies of women and children, and the rise of a decidedly postindustrial economy in which robber barons engaged in a world of high finance wearing fine suits and smoking expensive cigars while America’s newest immigrants toiled in their factories. By reclaiming the “bootstraps” masculinity of the Gilded Age robber barons, the Preservation Society is able to offer contemporary male visitors, most of whom also work in postindustrial fields, a link to America’s Gilded Age heritage.

The effect of this shifting narrative of labor, however, is not only a sentimental view of American industry and the men who oversaw it, but also a return to the pre-feminist obfuscation of work associated with women. While the social work of some of America’s wealthiest Gilded Age socialites, including Alva Vanderbilt, Mamie Stuyvesent Fish and Caroline Backhouse Astor, has now been acknowledged in tales of the fancy-dress balls they engineered and the opulent summer palaces they designed and oversaw, the lower-paid work of laundresses, housekeepers, lower kitchen staff, nannies and governesses is documented primarily in academic reports available online at the Preservation Society’s website, and goes largely undiscussed on tours.

Another significant characteristic of the contemporary “behind-the-scenes” tour of The Elms (and the one being formulated for The Breakers) is that these new tours examine labor only as a historic experience occurring during the Gilded Age, and fail to account for the continuing invisibility of the labor needed to maintain these late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century “white elephants” for posterity. Despite touring all of the Preservation Society properties multiple times over the years, one name I never

heard was that of French-Canadian Louis Chartier, a roofer whose work on Newport's Bellevue Avenue homes eventually enables him to buy several himself.

Born in 1904 in Central Falls, Rhode Island, still one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse of northern Providence County, Chartier was the son of Quebecois parents who relocated to Rhode Island to work in the textile mills discussed in detail in chapter 7. Also a factory worker, Chartier was temporarily unemployed during 1921 and took a job repairing and replacing the poor quality slate roofs installed in many of Newport's summer cottages. Eventually relocating to Newport, Chartier eventually founded the Newport Roofing Company and did much of the repair and restoration work following the hurricanes of 1938 and 1954, which wreaked havoc on Rhode Island's coastal built environs. Profiled in the April 1985 issue of *New England Monthly* one year after his death, Louis Chartier was remembered not as a laborer in Newport, but as a real estate mogul. By the end of his life, he owned five estates in Newport and according to the *Providence Journal*, "in the 1970s he was listed as the third largest taxpayer in Newport, with 15 parcels of property assessed at a total of \$2 million."

According to *New England Monthly*, Chartier's life was a quintessentially American tale of rags-to-riches (a la Horatio Alger). Possessing only a fifth-grade education and considerable work ethic, Chartier ended his life gardening in his own estate on Bellevue Avenue as gawking tourists drove by. One of the most oft-cited anecdotes features Chartier at work in his yard, where he is presumed to be a groundskeeper for the wealthy owner of the home by a passing tourist. When asked who owns the place he's so carefully grooming, Chartier answers in a "parody of his own Franco-American heritage" and answers that he does not speak English. Acknowledged as a good joke on Chartier's

part, this anecdote reveals yet again the invisibility of contemporary labor associated with the Newport Mansions. Until my research on the tourist narratives associated with the opulent Bellevue Avenue residences brought me to a Newport Historical Society vertical file on locally-collected oral histories, I had never heard of Louis Chartier, despite his role as the Francophone modern-day Albert Smith of Newport real estate.

Much as the narrative governing colonial Newport and Bristol's collective slave-trafficking past goes unconnected to the contemporary politics of maintaining and presented a tourist narrative related to that past, so too is Gilded Age labor understood to be a historical phenomenon, and not one that continues well into the present. Yet despite the reputation of Newport as predominantly white and affluent, the demographic information presented in chapters 4 and 5 reveal that moving beyond the "historic hill" of carefully restored colonial structures and the glittering wealth and ocean vistas of Bellevue Avenue puts Newport tourism into a strikingly different contemporary context. Only one city located on the southern end of Aquidneck Island, Newport, Rhode Island presently features one of the largest black and Latin populations in Rhode Island outside of the capital city, Providence, and the largest minority population in the southern part of the state. While Newport is home to antique shops, colonial homes featuring historic placards, an old vaudeville movie house, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, the scenic Cliff Walk, and Salve Regina University, it also features a number of two- and three-family dwellings. Thrown into relief against this semi-urban reality, the mansions of Bellevue Avenue and enormous private homes that line Ocean Drive appear even grander. While the tourist narratives traditionally associated with the Bellevue Avenue mansions relate stories of lavish costume balls, sporting events and parties during which

guests dug for jewels in specially made “sandboxes” and kept their findings as party favors, Newport’s year-round residents have always experienced a strikingly different sense of place, and one usually inextricably bound up with the maintenance of the city’s mainstream tourist narrative and spatial performance.

Despite the grandeur and scale of the individual mansions and their collective presence along the Bellevue Avenue streetscape, it is perhaps the craggy rock path known as the Cliff Walk that is the most telling location of Newport, RI from a performance studies and cultural geographical perspective. Running parallel to Bellevue Avenue behind the mansions, the Cliff Walk is a partially paved walkway carved into the rocks that sandwiches tourists between Rhode Island Sound and the “backyards” of the mansions. While tourists can enjoy the ocean view and let their fancy fly to times when this strip of land provided lower- and middle-class Newport residents their only view into the private lives of the wealthiest Americans, such visions are fast retreating under the weight of economic necessity. The “backyards” of the great mansions, which are not included within the boundaries of the property owned, maintained and operated by the Preservation Society of Newport County, are fast becoming the sites of opulent neo-colonial and neo-Victorian homes privately owned by some of Rhode Island’s richest summer lodgers and year-round occupants. In some cases, the view of the mansions from the Cliff Walk has been blocked by these gargantuan edifices. Their surrounding iron gates now feature call boxes in lieu of the liveried servants who once presided over the traffic on Bellevue Avenue and its cross streets. While the Cliff Walk, in accordance with Rhode Island’s Charter of 1663, has always been accessible to the public (much to the chagrin of some of the summer residents of the Bellevue Avenue mansions), since the

opening of the mansions to tourists starting in the 1960s, this walkway has also become a tourist attraction on which visitors may stroll and imagine a time when the path might reveal a view into one of Alva Vanderbilt's sparkling lawn parties. Ironically, the contemporary Cliff Walk, with its views of the Gilded Age mansions increasingly obscured by the construction of what some critics might refer to as "McMansions" seems to be experiencing an end to its 40 year span as a tourist attraction in its own right and devolving back into a border territory from which the have-nots can gaze longingly at the fruits of America's new Gilded Age of accumulated wealth and conspicuous consumption.

Turning away from the Gilded Age and contemporary mansions of Bellevue Avenue, however, offers another view from the Cliff Walk—one of unabated commerce and industry instead of real estate development. Looking out to sea on a clear day, a tourist or a morning walker can see fishermen and women at work in their boats, hauling in their morning catch, as the Narragansett Bay continues to be the cleanest source of sea food on the East coast. Still, the awareness that these fishermen and women are not, in most cases, the kinds of contemporary captains of industry who can afford to buy the updated Bellevue-backyard-mansions throws Newport's performance of conspicuous consumption into sharp relief.

## Chapter 5:

### The Spatial Politics of Restorative Nostalgia

#### Vernacular Architecture and the Civic Cultural Landscape of Benefit Street

Benefit Street was created in 1758...[and] continued to be a stylish address throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as seen by the imposing Italianate and Second Empire houses, built into the 1870s, along the street. The middle section of the street, at the intersection of Waterman Street, took on a decidedly institutional cast in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the presence of courthouses, clubs and schools, especially the Rhode Island School of Design... The north end of the street became the home to Providence's growing immigrant population in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but by the 1950s it had become seriously blighted. Its rescue was a triumph for historic preservation, based on an innovative plan for conservation of the entire neighborhood. Local citizens invested substantial private capital to transform a dilapidated slum into a handsome and desirable residential area. The preservation of Benefit Street continues, as the area has become one of the nation's premier, vibrant historic neighborhoods.<sup>275</sup>

In its June 2006 issue, *Rhode Island Monthly* magazine featured an article on the Soes, a family of nine fleeing the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana. Like many recent refugees from the Soes' native Liberia, Tea-Tahyor Soe, his mother, brothers and sisters and their children were all displaced by civil war in 1989, when members of tribes opposing the leadership of Samuel Doe invaded from Cote D'Ivoire. The Soes, also members of Doe's Krahn tribe, fled their family farm in 1990 but were captured by advancing troops and removed to captivity in Cape Palmas, where they lived as slaves for eight years. After Tea-Tahyor's mother disappeared in 1998, the remaining family members took advantage of a conflict which left their camp unguarded and they escaped, making their way first to Cote D'Ivoire, where they lived in a refugee camp for four years and finally to Ghana and Buduburam. The camp, originally constructed in 1990 to house 5,000 people, was home to 50,000 refugees by the time the Soes arrived. At Buduburam,

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<sup>275</sup> Downing, Dunning, Hagglund, Mason and Woodward, "Benefit Street: A Mile of History" Second edition, (Providence: Providence Preservation Society, 1980 and 1995).

the Soes survived for three years on monies from the United Nations and from relatives in the United States until November of 2005, when nine members of the family were resettled in the U.S. Three of Tea-Tahyor's brothers and sisters were left behind in the camps, refused entry to the United States for reasons that remained a mystery at the time of the article's publication.

The Soes' story is not an unusual one for Liberian refugees: displaced by civil war, the luckiest among them are housed in interim camps while they wait to be officially classified as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner. What might seem surprising about the Soes' story of resettlement, though, is that their travels ended in Providence, Rhode Island, a location which at first seems unlikely, given the assumptions often made about the state's demographics based on its location in the rarified air of New England, a region known more for its colonial heritage and scenic landscapes than for the diversity of its inhabitants.<sup>276</sup> Even a cursory glance over the state's demographics as reported by the 2000 U.S. Census, however, reveals another image of this small segment of southern New England. According to the Census Bureau, Rhode Island is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the nation for its percentage of foreign-born population, coming in behind more obvious border territories such as California, Florida, Nevada, Texas and Arizona as well as more metropolitan locations including New York, the District of Columbia and Massachusetts.<sup>277</sup> Indeed, Rhode Island moves even further up the national register when evaluated based on the percentage of individuals 5 years old and over who speak a

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<sup>276</sup> As a case in point regarding Rhode Island's reputation as a pretty place to vacation or pass through on the way to Boston, the internet home page Yahoo featured Block Island, a small island in the Rhode Island Sound, as one of the last sites of untamed "wilderness" in the United States. Yahoo home page accessed October 5, 2006.

<sup>277</sup> While Rhode Island does place behind Massachusetts, it does place ahead of any other New England state, with Connecticut trailing close behind. For more on such rankings, see the United States Census on 2000. This particular report is associated with the 2005 American Community Survey and available online at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Accessed online 2 October 2006.

language other than English at home. Placing behind the same areas noted above, Rhode Island comes in 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation, and more specific surveys, compiled by the private nonprofit organization The Providence Plan, demonstrate that in the year 2000, the city of Providence became “majority minority” for the first time in its history, with 75% of its youth under age 18 classified as a racial/ethnic “minority.”<sup>278</sup>

What I find most interesting about the Soes’ story, then, is not that it involves the displacement of members of the African diaspora to the city of Providence (indeed, according to *Rhode Island Monthly* “an estimated 15,000 Liberians have found refuge in Rhode Island,” (most in the state’s capital city), but the immigration narrative of which their story has become part as a result of its prominent placement in the state’s monthly periodical.<sup>279</sup> I initially encountered this article as a photocopy included in an informational packet distributed by the resettlement agency assigned to the Soe family—the International Institute of Rhode Island.<sup>280</sup> Like the Providence Plan, the International Institute of Rhode Island (IIRI) is an agency committed to the economic, environmental and cultural longevity of Providence’s neighborhoods and residents. It is also a nonprofit organization located in Rhode Island’s capitol city that works with other local associations and publications not only to provide services to recent immigrants and

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<sup>278</sup> This information is based on data compiled by the Providence Plan from the U.S. Census and U.S. Census American Community Survey. This report is available online at <http://204.17.79.244/profiles/censummary.html> and I accessed the report 13 December 2006.

<sup>279</sup> Tim Lehnert, “Divine Providence” *Rhode Island Monthly* June 2006. Lehnert also notes that Rhode Island is home to the largest concentration of displaced Liberians in the United States.

<sup>280</sup> Also noted in a press release from June 6, 2004 available on the International Institutes website is the increasing population of resettled Africans in Rhode Island. According to Betty Johnson-Simons, Director for refugee Resettlement and Data Management, “Africans represent the state’s fastest growing new populations of immigrants and refugees.” While there has been a decline since 1999 in the number of Asian populations (including Cambodians, Hmong and Laotian immigrants) there has been a steady increase of individuals from Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Somalia. According to the release, “African-born clients totaled 31% of the Institute’s total new clientele.” For more information, see the June 8, 2004 release entitled “International Institute of Rhode Island Documents that Africans Represent the State’s Fastest Growing New Populations of Immigrants and Refugees,” available online at [www.iiri.org](http://www.iiri.org).

political exiles, but also to increase awareness around issues of migration, displacement, and diaspora.<sup>281</sup> Given the goals of such an organization, the inclusion of the *Rhode Island Monthly* article on the Soe family in the International Institute's informational folder seems telling regarding the portrait of Rhode Island and its bodies politic that both the Institute and the monthly periodical are submitting to donors, board members and fellow Rhode Island residents.<sup>282</sup> According to the information distributed by these institutions as well as that which is available through the U.S. Census Bureau, Rhode Island is, and always has been, a transnational state, and Providence might be considered a miniature version of what feminist scholar of globalization Saskia Sassen has referred to as a "global city."<sup>283</sup>

While the visual image of Providence's contemporary diasporic population is strikingly different from that of the colonial period, during which the religious refugees from Massachusetts Bay were predominantly male (at least initially) and of European descent, the mythology of exile and forced immigration remains largely unchanged. Accordingly, in this chapter, I contextualize Providence's mythscape of "otherwise-

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<sup>281</sup> For more on the services offered by the International Institute of Rhode Island, see [www.iiri.org](http://www.iiri.org). For a concise history of the Institute and its role in the national organization of International Institutes, see Joan Retsinas, "The International Institute of Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 54.1 [November 1996]: 122-138.

<sup>282</sup> *Rhode Island Monthly* is decidedly upscale, featuring ads for home improvement, jewelry and vacations, as well as listing local tourist attractions. Some might suggest that this magazine presents a skewed view of the state's residents. According to statistics compiled by the magazine staff, most of its subscribers are female, affluent and well educated. Additionally, the magazine promotes this information to potential advertisers, stating, "When you advertise in Rhode Island Monthly you reach an upscale, educated, and influential audience" See <http://www.rimonthly.com/Rhode-Island-Monthly/About-Us-Advertise/>. Also interesting to note is the fact that my own review of every issue of the magazine since its earliest date of publication in the 1980s revealed that there have been almost no people of color featured on the magazine's cover or in its main articles.

<sup>283</sup> While Sassen has explored the notion of the "global city" in earlier works, she combines an abridged version of that analysis with a more overarching theoretical apparatus which specifically takes into account the impact of globalization on traditionally marginalized individuals and groups in her collection of essays, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998): xx.

mindedness,” a performed philosophy produced in the seventeenth century by a unique combination of forced exile and religious and political dissidence, against a portrait of the city’s contemporary demographics and its governing rhetoric of exile and forced migration. I argue that tourist narratives associated with Providence’s historic East Side, particularly College Hill, reclaim the heritage of otherwise-mindedness by mobilizing narratives of the earliest European settlers of Providence. While in Newport “soul liberty” was understood as related to freedom *of* religion and is evidenced by a variety of colonial era ecclesiastical structures, the founders of Providence, particularly Roger Williams, championed freedom *from* religion, with the city’s most famed religious structures not constructed until well after Williams’ death.

Because these mythologies are primarily mobilized through the College Hill neighborhood located closest to the original colonial settlement Roger Williams and the other founding citizens negotiated with the Wampanoag Indians, I focus on the geographical and cultural terrain of the area now known as the East Side. This neighborhood is dominated and largely defined by College Hill, a steep incline that crests to the east of the plain on which central Providence sits. This area, originally known as “The Neck” for the shape the land took within the local river system, is home to the city’s oldest private homes, cultural organizations, and religious institutions. The College Hill neighborhood is also the location of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, two nationally-recognized and well-respected educational institutions and major economic engines for the city and the state.

If the built environment of contemporary downtown Providence, with its newly exposed river system, scenic walkways lined with retro-Victorian streetlamps, and fleet

of gondolas, now channels its European sister city of Venice more than a traditional early American seascape replete with wharves, rope walks, grist mills and communal grazing meadows, the urban residential neighborhood of College Hill is a thriving record of Providence's early settlement and reputation as a home for the exiled and reviled. Nationally celebrated by historic preservationists and city planners alike for its mid-twentieth-century rehabilitation, contemporary College Hill is now a trendy neighborhood featuring a mix of young, creative Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design students and the older Providence patrician class, some of whose members formed the Providence Preservation Society in 1956 expressly to stop the demolition of the neighborhood's historic structures.

A bustling and compact town during the colonial period, the East Side of Providence has developed into a primarily residential neighborhood, interspersed with cultural institutions and commercial pockets, but it has also experienced its ups and downs, reaching its nadir during the 1940s and 1950s, by which time its wooden colonial and brick Federal-style homes and grand nineteenth century structures were largely subdivided into tenement apartments for a growing population of low-income residents. Still considered a bohemian, if slightly shabby address in the 1930s and 1940s, pockets of the neighborhood had officially been designated "slums" by the 1950s and faced either wholesale clearance at the hands of urban-renewal-minded city officials or spot clearance (individual buildings cleared as needed) conducted by Brown and RISD as the schools expanded. By the mid-fifties, when long-time residents of "the Hill" organized their individual efforts into a collective rehabilitation movement, the neighborhood had become almost unrecognizable as the same spot at which Roger Williams and his fellow

travelers first landed in 1636, yet it is arguably Williams' legacy and the mythologies of "otherwise-mindedness," initially induced by Williams' forced exile from Massachusetts Bay Colony for his determined belief in a division between church and state which have been used to legitimate efforts to restore the neighborhood as a whole, rather than singling out disparate structures for their supposed historical significance.

It is the aggregate streetscape of College Hill, Providence preservationists and tourism officials argue, that tells a story about the city, and that story inevitably begins with Roger Williams and his fellow exiles of Massachusetts arriving tired, hungry, and hopeful that they might create a new Zion in North America. Williams and his fellow exiles named their prospective city on the hill Providence. Interestingly, while the neighborhood-wide preservation effort associated with the East Side of Providence has been long-heralded a national success story for a cultural landscape approach to whole-place preservation, an approach which relies on the creation of a cohesive narrative articulating multiple sites as a unified coherent cultural spectacle, such an approach has not been as successful elsewhere in Rhode Island. Indeed, the Newport World Heritage Committee's attempts to produce unified narratives for colonial-era and Gilded Age Newport respectively, profiled extensively in part one, proved unconvincing to the National Parks Service.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I pose the following questions: How/have the mythscapes of exile and forced migration shaped the built environment of Rhode Island's capital city? Which institutions have been responsible for interpreting the built environment through the lens of exile and diaspora and crafting a related tourist narrative, and how did the College Hill neighborhood become the city's first bonafide tourist

attraction? How have these dominant tourist narratives written Providence into or out of local, national and transnational historical narratives and what effect does this have on the contemporary meanings and symbolic capital of Providence's colonial-era attractions? Finally, why has whole-place preservation been so successful on College Hill as to set a national preservation precedent, when the same approach appears to have foundered in relation to other historical attractions in the state of Rhode Island?

To answer these questions, I analyze the evolution of the constitutive tourist narratives related to Providence's historic College Hill, taking as my specific case study the "Mile of History" tour, the culmination of these related narratives. Originally authored by members of the Providence Preservation Society and guided each spring, fall and summer season by Rhode Island Historical Society docents, the "Mile of History" tour along historic Benefit Street relies on streetscapes and representative elite, vernacular and ecclesiastical architecture to mobilize the story of more than 300 years of financial, cultural and intellectual history in Providence. In this chapter, I specifically consider the ways in which mythscapes of otherwise-mindedness are mobilized through the built environment of College Hill, arguing that while the efforts of local historical and preservation organizations have resulted in significant cultural and economic advantages for not only this neighborhood, but also for the city and the state as a whole, these undertakings have also produced considerable tensions between College Hill residents and visitors and the rest of the city's population, most of which seems decidedly disconnected from the benefits of the historic tourism of the East Side and the highbrow intellectual and fine arts cultures of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design

While the mythologies of “otherwise-mindedness,” of religious and political dissidence, exile, and forced migration are largely maintained and mobilized through the carefully renovated and restored East Side, this is not the area in which most of Providence’s more recent diasporic populations, including those from the Pacific Rim, the west coast of Africa, and South America have traditionally been resettled. Instead, these immigrants have historically made their homes in more peripheral areas of the city, including Federal Hill (still considered Providence’s “Little Italy” though its population is increasingly Latino), Elmwood, Silver Lake, Olneyville and South Providence, as well as in the bordering cities of Providence County such as Woonsocket, Pawtucket and Central Falls. Indeed, the East Side of Providence has long been acknowledged as a rarified location, home to the city’s well-entrenched patrician class and a revolving population of university students, not Providence’s long-established working class residents.

Yet despite Providence’s status as the state’s capital and its justifiable reputation for ethnic diversity, the city has not yet become a tourist destination on the scale of Newport. While recent additions to Providence’s built environment, particularly the urban water park known as Waterplace and the vast retail emporium the Providence Place Mall (both sites which are dealt with extensively in chapter 8), have certainly contributed to Providence’s reputation as a “renaissance city” filled to bursting with restaurants, theatres, art galleries, live music venues, libraries and an assortment of other cultural institutions, contemporary Providence flourishes as the primary business center for the Ocean State and, in recent years, as a destination for professional conventions and meetings. With an assortment of large luxury hotels and a dedicated convention center

located conveniently within walking distance of the educational institutions and architectural attractions of the celebrated East Side of the city, the “downcity” restaurants, Waterplace Park and Providence Place Mall, Providence provides venues for conventioners and meeting planners that the state’s southern cities simply cannot equal, but when the weekend rolls around, convention attendees board buses that take them to the historical attractions, antique stores and curiosity shops of Bristol and Newport, or the golf courses and beaches of Washington County.<sup>284</sup>

Lacking the varied and consistently available cultural tourism credentials of these southern areas to attract tourists from outside the state (as opposed to appealing primarily to city and state residents already familiar and comfortable with Rhode Island’s most urban areas), Providence’s tourist rhetoric instead relies primarily on the narratives mobilized around its built environment, particularly the colonial and early American mythscapes of the “otherwise-mindedness” that first established Rhode Island as a site of refuge for exiles of the puritanical Massachusetts Bay Colony. While Newport’s transnational reputation related to the flow of bodies-as-capital is largely historical in scope (its contemporary population is still perceived as predominantly, though not exclusively, white and affluent) Providence remains the first site of resettlement for many people displaced not only by ideological or political differences akin to those experienced by the earliest European settlers of the city, but also by war, famine, and ethnic cleansing.

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<sup>284</sup> Trudy Coxe, CEO of the Preservation Society of Newport County, notes that Providence, as the larger, more heavily populated and centrally located capital city, will likely always attract a far greater number of professional conventions than Newport. The limited resources of convention-scale facilities in Newport, she admits, make it an unlikely choice for such events, and her organization willingly refers conference planners interested in Rhode Island to the Providence/Warwick conference and visitors’ bureau. Coxe, interview with author July 10, 2008

### ***Providence as Business Center and Tourist Destination***

While Providence far outpaces Newport in convention and meeting tourism (a niche market in which success is measured by “heads in beds” tallies), the state’s capital city cannot yet compete with Newport in sheer quantity of genuine tourist attractions. Newport, located on Aquidneck Island at the southern and eastern tip of the state’s boundaries, enjoys relatively close proximity to the much-lauded beaches of mainland Washington County (known colloquially as South County, and characterized by large open spaces of relatively flat land, farms, and craggy, picturesque coastal expanses). Additionally, the Newport County Chamber of Commerce (which has recently joined forces with the nearby town of Bristol) promotes more than 7 museums, 27 historic houses and religious structures (including the oldest synagogue in the United States), 7 historic cemeteries available for tours, and myriad official and unofficial historic walking tours in addition to other cultural tourism attractions such as local theatres, art galleries, mainstream and independent movie houses, video arcades, and a vast selection of retail emporia. Newport also boasts ocean vistas and sea breezes easily accessible by foot and by car along relatively uncongested coastal highways and walkways such as Ocean Drive, a road that travels along the island’s rocky and decidedly picturesque southern coast, and the Cliff Walk, the path that parallels much of Bellevue Avenue and offers breathtaking “back yard” views of some of the “summer cottages” of the Gilded Age.

By comparison, Providence houses only a handful of museums, including the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art and the Children’s Museum, as well as a limited summer program of walking tours on Providence’s East Side. Additionally, located only a short car or train ride from Boston, with its vast numbers of nationally

recognized cultural institutions, Providence suffers from its proximity to larger urban centers such as Boston and New York, while Newport actually benefits from its picturesque isolation.

Not surprisingly, contemporary Providence, from a tourist perspective, is comparatively all work and little play, a bustling capital city during the weekdays that is still struggling to find ways to attract suburban tourists to its environs on nights and weekends. Since the early 1990s, the city has undergone a cultural sea change, with the opening of scores of new restaurants and “downcity” shopping areas in addition to the vast Providence Place Mall.<sup>285</sup> The city’s remarkable number of performing arts theatres (including Perishable Theatre Company, the Providence Black Repertory Theatre and the Tony Award-winning Trinity Repertory Company), performance roadhouses (such as the Providence Performing Arts Center and the various college campus facilities around the city), art galleries, and academic institutions have enjoyed a similar rebirth, as locals are no longer afraid to venture downtown after dark. But with the notable exception of Waterfire (also discussed in chapter 8), even the city’s most emphatic boosters admit that Providence still suffers from a lack of consistently available and professionally marketed tourist attractions.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Though the city used to boast the nation’s oldest indoor shopping mall, the Providence Arcade, the Arcade officially closed its doors in 2008, despite the continued occupancy of a number of viable small businesses. While the owner of the property searches for a large single company to take over the space, a new and decidedly upscale mix of national chain stores and local independent retailers, including American Apparel, has opened along a strip of Washington Street in downtown Providence.

<sup>286</sup> An article in the *Providence Journal* admits as much, with Providence residents Alan Rosenberg and Avis Gunther-Rosenberg documenting their attempts to experience the city as a tourist on given Saturday. While the pair enjoyed their hotel accommodations, they found decidedly little literature on how to experience the town as visitors, and were repeatedly frustrated when they showed up in at attractions only to discover the doors locked, with no admission information available. See Alan Rosenberg and Avis Gunther-Rosenberg, “Locals Play Tourist in Providence” *Providence Journal* February 10, 1995. Similarly, as a longtime resident of Rhode Island whose work and social life kept me in Providence almost every day of the week, while conducting my research for this dissertation I too encountered a number of dead-ends when trying to find out if the “riverwalk” referenced in tourist brochures and on the city’s

The small size of the state has also acted as both a boon and a challenge to its capital city. Meeting and convention planners find Providence an attractive site for their events because business can be conducted there, while leisure activities taking attendees to Newport's cultural attractions, Washington County's beaches and working farms, and the industrial museums and sites of northern Providence County are all within an hour's bus ride. If Providence attracts affluent visitors, then, the small size of the state and the proximity of competing attractions can make it difficult to keep those visitors in town for dinner and a movie, for shopping, or for any weekend walking tours or artist markets that have recently become available.

Additionally, Providence houses not only the city's municipal offices, but also those of the state government. This medium-sized capital city, the second largest city in New England, is also home to the majority of the state's nonprofit associations, and is the seat of the state's Catholic Church. All of these resources take up a significant amount of real estate within the city's built environment without offering a sizable tax base (since government, nonprofit associations and churches all occupy their land tax-free). With only a finite amount of land left over to commit to explicitly recreational activities and tourist attractions, the city is forced to rely heavily on the seasonal Waterfire (carefully scheduled to complement convention center events attracting out-of-state visitors) and on the College Hill Historic District, the oldest part of city, with its cache of eighteenth and nineteenth century private homes and institutional structures to reference the mythscapes of exile associated with its founders (particularly Roger Williams) and to bolster its credentials as a tourist destination and a site of national and even transnational

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website had a beginning and end. I had little luck, however, because none of the locals (including those at historical organizations) had even heard of a "riverwalk" and asked if I was actually referring to the paths that lead to Waterplace Park.

significance. Indeed, the architecture of Providence's East Side, which by 1980 was a historic gem in an otherwise drab post-industrial city, seems only to have gained in prominence in recent years, now seen as an historic complement to the neoclassical redesign of the city's downtown core.

### **“The Mile of History” and Providence’s Mythscape of Otherwise-Mindedness**

Originally created in 1980 after the restoration of Benefit Street was largely complete, the “Mile of History” tour exists in two forms. While the full-scale, published tour of historic Benefit Street authored by Providence Preservation Society (hereafter PPS) members Antoinette Downing, Deborah Dunning, Carol Hagglund, Darielle Mason and William McKenzie Woodward traverses the full length of the street, offering detailed paragraphs of information on each historically significant structure according to street number, the guided walking tour offered by docents from the Rhode Island Historical Society is significantly abbreviated. This shorter tour travels north along only the southernmost end of Benefit Street, covering the streetscape between the John Brown House at the corner of Benefit and Power streets, and the First Baptist Church at 75 North Main Street, the first street cut in colonial Providence originally known as Towne Street. Additionally, the guided tour provides interior access to several structures, including the Stephen Hopkins house, the Providence Athenaeum and the First Baptist Church. Lasting a little more than one hour, this tour showcases elite architecture but maintains an emphasis on preservation history, taking as its primary tenet the idea that the built environment is an attraction and a cultural text that can not only memorialize events and

people of the past, but also one that can and does engender and renew senses of civic pride and identity.<sup>287</sup>

While some of the individual structures on Benefit Street contribute to the cultural capital of Providence due to their connection to particular architects or noteworthy individuals, it is the aggregate of the various structures, this tour suggests, which makes the East Side of Providence special, and testifies to not one period of urban development, but to more than three hundred years of intellectual, cultural and civic contributions made by Providence's earliest European settlers and descendent citizens.<sup>288</sup> Indeed, the first lines of the published tour make this clear, noting that Benefit Street is "renowned not only for its Colonial and Early Federal buildings, but also for its interesting mix of later 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings" and observing that it is this architectural mix of "civic, cultural, and religious institutions, mingled with private residences" which continues to "add diversity and vitality to the neighborhood."<sup>289</sup> According to the Mile of History narrative, then, to tell the story of Benefit Street is also to tell the story of how and why Providence has developed over three centuries, and how some of its most memorable

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<sup>287</sup> The notion that architecture and the collective built environment of a given area can tell the story of a place and its people is one that is explored in William Morgan's foreword to W. MacKenzie Woodward's *Guide to Providence Architecture* as well as by respected scholars of place, space and identity. See Woodward, *Guide to Providence Architecture* 8.

<sup>288</sup> As preservationist William Morgan notes in his foreword to W. Mackenzie Woodward's *Guide to Providence Architecture*, Providence is not lacking in notable historic structures by nationally recognized architects. He states, "Few places of similar size in this country are as architecturally endowed as Providence...McKim Mead & White's State House is the epitome of the neoclassical public building. St. Stephen's is an evocative English Gothic church by the leading ecclesiastical architect of the nineteenth century, Richard Upjohn, while Percival Goodman claimed that Temple Beth El was his favorite synagogue design. The snazzy Art Deco skyscraper by Walker & Gillette is situated halfway between one of Paul Randolph's heroic housing blocks and Philip Johnson's Brutalist art building for Brown University." Morgan also notes the work of local architects, including John Holden Greene, Russell Warren, and Alpheus Morse, all of whom contributed to the city's built environment and complemented more nationally recognized architectural contributions. See Morgan in Woodward, *PPS/AIAri Guide to Providence Architecture* (Providence: Providence Preservation Society, 2003): 8-9. For more on the ways in which architecture and the built environment can serve as cultural capital, see Darrell Crilley, "Architecture as Advertising: Constructing the Image of Redevelopment." *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, editors (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993)

<sup>289</sup> "Benefit Street: A Mile of History" 1980, 1995.

structures and streetscapes have been preserved and restored by the efforts of civic-minded neighborhood residents in collaboration with the Providence Preservation Society.

Like their counterparts at the Newport Historical Society, Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) tour guides unfold the history of Providence and the preservation of the East Side according to specific themes, including elite architecture and financescapes, civic development and vernacular architecture, and finally, the “soul liberty” for which Providence first gained fame. Despite the presence of several grand and carefully preserved residential structures, narratives of civic development and restoration projects undertaken on the city’s East Side make up the bulk of the tour narrative as visitors take in the Providence Athenaeum, the Stephen Hopkins House and the tree-lined streetscape of modest and neat eighteenth century clapboard homes built for merchants and artisans, many of which have been extensively refurbished and reconstructed for contemporary dwellers while maintaining their early American architectural elements and historic charm. Finally, the colonial history and mythology of “soul liberty” and individualism are emphasized as the crowd visits the religious structures of the neighborhood, none of which were constructed until well after Roger Williams’ death, since he championed independent and individual worship and disdained the idea of building a community church.

The guided tour begins at the John Brown House, where visitors enter through the back of the home, near the carriage house, and purchase their tickets inside the small gift shop that features local history texts, reproduction maps of colonial Providence, jewelry, and postcards as well as a collection of free brochures on related cultural attractions in Providence. Offered during spring and summer, the walking tours are delivered by Rhode Island Historical Society interns and employees or by Tourism Services Manager Barbara Barnes. Under the auspices of the Newell D. Goff Center for Education and Public Relations, the RIHS’s tourism program is housed not at the Society’s administrative offices, but at the John Brown House itself, the only museum the Society maintains within the city limits of Providence. Tours of the Brown House are offered year round and are not included in the spring and summer “Mile of History” walking tours (though admission to the house and its exhibits can be purchased separately). Nevertheless, the house and its grounds act as the meeting station for all the tours, and throughout the warmer months it is not unusual to see a small group of tourists armed with umbrellas, sunscreen and water bottles gathered in the shaded gardens at the Brown House or on the front steps of the mansion, ready to explore historic College Hill.



*John Brown house, front view from Power Street*

Beginning the Mile of History tour narrative at the grand estate of John Brown necessitates a brief nod to the shifting geography of early Providence and the “financescapes” which occasioned the growth and expansion of the town during the colonial and early American periods. After greeting guests, tour guides contextualize the

surrounding neighborhood, noting that although Benefit Street contains architectural elements spanning the 300-plus years of Providence's growth, it is not the original street around which the first colonial settlement grew. Instead, as architect William MacKenzie Woodward notes in his own 2003 guide to the city, Benefit Street stands as a testament to the town's successful transition from a land-based agricultural and artisan economy to a flourishing maritime trade port.

Indeed, Providence's East Side is defined by its proximity to the waterways flowing through Rhode Island's capital city. Originally known as Moshassuck by the Wampanoag Indians, the land east of the Moshassuck River came to be known as "The Neck" by the early European settlers, a reference to the shape of the peninsula rising to the east of the three-river confluence that bisects Providence.<sup>290</sup> Gertrude Kimball, one of the earliest chroniclers of colonial Providence, notes the dimensions and characteristics of this area at some length, paying particular attention to the water routes that made early settlement possible and allowed the colonial town to flourish:

The lands thus designated comprised a territory of about four square miles. It included the peninsula formed by the Seekonk and Moshassuc [sic] Rivers, whereon the East Side of the present city stands, as far north as "the Rivers and Fields of Pautucket." The Seekonk lies to the east, and the Moshassuc to the west, of this peninsula, and both empty into Providence Harbor at a distance from each other of about a mile. To the west of the Moshassuc is the Wanasquatucket [sic], which flows south and east into the cove above the harbor. The swift current of these two streams, as they met in the shallow cover, had eaten away the soft soil of the western shore, and formed a large tract of marshland on that side of the river. Some five miles to the south of Providence, the Pawtuxet, after a course of some twenty-five or thirty miles, flows northeast into Narragansett Bay. The western limit of the original township was marked by the so-called Four Mile Line, running down from Neutakonkanut Hill, a short distance south of the

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<sup>290</sup> John Hutchins Cady, *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence: 1636-1950* (Providence, RI: The Book Shop, 1957): 4.

Wanasquatucket River, to the point where the Pachaset, or Pocasset, River enter the Pawtuxet, about three miles from its mouth.<sup>291</sup>

Finally destroyed in 1676 by the Narragansett Indians during King Philip's War, Roger Williams' original settlement was bounded by what are now North and South Main Streets, Wickenden, Hope and Olney Streets.<sup>292</sup> The lots were narrow and deep, fronting on North and South Main and extending up the hill to what is now Hope Street. The first town center was known as Market Square, where the Rhode Island School of Design Auditorium now stands on the edge of the Moshassuck River at the intersection of Canal and College Streets.<sup>293</sup> Initially a hub of commercial activity, colonial-era Market Square boasted a grist mill run by John Smith and a tannery established by Thomas Olney, Jr. (both founding settlers) and remained the city center until the mid-nineteenth century, by which time a series of railroads had been constructed on the cove lands of the Providence's newly developed west side, rendering the narrow overland passages and wharves of the East Side obsolete as major conduits of industry and trade.<sup>294</sup> By 1650, tax records show that 51 houses were standing in Providence.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, *Providence in Colonial Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912): 19-20.

<sup>292</sup> Roger Williams officially executed the initial deed for the town of Providence in 1638, which provided land for Williams and his first twelve fellow settlers, with each person receiving "a home lot, a six-acre lot for planting, an extent of meadow or pasture land of cattle, and a tract of woodland, to an aggregate of about 100 acres." In a later deed of 1666, the initials of the twelve settlers were matched to Stukely Westcott, William Arnold, Thomas James, Robert Cole, John Greene, John Throckmorton, William Harris, William Carpenter, Thomas Olney, Francis Weston, Richard Waterman, and Ezekial Holliman. Later, 25 acres of land were granted to each new settler who agreed to follow the adopted laws and policies of the town. In 1645, these folks included John Browne, Thomas Clemence, George Shepard, Robert Pyke, Mathurin Ballou, Thomas Walling, Lawrence Wilkinson, Daniel Comstock, Benjamin Smith, John Smith, John Clauson, Thomas Suckling, Benjamin Hernden, Edward Inman, Samuel Bennett, Edward Smith, John Fenner, Stephen Northup, Daniel Brown, Epenetus Olney, John Steere, George Way, Henry Reddock, and John Sayles. Cady 4-5

<sup>293</sup> Ibid 6-7.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid 9.

What is now known as North Main Street was effectively the center of civic and economic life in colonial Providence, with residential dwellings located along the street's northern and southern extremities, and commercial sites at Market Square on the center, just across the river from what is now "downcity" Providence. As the town grew, additional roads were cut along the width and length of the narrow peninsula to increase access to land and alleviate the congestion of extant overland routes. One such street was Benefit Street, the most famous and well-documented heritage area of the East Side, cut in 1758 "for the common benefit of all."<sup>296</sup> Known as Back Street until 1772 for its position behind the original lots, this street now features architecture representative of Providence's growth from a colonial town to a bustling nineteenth century city with significant commercial economies and corresponding wealth.

As opportunities for economic growth broadened during the eighteenth century, the town's population swelled and new social boundaries evolved. The residential core of the town grew to accommodate the workers needed to support the maritime trade, and new homes were constructed farther up the incline of College Hill, separating the older, more established families at the helm of the new shipping dynasties from their employees, who were increasingly newly arrived immigrants living along the water's edge. Indeed, the wealthiest merchants moved uphill first, building grand mansions from which to survey their land and wharves.<sup>297</sup> Accordingly, Benefit Street, by the time of its cultural apex in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, was "a stylish address" featuring a mix of housing styles. According to the Providence Preservation Society, "[m]agnificent

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<sup>296</sup> "Benefit Street: A Mile of History" printed pamphlet.

<sup>297</sup> See Woodward, "Tour Two: Moving Up: The Lower Slope of College Hill" in *A Guide to Providence Architecture*: 33-76.

houses, built first for successful ship-owners and later for manufacturers, mingle with the more modest dwellings of mariners and artisans” along this historic street.<sup>298</sup>

If Roger Williams’ original colonial settlement exists now only on historic maps, then, its heritage is yet alive and well in the Mile of History tour narrative, with its governing rhetoric of teleological capitalist progress, as the leading families of nineteenth century Providence all had their roots in the colonial period but managed to accrue extraordinary wealth and power via a shrewd and gradual transition from agricultural interests to more lucrative maritime commerce. This commerce, made possible by the waterways which would so vex Providence city planners half a century later that they would eventually be filled and paved in efforts to reunite the cities disparate land-masses (discussed in greater detail in chapter 8), was based largely on extensive and varied financial portfolios that included interests in the China Trade, or the exchange of alcohol and other New England products for far-eastern fabrics, teas, and opium at colonial ports of call along the Atlantic seaboard, and the Guinea or “Triangle” trade, or the exchange of Rhode Island rum for enslaved Africans sold in Cuba. These early maritime interests in turn financed a diverse collection of early industrial projects that made Rhode Island the most industrialized state in the union by the mid-nineteenth century.

### *Elite Architecture and the Financescapes of College Hill*

John Brown, a descendent of original settler Chad Brown, was the first of the town’s elites to abandon his family’s colonial home on Towne Street and “move up” the hill. Designed by his brother, architect Joseph Brown and completed in 1788, John Brown’s home stands on land owned by his mother’s aptly-named family, the Powers,

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<sup>298</sup> “Benefit Street: A Mile of History” 1980, 1995.

with the mansion fronting on Power Street and offering an impressive side view from Benefit Street. According to the published PPS tour, Brown's home was also "the first of the large three-story mansions in this area" though other Brown family members and their associated business partners soon followed suit, establishing Benefit Street as a locus of social power at once dependent upon and discrete from the waterways supporting the trade dynasties operated by Providence's elite families.

Now maintained as a museum by the RIHS, the Brown House remained in the hands of the Brown family until the early twentieth century when it was purchased by Rhode Island utilities, real estate and transportation magnate Marsden Perry. After Perry's death in 1935, John Nicholas Brown, a founding member of the PPS, purchased the home of his great-great-great uncle, then donated it to the RIHS in 1941 for use as a museum.

During his tenure there, Perry redesigned the John Brown house substantially, installing new hardwood floors, decorative plasterwork, a paneled library, and a second floor bathroom so elaborately decorated that the RIHS chose to maintain it as an element of its current tour even after restoring the rest of the home to its late eighteenth century appearance.<sup>299</sup> Additionally, just as John Brown had constructed a dwelling for his horse-drawn carriage, Perry commissioned an elaborate barn for his horses and automobiles. Located diagonally across the street from the main house and long since converted into a residence, this structure was also home to notorious Providence Mayor Vincent "Buddy" Cianci from 1983 to 2002. Cianci served from 1974 to 2002, but was removed from office first in the late 1980s and then again in 2002 (after an overwhelmingly successful bid for reelection in 1990) on felony charges of aggravated assault and corruption,

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<sup>299</sup> Woodward 57-59.

respectively. Accordingly, the John Brown House has been associated with extraordinary social and financial power since its construction more than 200 years ago.

Surveying the outside of the home, “Mile of History” tour guides are also careful to remark upon the situation of the house and the social status it bespoke regarding its inhabitants and the role the Brown family as a whole played in the development of Providence from the colonial period to the present. The home overlooked Market Square, John Brown’s wharves and the substantial grounds of Brown’s estate, and well as looming above the colonial-era settlement on North and South Main Streets. Indeed, tour guides observe, it was the house’s grand scale, extensive grounds and graceful architectural details that gained this structure the approbation of John Quincy Adams, who visited the home and pronounced the Brown house “the most beautiful and elegant private mansion that I have ever seen on this continent.”<sup>300</sup>

That Adams was impressed by Brown’s home is hardly surprising, since it was certainly intended to be a showpiece in addition to a family dwelling. What is perhaps more disarming is that the statesman, future president and notable anti-slavery lobbyist would have overlooked some of the elements of the diverse financial portfolio which enabled Brown to build his palatial estate at the crest of College Hill. This portfolio, expanding exponentially in scope and profit throughout the nineteenth century, included not only the



*Plaque posted beside the front gate at the John Brown house.*

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<sup>300</sup> “Benefit Street: A Mile of History” pamphlet 1980, 1995.

China and East India trades (involving the exchange of goods from Providence for the fabrics and teas of the far east), but also the “Guinea trade,” or the trafficking of enslaved Africans. Indeed, as tour guides conduct their visitors around the front of the brownstone wall encasing the property, they draw their guests’ attention to the plaque outside the front gate of the mansion.

Installed in 2002 largely as a response to criticisms from the local African American community regarding the silence surrounding Providence’s role in slave trafficking and ownership, the plaque acknowledges that John Brown earned his fortune specializing in trade with China and the East Indies (for which he named his Providence wharf “India Point,” a moniker that has stood the test of time), but also from his participation in slave trafficking ventures and his reliance on slave labor at his Providence estate. This sign, though, is both the first and last reference to slave trafficking and/or slavery that visitors will encounter on the “Mile of History” tour, and no mention is made in the published self-guided tour of the Brown family’s extensive involvement in the “Triangle Trade.” Indeed, despite the Brown family’s substantial role in the shaping of every aspect of Providence from the colonial period through the late nineteenth century and beyond, information about the Browns is largely confined to narratives accompanying tours of the interior of the John Brown house (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter), where both architectural elements and fine furnishings of the period provide the catalyst for brief overviews of the economic and cultural histories related to the Brown empire. Visitors who have already toured the Brown House, or those familiar with the maritime trade histories of Providence, however, will recognize the family names associated with some of Benefit Street’s most luxurious

residences as those of family members and business associates of John Brown and his brothers Joseph, Nicholas and Moses.

Indeed, the next home discussed on the tour, the Thomas Poyneton and Hope Brown Ives House (constructed in 1806 and located next door to the John Brown House at 66 Power Street) makes clear that Brown was hardly the only merchant whose financial interests were tied up with various forms of transatlantic trade. Following the

example of her uncle John Brown, Hope Brown Ives and her husband Thomas Poyneton Ives also constructed a Federal style brick home on inherited Brown family land. Thomas Poyneton Ives and Hope Brown married in 1791, after Ives joined John Brown as junior partner in the shipping business that eventually became known as Brown & Ives. As



*Contemporary Nightingale-Brown House, now property of Brown University*

Charles Rappleye notes in his 2006 text *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade and the American Revolution*, John Brown, senior partner in the firm, continued to traffick in African slaves until after the federal prohibition of the trade in 1808, long after Ives had joined the firm.

Yet another home that eventually passed into the hands of the Brown family is the Nightingale-Brown House, located just across Power Street from the John Brown and Hope Brown Ives homes. An impressive three-and-one-half story wood frame structure featuring extensive gardens originally laid out by Frederick Law Olmstead, the Nightingale-Brown house faces Benefit Street and was built in 1792 for Joseph Nightingale, who financed the structure in the same manner as his neighbors the Browns.

Completed only a few years after John Brown's palatial mansion the Nightingale house testifies to the broad practice of both the China trade and the African slave trade not only in Newport and Bristol, but also Providence.

The home passed to the Brown family in 1814, when Nicholas Brown acquired the property. In 1864, his son, John Nicholas Brown, built an addition on the northeast corner of the home to contain his private collection of Americana (the collection has since been relocated to the John Carter Brown Library). Restored to its Colonial Revival style in the 1920s by John Nicholas Brown II, the home remained in the Brown family until 1985, when it was donated to Brown University. Like many of the grandest eighteenth and nineteenth century structures on College Hill, the house now provides classroom and administrative space for Brown University, serving as the John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization.<sup>301</sup>

The last explicit example of the wealth accrued in the China trade highlighted on the guided Mile of History tour is the Corliss-Carrington House (66 Williams Street, 1810), constructed of brick and notable for its resemblance to southern plantation architectural styles. Although nationally-recognized steam engine inventor John Corliss (for whom Providence's Corliss Wharf has since been named) began construction of the house, he ran out of money and was unable to complete the structure, allowing Edward Carrington to finish the home and solidify the social position he had achieved by marrying Lorian Hoppin, a member of yet another prominent Providence trading dynasty whose family home has since become part of the Brown University campus. Though colonial Newport is more commonly associated both economically and culturally with the southern aristocracy, the Corliss-Carrington house makes clear that Providence

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<sup>301</sup> Woodward 56-57.

merchants too maintained extensive economic and cultural networks reaching north and south and across along the Atlantic seaboard.

On the guided “Mile of History” tour, then, it is a handful of mansions located at the southern end of Benefit Street which largely mobilize the economic histories of colonial and early American Providence, with several grand estates of Providence’s wealthy merchant class of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries testifying to the continued growth of the financial portfolios of the descendents of the first European citizens of colonial Providence. However, the published “Mile of History” tour, as well as walking tours suggested by Providence architect William McKenzie Woodward in his *Guide to Providence Architecture*, make clear that a more complete story of the wealth accrued by families such as the Tillinghasts, Powers, Hoppins, Bowens, Nightingales and of course, the Browns is told by considering Benefit Street in its entirety, as tours of the northern expanses of this eighteenth century thoroughfare also reveal the magnificent Sullivan Dorr House, the 1810 structure which graces the cover of the PPS Mile of History tour booklet. Indeed, Sullivan Dorr, the father of Thomas Wilson Dorr, best known as for his mid-nineteenth century efforts to expand voting rights in Rhode Island, also made his fortune in the China Trade. Standing on part of Roger Williams’ original house lot, this Federal-style home is lauded by the PPS as “the masterpiece of [local architect] John Holden Greene” as well as one of the most elaborate mansions of Providence’s East Side.

### *Middle-Class Architecture and the Vernacular Streetscapes of College Hill*

What went unaccounted for by these wealthy merchants and their descendents as they used their profits to establish the city's first banks and municipal institutions and built their grand mansions along Benefit Street, however, were the effects of this trade on the population and social geography of Providence as the city expanded yet again from a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century port of call to one of the earliest and most significant industrial hubs of the northeastern United States. The same maritime trade that brought wealth and prosperity to Providence's leading families would also bring with it not only a proportionally small number of enslaved Africans and free blacks whose descendents would by the mid-twentieth century make up a sizable portion of the population of Providence's East Side, but also a working class of immigrants from the Cape Verde islands.

Indeed, the settlements of free blacks and Cape Verdean "bravas" on Lippitt Hill, South Main Street and throughout the waterfront area that came to be known as Fox Point would effectively surround the Anglo patrician class of College Hill by the 1940s, resulting in a social panic and a rhetoric of neighborhood dereliction that would inspire



*Two views of the contemporary streetscape of Benefit Street, along which the "Mile of History" tour is conducted*

long-time white residents and descendants of Providence's "first families" to take action to "save" the East Side from the disinvestment plaguing the aging structures of these working class neighborhoods. If other mid-sized cities throughout the United States experienced "white flight" during the 1950s and 1960s, however, Providence's long-time East Side residents resisted this trend, with many city planners then as now applauding the Providence patricians for digging in their heels, forming the Providence Preservation Society and "rescuing" their historic neighborhood from blight. These efforts effectively established the rhetoric of rebirth around the College Hill rehabilitation project of the 1950s and 1960s that has since become the secondary focus of the guided Mile of History tour, mobilized not by the grand estates of southern Benefit Street, but by the vernacular streetscape for which the College Hill Historic District was recognized in the 1980s.

While many of the grandest domestic structures of Benefit Street, built for the merchants of the flourishing China and Guinea trades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century have been preserved as museums or enjoyed renewed life as classrooms and administrative offices for Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, it is the neatly restored streetscape of modest eighteenth century clapboard dwellings that are now most commonly associated with College Hill and which occasion the bulk of the "Mile of History" tour narrative. Thanks largely to the nationally-recognized preservation and restoration efforts of the Providence Preservation Society, these homes, which stretch the entire length of Benefit Street, serve as a monument to Roger Williams' first European settlement in Providence, with its narrow home lots, simple four-room, two-story wooden structures, and the communitarian ethos evidenced by shared meadows, gardens and other open spaces. Although the northern end of

Benefit Street enjoys a greater number of eighteenth century structures than does the southern end, which is located more closely to the commercial town center at Market Square, the “Mile of History” tour makes use of the centrally-located Stephen Hopkins house to contextualize the meanings of Benefit Street’s more modest structures during their original period of construction, and during the present as contemporary monuments to Providence’s colonial and early American periods of development.

Built in 1707, the Hopkins house is named for its most famous occupant and owner, ten-term Rhode Island governor and anti-slavery advocate Stephen Hopkins. Hopkins was author of the influential political pamphlet of the Revolutionary period, “The Rights of the Colonies,” as well as a member of the Continental Congress, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a chief justice of the Superior Court and the first chancellor of Brown University. Hopkins purchased the house in 1743 and although it now occupies a residential lot on a street named for the former governor, just slightly lower on College Hill than John Brown’s mansion, the structure has actually been moved several times before coming to rest in its present location at the corners of Benefit and Hopkins streets.

In answer to the geography of power at work on College Hill, a neighborhood in which social distinction was marked by upward mobility in the most literal sense, the Hopkins house too has gradually moved uphill as its profile as a historic location has developed and the efforts of the Providence preservation community made it into a historic tourist attraction. Originally located at the base of the hill on Towne Street (now North Main), the house was later moved to what is now the site of the Providence County Court House, at 250 Benefit Street, and then to its current location just off of Benefit

Street and overlooking what was once Market Square. Fully restored to its colonial-era appearance by local architect Norman Isham, the Hopkins house is owned by the State of Rhode Island and maintained and operated as a tourist attraction by the Rhode Island chapter of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Normally available for tours by appointment only, the interior of the Hopkins house, as well as its gardens, is included in the guided “Mile of History” tour.

The tour narrative offers the Hopkins house as what Providence-based architect and guide book author William McKenzie Woodward refers to as “a foil” for the John Brown House, since Hopkins was certainly every bit as significant a civic figure in his day as John Brown and his brothers were in theirs.<sup>302</sup> But despite Hopkins’ marked success as a merchant and a statesman, he never accrued the scale of wealth and power that was later associated with John, Joseph, Nicholas and Moses Brown, as well as leading families including the Bowens, Angells, and Tillinghasts, all of whom earned extraordinary fortunes from trade and manufacturing opportunities that were not yet available to Hopkins and other earlier merchants. The comparison of the Hopkins and Brown homes, then, also throws into relief the sheer scale of wealth, power and influence accumulated by merchants during the early nineteenth century in contrast not only to their agriculturally-dependent colonial ancestors, but also their artisan and merchant-class counterparts of the mid-to late eighteenth century.

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid 22-23.

Also testifying to the type of vernacular domestic and civic landscapes to be found along Benefit Street during the early to mid-nineteenth century are two collections of row homes, several modest domestic dwellings, and a handful of civic structures. Facing each other on the 200 block of Benefit Street are Ives Row and Athenaeum Row (1814-1819), rare examples of attached townhouses in Providence named for their builder, Thomas Poynton Ives, and their proximity to the Providence Athenaeum, respectively. Constructed of brick in the federal style and featuring Ionic doorways, these neat row homes stand alongside the restored wooden structures known as the John Larcher House (1819) and the Eliza Ward House (1815).



*Benefit Street row homes. One of the few examples of row homes in Providence*

The tour continues past the Providence County Court House on the left, which fronts on North Main Street but also features an entrance at 250 Benefit Street, with guides giving scant attention to this massive Georgian municipal

structure built in 1926 and instead turning their visitors' attention across the street toward the Providence Athenaeum, constructed almost a century earlier. One of only seven private libraries remaining in the United States today, the Athenaeum is associated with the Providence Library Company, founded in 1753, though the building itself was not constructed until the 1830s.<sup>303</sup>

The tour through the Athenaeum is best described as a brief walk-through, and though it reveals only a glimpse of the library's sizable collection of both contemporary and historical materials, it does occasion a discussion of Providence's literary pasts.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid 156.

Standing just inside the entranceway, visitors are encouraged to look up toward the balconies overhead, where nineteenth century literary giants H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe studied. Indeed, tour guides note, Poe was a frequent visitor to the Athenaeum throughout the duration of his friendship with Providence resident and poet Sarah Helen Whitman.

Benefit Street also offers a view of other private, albeit civic-minded institutions. The Hope Club, once the premiere social club for the elite men of Providence now extends membership to women as well. Originally founded in 1885, the club is still functioning in its original brownstone at 6 Benevolent Street, though its symbolism of “hope” seems somewhat ironic to Providence architect William McKenzie Woodward, who states:

Despite or because of the collected accumulated wealth this building represents, the concept of a club called Hope, for those who already have so much good fortune, located at the corner of Benevolent and Benefit Streets, seems both ironic and appropriate in a place called Providence.<sup>304</sup>

Another similar structure is the Brown Faculty Club, housed in the Zachariah Allen House of 1864. Located at 2 Magee Street, this home is built in the Italian Renaissance style so popular in mid-nineteenth century Providence. Like many other Providence elites, the Allen family made its fortune in the transatlantic trades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Zachariah Allen, born in 1795, attended Brown University before turning his interests (and his inherited wealth) to textiles manufacturing and engineering. He developed “fire-proof” constructions methods for mills and factories, greatly influencing the practice of insuring such manufacturing concerns in Providence as well as in northern Rhode Island and throughout New England. His home was acquired

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid 53.

by Brown University in 1938 and expanded in 1980, serving now as a private club for the university professoriate.<sup>305</sup>

*Freedom from Religion and the Legacy of “Soul Liberty” in Providence*

If the central focus of the guided Mile of History tour is the preservation narrative governing College Hill and the neighborhood’s recreation as a tourist attraction, the last few minutes are spent reminding visitors how and why the “lively experiment” which resulted in contemporary Providence began in the first place. As the tour moves toward its conclusion, the final structures visited are ecclesiastical. Though the churches included on the tour, the First Baptist Church (1774) and the First Congregational Church (1815, now a Unitarian congregation) are both contemporarily acknowledged as having been built well after Roger Williams’ death, it does seem somewhat ironic, at first glance, that these structures are now the points on the Mile of History tour that stand in closest proximity to the original colonial settlement and indeed, closest to Roger Williams’ own original homestead. However, though William MacKenzie Woodward, the Providence Preservation Society and the Rhode Island Historical Society all maintain that the First Baptist Church, as it currently exists, was not built until 1774, other earlier sources contended that a religious structure did house the First Baptist congregation in the United States as early as 1638. Indeed, some sources contend that this first official house of collective worship predates even those of Newport, Rhode Island.

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid 52.

According to early state historian Samuel Greene Arnold, whose comprehensive *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* was published in 1859, the First Baptist Church in America did indeed stand at what is now 75 North Main Street at the foot of the area now known as College Hill, the



*First Baptist Church, at 75 North Main. Side view.*

congregation officially housed there as early as fall of 1638, predating the residency of Newport's Baptist congregation at their house of worship March 16, 1639.<sup>306</sup> Arnold's claims, however, were not undisputed, even in his day, as Providence and Newport vied even for the hour of claiming the first official religious structure associated with the Baptist faith in America. Arnold documents this competition in a substantial footnote, citing the fact that the local Warren Association (named for a small town in southern Rhode Island) was approached to mediate the dispute between the two congregations. According to Greene, evidence was presented by the Providence congregation at the Association's September 12, 1850 meeting which was then published in pamphlet form and distributed as a kind of lobbying campaign throughout the state. Newport's pastor Reverend S. Adlam followed suit, publishing his own pamphlet, argumentatively titled, "The First Baptist Church in Providence Not the Oldest of the Baptists in America." Adlam claimed that the original Providence church was destroyed in 1718, but that Newport's church, in any case, predated both structures. Though Greene himself presents evidence of his own supporting the Providence congregation's claims, this dispute is

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<sup>306</sup> Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations: Volume 1: 1636-1700* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1859): 107.

unmentioned on contemporary “Mile of History” tours, and 1774 is the date associated with the current church standing at 75 North Main Street, despite the claims of the contemporary congregation that the First Baptist Church of Providence is also the First Baptist Church of America.<sup>307</sup>

Though this dispute has apparently been long-settled by architectural historian W. McKenzie Woodward, it seems interesting that the competition between Newport and Providence for evidence of freedom of religion, considered constitutive of Rhode Island’s particular brand of republican self-determination known as “otherwise-mindedness” goes unmentioned in a tour so focused on the legacies of Roger Williams. Emphasizing Williams’ arduous “errand into the wilderness” in pursuit of religious freedom, the “Mile of History” tour emphasizes the fact that no churches were established during Williams’ lifetime and instead heralds Williams’ chief contribution as a civic one: the chief architect of the separation between church and state and one of the philosophical forbears of the first and second amendments of the Constitution. On the “Mile of History” tour, which so heavily emphasizes the built environment as evidence of more than three hundred years thriving civic life in Providence, it is freedom *from* religion that is discussed, essentially ceding to Newport dominance over the narrative of freedom *of* religion.

Yet according to Greene and other historians of colonial Providence, a physical ecclesiastical structure is not necessary to substantiate claims of religious practice among Providence’s earliest Anglo settlers. At least 2 members of the original Providence settlement, Roger Williams himself and Thomas James, were ordained ministers, and

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. See the contemporary congregation’s website, <http://www.fbcia.org/>. Accessed online 16 December 2009.

another minister, Williams Blackstone, settled just six miles north of Providence in the valley that would later be named for him (see chapter 7). Accordingly, argues, Greene, religious observances were likely convened in private homes, as Williams had formerly delivered sermons in secret during his persecution in Massachusetts.<sup>308</sup>

Though the oldest religious structures in Providence stand in close proximity to North Main Street, the site of Roger Williams Providence homestead, none are currently believed to have existed during colonial times, according to the dominant narrative presented on the “Mile of History” tour, and indeed, the narrative which accompanies these structures has much more to do with civic life than with religious worship. When visiting the interior of the First Baptist Church at 75 North Main Street, for example, tourists receive stories about the church as a site of civic functions including Brown University commencement ceremonies. Designed by Joseph Brown (who also designed his brother John’s home on Power Street), the 1774 structure no longer serves as the official home for Brown’s commencement, but as McKenzie Woodward notes in his published tour narrative, undergraduates at Brown still perform the ceremonial march down College Hill to the church in observance of the church’s former significance.<sup>309</sup> According to Woodward, the PPS and the RIHS, then, the First Baptist Church serves an important aggregate purpose in Providence’s long history, fulfilling the role of ecclesiastical structure and traditional New England town meeting house.

Interestingly, this determination of the tour authors and guides that the site serves both religious and civic purposes undermines the very precepts on which Williams founded his philosophy of the separation between church functions and those associated

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Woodward 24.

with civil society. Creating a narrative that essentially conflicts with Williams' original goals for his "city on the hill" in Providence, then, it makes sense that the tour would leave out the controversy over the dating of the First Baptist Church. If the congregation was formed in 1638 but a structure did not appear until 1774, long after Williams' death, no conflict arises, allowing Providence's contemporary built environment to function appropriately as a mythscape for Williams' "soul liberty" and Rhode Island's peculiar brand of "otherwise-mindedness."

### **Creating and Curating the East Side:**

#### **The Rhetoric of Loss, Rescue and Redemption in the City on the Hill**

As indicated by the touring narrative presented above, the Mile of History tour of historic Benefit Street (both the guided and self-guided versions) focus primarily on the architectural and related preservation histories associated with College Hill and the Providence Preservation Society. With only an hour and a space of about 4 blocks, such a focus leaves little time for a more than a cursory introduction to the cultural history of the neighborhood and its relationship to the city and state as a whole, and allows for no revisionist information (i.e., those incorporating new historical research undertaken by resident scholars and RIHS staff) that might augment the traditional narrative, particularly in relation to the complex and far-reaching social and financial networks that produced the extraordinary wealth which occasioned some of College Hill's most extravagant architectural spectacles and supported the economic infrastructure of the rising middle class. Accordingly, in this section, I analyze and complicate the preservation narrative presented on the tour as well as examining what historical material

is left out and why it does not necessarily fit alongside the story of an overwhelmingly successful neighborhood-wide restoration effort.

Though the Mile of History tour presents a celebratory narrative of the preservation and restoration of the area, with tour guides awarding high praise to the long-time residents of “the hill” who formed the Providence Preservation Society in 1956, and to Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design for stabilizing, restoring and reusing historic homes as classrooms and administrative offices, some scholars have since sought to problematize the story of Benefit Street’s renewal as it is circulated by the Mile of History tour. Indeed, city planner Gene Bunnell, who profiles this area of Providence extensively in his 2002 text *Making Places Special: Stories of Real Places Made Better by Planning* cites several sources who recall the very real threats to the local built environment posed by the impending expansion of Brown and RISD, and academic Briann Greenfield draws attention to the displacement of black and immigrant populations from the neighborhoods of the East Side occasioned by the restoration projects associated with the PPS.

While the elite architecture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was largely preserved on an individual basis and integrated into the campuses of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design the more modest domestic structures, so integral to the historic streetscape of College Hill, had fallen into disrepair by the 1950s and faced direct and repeated threats of demolition as Brown and RISD sought to expand their campuses. Indeed, widespread enthusiasm for the colonial period and its architecture waned as the northeast found itself in the throes of post-bellum industrialization and accompanying urbanization, and the area of Roger Williams’

original settlement began a gradual slide toward decay and disinvestment. Additionally, as Providence expanded and was declared the state capital following the American Revolution, the city core shifted from the East Side's Market Square, located on what is now North Main Street, to the flat, central plane located between the Providence and Mossasuck Rivers where several railroad lines entered the city in the nineteenth century. By the opening of the twentieth century, then, it was the central city's established overland rail routes, and not the traditional maritime ports of the East Side, that connected Providence to areas including Boston, Philadelphia and New York. The city's future, it seemed, would be firmly (if unevenly) grounded on dirt and cobblestone, and industrial elites gradually turned away from the colonial waterfront that once sustained the city and its merchant class.

No longer the center of economic or civic life, the predominantly residential areas of the East Side, particularly historic Benefit Street gradually fell into disrepair. According to Briann Greenfield, who chronicles the historic preservation of this area in her unpublished dissertation "Old New England in the Twentieth-Century Imagination," as "The Neck" approached its two-hundredth anniversary in the 1950s, the future of the neighborhood's built environment seemed shaky at best, as its northern and southern extremities had steadily eroded from single-family, owner-occupied dwellings to cold water flats and tenements for low-income residents and recent immigrants:

Laid out in 1758 to improve access to the settlement's meetinghouse, Benefit Street cut across what would become the College Hill neighborhood on the East Side of Providence, Rhode Island. Two centuries later, the street contained buildings spanning the city's history. Opulent mansions from wealthy eighteenth century sea merchants and smaller vernacular homes built by early artisans mixed with those of nineteenth century industrialists and multi-family tenements erected

to house Jewish immigrants. The street itself reflected this mixed character. Slums marked both ends.<sup>310</sup>

Although the “mixed character” of the College Hill neighborhood and its surrounding environs need not have signaled the onset of blight, the historic structures were not maintained by absentee landlords, and many were eventually left vacant until the threat of wholesale and spot clearance (at the hands of either urban-renewal proponents in city government or the East Side educational institutions Brown and RISD) inspired a number of long-time neighborhood residents to form the Providence Preservation Society in 1956. Indeed, Bunnell cites city planner Lachlan F. Blair, who states unequivocally, “Brown was the devil.”

Facing these impending threats, individual residents of the neighborhood worked to save specific structures and to form an organized activist response. Citing his interview with Tina Regan, chair of the city’s College Hill Historic District Commission, city planner Gene Bunnell notes that the College Hill he toured in 1998 was very different from the one that existed at mid-century. Viewing the restoration of the neighborhood as evidence of the values of careful city planning and grassroots efforts to save specific structures, Bunnell argues that the people who got involved in restoring College Hill early on did so by “developing a coherent, overall development strategy rather than a series of ad hoc, crisis-driven actions.”

Among the individuals at the helm of this new approach to city planning were preservationist and architectural historian Antoinette Downing and architect and planner William Warner (later associated with Providence’s downtown renaissance), with

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<sup>310</sup> Briann Greenfield, “Old New England in the Twentieth-Century Imagination: Public Memory in Salem, Deerfield, Providence, and the Smithsonian Institution” (Unpublished dissertation. Brown University: 2002): 127.

Downing conducting surveys of the extant historic buildings. It was also Downing who produced the final report, “College Hill: A Demonstration Study and Plan for Historic Area Renewal” which is also known as the 1959 College Hill Plan. The plan was more than 200 pages long, including maps, illustrations and photographs and recommended establishing a permanent committee to oversee area development; engaging in selective clearance, rehabilitation and conservation; creating a historic trail along Benefit Street; developing a national park on the site of the Roger Williams’ Spring on North Main Street; adopting zoning regulations for the area to protect historic elements; stimulating private investment; getting the universities in line with the new attitude toward planning and preservation; and establishing public education programs to gain widespread support for the efforts of the PPS.

By the time Gene Bunnell toured the neighborhood in 1998, most of these elements had been accomplished. More importantly, however, a precedent for historic area renewal had been set, and a small neighborhood organization in Providence had been the one to do it. The College Hill Plan created what Bunnell calls “a structured methodology for inventorying and evaluating historic properties.”<sup>311</sup> Indeed, the PPS did the job so thoroughly that the methods used on College Hill were later adopted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and have since been applied across the United States.<sup>312</sup>

After this auspicious start, the dominant restoration narrative continues, several wealthy residents of the East Side stepped in to purchase and rehabilitate houses with their own private resources. Beatrice “Happy” Chace, whose family has roots in

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<sup>311</sup> Gene Bunnell “Providence Saves a Neighborhood.” *Planning* 68, issue 10 [October 2002]: 24-25.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.* After the publication of the College Hill Plan in 1959, another report on its implementation followed in 1961. This update, called “College Hill 1961” was authored by Martin Adler.

Providence dating back to the colonial period and who remains active in urban renewal efforts on the East Side and in several of downtown Providence's cultural institutions, purchased 15 structures on College Hill and restored their exteriors, leaving the interiors to be decorated by the buyers.

Despite the depressed economy of the 1950s and the run-down state of the neighborhood, the College Hill area boasted higher rents and home values than most other areas of the city. Taking advantage of the good property values and low purchase prices, Chace purchased the historic homes and founded Burnside Company in 1956. The costs of the restorations were considerable:

Burnside Company sold its properties at cost, but restoration expenses in the 1950s and 1960s drove the prices from three thousand dollars to twelve thousand dollars a house to ten thousand to twenty-two thousand dollars. In addition, owners generally invested another twenty-five thousand dollars to thirty thousand dollars above the purchase price to complete the interior restoration.<sup>313</sup>

To help mitigate the costs involved, the PPS studied the strategies used in other historic areas across the US and settled on a good model in Bolton Hill, Inc and Historic Georgetown, Inc, two corporations working in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC respectively. These two areas devised plans in which they raised money for rehabilitation efforts through stock subscription. Following this example, a number of for-profit corporations were formed in Providence including Netop Restorations, Foxes Hill Corporation, the King Phillip Company and Hill Realty. When these companies turned a profit, they reinvested the money in further preservation efforts.<sup>314</sup>

By 1967, an updated version of the 1959 plan appeared, documenting what had been accomplished in the neighborhood and what remained to be done. After this plan

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<sup>313</sup> Greenfield 149.

<sup>314</sup> Greenfield 145-153.

was published, another phase of the College Hill project effectively got underway—the development of zoning legislation which established an institutional zoning overlay for the district in 1986 and helped regulate the growth of the city’s educational institutions. By 1991, institutions were required to turn in their own master plans so that the city would be kept aware of their ideas via scheduled and publicized community hearings.<sup>315</sup>

Bunnell summarizes the end result of these preservation efforts well:

Because of the success in College Hill, over 11,000 people live in a neighborhood with a distinctly urban character and a wide array of housing, literally a stone’s throw away from the heart of the city. Few American cities as large as Providence (pop. 174,000) have such a large, stable, and attractive residential neighborhood so close to the downtown core.<sup>316</sup>

And Bunnell is not alone in his characterization of the College Hill preservation and rehabilitation program as a success. Though her careful examination proves somewhat less celebratory, Briann Greenfield acknowledges the revolutionary approach taken by the PPS, which involved not only preservation and rehabilitation but also set a national precedent by developing a new kind of “pro-market” preservation ethic that combines the restoration of historic structures with marketing and commerce.<sup>317</sup> Where early preservation efforts in the U.S. often resulted in small house museums or privately funded historic villages maintained by extraordinarily wealthy patrons like John Rockefeller and Henry Ford, “pro-market preservation was more inclusive” and could have an impact on whole neighborhoods at one time. This approach also marked a change in extant preservation ethics and strategies, transforming historic preservation from a charity or philanthropic social activity to a real-estate investment that values “private

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<sup>315</sup> Bunnell 27.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Greenfield 129.

property over public resources” such as museums. Pro-market preservation efforts, Greenfield argues, combine the desire to create culturally diverse urban landscapes with individual character with the type of economic investment needed to create such communities. But such an approach also consciously embraces a planned program of gentrification and the displacement of low-income residents as pro-market preservation groups often join forces with urban renewal agencies to destroy working class housing and non-residential structures.<sup>318</sup>

The real estate market in Rhode Island, as it existed in the 1950s and 1960s, was economically depressed, as it has remained perennially since. The lagging economy was displayed in the landscapes around the state, and especially by the dilapidated condition of the built environment of downtown Providence. It was a desire to create new and sustainable economic growth in the city, and not simply a love of the historic streetscapes of the East Side, Greenfield argues, that inspired some of the area’s wealthiest and oldest families to get involved. Indeed, descendents of Samuel Slater, the Sharpe family, and the Goddard family were still significant to the economic well-being of the city at mid-century, occupying high-ranking posts in some of the most influential local concerns.<sup>319</sup> Indeed, John Nicholas Brown, a benefactor and descendent of Brown University’s namesake, made clear that he was not interested in preservation for preservation’s sake alone. Preserving Providence’s history would ensure sustainable economic growth over the long term, he argued.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid 130-132.

<sup>319</sup> While the Slater was associated with textiles manufacturing and the founding of the first cotton mill in North America (see chapter 7), the Sharpe and Goddard families were notes for the manufacture of metals and fine wooden furniture, respectively.

<sup>320</sup> Greenfield 137.

Such pro-growth language and spirit seems to have made friends out of governmental agencies and the PPS early on. While public officials were often of Italian and Irish ancestry (and therefore more sympathetic to the interests of the working class and new immigrants to the area) they shared the economic interests of Providence's patrician class.<sup>321</sup> Keeping College Hill primarily upscale and residential, and creating more housing would benefit both long-time locals and the city as a whole by expanding Providence's limited tax base and creating a genuine tourist attraction in the state capital. And this preservation-as-real-estate-speculation has paid off, as the values of the homes on College Hill have continued to increase over the years:

While Burnside Company purchased properties for between five thousand dollars and ten thousand dollars in the 1950s, ten years later prices had more than doubled. Restored properties regularly sold for over forty-five thousand dollars and in at least one case shooting up to \$125,000.<sup>322</sup>

Indeed, if Benefit Street and its surrounding environs had declined into a slum facing the threat of both wholesale and selective spot clearance by the 1950s, 60 years later it has been almost completely restored to an eclectic, updated version of its colonial-era appearance, with residential blocks featuring a mix of single-family homes, owner-occupied rental units, luxury condominiums, dorms and other student housing, commercial pockets of small, independent businesses thriving alongside larger retail chains like Urban Outfitters; and finally, cultural and educational institutions interspersed throughout.<sup>323</sup> Contemporary College Hill features a mix of the commercial shops, ethnic

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 173. These figures are from 1964.

<sup>323</sup> Though this is true, in many of the commercial locations rents are skyrocketing and making it more and more difficult for the smaller independent shops to stay in business. Despite Mayor Cicilline's desire to reinvent Providence as a "creative capitol," since the "renaissance" began roughly ten years ago the city has lost several music clubs and small, independent fine arts performance venues that once encouraged local alternative artists, and seen a marked reduction in the number of independent and alternative bookstores, record shops and stores selling second hand musical instruments. A good case in point is Thayer Street,

restaurants and art-house movie theatres of Thayer Street, the intellectual atmosphere and historic campus of Brown University, the artsy character of the Rhode Island School of Design and its student population, and the charm of the narrow residential streets with their hidden gardens, neat wooden colonial homes and romantic looming Victorian structures. Careful neighborhood planning and the successful lobbying of City Hall have re-established College Hill as a diverse, upscale bohemian-chic neighborhood as attractive to locals as it is captivating to tourists and other visitors, with Gene Bunnell supporting the traditional consensus regarding the successful redevelopment of the East Side. Bunnell concludes,

Preservation did not simply produce elegant homes for wealthy people. Many long-time and well-to-do families live on College Hill, but the population there is remarkably varied by age, income, and household characteristics. Over one-quarter of the people who live on College Hill are students. They and their neighbors are the beneficiaries of a 40-year effort to save a place that deserved to be saved.<sup>324</sup>

Gene Bunnell's rather sanguine conclusions notwithstanding, a number of other scholars have found much to criticize regarding the College Hill restoration and the preservation narrative that has since come to be featured on the Mile of History Tour, on the PPS website, and in William McKenzie Woodward's *Guide to Providence Architecture*. While these sources walk visitors and/or readers through the long, painstaking periods of planning and lobbying that occasioned the rehabilitation of the College Hill neighborhood, they do not address issues of displacement and gentrification,

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located on College Hill near Brown University. Once a mecca for the alternative arts community featuring ethnic food emporia, reasonably priced vintage stores, body piercing studios, and several independent record stores, this "artsy" commercial district has, in the past 10 years, lost all of its independent record stores and second-hand music shops and several of its smaller-scale independent food franchises (including RI staple Spike's Junkyard Dogs). While some shops have relocated further east to Wickenden Street, most have simply closed their doors for good, citing impossibly high rents and decreased clientele.

<sup>324</sup> Bunnell 27.

nor do they adequately observe and account for the historic class differences (and resulting tensions) between the East Side of Providence and the other, less affluent and well-maintained areas of the capitol city. Indeed, while Bunnell admits that low income populations “who had come to occupy the badly run-down but cheap tenement apartments there” were indeed displaced, he maintains that even more widespread displacement would likely have occurred if the College Hill Plan had not been put into practice, as clearance was the only other option suggested at the time.<sup>325</sup>

Other researchers, however, take a different view. Greenfield argues that displacement of low income groups was also complicated by the redevelopment of nearby area Lippitt Hill. While College Hill experienced only spot clearance, the Providence Redevelopment Agency demolished nearly 400 buildings in Lippitt Hill during the 1960s, leaving low income families few places to relocate. Most of the destroyed structures were also multi-family dwellings, significantly raising the number of displaced families. In place of these homes, University Heights apartments were built to promote racial, ethnic and religious diversity, and it did boast a considerable mix of inhabitants.<sup>326</sup> Still, the area became much less densely populated in the years following the slum clearance:

Before urban renewal, the thirty-two acres that became University Heights was a densely populated neighborhood with nearly seven hundred dwelling units providing shelter to approximately sixteen hundred individuals. In contrast, University Heights provided only 349 units, most of which were out of the price range of area African Americans.<sup>327</sup>

Local black families moved to the periphery of the area, toward white suburbs, and the white population began to move away in droves. The PPS did not work on behalf

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<sup>325</sup> Bunnell 27.

<sup>326</sup> Greenfield 176.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid 177.

of the displaced residents, nor to preserve Lippitt Hill. In fact, several PPS members were stockholders in University Heights. And despite newly developed programs and increased attention to areas beyond the historic East Side, the class disparities within the city of Providence have not necessarily improved.

In 2006, the Providence Plan, a local nonprofit community planning organization, reported that the average median family income for this neighborhood was \$121,521, “nearly four times the city’s median family income of \$32,058” with only 5% of the College Hill population recorded as living below the poverty level. Just over 90% of the residents were high school graduates, while more than 40% had achieved graduate or professional degrees. As of 2000, 1 in 6 residents were employed in the “professional services sector” and the neighborhood unemployment rate of 6% was substantially lower than the citywide figure of 9.3%. The median cost of a home in the neighborhood was \$404,000 in 2000, “almost double the citywide median sales price of \$220,000” and the rents in this neighborhood were 21% higher than those in the rest of the city. Finally, despite the reputation of the neighborhood as ethnically diverse (largely observed in the student demographic maintained by Brown University and RISD), nearly 76% of the residents identified as white (non-Hispanic), 13.6% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 5% as Hispanic, and 4.4% as Black or African American.<sup>328</sup>

What Bunnell and other scholars fail to note in their celebratory conclusions regarding the restoration of Providence’s East Side is the fact that students, which make up a sizable portion of the College Hill neighborhood once Brown and RISD dorms are factored into the equation, report a low income, but are often supported by additional

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<sup>328</sup> Providence Plan, “College Hill Neighborhood profile,” Accessed online 13 December 2006 at [http://204.17.79.244/profiles/coh\\_main.html](http://204.17.79.244/profiles/coh_main.html).

funding from well-to-do parents who live elsewhere. These students are not from Rhode Island, but come from out of state and usually leave when their education is complete. Additionally, students leave town in droves during the summers, rendering vast numbers of apartments vacant not only on the East Side, but also other areas throughout the city, particularly the downtown neighborhoods of Federal Hill (Providence's Little Italy) and the Broadway area. Hulking nineteenth and early twentieth tenements, the structures in these neighborhoods are left vacant throughout the summer months and semester breaks, creating an atmosphere of desolation as well as a very real financial crunch for local landlords, who have no choice but to rely on student occupants for their livelihoods given Rhode Island's perennially depressed economy. The entire city's fortunes are bound up with the cultural epicenter located on the restored East Side, creating a dependence that necessarily causes tension.

### *Fox Point and the Displacement of the Cape Verdean Community*

If the preservation and restoration of the area were considered an unqualified success by the 1980s, even some of the preservation community's most significant boosters began to publically recognize the movement's casualties by the 1990s. Downing herself admits openly that lower-income residents were displaced because of the restoration of Benefit Street and its surrounding environs, and other areas continued to suffer blight and dereliction while the East Side was returned to its early nineteenth century glory. Researcher Sam Beck provides a particularly cogent analysis of the areas and populations which suffered as a result of the renovation of the celebrated East Side, focusing closely on the Cape Verdean community of Fox Point, a historic waterfront alongside John Brown's famed maritime port India Point.

In his 1992 text *Manny Almeida's Ringside Lounge: The Cape Verdeans' Struggle for their Neighborhood*, Sam Beck cites the expansion of Brown University, local urban renewal policies and the development of the first historic preservation movement in the nation as the major causes of the disruption and ultimately, the destruction of a coherent Cape Verdean community on Providence's easternmost waterfront land. While local Cape Verdeans looked beyond structural dereliction and saw Fox Point as *their* neighborhood and community, Beck argues, "developers (including governments) and investors perceived the properties there to have economic development potential that was being destroyed by the people who lived there."<sup>329</sup>

Tracing the history of Cape Verdeans in Providence, Beck observes that the Azores were settled originally in 1460 as a colonial holding of Portugal and that Madeira, one of the larger cities on the islands, quickly became a port of call during the colonial period in America.<sup>330</sup> Not surprisingly, many of the ships leaving Providence as part of the China Trade stopped in Madeira to collect, among other goods, the wine that was popular with the affluent classes of Europe and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Noting the constitutive role of colonial ports of call in Rhode Island's transatlantic trade interests, Beck observes that common interests and economies established powerful connections between the Azores and Providence. According to Beck:

Alcohol and slave trading initiated the contact between the settlers of Providence and the Cape Verde Islanders and inexorably bound these two areas of the world, once separated both by the Atlantic and by their distinctive ways of life. Through trade, Europeans introduced their potent alcoholic beverages to indigenous people all over the world and, when

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<sup>329</sup> Sam Beck, *Manny Almeida's Ringside Lounge: The Cape Verdeans' Struggle for their Neighborhood* (Providence, RI: Gavea-Brown, 1992): 17.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid* 21.

employing these people, included alcohol as part of their wages. The conditions that brought slavery into being made humans into objects of labor for sugar production, distilling alcohol in large quantities, and for trade.<sup>331</sup>

The money made through the sea trade in Providence went to developing land-based industries including manufacturing, particularly in the northern areas of the state including the cities of Pawtucket and Woonsocket. Accordingly, Beck makes explicit the connection between the Atlantic sea trade and the development of patterns of global capital, arguing:

While alcohol production and sales remained important for accumulating investment capital, it was the formation of modern industry and financial institutions that brought about a shift in the global economy by further stimulating the need in the United States for poorly paid wage labor.<sup>332</sup>

Many Cape Verdeans worked on and off in this field, as jobs came and went, and the type of work they did, as well as their status as Islanders, contributed to their establishment of a distinct ethnic identity in Rhode Island. Where they settled along the water at Fox Point, Cape Verdeans were not living with and did not identify with communities of whites, Indians or blacks. Yet they were seen as black by whites and not-black by local African Americans. According to Beck, “Cape Verdeans were doubly stigmatized for being black and for their association with Portuguese language and culture. Yet their color made them more like black Americans than their Portuguese cultural affiliation made them like “white ethnics.”<sup>333</sup>

If their phenotypical attributes made racial identification difficult for Cape Verdeans, so did their national allegiance to their home islands and the family members

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid 25.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid 29-30.

Cape Verdean immigrants to Rhode Island had left behind. Just as theorist of Asian immigration along the Pacific Coast Aihwa Ong argues that recent immigrants maintained strong ties to their nations of origin and made effectively formed a “Pacific shuttle” between their United States working environment and their homelands, many Cape Verdeans continued to shuttle back and forth between the Azores and Providence on the packet ships that transported mail, cargo and people between the New World, the islands, and Africa. Functioning like an “Atlantic shuttle” the “packet trade” also transported and created a transnational culture and cultural identity for both Cape Verdeans and the Rhode Islanders they worked for and with. According to Beck:

For decades, into the middle of the twentieth century, the packet trade was a fundamental part of Cape Verdean existence and identity. People on shore waited for the ships to arrive with news from friends and relatives, and when the ships arrived crowds gathered...Some who invested in this trade became wealthy and obtained the respect of their countrymen in New England and in the Islands.<sup>334</sup>

While their role in the transatlantic trade of the nineteenth century is well-documented, however, the earliest origins of the population of Fox Point’s Cape Verdean population remain somewhat nebulous. While some scholars claim that Cape Verdeans provided labor aboard slave ships and rum runners, Beck theorizes that Providence’s contemporary Cape Verdean community likely came from elsewhere along the eastern seaboard, particularly New Bedford, Nantucket, and Cape Cod, where they worked in the whaling trade.<sup>335</sup> Like many scholars writing about the civic development of nineteenth century Providence, Beck is careful to contextualize the arrival of the Rhode Island’s Cape Verdean population among the other massive shifts in population that occurred

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid 31. While the dock work was mainly undertaken by Cape Verdean men, women worked seasonally in cranberry bogs and picking strawberries, later gaining employment in textile mills.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid 32.

between roughly 1820 and 1920. Not only did Providence's population swell from 7,614 in 1800 to 175,597 by 1900 (with the largest increase of roughly 70,000 between 1880 and 1900), but so did the population of new immigrants from Ireland, Portugal, and the Mediterranean.<sup>336</sup>

Roughly one hundred years one hundred years after their arrival in Rhode Island, Cape Verdeans had established a community along the Fox Point waterfront that came to be known as "the original slum in Providence." South Main Street was identified as the nexus of the Cape Verdean community, as residents both lived and worked there, and the very name of the street "became a shorthand way of referring to the Cape Verdean neighborhood and way of life in Providence."<sup>337</sup> As in many low-income urban neighborhoods, poverty was a unifying factor in establishing a neighborhood identity and an ethnic identity, as neighbors learned to depend on one another for survival, particularly since social networks were the primary means of finding the seasonal work that depended on knowing who needed what, when, and where.

If the Fox Point neighborhood was indeed physically dilapidated, suffering from the neglect of absentee landlords and poor local resources, the future gentrification that befell the area and its Cape Verdean population reveals what remains one of the greatest ironies of inner city urban decay and disinvestment: such forces necessarily prepare the ground for processes of reinvestment, reclamation and economic redevelopment. Though a number of urban redevelopment plans were proposed and/or undertaken in Providence during the post-war period, in Fox Point there was no slum clearance, as the

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid 47.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid 37.

neighborhood's built environment was deemed too valuable and historic to be destroyed.

Instead, it would be "rescued" by a preservation effort:

Historic preservation, rather than traditional slum clearance, was the means by which Cape Verdeans were wrenched out of their homes and cut off from the nurturing social relations of their neighborhood....Familiar landmarks were demolished, replaced, or altered, undermining the people's sense of neighborhood identity and integrity, not to mention residents' own sense of social continuity. The Fox Point Cape Verdean community, the neighborhood unit, as a social process of cultural reproduction and transmission, came to an end.<sup>338</sup>

Preservationists were in favor of saving the built environment of Fox Point even if it meant destroying the resident community culture and argued that "natural" market forces were simply working themselves out in Fox Point. Indeed, as early as 1935, Fox Point had been labeled a slum and cited as encroaching on some of Providence's most valuable real estate in a WPA report. The report went so far as to claim that the neighborhood was not unified in any coherent way:

The present population is unstable and employment is irregular. Small low grade shops border the highways. The area, centrally located, is excellent for wage earners...All points in the city can be reached by trolley or bus, and the principal shipping is within walking distance...The stores and offices for the most part are very low grade, and many are now vacant...In general, overcrowding conditions prevail in the area, the buildings setting directly on the street and little yard space being available.<sup>339</sup>

Though the neighborhood lasted throughout the depression of World War II, when there was not enough money to implement the plan proposed by the WPA, a master plan was adopted in 1946. In 1950 the Providence Redevelopment Agency prepared the *Tentative Plan for South Main Project Area D-8A*. The project area involved 193 dwelling units, of which 7 were vacant and 186 housed 195 families. 700 people lived in the area and almost all the dwellings were located in historic buildings. 86 percent of the

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid 68.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid 70.

buildings had been constructed before 1900, almost 50 percent were more than 100 years old, and 17 structures were built in the eighteenth century.<sup>340</sup> There were also municipal structures that would be closed and relocated, including a fire house, Boys Club, Salvation Army, and a post office, according to the 1950 report. Meanwhile, the streets told the story of Cape Verdean connections to downtown Providence and the waterfront, with South Main as a main artery to both areas.

The project area was selected, according to the report, because the area was blighted but was geographically neighboring a good quality area (College Hill). Taking this area back for middle class and predominantly white populations would accommodate a population that could generate higher tax revenues. As is often the case when redevelopment occasions displacement of a poor group, it was argued that removal was actually better for the displaced population than remaining in such blighted conditions.

In a foreword to Beck's text, John W. Cole, professor of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, accounts for these and other arguments in favor of gentrification. Additionally, he provides an excellent working summary of the main characteristics of this cultural and physical phenomenon. According to Cole:

Ongoing physical and demographic change is an inevitable element in the life of any city. In America this is conceived of as an endless process of decay and renewal. In recent years it has often taken the form of gentrification. Old neighborhoods receive a physical overhaul through either replacement or renovation of existing structures. This is accompanied by a change in inhabitants. The poor are replaced by the more affluent and as often as not the poor are people of color and the affluent are not.<sup>341</sup>

Yet despite the clearance of the poorer population for redevelopment, the 1960s did not see a massive growth of population in Providence, nor was there growth in the

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid 71.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid 13.

manufacturing or other economic sectors in the city or the state as a whole. In fact, people moved out of Providence in the 1960s, as did industry. The population of Providence got older, as 18-65 year olds still left the city to pursue opportunities elsewhere, and household sizes were decreasing. Between 1950 and 1960 the state as a whole suffered a 53.8 percent decline in the textile industry with the number of jobs decreasing from 60,600 to 28,000. By 1963 the per capita yearly income of the city was \$2,119.<sup>342</sup> The majority of the population was unskilled and in low-wage jobs.

Providence's smallish size means that the populations of poor and working class neighborhoods interact in daily life more than do those of far-flung communities. Groups that have been able to stay in their neighborhoods for long periods of time have also had ample opportunity to establish coherent ethnic identities and shore up political power. Recognizing these patterns of spatial and social development, asserts Beck, government agencies have accordingly engaged in three strategies for using neighborhoods as engines of economic redevelopment. First, they have "targeted neighborhoods as political and economic units" that can either be tapped to assist economic redevelopment or ignored until they degenerate and become candidates for later renewal; second, politicians mobilize ethnically constituted neighborhoods for electoral strength; and three, neighborhoods serve as political constituencies after officials are in office, gaining political favors through unofficial means.<sup>343</sup>

College Hill residents were certainly well-aware of these types of implications when they undertook their community preservation efforts during the mid-twentieth century, and sought to create a neighborhood characterized not only by a carefully

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid 75.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid 91.

restored historic built environment, but also one featuring an engaged electorate with substantial political influence. Facing impending threats from the local universities as well as city planners, the residents of the East Side fought back. But if restoring Benefit Street and the College Hill neighborhood can be characterized as a successful grassroots community effort, then, it should be done so while recognizing that the significant power, social prestige and financial wealth available to the PPS and the College Hill residents were not resources available to the Cape Verdean population of Fox Point. As made clear by Beck and a number of other contemporary sociologists and anthropologists, identity is spatially organized and socially constituted, and Cape Verdean identity in Providence did not spring from nowhere. Instead, it was constructed both consciously and by happenstance over a long period of time, influencing and being influenced by geography, trade, the global flow of capital and the establishment of tasksapes related to particular water-based industries. Cape Verdean identity was defined as much by labor and location as by shared cultural practices and beliefs, but none of these elements proved coherent or legible to city planners and preservationists attempting to write Providence into a national narrative championing both teleological capitalist progress and a nostalgic interpretation of historic restoration.

## **Reconciling the Legacies of Exile and Diaspora in Contemporary**

### **Providence: Revisionist Historical Approaches**

The evidence presented by the structures and accompanying historical tourism of Newport and Bristol, RI, profiled in part one make clear the social and financial connections between Providence and these more southerly towns based on their

commercial constitution, directly or indirectly, by the traffick in enslaved Africans as well as slave labor. While historical monographs from the 1970s to the present have significantly altered the discourse surrounding these issues, only recently has such information made its debut in the state's historical tourism sector. Additionally, associated with historical tourism, the information is presented not as part of a living legacy that continues to influence contemporary Rhode Island's political, financial and cultural economies, but instead as a shameful element of the past uncovered as part of an "objective" historical narrative. Indeed, while educational director of the Providence-based Rhode Island Historical Society C. Morgan Grefe notes the value of recent popular discourse on slavery and the slave trade in Rhode Island, she too observes the limited information available regarding black individuals, communities and spheres of influence outside of this earliest context of members of the black diaspora as exclusively victims. Grefe also observes, however, that this historical gap is being gradually filled as historical agencies and organization throughout the state work together on more encompassing collaborative projects. During our interview of June 19, 2008, Grefe discussed the efforts of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities (RICH) in sponsoring the contemporary "On the Road to Freedom" initiative on African American history in Rhode Island. RICH is acting as an umbrella organization to bring together the "billion little historical societies and historical agencies and professors and historic houses and nonprofits" all attempting to expose and reconcile the state's rich African American histories, culminating in a proposed "freedom festival" that took place in fall 2008 to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of the international slave trade.

While this recent burst of attention to Rhode Island's role in slave trafficking and ownership, as well as the renewed commitment to connecting the legacies of the early American period to the present may be related to the inevitable lag that occurs between the publication of scholarly texts and the development of related popular discourse, it is likely that the recent attention given to slave trafficking and the slave trade in the commercial development of the dominant tourist destinations of Rhode Island have much to do with the efforts of two of the state's educational institutions, both of which have recently emphasized the need for revisionist histories to be more prominently displayed as part of not only the local intellectual economy, but also the dominant tourist narrative presented in Providence. In 2000, the year Providence became officially recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau as "majority minority" based on its racial demographics, scholars the anthropology department at Rhode Island College requested that this effort begin at the John Brown House.

### *Exhibiting Slavery at the Brown House*

Originally the seat of the Rhode Island Historical Society, the John Brown House now functions as a museum and a point of departure for RIHS tours of College Hill, Fox Point, and the Downcity riverwalk. Described by the Society as "one of American's grandest mansions" at the time of its completion in 1788, the house continues to stand as a symbolic representation of the types of extraordinary wealth and social prestige accumulated not only by the leading families of Rhode Island, but also by similar family dynasties throughout early America. According to the RIHS:

...this is more than an eighteenth century mansion. It was the home of John Brown's daughters and their families; the winter residence of the elegant Gammell family during the second half of the nineteenth century;

the formidable mansion of Providence utility, real estate and trolley mogul, Marsden Perry in the early twentieth century. Today this magnificent and elegant building serves as a place in which the public can learn about these men and women who helped to create Rhode Island's capital city.<sup>344</sup>

To tell the story of the Brown family is to trace the transformation of early America from agricultural prosperity to the rise of maritime commerce and mainland industry, and new historical approaches which attempt to account for issues of race and class have resulted in an alternative narrative of Providence which recognizes the ways in which the fortunes and financial portfolios of the city's elites were intertwined with enslaved Africans, free blacks, and a labor diaspora dependent on maritime commerce for their survival. While the façade of the John Brown House bespeaks the influence and power of John Brown and his family, and the interior décor occasions descriptions of family life and testifies to the extraordinary wealth accrued by Providence's elite maritime merchants of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a first floor room of traditional museum exhibits now testifies to the practices by which the Browns and other local elite families established themselves as trading dynasties and successfully passed on generations of inherited wealth.

Regarding the significance of the Brown family, Providence preservation expert Antoinette Downing asserts, "The story of the commercial and industrial undertaking of the Browns, spanning a period of over 200 years, is a history in microcosm of evolving commercial life in the United States."<sup>345</sup> Although the Brown family history in

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<sup>344</sup> <http://www.rihs.org/Museums.html>. Accessed 12 July 2009.

<sup>345</sup> Antoinette Downing, "The John Brown House" in *Providence: From Provincial Village to Prosperous Port, 1750-1790. Lectures Presented at the First Annual Forum on Rhode Island History, January, 1975, Providence, R.I., sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Providence Preservation Society*. Levin, Linda Lotridge, editor. Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, RI, 1978): 59.

Providence starts with Reverend Chad Brown, one of the original settlers of Providence who arrived in 1638, it was not until after the Revolution that the fortunes of the Browns really accumulated:

After the Revolutionary War, when they returned for a period to the sea, their ships were despatched [sic] to China, to the East Indies, to the Baltic and Mediterranean countries, and to South America. At the same time they went into banking and insurance, promoted the building of turnpikes, and most important, introduced the manufacturing of cotton in this country.<sup>346</sup>

Though he worked in partnership with his brothers, John Brown was the most active in the China Trade, and his was the first vessel to set sail from the shores of Rhode Island to China. The ship, named the General Washington, sailed in 1787 from Brown's private wharf, India Point, a name that maintains in contemporary Providence.<sup>347</sup>

The John Brown House was extravagant during its time, and remains an example of wealthy architecture in the city. According to architectural expert Downing,

The interior of the house is laid out on the classic 18<sup>th</sup> century plan composed of a broad central hallway flanked by paired rooms. The grand stair-case, rising in two flights in the traditional place at the rear of the hall, has beautiful twisted balusters and ramped railings finished in a spiral turned around the twisted newels. The treatment of the shadow rail, ending in a spiral scroll against the wall, seems to be a particular feature of Joseph Brown's work and appears in his own house on South Main Street. Such staircases are found in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century English houses; they were considered almost essential for fine mansions in the Colonies during the early to mid-eighteenth century, and Newport account books, at least, show that Job Townsend and other cabinetmakers were often commissioned to make the balusters.<sup>348</sup>

When the house-building was undertaken in 1786, Brown advertised in the Providence Gazette that building materials would be accepted in payment of debts. The finished specifications of the impressive structure are as follows:

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid 61.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid 63.

The United States tax list of 1798 described the house as measuring 54 by 50 feet, with 30 windows of 12 lights measuring 12 by 18 inches and 15 windows of 12 lights measuring 12 by 12 inches. Two outbuildings were mentioned, a barn and wood house and a chaise house, both of wood, 40 by 15 feet in size and one story high.<sup>349</sup>

The social network and diversified financial portfolio required to support such a grand architectural undertaking during the early American period should not be underestimated. Under the names of Brown; Brown & Francis; Brown, Benson & Ives; and Brown & Ives, Providence's earliest and most prominent families accrued some part of their fortunes through the China trade and/or the African slave trade, though, as was the case in Newport, not all the families owned their own ships. Instead, when a company had outfitted their ship for trade with Africa or the East Indies, an ad was placed in the local newspapers for the goods to stock the ship. Similarly, when a ship returned with cargo from the east, that cargo was advertised for immediate sale.<sup>350</sup>

Families such as the Hoppins, Tillinghasts, Cushings and Bowens, most of whom had roots stretching back to the first colonial settlement, all contributed and gained capital connected directly or indirectly to these trades, but the first ship to leave the Port of Providence for the East Indies, the *General Washington*, was owned by Brown and Francis. Indeed, according to a letter written from John Brown to his brother Moses about the potential of the China trade, by the time the *General Washington* departed Providence on its maiden journey to the East Indies, the ship had already served the Browns as a slave trafficking vessel. The letter, dated August 18, 1787, reads:

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid 65.

<sup>350</sup> Gertrude Selwyn Kimball "The East India Trade of Providence: 1787-1807" in *Papers from the Historical Seminary of Brown University*, J. Franklin Jameson, editor (Providence, RI: Preston and Rounds, 1896): 32.

...I take this method to inform you that I have it in contemplation to Fit the ship Genl Washington to the East Indies in which Case shall shall not be any more concerned in the Ginney Trade...if she goes she ought to carry a cargo from £10000 to £12000 L.M. value, in Cannon, Shot, Anchors, Barr Iron, Tarr, Ginseng, Madeira Wine, Brandy and Spirits, Jamaica Spirits;...For such a Cargo carried to the Hither Indies, and to take a Freight from there to China she may bring home a cargo worth £40000.<sup>351</sup>

By July 9, 1789, the General Washington returned home to Providence after visiting the ports of Madeira, Madras, Pondicherry, Canton, St. Helena, St. Ascension, and St. Eustatia.<sup>352</sup> The cargo aboard this ship was valued at \$99,848 at the time of its return and according to Providence historian Gertrude Kimball, the value of total China trade imports to Providence increased exponentially over time:

In 1795, the volume of imports was \$311,910. In 1800, imports from the East Indies were valued at \$726,924. In 1804, the volume of imports was \$887,000; in 1806, \$662,000—but in that year two of the largest Indiamen (the *John Jay* and *Ann and Hope*) failed to make their expected haven in safety.<sup>353</sup>

In 1806 the *John Jay* was captured by the British, who were increasingly interested in keeping the India trade to themselves. During the capture of the *John Jay*, Moses Brown wrote a letter in which he stated clearly the influence of the Brown family and the value of the ship:

Brown and Ives have steadily owned Upwards of one hundred Shares in the said [Bank of Providence], the Correct Price of which has been 470 to 500 dollars a Share, and Nicholas Brown having during that Period and up to the present time been also one of the Board of Directors, and his Partner, Thomas P. Ives, one of the Directors of the Providence Insurance Company, who do their business at the said Bank in [sic] that as well as other State Institutions they are Large Stockholders, as also in the Public Fund of the United States...<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid 33.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid 23.

To demonstrate the far-reaching impact of not only the family, but also their displayed wealth and social status, John Brown House curator Wendy Cooper worked with personal family papers, business papers and current pieces of furniture in the possession of the Brown estate.<sup>355</sup> In her published work on her curatorial efforts, Cooper includes information on John Brown's life before he built his famous mansion, as well as the recollections and writings of travelers to Providence who became familiar with Brown, his reputation and his home. One such observer wrote about his 1795 visit to Providence:

The richest merchant in Providence is John Brown, brother to Moses Brown, the Quaker... In one part of town he has accomplished things that, even in Europe, would appear considerable. At his own expense he has opened a passage through a hill to the river and has built wharves, houses, an extensive distillery, and even a bridge by which the road from Newport to Providence is shortened by at least a mile. He had sold many of his houses. At his wharves are a number of vessels which are constantly receiving or discharging cargoes. In his distillery he maintains a great number of oxen, the labor of which is extremely useful, and a great saving expense to him.<sup>356</sup>

Initially established as “a decorative arts museum, reflecting the aesthetic approach to objects with historical significance and the passion for high-style furnishings pioneered by well-known collectors such as Marsden Perry...,” the John Brown House originally featured a narrative related to the architecture and interior décor of the house, as well as the restoration of the home to its eighteenth century appearance.<sup>357</sup> In October of 2000, however, a letter was sent from Carolyn Fleur-Lobban, a professor of Anthropology at Rhode Island College and “eight other educators and community and church leaders” including Joaquina Texeira, the executive director of the Rhode Island

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<sup>355</sup> Downing, “The John Brown House,” 68.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid 69.

<sup>357</sup> Joanne Melish, “Recovering (from) Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell the Truth,” in *Slavery and Public History: The tough Stuff of American History*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press): 106.

Black Heritage Society that stated that the current narrative presented at the John Brown House was woefully incomplete where the issues of slavery and slave-trafficking were concerned. The signers of the letter urged the RIHS to take steps to mitigate this situation immediately, and the RIHS responded by establishing a committee to re-examine the narrative associated with the house and museum. The Committee To Review All Aspects of the Content and Presentation of the John Brown House Tour was especially charged with considering the degree to which information about Brown's role as a slave trader should be integrated into the historic interpretation of the home.<sup>358</sup>

The committee was made up of Carolyn Fleur-Lobban and the co-signers of the letter; Michael Gerhardt, acting director of the RIHS; the executive director of the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (also a RIHS board member); several RIHS staff members, 2 historians (of which historian and expert on slavery and slave-trafficking in the northeast Joanne Melish was one); and the committee chair, Ray Rickman, a former state representative, assistant secretary of state, executive director of the Providence Human Relations Committee and president of the local ACLU. Rickman was also a member of the RIHS board, a local expert on black history, and an African American man.<sup>359</sup> According to Melish, who has also published scholarly work accounting for the activities of the Committee, some of the committee members had significant and incommensurable differences in their approach to the issues at hand. Indeed, she specifically cites a standing conflict between Richard Lobban, a professor of Anthropology at RIC, and J. Stanley Lemons, a professor of History at RIC, noting,

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid 107.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid 108.

“Lobban saw Lemons as an apologist for slavery; Lemons saw Lobban as an ahistorical and factually inaccurate zealot.”<sup>360</sup>

Despite many painful and acrimonious debates, there were finally eventually 16 recommendations made by the committee, the most significant of which suggested “placing documents and artifacts connected to the slave trade in the house,” creating a new brochure about the house that included information about slavery and slave-trafficking, and posting a plaque outside the home that acknowledged Brown’s involvement in the slave trade.<sup>361</sup> Interestingly, the plaque already existed, having been made earlier by the Black Heritage Society for an earlier Black Heritage Trail project that never came to fruition. Indeed, while the creation of a new brochure promoting the John Brown House was difficult and time-consuming, the plaque was posted and “unveiled” at a ceremony held on August 1, 2002 that included traditional West African drumming as well as the “recitation of Rhode Island slave names.”<sup>362</sup> With an inscription that reads “John Brown House: The home of John Brown, reflecting his wealth and position gained

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<sup>360</sup> While Lobban argued that slavery and slave-trading were central to John Brown’s financial portfolio, Lemons disagreed, arguing (according to Melish) that “slave trading was a relatively minor aspect of John Brown’s life, contributed little to his fortunes compared to his other manufacturing and commercial interests, and thus should not be represented as central to the house’s interpretation.” It was also noted that since the current tour narrative focused primarily on the artifacts and furnishings in the home, integrating information about slavery could be difficult, and seem incongruent. Ibid 108-109.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid 109.

<sup>362</sup> According to Melish, creating the new brochure was difficult, and discussions often broke along disciplinary lines, with the anthropologists seeing Brown’s slave-trading activities as central to his life and the historians taking the position that Brown’s role was “typical of a period in which the involvement of the society as a whole in slaving and slave-holding was the important story to be told at the John Brown House.” The debates became even more heated after the Providence Journal got involved, publishing an article in February 2002 to support Black History Month which suggested that the Brown family of Providence and the DeWolf family of Bristol made their fortunes primarily from the slave trade, which was inaccurate in the case of the Browns, who never held as large a stake in the slave trade as the DeWolfs. Ibid 110-111.

from his lucrative career as a slave trader, privateer, China trade merchant and patriot,” the plaque is now posted on the gate at the front of the house on Power Street.<sup>363</sup>

A year after the unveiling of the plaque, a new pamphlet was finally produced, entitled “Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade: John Brown and the Colonial Economy of Slavery.”<sup>364</sup> The brochure, published in 2003, was soon followed by the creation of a new exhibit tracing the chronology of John Brown’s role as a slave owner and international slave trafficker. Created from a spring 2005 Group Independent Study Project at Brown University, the recent addition to the John Brown House’s permanent collection especially details the infamous voyage of the *Sally*, one of the most disastrous slaving expeditions conducted by the Brown family. The original exhibit produced was entirely funded by Brown University and made use of University documents and artifacts, but the final product currently displayed on the lower level of the tree-story Brown mansion is a slightly scaled-down version funded by the Rhode Island Historical Society and relying primarily on artifacts from the RIHS collections. While the original exhibit primarily consisted of carefully researched wall panels telling the story of the voyage of the *Sally*, extensive touring among Rhode Island and New England educational facilities and museums eventually made it necessary to replace the original panels. When

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<sup>363</sup> The newspaper coverage of the event created controversy when committee member anthropologist Richard Lobban gave a quote stating that, “This is the house that slavery built...” and fellow committee member historian J. Stanley Lemons rebutted this position in an editorial published on August 12. Lemons publicly took issue with the interpretation of slavery and slave-trafficking as the primary means by which Brown accrued money and prestige and argued that Lobban had his facts wrong. Norman Fiering, director and librarian of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, supported Lemons’ interpretation in a letter to the editor of the Providence Journal. Lobban then responded to both in the RIC student newspaper, taking issue with Lemons’ claim that Lobban lacked credentials as a historian and suggesting that Lemons was still in denial about the role of slavery and slave-trafficking in Rhode Island (112). Despite the differences that existed between these individuals, however, Melish notes that all the involved parties “understood how Brown’s other income-generating activities were also embedded in a transatlantic commercial world inseparable from—indeed, dependent on—the slave trade and slavery (111-113).

<sup>364</sup> Ibid 113.

the panels were recreated, they were also scaled down in size and number, and accompanied by artifacts including the types of leg and wrist irons used to outfit slave ships during the period as well as more benign objects associated with the maritime trade and the period generally, including binoculars, eyeglasses, and containers. The refurbished exhibit was installed at the John Brown House in spring 2006, while the original, full-scale exhibit has since been installed at the Moses Brown School, also located on the East Side of the city.

Using the technologies noted above, the exhibit foregrounds the story of the *Sally* but also traces the long history associated with Providence slave trafficking, specifically the efforts of John Brown. The wall panels present information by now well-documented by historians Gertrude Kimball and James B. Hedges: the first slave ship departed from Providence waters in 1736. Named the *Mary*, it was owned by the Brown family, with Obadiah Brown and Captain James Brown at the helm of the business.<sup>365</sup> A number of voyages followed, but the most infamous was that of the *Sally*, which sailed in 1764-1765. According to Hedges:

The cargo of the *Sally* consisted of 159 hogsheads and 6 tierces of rum, amounting to 17,274 gallons, 25 casks of rice, 30 boxes of spermaceti candles, 10 hogsheads of tobacco, 6 barrels of tar, 40 barrels of flour, a quantity of loaf sugar, 2 tierces of brown sugar, 96 pounds of coffee, and 1800 bunches of onions.<sup>366</sup>

Aware of the dangers of the “triangle trade,” the ship was also outfitted with guns, gunpowder, handcuffs, shackles, chains, pistols, knives, and padlocks, all of which would be used to keep their human cargo under control.<sup>367</sup> The captain of the ship was Esek

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<sup>365</sup> James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1952): 71.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid* 75.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid* 76.

Hopkins, a member of another of Rhode Island's most prominent families. Probably because it was such a failure and because the records of the voyage were peculiarly well kept and complete, the journey of the Sally remains one of the most well documented of the time. Exact amounts given in trade for African people were recorded in the log book, with 156 gallons of rum and 1 barrel of flour given in trade for one African girl and boy. They were purchased for the equivalent of 17 pounds.<sup>368</sup> It took some time for a number of slaves to be accumulated onboard, with months passing as the ship remained in port on the coast of Africa. As the slaves were accumulated, some were resold soon after, but the many who were kept on board began to suffer sickness and despair. Enslaved Africans died from sickness, and one woman hanged herself between decks. By August 20<sup>th</sup>, 196 slaves had been traded for. Of these, 9 were sold and 20 died, leaving 167 Africans aboard the Sally when the ship began its return journey.<sup>369</sup> The return journey saw only more death and violence, with suicide, death by disease and an uprising resulting in 88 more dead Africans. The remaining slaves were sick. By December 20, 1765 the 109<sup>th</sup> death was recorded. Of the 62 slaves left, 24 were sold, and 38 remain unaccounted for. The voyage was a disaster, but fellow RI merchants, the Wantons, nevertheless sought information for the voyage to begin their own trade in slaves.<sup>370</sup>

According to Hedges, only a small percent of the Brown family interests were devoted to slave trafficking by 1765, by which date the family had sent 3 ships to Africa. One ship was lost, another venture a failure, and one a huge success.<sup>371</sup> After the terrible

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid 77.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid 78.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid 80-81.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

voyage of the Sally, Nicholas, Moses, and Joseph likely never participated in another slave trafficking voyage, but John Brown kept at it until the time of his death.

### **Reconciling the Legacies of Exile and Diaspora in Contemporary Providence**

The major chronicler of the revisionist narrative now on display at the John Brown House, Joanne Melish credits much of the recent attention given to the histories and legacies of slave-ownership and slave-trafficking in Providence to the formation of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, which she traces back to a March 13, 2001 paid ad that appeared in the Brown student newspaper. The ad, taken out by David Horowitz, noted “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea—and Racist Too,” angering the Coalition of Concerned Brown Students, which wanted to see the money from the ad donated to Brown’s Third World Center or community organizations run by and for minority populations.<sup>372</sup> When this did not happen, all the copies of the paper were confiscated. The next edition of the Brown Alumni Magazine featured an article entitled “History Lesson: Did Brown Profit from Slavery?” Later that year, in July 2001, Ruth Simmons, who traced her family lineage to slaves, was appointed Brown University’s new president, making history as the first African American to head an Ivy League university.<sup>373</sup> In April 2003 Simmons created the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, a committee of faculty and students chaired by James T. Campbell, associate professor of Africana studies and history, as well as the leader of the independent study that would produce the new exhibit at the

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<sup>372</sup> Melish 119.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid 120.

John Brown House in 2005.<sup>374</sup> As arranged by the University, the committee's establishment was covered exclusively by the *New York Times*.<sup>375</sup>

Charged by President Ruth Simmons, who traces her own ancestry to American slaves, to consider Brown's role in historical and contemporary racial inequality, the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice posed questions that have explicitly linked local practices and historic legacies to contemporary national and transnational phenomena. At the outset, the Committee queried:

How are we, as members of the Brown community, as Rhode Islanders, and as citizens and residents of the United States, to make sense of our complex history? How do we reconcile those elements of our past that are gracious and honorable with those that provoke grief and horror? What responsibilities, if any, rest upon us in the present as inheritors of this mixed legacy?<sup>376</sup>

In the end, as these questions suggest, the goal of the committee was to face Brown's past and figure out its legacy in the present. To accomplish its mission, Brown sponsored more than thirty public programs on the issue, including lectures, discussions, film screenings, and international conferences, and several of these programs have produced materials which will later be published in an anthology.<sup>377</sup> Another product of the effort is a high school curriculum entitled "A Forgotten History: the Slave Trade and Slavery in New England." As one of its own acts of restitution, Brown has provided every high school history and social studies classroom in the state a copy of this curriculum.<sup>378</sup>

The final report of the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice is split into three pieces, the first of which provides an introduction to the historical role of slavery

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid 121.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> "Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice" (Providence, RI: Brown University): 4 Accessed online 13 August 2008.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid 5.

and the slave trade in the founding and funding of Brown University and in the commercial success of Rhode Island generally; a second section deals with the issue of in/justice generally and how it has been dealt with head-on in various locations around the world; and the final section considers the issue of response and the righting of injustice through reparations other forms of restitution. While the first section, entitled “Slavery, the Slave Trade and Brown University” summarizes information that has been made available in recent scholarly texts on slave trafficking in Rhode Island (particularly those by Jay Coughtry, Charles Rappleye, Robert Fitts and Rachel Chernos Lin), it also notes the connections between the economies of Newport, Bristol and Providence, observing that the three families most engaged in the trade came from these areas. The report notes the slave trafficking dynasties established by the Vernons of Newport, the Browns of Providence, and the DeWolfs of Bristol, while also recognizing that slave ownership in Providence and its immediate environs played a significant role in the construction of Brown University itself. While the Browns and other families supported the building of the college financially, some made “in kind” donations in the form of the labor of their slaves.<sup>379</sup> Indeed, there is a facsimile print of the construction records on display on the first floor of University Hall which documents the slave labor used in the construction. According to the committee, then, this is “a history that has long hidden in plain sight.”<sup>380</sup> Additionally, the report notes the connection between Rhode Island and the Deep South, as several thousand pounds in donations to the college were also raised from the southern planters socially and economically connected to prominent Providence families.

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid 12.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid 13.

There is a special subsection in this part of the report dedicated exclusively to the Brown family and its role in slave trafficking and ownership. The Browns maintained an extensive operation for years, but they have also earned a prominent place in Rhode Island's slave trafficking history because their records have been well-maintained and, even by the standards of the colonial era, exceptionally thorough. The records of a number of the Brown family slave voyages are maintained at the John Carter Brown library on campus, as are materials relating to the Brown family's ownership of slaves. According to this report as well as several independent historians, "Moses [Brown], who is 1773 became the first of the brothers to renounce slaveholding, seems to have held the largest number, owning six slaves outright, as well as a quarter interest in several others."<sup>381</sup>

While Moses and the other Brown brothers removed themselves from an active role in the slave trade, all had earned substantial sums from the early ventures, and reinvested that money in other forms of commerce. Moses Brown not only established an iron foundry known as the Hope Furnace in northern Rhode Island, but also hired English textiles expert Samuel Slater to create the first cotton mill in the United States, effectively beginning the American Industrial Revolution. Accordingly, the Steering Committee's report rightly acknowledges the connection between Rhode Island's earliest of industrial ventures and the financial successes of slave traders, as well as the continued connection between the established cotton mills of the nineteenth century and the slave labor used to mill cotton in the American south (25-26).

While it is not the only state institution to concern itself in recent years with Rhode Island's slave trafficking past, the Brown University Steering Committee is

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid 14.

unusual insofar as it is committed not only to documenting the less honorable aspects of the state's past, but also considering their legacies in the present.<sup>382</sup> Indeed, the second section of the Slavery and Justice report, "Confronting Historical Injustice: Comparative Perspectives," contextualizes both slavery and slave trafficking in Rhode Island against a historical backdrop of injustices perpetrated throughout the modern era including the Jewish Holocaust, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and elsewhere, the government-sponsored "dirty wars" of Argentina that resulted in millions of "disappeared" people, and other similar acts now categorized as crimes against humanity. Attempts to redress such wrongs, the Committee suggests, must be carefully considered and formulated in a comparative global contexts before they can be successfully undertaken by individuals or groups.

In making such connections between the eighteenth and nineteenth century victimization of the black diaspora in Rhode Island, the committee clearly sees itself involved in an act of "reparative justice" and responds to critics who see digging up old wounds as an attempt for some populations to wallow in histories of abuse and inequality. The committee argues that efforts like theirs can open dialogue and generate awareness as a way of coming to terms with painful historical legacies.<sup>383</sup> Drawing on the legacies of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee convened in South Africa and the efforts of similar organizations to excavate the underground evidence of Argentina's Dirty Wars, the Brown University Steering Committee argues that the "reparative justice" takes several forms: apologies, truth commissions, and reparations and this report looks at

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<sup>382</sup> During March of 2006, Rhode Island's primary newspaper, the *Providence Journal*, ran a week-long series of articles and timelines regarding slavery and slave trafficking in the state entitled "The Unrighteous Traffick."

<sup>383</sup> "Slavery and Justice" 39.

each of those options in turn. While the strength of apologies is that they acknowledge the scale of a wrong committed, their weakness is that they can be a false catharsis—the apology may become the thing which, once issued, supposedly makes the crime go away.<sup>384</sup> Apologies can also make it seem as if the crime is of the past, and has no repercussions in or on the present, effectively denying the powerful effect of legacies of oppression and inequality faced by the northeastern-based black diaspora in contemporary contexts.<sup>385</sup> A particular example of this are the apologies for slavery proffered by Presidents Clinton and George H.W. Bush (in 1998 and 2003, respectively) for African slavery, which made no connection to the legacies of slavery in the present and were delivered off-shore at the slave castles of West Africa.<sup>386</sup> Unfortunately, such apologies, while valuable, are not enough when attempting to reconcile legacies which live in the present via material culture, social inequality and painful memories. Indeed, the committee notes, the contemporary condition of the North American black diaspora has everything to do with both the material effects and cultural legacies of slavery and slave trafficking.

After providing a rudimentary history of black Americans from slavery to the present, the Committee observes the extant economic inequalities faced by black communities in comparison to those of Anglo Americans:

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than one in five African-Americans—and nearly one in three African American children—lives below the federal poverty line. Recorded in the midst of a booming economy, these figures are the lowest in U.S. history, yet they are still more than three times the comparable figures for non-Hispanic whites. Median white family income is about 50 percent higher than the median black income...<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid 41.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid 44.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid 79.

Lest the legacies of slavery and slave trafficking be consigned primary to economic considerations, the Committee also joins a number of contemporary theorists and scholars in arguing the cultural ramifications of broad-scale crimes against humanity. They note, “...the struggle over retrospective justice is waged not only in courts and legislatures but also on the wider terrain of history and memory—in battles over textbooks and museum exhibitions, public memorials and popular culture.”<sup>388</sup>

Given the number of fronts on which the battle against social injustice must be fought, then, the Committee argues that universities like Brown must recognize their responsibility to lead the way and appropriately commit all their available resources to the task. Not surprisingly, then, the recommendations of the Steering Committee are multiple, and include truthfully acknowledging and documenting of the histories and issues at hand, memorializing those histories, maintaining ethical standards regarding contemporary investments and donations, and expanding educational opportunity to those disadvantaged by the legacies of injustice.

**Conclusion: The Politics of “Restorative Nostalgia”: “Saving” Benefit Street, Restoring Anglo Heritage and Revising Providence’s Past**

Given the gentrification that has occurred relatively recently in Fox Point and the contemporary historical revisionism undertaken by Brown University and the RIHS at the John Brown House, the cultural politics of tourism on College Hill remain extraordinarily fraught. Indeed, tensions still exist between these College Hill and Fox Point, two adjacent neighborhoods, as well as between College Hill and other “majority minority” neighborhoods on Providence’s west and south sides. To restore Benefit Street, scholar

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid 45.

Brianne Greenfield astutely observes, was also to reclaim it for the descendents of the first white settlers of Providence and reassert this most historic and choicest of residential neighborhoods as a bastion of social prestige, privilege, and inherited wealth. Indeed, the earliest efforts to preserve Benefit Street might be more accurately considered memory projects, combining personal memoirs, historic novels, and the documentation of civic activities related to specific buildings and the aggregate cultural landscape of Benefit Street during its period as an upscale fashionable community in the first quarter of the twentieth century, before its northern and southern extremities devolved into increasingly squalid slums supporting tightly knit communities of working class ethnic populations.

To create enthusiasm around the reconstruction of this area, the power of narrative was harnessed to create an “imagined community” in the area, largely made of the neighborhood’s oldest and wealthiest families.<sup>389</sup> Guidebooks about the area were published to raise the profile of the neighborhood and its historic significance to Providence.<sup>390</sup> Additionally, memoirs were published by older neighborhood residents. Margaret Stillwell published two such texts in the 1940s, entitled *While Benefit Street was Young* and *The Pageant of Benefit Street*, in 1943 and 1945 respectively. Additionally, David Cornell DeJong authored a novel entitled *Benefit Street* in 1943, which discussed the lives of boarding house residents in the poorer areas. These portraits increased the profile of the area and contributed to a sort of spiritual restoration of the area before the physical work was actually undertaken. Interestingly, these romantic narratives of the area repeatedly emphasized private lives and homes, marginalizing the

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<sup>389</sup> Greenfield 157.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid 158.

forces of commerce and the presence of minority populations including recent immigrants and long-established pockets of African Americans.

By the 1950s, famed preservationist Antoinette Downing had published a book on the architectural history of the College Hill neighborhood at the request of the PPS and later authored scripts for walking tours of the area.<sup>391</sup> Downing's book, like those published throughout the 1940s, helped to shift the focus from individual historic structures to a broader narrative of the area as a collection of culturally significant sites and was aided in this project by Providence surveyor and city planner John Hutchins Cady, who authored his own text, *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence: 1636-1950*.<sup>392</sup> Still considered the preeminent text on the development of Rhode Island's capitol city, Cady's book was published in 1957 in support of the first efforts of the Providence Preservation Society, of which he was a founding member. Later, a number of the structures and spaces identified and chronicled in the Downing and Cady texts would be connected via their physical proximity on Benefit Street, their story told through the "Mile of History" tour first suggested by PPS president Elizabeth Allen.<sup>393</sup>

These attempts to create College Hill as a sort of living monument to the first Anglo settlement of Providence, characterized by narratives celebrating the private over the public (i.e., the restoration of historic homes for use as private residences or elite clubs), and asserting the symbolic and monumental interpretation of the vernacular streetscape of the neighborhood fall in line with the cultural phenomenon theorist Svetlana Boym identifies as "restorative nostalgia." According to Boym, whose 2001 text

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid 162-164.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid 164.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid 165.

*The Future of Nostalgia*, provides an overview and a history of nostalgia as a concept related explicitly to history and memory, nostalgia is both romantic, formulated and applied most coherently across the distance of space and time, and essentially conservative, predicated on the experience or anticipation of loss:

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams...nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.<sup>394</sup>

According to Boym, nostalgia is also not only an individual or private condition, but a condition that plagues contemporary thought and experience and involves issues of locals and globals: “Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into “local” and “universal” possible.” In this way, then, nostalgia must be separated from melancholia, a more private, individual experience of loss and mourning. According to Boym, “...nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”<sup>395</sup>

Perhaps most usefully as pertains to my own case study of the College Hill neighborhood preservation project, Boym identifies two contemporary forms of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. While “restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* [home] and proposes to build a lost home and patch up the memory gaps...reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of

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<sup>394</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books), 2001: xv.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid* xvi.

remembrance.”<sup>396</sup> The practitioners of these types of nostalgia can be similarly distinguished. According to Boym, “[t]he first category of nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgics” and instead “believe that their project is about truth,” making restorative nostalgia a good fit for “national and nationalist revivals all over the world.”<sup>397</sup> This kind of nostalgia is obsessed with the original and with the concept of authenticity, while reflective nostalgia maintains a critical distance and insists on the existence of narratives of the past that are both multiple and flexible. “While reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time,” asserts Boym, “[r]estorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstruction of monuments of the past...”<sup>398</sup>

Restorative nostalgia is a strategy used to creating a usable past in the present, and is one traditionally used to construct official narratives, those seeking to represent nation-states or specific communities with shared ideals and cultural practices. Restorative nostalgia is effectively monumental in scope, requiring specific sites of memorialization around which to create social rituals from what Boym refers to as “restored traditions” which manifest “a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than the actual peasant customs and conventions after which they were patterned.”<sup>399</sup> Not surprisingly, then, most urban renewal projects exhibit the politics of restorative nostalgia, as they imbue select historic sites and structures with symbolism of past beliefs and practices that are supposedly lost or threatened in the contemporary climate of post-modernity. This idealization of the past is about a desire to imagine or remember “a more

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid 41.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid 42.

humane public sphere” than the one currently in practice and requires the recreation of a monumental environment on a human scale, one which not only means something to the resident population but also serves as technology or tool through which that population is represented to itself and to outsiders. Rather than being conceptualized as a place for the cast-outs/exiles from an Edenic countryside, then, the city can instead be seen as a contact zone that reconciles local, national, and global contexts from which to create and mobilize usable pasts in the ever-evolving present tense. Restored and renewed, the city and its specific neighborhoods can function, Boym asserts, as “ideal crossroads between longing and estrangement, memory and freedom, nostalgia and modernity,” creating a perfect modern communion between the diasporic mythscape of Roger Williams’ original settlement and the contemporary desire for a residential safe haven within an increasingly urbanized environment.<sup>400</sup>

But in order for this kind of symbolic renewal to take place, there must be corresponding renewal of the physical environment. Monuments must be built, homes restored, and walking tours authored and financed: the past must be performed, recreating specific sites and places as stages for local culture with national and global implications. And all of this takes financial and cultural resources, a lesson well-learned during the restoration and corresponding gentrification of the East Side. While the casualties of that restoration are still being felt throughout the city, the PPS and other local preservation organizations have since taken action in preserving vernacular structures associated with the other times and place of Rhode Island’s capitol city. First turning their attention to the famous triple deckers of Providence’s industrial Smith Hill, the housing made expressly for new immigrants and factory workers in the nineteenth century, the members of the

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid 76.

PPS helped put several new preservation organizations were in place. In 1977, an organization called SWAP (Stop Wasting Abandoned Property) was founded with the goal of getting people into empty structures by asking the city to forgive back taxes and providing assistance with much-needed renovations. The group identifies eligible properties, locates owners, and gets them to sell the buildings at prices below market value. On the other end of the spectrum, it entices middle class residents to purchase the houses by helping to secure loans and other financial easements. By 1985, SWAP had “upgraded” more than 300 houses throughout the city. Additionally, in 1980, the Providence Preservation Society created a Revolving Fund specifically to assist low- and middle-income families in purchasing and restoring these types of properties. This program provides substantial loans (\$10,000 or more) to homeowners restoring their historic properties. The Providence Preservation Society also offers classes teaching residents how to do some of the work themselves, including carpentry. Originally formed to protect and reclaim the historic streetscape of Providence’s East Side, the PPS has since been labeled “a citywide educational and advocacy group” that has helped in the rejuvenation of areas including the Armory District, Broadway and Mt. Hope neighborhoods, with their respective caches of Victorian Queen Anne homes.<sup>401</sup>

These most recent efforts of the PPS clearly indicate an interest in widening the scope of their mission to include the entirety of the city of Providence rather than the limited and privileged cultural and physical terrain of the East Side. Indeed, the PPS website and corresponding database of historic properties now includes information about the substantial collection of industrial structures spread across Providence’s West Side that stretches underneath and beyond Rhode Island Interstate 95, which was constructed

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

in the 1950s and effectively bisects the city. Due to this physical bisection as well as the cultural emphasis placed on the East Side, tensions have long existed between Providence's wealthiest taxpayers of College Hill and the residents of the city's lower-income (and less well-preserved) neighborhoods. Unlike the East Side's College Hill, other historic areas of Providence, including the West Broadway and Federal Hill neighborhoods, as well as the Elmwood neighborhood of South Providence, feature mostly nineteenth and early twentieth-century structures that either originated as multi-family dwellings or have since been converted into apartments. Accordingly, given their date of construction, their location and their number of units, these homes are more closely associated with the influx of immigrants into Rhode Island that occurred between 1880 and 1920, when vast numbers of laborers were needed to work in the textiles and metals factories of Smith Hill in Providence and throughout the northern cities of Providence County that now comprise the Blackstone Valley. Mobilizing decidedly different histories, the East Side of Providence is associated with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the heady values of virtuous republican patriotism, "soul liberty" and "otherwise-mindedness," while the West Side and the surrounding areas of Providence County mobilize histories of immigration and labor. In short, the East Side of Providence remains Providence's preeminent tourist attraction and residential neighborhood because it lent itself well to the sort of "restorative nostalgia" that establishes the neighborhood as the stuff of not only history, but also contemporary cultural mythology. Accordingly, in the next chapter, I consider the politics of recreating a cultural mythscape of labor and immigration as these projects have been undertaken in Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley.

## Chapter 6

### Performing Histories of Industry and Immigration in the Blackstone Valley

Fifteen years ago, it may have sounded like a pipedream -- the ramblings of a deranged mind. But today, no one is laughing. The Blackstone Valley has truly become one of the premier tourist attractions in Rhode Island. As one of 6 state funded regional tourism councils, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has become a major force in enhancing the region's economy, preserving its environment and cultural heritage and expanding its recreational opportunities. By attacking the issue on all fronts and fostering collaboration among the communities and organizations working to enhance and promote region, the Council has helped attract tens of thousands of visitors into the Valley and improve the quality of life for all of the Valley's residents.<sup>402</sup>

During the early nineteenth century, Rhode Island established a reputation as “the polyglot state” due to the flow of immigrants into the state’s capital city and surrounding county. These immigrants, their cultural practices, and the industries established and supported by their presence came to define Providence County as both financially lucrative and ethnically diverse. Indeed, this perception remains accurate even today, long after immigration restrictions in the 1920s closed Providence’s ports to ships bearing immigrants from nations including Ireland, Italy, Sicily, and Portugal. Indeed, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Rhode Island is currently ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the nation for its percentage of foreign-born population, and The Providence Plan, a Rhode Island-based non-profit organization, offers data indicating that the year 2000 saw the city of

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<sup>402</sup> The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, “About the Valley: A Premiere Tourist Attraction” accessed online at <http://www.tourblackstone.com/about4.htm> 12 December 2009.

Providence become “majority minority” for the first time in its history, with 75% of its youth under age 18 classified as “minority.”<sup>403</sup>

Nineteenth century Providence, though increasingly industrialized, remained a significant port largely due to the influx of immigrants from Southern Europe who boarded French steamers that bypassed Ellis Island and landed directly in Rhode Island’s capital city.<sup>404</sup> Ironically, however, while French steamships brought scores of Mediterranean immigrants into Rhode Island, the French-Canadian population that would prove so influential in the cultural and industrial growth of Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley gradually migrated south through New England using overland routes. Indeed, even as southern Italians and Portuguese immigrants boarded boats departing Mediterranean ports for Providence in record numbers, struggling French-Canadians left the farming communities of Quebec for work in the textile mills of the Blackstone River Valley that earned Rhode Island its reputation as “the Polyglot state.”<sup>405</sup>

To contextualize these patterns of immigration and their effects on the cultural geography of Providence County and the state of Rhode Island as a whole, I look closely

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<sup>403</sup> Important to note is the fact that according to the U.S. Census, the term “minority” is an explicitly racial designation, and not a term denoting other identify formations that might contribute to an individual or collective’s peripheral status or demographic marginality.

<sup>404</sup> The French steamship line, the Fabre Line, brought immigrants from the Mediterranean to Providence from 1911 until new immigration restriction shut it down in 1921. George Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The Independent State* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982): 76-77.

<sup>405</sup> According to Kellner and Lemons, “By the 1920s Rhode Island had the highest percentage of immigrants in the nation, Catholics outnumbered Protestants, a cacophony of foreign tongues drowned out English, and signs of ethnic diversity were everywhere.” See Kellner and Lemons 75. While the Irish came largely as a result of the failure of potato crops to work on the construction of the Blackstone Canal, French-Canadians gradually moved the Irish out of the area as textile mills were constructed and the Blackstone Valley shifted to an industrial economy. In 1865, 65% of immigrants coming to Rhode were Irish, but French-Canadians gradually overwhelmed that population, making the Blackstone River Valley of Rhode Island host to the largest French-Canadian population anywhere in the world outside of Montreal. See Kellner and Lemons 76. By the 1890s, the largest influx of immigrants was from the Mediterranean, particularly southern Italy. According to Kellner and Lemons, “[the Fabre steamship line] brought thousands of Italians and smaller numbers of Portuguese, Greeks, Armenians, and Russian Jews..[and] [i]n 1914 over 18,000 immigrants disembarked at Providence, making the city the fifth largest port-of-entry in the United States.” Kellner and Lemons 76.

at the dominant tourist narratives associated with the white ethnic cultures of northern Rhode Island's industrial heyday, from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1990s, and take as my case study the permanent exhibits of the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket. Besides functioning as a museum of industrial heritage with a substantial local following, the museum is also a designated visitor's center for the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor, a nationally-recognized park land encompassing the 9 northern Rhode Island cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, Glocester, Burrillville, North Smithfield, Smithfield, and Woonsocket as well as several cities in southern Massachusetts. Considering the narrative content of the exhibits as well as their organization, form and style, I argue that the current tourist narrative governing the Blackstone Valley both adheres to the tenets of heritage tourism, one of the newest and most popular forms of cultural tourism currently applied in the United States, and expands them. Emphasizing what the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council identifies as "whole place tourism," the heritage narrative presented in the Blackstone Valley, and most explicitly at Woonsocket's Museum of Work and Culture, is not only celebratory and local in scale, but also relies almost exclusively on already-identified cultural heritage attractions (from man-made structures such as historic homes to natural features such as the Blackstone River) rather than on the construction of new attractions meant to woo tourists. Instead, the heritage tourism of the Blackstone Valley, of which the Museum of Work and Culture is an integral part, has proven itself a valuable tool for economic regeneration and urban redevelopment while maintaining its roots in the local community and relying on residents of the Blackstone Valley and southern New England, rather than tourists from afar, for primary support.

Drawing on the work of scholars of tourism who theorize the politics of turning industrial sites into locations of heritage consumed within the context of contemporary leisure and cultural tourism, I explore the ways in which the “clean” postindustrial urban tourist industry recontextualizes labor histories of traditionally marginalized populations as spectacle, and consider the effects of such strategies on the contemporary economy and the working populations of northern Rhode Island’s mainland neighborhoods.<sup>406</sup> If the capitol city’s East Side, and the College Hill neighborhood particularly, mobilizes narratives of forced migration and “soul liberty” by drawing on Rhode Island’s rich mythscapes of otherwise-mindedness associated with Roger Williams, what narratives of ethnicity are created, curated and referenced in association with the vernacular streetscapes and museums of Providence County’s most historically industrialized areas? How and why are historic narratives of ethnicity linked to specific industries and how/ were those industries transformed or influenced by the cultural practices of workers? How do narratives of labor, many of which are mobilized within and around abandoned factories, mills and other former industrial spaces, inform and shape the contemporary identities of consumers and community members, a significant number of whom are locals with personal connections and memories of the types of work that are currently experienced as absence and loss? Finally, how/do these narratives complicate contemporary ideas of diaspora and immigration, particularly in light of recent debates over issues related to the presence and natural rights of individuals residing within U.S. borders illegally?

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<sup>406</sup> For more on the reinterpretation of labor histories as spectacle, see Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

## **Outside Providence<sup>407</sup>: Industrial Heritage in the Blackstone River Valley**

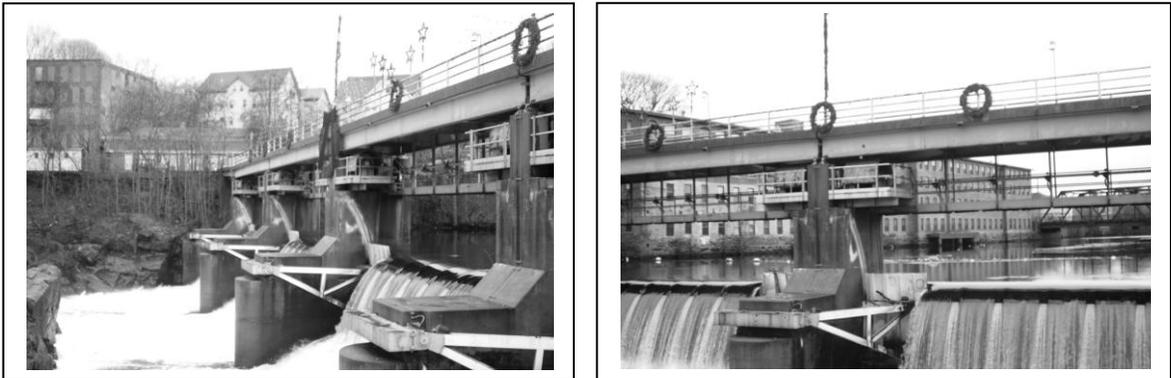
Despite the iconographic image of the picturesque New England village punctuated by neatly hewn public gathering spaces, stone walls and white picket fences, much of southern New England has long been better known for the heavy industry that grew up alongside the waterways that wend their way through southern Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. While the ports of Newport and Providence provided direct access to the domestic and international maritime trade routes that gave rise to the merchant economies of small seaside towns, areas located further inland, including the towns and cities that now comprise the northernmost section of Rhode Island's Providence County, maintained agrarian economies until new technologies made it possible to harness the power of the Blackstone River. Accordingly, just as the heritage narrative of Bristol plays a critical role in offering an alternative historical narrative of Newport County, so too does the contemporary heritage narrative mobilized in and around Woonsocket complicate the dominant cultural history of Providence County.

Known colloquially as “the hardest working river in America” for the vast number of mills and factories that sprang up along its banks between roughly the last years of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, the Blackstone River winds down from its headwaters in Worcester, Massachusetts and features two significant and powerful drops in elevation in what are now the cities of Woonsocket and Pawtucket, respectively. The picturesque frothing white falls of Market Square in Woonsocket are in

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<sup>407</sup> This is the name of a comedic film written by the nationally-recognized Farrelly brothers. The creators of blockbusters including *There's Something About Mary*, the Farrelly brothers have put northern Rhode Island on the national map by featuring the cities of Barrington and Pawtucket in their films, as well as by holding several star-studded film premieres at small Rhode Island venues, including the newly re-opened Stadium Theatre of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. *Outside Providence* tells the story of a young working class Pawtucket native of Irish ethnicity and the trials and tribulations he faces attending an exclusive Connecticut private school during the 1970s. It is directed by Michael Corrente, also a Rhode Island native whose own Italian ethnicity is explored in his 1994 film *Federal Hill*.

fact the product of a thirty foot cascade that occurs in the compact space of one mile. The largest drop in the river's entire forty-six mile run, these falls produced enough waterpower to run some of the area's earliest sawmills and gristmills, necessary support structures within the local farming



*Two views of the Blackstone River at the falls in Market Square, the center of downtown Woonsocket, decorated for the holiday season of 2008*

community.

During the 1820s, however, the Blackstone Canal was constructed, finally linking Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence and, more importantly, to Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The canal established a new trade route to and from southern Massachusetts, encouraging the growth of increasingly mercantile settlements alongside the river's banks and providing local farmers a steadily expanding consumer base, but it also introduced the first influx of immigrants to Woonsocket who were not white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, as experienced Irish stonecutters and trench-diggers arrived and were promptly put to work carving out the canal and constructing its intricate lock system.<sup>408</sup> When the canal was in place, mills and factories were built throughout the river's valley and created a new economy that guaranteed plenty of work for laborers who could provide the public works infrastructure for burgeoning towns. While the Irish

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<sup>408</sup> "Woonsocket, Rhode Island: From a Bend in the River to a New England Textile City" in *Rhode Island History* 55:1: 39.

canal workers found new employment building railroads and quarries, their family members, particularly women and children, were hired as carders, spinners, weavers, and finishers in the new textile factories. Indeed, by 1840, there were more than twenty mills in operation in the six villages that were later incorporated as the city of Woonsocket.<sup>409</sup> By 1847, the Providence and Worcester Railroad was up and running as well, providing another means for transporting goods throughout southern New England.

As the mills flourished and the economy developed, new workers arrived from the Mediterranean and eastern Europe, but the largest population of new immigrants by far came from the Francophone province of Quebec, Canada. These immigrants arrived looking for steady employment and found it in the cotton and woolen industries of Woonsocket and neighboring Pawtucket, and their descendents weathered depressions, cultural tensions, world wars and labor struggles for nearly one hundred years until the textile industry sputtered and died between 1960 and 1990. With no new local postindustrial economy to take its place, the cities once associated with the heaviest volume of industry, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket, struggled, their neighborhoods degenerating as much from limited resources and disinvestment as from the vacancy resulting from workers relocating to other areas in search of employment. Though several structures along Main Street in Woonsocket have since been classified as historic sites, the 1960s saw a number of mill complexes and other historic buildings destroyed by fire or urban renewal and the city's once-booming Market Square, where the Museum of Work and Culture now stands in the Lincoln Textile Mill (formerly the Barnai Worsted Company building), is only recently showing signs of life again, as two

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<sup>409</sup> Jenckesville, Social and Woonsocket Falls unified in 1867 under the name Woonsocket, and Globe, Bernon, and Hamlet were annexed four years later in 1872. The plan was officially approved by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1888 and the city of Woonsocket was finally established. Ibid 40.

new restaurants and several specialty shops have joined the rows of antique and thrift stores lining the streets of postindustrial Woonsocket's sleepy downtown core that lies along the banks of the Blackstone River.

But if the economy of

Woonsocket remains perennially stalled, the gradual comeback of the city's downtown has been effected based largely on the traces of the rich pasts evidenced there in the sound of the falls, the hulking

presence of abandoned mills, and the mom-and-pop shops and diners that still line the streets leading into Market Square. Also influential in the renewal of the city's built environment that has occurred since the mid-1980s is the population of older residents who continue to adhere to the provincial saying of Quebec, "*je me souviens*" ("I remember"). These long-time residents, mindful of the lifetimes their ancestors spent punching time-clocks in the unforgiving heat and unrelenting noise of the factory floor, refuse to forget how the city looked, sounded and smelled during its heyday, when the opportunities represented by American wage labor made their grueling work and new urban lifestyle seem worthwhile. According to the Rhode Island Historical Society-



*Above: Falls Mill buildings now housing several small businesses, including a florist and a yarn shop, as well as a new restaurant. Below: The old core of Market Square, featuring mom and pop thrift shops, hardware stores and diners*



authored promotional materials written in support of the Museum of Work and Culture and its location in the once-powerful mill town of Woonsocket,

Although not many new immigrants have settled in Woonsocket in the last half-century, although the all-French daily newspaper *La Tribune* is no longer published, and although the local radio no longer hosts broadcasts daily in French, it is quite possible to hear a lyrical conversation in third- or fourth-generation Quebecois dialect. There are still French-Canadian bakeries and the aromas of spicy meat pies and warm cinnamon buns, the rows of triple-decker apartment houses, the noisy and colorful international street festivals, the more serious and somber incense-scented church pageantries...and the names of the streets leading into downtown—Social, Bernon, and Hamlet, the names of the once-great mills. These are the clues to the legacy of Woonsocket's important role in the manufacturing and cultural history of the Blackstone River Valley.<sup>410</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, it is these clues, as well as their related cultural histories and practices, that were celebrated as efforts to rejuvenate the whole of the Blackstone Valley were undertaken during the 1980s, when local resident Robert Billington founded the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and the aggressive lobbying efforts of civic and political leaders persuaded the U.S. Congress to designate the river valley in southern Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island as the first ever national heritage corridor. Strikingly different from national parks in their financing and management, heritage corridors are meant to bring together disparate sites (both built and natural) into one coherent historical narrative based on shared characteristics and themes. In the Blackstone Valley, the main theme revolves around the co-constitutional natures of work and culture, and the role both the natural and man-made environments play in shaping and informing the practices and beliefs of the resident population. Conversely, the narrative also invites questions regarding the role of humans in altering their

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<sup>410</sup> *Rhode Island History* 55:1: 41.

surroundings, the culture of the labor in which they engage, and the products of that labor.

Once the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor was officially established in 1986, the seeds of local urban regeneration officially took root, with the city of Woonsocket in the lead as civic and political elites planned a year-long calendar of events to commemorate the city's centennial. In celebration of the anniversary of the city's official founding, balls and other cultural events were sponsored by the city and affiliated organizations, and Mayor Charles Baldelli proclaimed Woonsocket "in the midst of another comeback."<sup>411</sup> A new local history, *Woonsocket, Rhode Island: A Centennial History 1888-1988* was presented February 9, 1988 and the Rhode Island Historical Society sponsored a series of local history lectures. When a centennial parade was held on June 12 over 50,000 spectators attended.<sup>412</sup>

Following these initial celebratory events, a twenty-one member Board of Directors was appointed by Mayor Baldelli to oversee the development of the ten year, ten million dollar project known as "Main Street 2000." This project was intended to signal a new attitude toward urban renewal, championing the adaptive reuse of old industrial sites rather than advocating demolition and redevelopment of Woonsocket's original urban architecture. By 1994, when the city of Providence had officially opened the centerpiece of its new downtown, Waterplace Park (discussed at length in chapter 8), the smaller city of Woonsocket had also made great strides, with several mill structures

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<sup>411</sup> Ray Bacon, "Toward the New Millennium" (Woonsocket, RI: Ayotte Printing, Inc.) 227.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid 228. This number of spectators is not insignificant by Rhode Island standards. While the crowd of 50,000 constituted only 5% of the total state population of 1,003,464, it surpassed Woonsocket's total estimated population of 43,877, making clear that the celebrations attracted more than 6,000 spectators living outside the city. For these statistics, furnished by the 1990 U.S. Census, see <http://www.factfinder.uscensus.gov>. Accessed 11 December, 2009.

fully renovated for new industry. By 1998 the historic Stadium Theatre (a small, one-screen movie house), founded in 1926 and closed in 1990, was re-opened thanks to the efforts of local residents, and the theater even hosted the East Coast Premiere of Twentieth-Century Fox's blockbuster *There's Something About Mary*, written and produced by former Rhode Island residents Bobby and Peter Farrelly. Perhaps most significant to the sustainability of the new downtown core, however, was the 1998 re-opening of Main Street to two-way traffic, returning Market Square to its former role as city center. Finally, in 2000, local route 99 was completed, linking Woonsocket directly to the national highway system and increasing the city's potential to attract new business development.

It was amidst this atmosphere of “urban renaissance” celebration and infrastructural redevelopment that the Museum of Work and Culture was first proposed as a permanent heritage attraction that would bring together the interdependent histories of Woonsocket, Rhode

Island and the surrounding Blackstone River Valley. Initially conceived by local civic leaders in

the 1980s as a private entity meant to celebrate local heritage, inspire ethnic and working class pride of place and encourage efforts of city-wide urban renewal, the Museum of Work and Culture was also understood as a way to explicitly connect Woonsocket,



*Contemporary view of the Museum of Work and Culture, housed in an adapted and reused mill structure and located in the heart of the city's downtown Market Square*

Rhode Island to the broader narrative associated with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Indeed, this plan proved so popular that in 1992 it was determined that Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and not the Massachusetts city of Uxbridge, would become the new headquarters for the Heritage Corridor Commission, the organization overseeing the management of the Corridor. By 1994, the ribbons had been cut and the Commission was officially installed in Woonsocket, with a plan in place for the proposed Museum of Work and Culture to function as both a museum with permanent historical exhibits and a visitor's center for the Heritage Corridor.

But despite the support of local and state-wide civic and religious leaders as well as the tireless lobbying efforts of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and national champions of the newly created Heritage Corridor, the Museum was unable to secure the necessary funding from the National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) while it remained a quasi-public project primarily associated more with city-wide urban renewal efforts than a traditional historical enterprise. Indeed, the Museum faced significant funding hurdles until the Rhode Island Historical Society, under the leadership of historian Albert Klyberg, agreed to step in and assist in the development of the collection and its narrative organization. Once it was aligned with a long-standing and well-respected historical institution, the Museum was able to unite the funds already set aside from the Community Block Development Grants (CBDGs) made available by the federal government to assist some of the United States' most struggling urban areas in rebuilding their crumbling built environments with newly allocated monies from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The new museum finally opened its doors on October 10, 1997, featuring a permanent collection of artifacts and seven full-scale immersion exhibits displayed in the newly rehabilitated Lincoln Textile Mill that stands in the center of Market Square directly across from the falls that first gave rise to the American industrial revolution. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Mayor Susan Menard emphasized the import of the museum in bringing Woonsocket, Rhode Island back into the national narrative of industrial development and asserted the significance of the project to local pride and family memories, while the keynote speaker at a later event sponsored by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission emphasized the value of the Museum to the project of urban renewal and encouraged fellow mill owners and other industrialists to learn from the narrative presented by the Museum and the Heritage Corridor and begin to comprehensively address issues of contemporary unemployment in local urban areas.<sup>413</sup>

Receiving no shortage of media coverage following its official opening, the Museum of Work and Culture received more than 16,000 visitors by the end of its first year. Though this total was well-shy of the 80,000 visitors predicted by Rhode Island Historical Society Executive Director Albert Klyberg in the museum's planning materials, museum managers Ray Bacon and Anne Conway feel that this visitorship is appropriate for the size and scale of the community-minded museum, and the origins of the visitors seem to support that conclusion. Indeed, the museum's visitor log reveals that while the majority of visitors are groups of school-age children from local educational institutions, there is also a sizable population of adults who make their way to the

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<sup>413</sup> Bacon , "Toward the New Millennium," 235.

museum from within the state of Rhode Island and the surrounding Blackstone Valley.<sup>414</sup> While the Museum in no way boasts the international or even national-scale clientele of the Newport Mansions, Rhode Island's single-most popular tourist attraction, it does attract tourists from New England and the mid-Atlantic states. But its small scale, tight focus, and deeply rooted connections to the local community has effectively secured it a clientele that Newport Preservation Society Executive Director Trudy Coxe admits does not visit the mansions: Rhode Island residents to whom the narrative of deindustrialization and the workers it left behind is more familiar than that of the uber-wealthy robber barons of the Gilded Age, for whom local mills and factories were simply expendable pieces within the new corporate superstructure of global capitalism.

### **“The City by the Mill”: Mobilizing the Mythscape of the Blackstone Valley at the Museum of Work and Culture**

Though school-age children, who make up a large number of the annual visitors to the Museum of Work and Culture, are accompanied by both teachers and volunteer docents trained by the Rhode Island Historical Society, walking tours of the museum are generally self-guided and begin at the main entrance to the museum, with a wall panel explaining the first of two central themes around which the museum's collection of artifacts and exhibits is unified: the concept of “*La Survivance*.” Given that the promotional phrase of Quebec, the Canadian province from which much of Woonsocket, Rhode Island's population originally hailed, is *Je me souviens* (“I remember”), it is not

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<sup>414</sup> The Museum maintains site evaluations from school groups that attend, but also keeps a log in which visitor's to the Museum are encouraged to include their name and city of origin. Examining the available data from April 2004 (when the museum began keeping the log) to the present reveals that while the Museum certainly enjoys some international visitors (particularly from Quebec) the majority of guests are local schoolchildren and residents of the Blackstone Valley. It should also be noted that a sizable percentage of the annual visitation comes from the events hosted during the annual Labor Day festival in September.

surprising that the Museum of Work and Culture organizes its narrative according to the principles by which the newly emigrated French-Canadian population of late nineteenth century Woonsocket established a sense of community in their new home: memory and the maintenance of cultural traditions. But the museum also attempts to account for “Americanism,” or the cultural and legal processes (emanating from both inside and outside the French-Canadian community) which threatened and transformed those traditional diasporic notions of an ethnically-constituted community while simultaneously promising membership in a newer, broader American body politic based as much on legal citizenship as on cultural assimilation.

***“La Survivance” and the Universalist***

***Rhetoric of Diasporic Memory***

Defined in its strictest sense as merely “survival,” the museum’s first organizing principle, *La survivance*, actually has more to do with the celebration of “persistence and preservation” in the face of great change than mere subsistence living.

According to the February 1997 issue of *Rhode Island History*, dedicated entirely to interpreting

and promoting the exhibits and artifacts at the Museum of Work and Culture, the newest museum operated by the Rhode Island Historical Society, the seven permanent exhibits of the museum center around “the story of the human spirit as it confronts change and

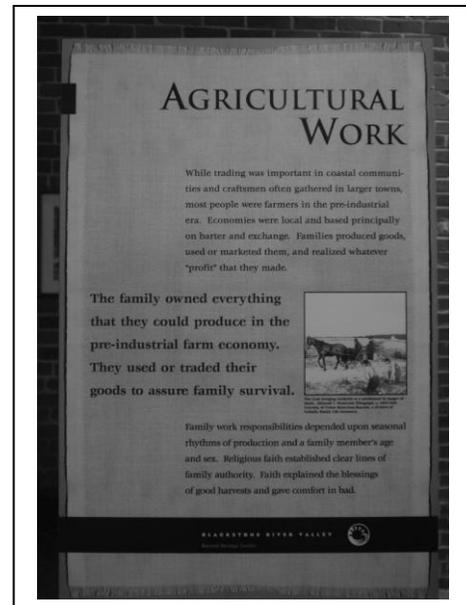


*Wall panel displaying the Museum’s primary organizing theme, “La Survivance”*

challenge, a story of deep commitment to preserve self-respect and the memory of one's origins and heritage."<sup>415</sup>

According to this rhetoric of universalist human experience in the face of change, the story of French-Canadian migration into northern Rhode Island, and the subsequent transformation of that population from farmers to factory workers, is one that relates closely to the experiences of all immigrants, refugees, and other populations forced to reconstitute and recontextualize themselves in new places, among new cultures, climates and geographical characteristics. Though the museum never explicitly uses the term "diaspora," its focus on the re-constitution of family and community through memory, narratives, and shared cultural practices celebrated as "heritage" clearly aligns its mission along the vectors of the local and global effects of that age-old phenomenon of human dispersion.

Accordingly, the first of the seven exhibits which together constitute the museum's permanent collection involves several explanatory wall panels detailing the history of the Blackstone River Valley and the relationship between geography, immigration, work and cultural practice. The panels tell the story of the French-Canadian immigrants ("*habitants*") who left agrarian communities throughout Quebec to seek opportunities in the increasingly industrialized northeastern United States. According to historian Gary Gerstle, who chronicles the



*Wall panel contextualizing the first of the exhibits, the farm house, which mobilizes the story of immigrants abandoning agrarian work in Canada for industrial work in the United States*

<sup>415</sup> Albert T. Klyberg "Foreword" *Rhode Island History* 55:1 [February 1997].

development of the French-Canadian workforce in Woonsocket, Rhode Island in his 2002 text *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960*, the biggest wave of French-Canadian immigrants into Woonsocket effectively began in the 1860s: “[b]etween 1861 and 1870, about 200,000 left Quebec for New England. As many as 500,000, representing about a fourth of the entire French-Canadian nation, settled in New England by 1901.” By 1900, Gerstle goes on to note, “French-Canadian immigrants and their children comprised 46 percent of the work force in New England’s largest industry, cotton textiles...”<sup>416</sup> This mass migration established French-Canadians as the fourth-largest ethnic group in the United States, after significant enclaves of English, Irish and German populations had already been established. Since many of these new immigrants sought work in the textile mills rapidly developing along the swift currents of the Blackstone River that flows down into northern Rhode Island from Massachusetts, it is hardly surprisingly that the vast majority settled in the six smaller villages that would later become incorporated as the city of Woonsocket. According to the promotional materials authored by the Rhode Island Historical Society, “[b]y 1900 Woonsocket was known as “*la ville la plus francaise aux Etats-Unis*,” “the most French city in the United States,” a reputation the city maintains even today, as many older residents continue to speak in their native French, and French colloquialisms pepper the vernacular of even some of the city’s youngest inhabitants.<sup>417</sup>

Mobilizing the story explicated on the wall panels is the second element of the first full-scale immersion exhibit included in the museum: a farm house outfitted to resemble the type of dwellings maintained by French Canadians in Quebec. The first of

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<sup>416</sup> Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 21-22.

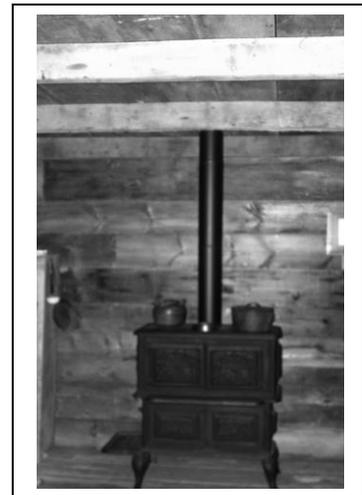
<sup>417</sup> “Artifacts and Themes” *Rhode Island History* 55:1; 6.

seven such exhibits created by the architectural firm of Christopher Chadborne, the farm house adheres to the accepted principles of immersion exhibits generally, relying on an elaborately detailed physical environment to create sensory experiences for visitors.

These well-detailed environments are intended to encourage a sense of authenticity in the hopes of stimulating visitor engagement with the stories being communicated.

Accordingly, period artifacts play a significant role in the set dressing of each of the exhibits, and the farmhouse in particular features two of the museum's most impressive and well-maintained pieces. An authentic spinning wheel and French-Canadian-made

cast iron stove emphasize the role "homework" played in the local agrarian economy as well as indicating the familiarity of French-Canadians (and French Canadian women in particular) not only with the daily grind of subsistence-living but also with early forms of textile production. Indeed, the hard lives and insecure incomes resulting from home-based textile production and farming,



*Period stove from Montreal*

when coupled with the costs of expenses including fuel

and rent and the harsh realities of the northern Canadian winters, made wage work in

newly developed textile mills and factories seem an attractive opportunity to the

struggling Quebecois and by 1900, almost half of the workers in New England's textiles

mills were French Canadian. By 1919 the French-Canadian population in Woonsocket

alone was large enough to support five exclusively French Canadian Catholic

congregations.

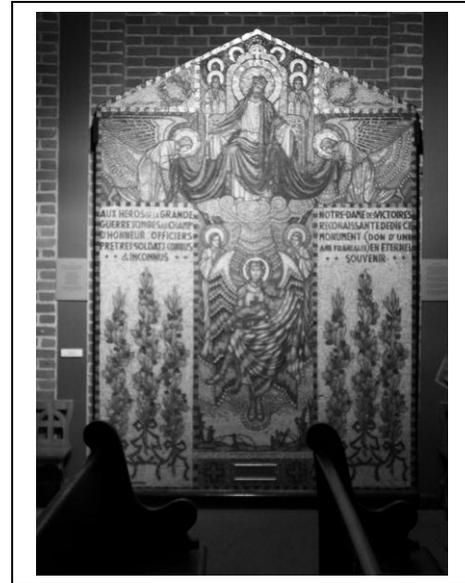
Indeed, though New England remains a bastion of Protestantism even in contemporary contexts, present-day Rhode Island is predominantly Catholic, a transformation that occurred during the nineteenth century, when scores of Irish, Mediterranean and French-Canadian immigrants arrived and struggled to reconstitute their ethnic communities on Rhode Island's mainland. Given the sheer growth of Providence County's Catholic population during the nineteenth century, it is perhaps not surprising that the second exhibit at the museum, a recreation of the Precious Blood Church, mobilizes the story of cultural preservation practices associated with the French Canadian diaspora. What is more challenging to reconcile, given the claims the museum makes regarding the universal application of the French-Canadian experience to all populations transplanted in pursuit of work, is the fact that the re-created church, a non-secular structure symbolizing the religious practices of only one immigrant population making its home in the Blackstone Valley, is also the exhibit in which the dominant narrative of the (decidedly secular) evolution of industry within the Blackstone Valley is told.

A scaled-down facsimile of the actual Precious Blood Church (*l'église du Précieux Sang*) founded in 1874 and rebuilt in 1881 after the original structure was destroyed by snowstorms in 1876, the exhibit features a hand-pieced mural of religious icons. Outfitted as a sanctuary where a priest might deliver a homily to his congregation, the small room actually functions as an auditorium, with the long wooden pews facing a screen on



*Full-scale exterior of the Church exhibit*

which an informational filmstrip about the evolution of industry in the Blackstone Valley plays. Beginning with interviews with older local residents who remember working in Woonsocket's many mills and factories, the film chronicles the rise and fall of the American textile industry and the fates of those individuals and communities whose livelihoods were inextricably bound up not only with the companies for which they worked, but also the geographic location and environmental



*Mural in the church exhibit, a recreation of the original located in the original Woonsocket church*

characteristics which gave the American industrial revolution its start in the Blackstone River Valley of southern Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island.

Providing the contextual narrative for the museum as a whole, this film places the origins of the American industrial revolution at Slater Mill in Pawtucket, where machinist Samuel Slater and financier Moses Brown opened the first factory-system mill in the United States in 1790. The film goes on to trace a nearly two-hundred year history of American textiles production, though it focuses most closely on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the number of mills and factories increased exponentially along the northeast corridor and made use of an influx of new immigrants from all over the globe. Of particular significance is the fact that although the film focuses on the events that unfolded in one northern city of the smallest state in the union, the narration contextualizes these events against the backdrop of the full scale contemporary global capitalism that has evolved since the first factories and mills opened their doors in

northern Rhode Island. According to the narrator the film, and by extension the Museum of Work and Culture itself, tells “a global story set in the Blackstone Valley...about how work changes people and how people can sometimes change the nature of their work.”<sup>418</sup>

This story begins not with the immigrants now associated with the factory landscape of northern Rhode Island, but one hundred years before their arrival on the shores of the United States, when the Blackstone Valley was still a primarily agrarian landscape on which Yankee settlers eked out subsistence livings. The film gestures to an idyllic image of eighteenth century town life, where “native Americans and the [Anglo] colonists farmed, fished, hunted and gathered food,” where “[f]amilies worked together on farms and in villages,” and “[g]ender and age determined the division of labor.” But in the last years of the eighteenth century, when Anglo settlers increasingly turned their attention to land-based industry and production “small local mills began to dot the waterways,” a market economy developed and “[p]roduce and goods started to be sold rather than bartered.” Soon, the efforts of Samuel Slater and Moses Brown would change the Blackstone Valley forever<sup>419</sup>:

By the 1830s S. and J. Slater, as their firm was called, ran at least four factories, operated 9,500 spindles, and provided employment for 66 men, 109 women, and 169 children. In addition to the factories, the outbuildings, and the company cottages, the Slater brothers acquired more than 1,200 acres of land in the...area [of northern Rhode Island that eventually became known as Slatersville].<sup>420</sup>

The Slater factories had several shared characteristics. They made the same types of products, used the same technology, employed entire families, engaged in personal

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<sup>418</sup> “Untitled Film” Museum of Work and Culture. Transcribed by author 14 August 2008.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Barbara M. Tucker, *Samuel Slater and the Origins of the American Textile Industry, 1790-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1984: 94.

management and were owned in partnership. Slater was clearly a careful manager, keeping records of wages over time:

In August 1829 Samuel Slater employed twenty-two male hand-loom weavers at his Webster woolen factory, and he paid them between \$0.14 and \$0.20 a yard for weaving various types of broadcloth and \$0.06 a yard for weaving kersey. Those who worked steadily earned between \$24.00 and \$30.00 that month.<sup>421</sup>

Though the first workers in the new mills were the women and children of already established Yankee families that were gradually turning away from the hardships of farming, soon family patriarchs joined the regimented workforce as well, and Slater, as well as other mill owners, began to rely extensively on entire families of laborers, rather than on individuals.<sup>422</sup> These workers chafed under the constraints imposed by factory labor and were soon discouraged by the drop in wages that resulted from the increasing numbers of competing mills.<sup>423</sup> Many returned to farming and were replaced on the factory floors by the newly arrived immigrants first from Ireland, then the Mediterranean and Canada. The film speaks of the opportunities for survival represented by wage labor, but also notes the massive cultural change this form of work demanded of recent immigrants:

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid 100.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid 125.

<sup>423</sup> Though it was the highly competitive milieu of factory work in the late nineteenth century that is most infamous for long hours and grueling working conditions, wage labor in the 1820s and 1830s, when the workers were still mostly native born Anglo-Americans, was also extraordinarily demanding. According to Barbara Tucker:

In the 1820s and 1830s hands worked six days each week, from twelve to fourteen hours each day. During the winter months operations began at daylight and continued until 8:00 P.M., while during the summer laborers worked from 5:00 A.M. until 7:00 P.M. Within the mill the long workday was broken by two meal breaks, one lasting approximately thirty minutes and another between thirty and forty-five minutes. The factory bell, the only time mechanism found in the mills, signaled the beginning and the end of each meal break, summoned hands to the factory in the morning, and tolled the end of the workday. Ibid 160.

They came to work, to make a better life for themselves and for their children. They were French-Canadian and Yankee, Irish, Romanian, Polish, and Italian. They came from all over to find work and to build lives as Americans. The new work was not what they had known. It changed the patterns of their lives. It forced them to new rhythms, timed by whistle blasts and the pace of the machine.<sup>424</sup>

The film is punctuated with the voices of former factory workers, who recall the extraordinary length of the workday and the harsh conditions. A male worker recalls, “We worked from 6 in the morning to 6 at night. It was hot. We didn’t wear any shoes. We went barefoot on the oil floor.” A female worker supports this claim, remembering, “It was hot even in the winter because you can’t open the windows. Any breeze would break the ends [of the thread].”

To maintain a steady supply of dependable wage labor under such unpleasant working conditions, scholars of American industry including Barbara Tucker and Susan Berry note, mill owners were careful to cultivate a superstructure of factory discipline that extended well beyond the public sphere (and spaces) of labor into every aspect of workers’ lives. Noting that factory discipline had less to do with direct and explicit force than with hegemonic acculturation, Barbara Tucker, in her 1984 study *Samuel Slater and the Origins of the American Textile Industry, 1790-1860*, argues that mill owners developed towns and villages explicitly for the purposes of creating a sense of community and preserving a carefully controlled social order in which technologies of power and control ranged from the time clocks and surveillance of the factory room floor to the more insidious architecture of power legislating the private lives of workers in their homes and other vernacular spaces.<sup>425</sup> Allowing workers just enough space and time to

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<sup>424</sup> Untitled Film, Museum of Work and Culture.

<sup>425</sup> While Barbara Tucker undertakes a study of Slater’s practices and some of the first mill villages specifically, Susan J. Berry provides a Marxist analysis of the “architecture of power” at work in seven mill

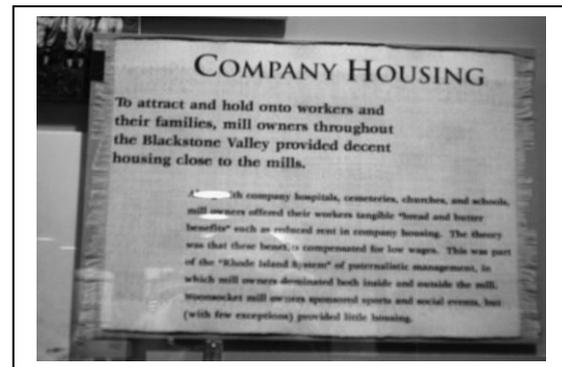
cultivate vernacular cultural practices and experience limited degrees of self-determination and agency, local mill owners were able to maintain a balance of power that guaranteed a stable and politically quiescent workforce even as a fever of labor organizing swept through the United States during the Progressive Era.

Acknowledging the spatial organization of power and social control at work between laborers and employers, The Museum of Work and Culture organizes its seven permanent exhibits by theme and space,

demonstrating that it was not only the factory floor, but also sites including religious structures, residential dwellings and factory towns and recreational spaces

that served to reinforce malleable structures of social control. Given its focus on French-

Canadian culture, the Museum also explicitly illustrates the particular roles ethnicity and class play in the construction of community from both inside and outside. While French-Canadians certainly sought to reconstruct ethnic and religious communities in their new homes and workplaces, mill owners too saw the potential for social control in keeping workers organized by specific demographics and cultural practices, particularly when the devout Catholicism and shared ethnic traditions of the largest population of mill workers, if encouraged, might keep laborers from organizing into communities based on a working class identity.



*Wall panel describing the reasons behind creating company town and residential structures.*

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villages throughout Rhode Island, explicitly engaging concepts of surveillance and hegemony to understand the power relations constantly being negotiated between workers and mill owners, particularly as an increasingly corporatized mill structure developed later in the nineteenth century. See Susan J. Berry's unpublished dissertation, "The Architecture of Power: Spatial and Social Order in Seven Rhode Island Mill Villages," (Berkeley, CA: University of California), 1992.

Given the valuable role played by social control in the maintenance of a skilled and quiescent workforce, as well as the thematic emphasis placed on the concept of “la survivance” and the maintenance of cultural traditions encouraged among Woonsocket’s nineteenth century French-Canadian labor diaspora, it seems a fitting choice to use an exhibit of a church, supported by a like-minded congregation sharing not only spiritual values but also cultural practices, to mobilize the dominant historical narrative of work and culture presented by the museum. According to the promotional materials published at the time of the museum’s opening in 1997, the Precious Blood Church is symbolic of French-Canadians’ desire to remain an intact, if transplanted, community and to protect three particular elements of their cultural heritage: first, the traditions of their French ancestry; second, their language and their right to communicate in that language; and finally, their right to practice their particular brand of Catholicism within a predominantly Protestant region.<sup>426</sup> But with the massive influx of Catholic immigrants following so soon after the second Great Awakening that swept the United States in the 1840s, the maintenance of Catholic traditions alone was suspect to long-established Anglo residents, and was only compounded by the fact that immigrants from Ireland, Poland, Italy and Quebec all practiced their Roman Catholicism with specific ethnic inflections and practices, not the least of which was the language in which mass was conducted and religious schools instructed their ethnic students.<sup>427</sup> Away from their homelands and

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<sup>426</sup> “Artifacts and Themes,” *Rhode Island History* 55:1 [1997]: 7.

<sup>427</sup> While the “Great Awakening” period spanned the years between roughly 1790 and 1840 and is traditionally broken into two waves by historians, both waves were exceptionally significant to the northeastern region of the United States, and particularly New England. Indeed, new England literary history is jam-packed with the writing of transcendentalists whose work, like the Protestant religious traditions and Enlightenment philosophy which inspired it, emphasizes civic engagement and good works rather than pre-destination or an emphasis on faith alone. Accordingly, the Great Awakening had an evangelical fervor and was associated with social causes including temperance, abolitionism, prison reform and was extraordinarily productive of literature and pamphlets. For more on the Protestantism of the Great

forever divorced from their inherited agrarian livelihoods, French-Canadians and other new immigrant populations clung even more steadfastly to cultural traditions, none more so than religious practice:

To families making the difficult transition from farm life to life in industrial cities and mill villages, the church offered guidance and consolation: have faith, it counseled, and adhere to the traditional values of your heritage—ritual diligence to work, however tedious; resolute fealty to employers, however cruel; unquestioning obedience to authority, however harsh.<sup>428</sup>

These values aligned recent French-Canadian immigrants with Rhode Island's earliest Anglophone settlers who pursued freedom of religion even as it put them out of step with these settlers' descendents—the state's Protestant majority. But it was their adherence to their particular brand of Roman Catholicism and their deference to religious leaders, as well as the insularity resulting from their cultural separatism from local Anglo communities that made French-Canadians particularly reliable workers. Determined to maintain their ethnic and religious traditions and reconstitute a vibrant French-Canadian community within the United States, French-Canadian workers resisted joining the labor unions that were gradually cropping up throughout the northeast in response to grueling labor practices, fearful that new alliances based on work and class would lead to the dissolution of their carefully maintained ethnic and religious communities. If the maintenance of their Quebecois cultural identity provided a strong sense of community, the film argues, it did not provide any hope for agency or power in the workplace.

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Awakening, see Richard D. Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order", *Church History* 39 (1970): 345-64.

<sup>428</sup> *Rhode Island History* 55:1 [1997]: 9.

### *Americanism*

If the new order of capitalist production at work in the mills and factories of Woonsocket offered little sense of control to laborers, it still represented a valuable venue for socialization and assimilation into a gradually transforming American cultural order. Besides creating an “imagined community” of workers with very real material connections, work itself, because it transpired in an explicitly secular environment, not only encouraged but in fact necessitated the interaction of people of varied ethnicities, all of whom maintained different cultural practices related to religion, kinship structures, foodways, and language. Accordingly, after the exhibit recreating the Church of the Precious Blood, the museum foregrounds the complicated negotiation at work within individuals, families and other social units between the cultural maintenance of tradition and the acceptance of assimilation. Facing similar struggles at work, the laborers were often forced to choose between cultural solidarity and class solidarity. Indeed, the Museum’s repeated references to time clocks reveal that mechanized factory work required a massive psychological and cultural shift on the part of immigrant workers:

In agricultural life the seasons, the sun, and the sounds of hungry livestock are the natural time signals of a farmer’s workday. But in city life the coordination and synchronization of activities depends on trustworthy timekeepers with accurate timepieces...[W]ork for wages...involves a daily exchange: management buys the workers’ time, and workers sell their time to management.<sup>429</sup>

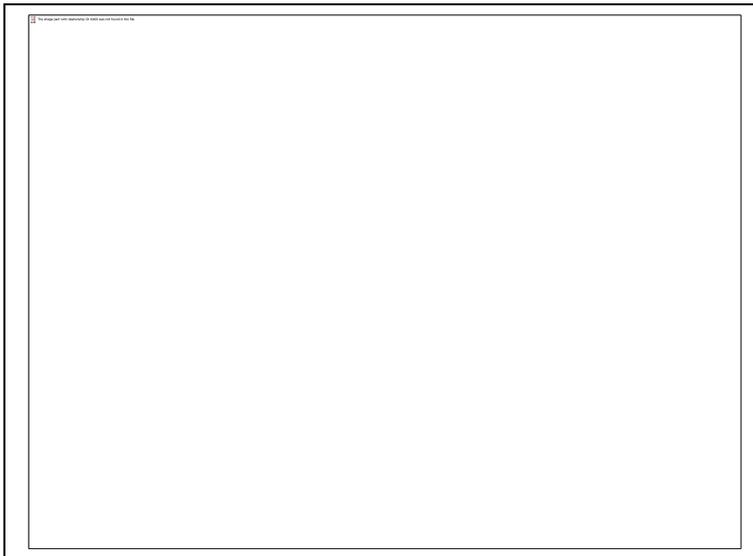
To represent the experience of actual factory work and the time constraints under which it was conducted, the third exhibit of the museum’s permanent collection, the factory floor and mill shop, mobilizes this story of time, dividing it into clear binaries of labor and leisure, with life-size statues of a man and a woman working at period mill

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<sup>429</sup> “Time Clock: *Tempus Regit*,” *Rhode Island History* 55:1 [February 1997]: 11.

textile machinery at one end of the exhibit space and a display about activities associated with leisure time at the other.

Though it is Slater Mill, and not the Museum of Work and Culture, that houses Rhode Island's most comprehensive collection of textile machinery, the Museum of Work and Culture does include a full scale spinning mule in its factory floor exhibit and the promotional materials associated with the museum are careful to explain the



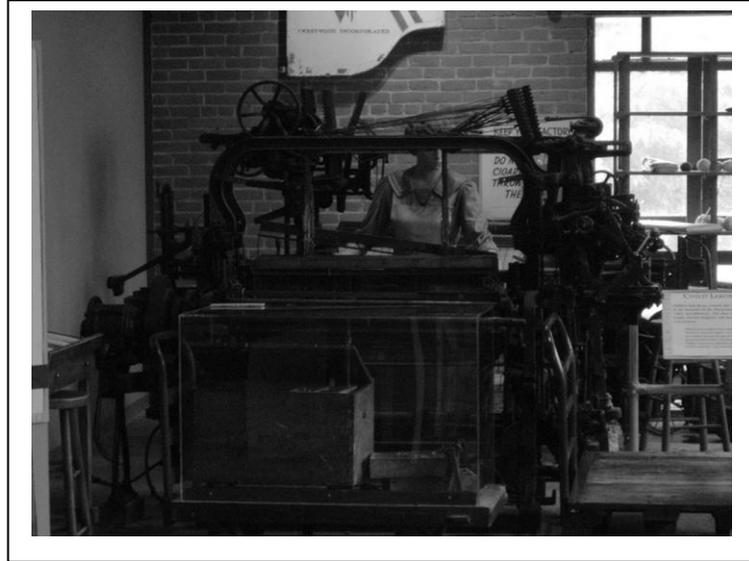
*The factory floor exhibit is one of the most impressive at the museum, featuring full-scale machinery with human figures for contextualization*

progression of textile technology from spinning mules to mechanized looms and the impact these technological developments had on the workforce. Manual-operated spinning mules that required human hands to move the thread

shuttles back and forth within the device were dangerous, requiring an individual (usually a woman or a child, due to the smaller size of their hands and wrists) to place their hands inside the mule, alongside its moving parts, and use a wooden shuttle to move the thread back and forth. These machines operated on mechanized systems of thick leather belts overhead, and although they could be stopped in an emergency, the machine's response was hardly immediate. Instead, all the floor machinery would slow down gradually, grinding to a grudging halt according to the laws of inertia. Not surprisingly, injuries were not only plentiful, but serious, often resulting in maimed workers unable to return to

their jobs on the factory floor. As machinery became increasingly mechanized, cotton and woolen production grew exponentially safer, but required fewer skilled workers, and produced a fierce competition for jobs and substantially degraded working conditions, particularly in the glutted marketplaces following World Wars I and II.

If the workday posed extraordinary challenges for laborers, leisure time took on increased importance, and was carefully organized by



*Factory floor exhibit with female worker*

mill management to allow workers to blow off steam

and engage in community recreational activities not totally unrelated to their daily work.

Baseball leagues were officially formed for both male and female employees in 1924 throughout the Blackstone Valley, encouraging company pride and loyalty as mill-sponsored teams competed against each other on weekends, during breaks, and after work hours. Besides offering workers an opportunity to socialize with each other and engage in healthful physical exercise, the new baseball leagues were also a way for recent immigrants to engage in an explicitly “American” activity without abandoning their own ethnic communities. If playing baseball during the day subtly brought French-Canadians into contact with yet another American cultural practice, potentially loosening ties to French-Canadian identity, it did not explicitly compromise Quebecois cultural practices

including church attendance, the maintenance of the French language, or the singing of French songs in parlors and on front porches.

However, if community life and leisure time were increasingly organized by the mills, so too was home life, represented in the museum by the fourth permanent exhibit, the triple-decker. Though multi-family dwellings quickly became associated with the contemporary urban development of the late nineteenth century in Providence, the triple-decker is a particular structure found mostly in the northern cities of Rhode Island, particularly Woonsocket and Pawtucket, that grew up around mills and factories.<sup>430</sup>

According to the Rhode Island Historical Society,

Most of [the triple-deckers] have three separate one-floor apartments, sometimes with both a front and a back porch, or a smaller side porch, at each story. The apartments are typically deeper than they are wide, with a parlor in the front, then a dining room, kitchen, and bathroom off a long central hallway, and bedrooms at the back. Some triple-deckers have six units, with two adjacent apartments on each floor.<sup>431</sup>

Because these types of dwellings were large and located on small, deep lots in urban areas, there was not much space for back yards or front lawns, so “porch life” was encouraged, and not limited to first floor street-side seating. Instead, neighbors could gather on the first floor porches and stoops or sit on their own second and third floor porches overlooking the street, watching passersby or chatting with next door neighbors, whose own porches might be less than ten feet away across an alley. Then, as now, people used their porches to socialize as well as to hang laundry on clotheslines, store supplies, or play musical instruments as they relaxed in the evenings after work.

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<sup>430</sup> For more on the general pattern of multi-family housing that developed in Providence and other mid-sized northeastern cities during this period, see Patricia Raub, “Another Pattern of Urban Living: Multifamily Housing in Providence, 1890-1930” in *Rhode Island History* 48:1 [February 1990]: 3-19.

<sup>431</sup> “Triple-Decker: A City of Porches,” *Rhode Island History* 55:1 [February 1997]: 23.

A primary location of vernacular socialization, these dwellings encouraged the development of tight-knit ethnic enclaves, as multiple generations of one family could occupy the same residential structure, with older married children living upstairs from their parents. Such practices helped to maintain stable ethnic neighborhoods even as labor practices changed and supported the arrival of new populations from different locations around the globe.

In addition to the independently-owned triple-deckers of urban areas, tree-lined suburban company towns developed throughout central and northern Rhode Island in support of the earliest of the mills. Company towns mimicked the earliest of New England villages, with linear street patterns and communal open fields. Featuring single-family housing and manicured lawns alongside local schools, hospitals, baseball fields and company stores, these towns were the brainchildren of shrewd factory owners who realized that keeping a stable workforce meant providing attractive social incentives that kept employees dependent on the corporate mill infrastructure for every aspect of life. Writing on industrial community life, Barbara Tucker describes one of northern Rhode Island's earliest mill villages:

Founded in 1806, Slatersville was...built around a broad road that traversed the town center. The smithy, the grocery and dry goods stores, the church, and the school were on this road. Predictably, the Congregational church stood in the geographic center of the village and was surrounded by a broad common. Toward the outskirts of the village lived more than six hundred textile workers, farm laborers, merchants, and mechanics. Their homes were one- and two-story detached and semidetached dwellings that were built parallel to the main road and separated from one another by garden plots. Each dwelling was occupied by a single family. No house stood isolated from the central community. The mill and its outbuildings, which were owned by Almy, Brown, and the Slaters, did not disturb the traditional sense of community. They were

built at a short distance from the village and were surrounded by fenced and tilled fields belonging to the company.<sup>432</sup>

These sorts of factory towns predominated in the Blackstone Valley of Rhode Island. In these villages, there were also factory farms in which were planted a variety of crops including vegetables, cranberries, oats, hay and corn, foods used to sustain the community as well as the livestock. These towns also had early welfare systems, in which some members of the community were supported by the rest of the community due to birth defects or hardship.<sup>433</sup> In creating mill towns, Slater wanted to create communities, not just places to work, eat and sleep:

To attract workers to his factories, Samuel Slater tried to construct a bridge to the past. The design of his factory colonies, the architecture of his company dwellings, and the institutions he established in the villages conformed in broad outline to those found throughout much of New England a century earlier. This link with tradition was not cosmetic, and it reached into the workplace. The occupations provided for men, women, and children, the conditions under which they labored, and the settlement of wages conformed to custom. Within the context of the new industrial order, familial values were preserved; alterations in the new economic orientation and structure of society do not inevitably lead to major changes in its traditional units or beliefs.<sup>434</sup>

If the exhibits on baseball, recreational activity and triple-decker home life symbolize the vibrant local ethnic enclaves and vernacular practices that flourished even within the constraints of corporate structures, then, the fifth and sixth permanent exhibits at the museum, the Factory Boardroom and the Schoolhouse, symbolize the absolute control maintained by the gradual evolution of the collaborative power of religious leaders and factory managers.

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<sup>432</sup> Tucker 126.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid 136-137.

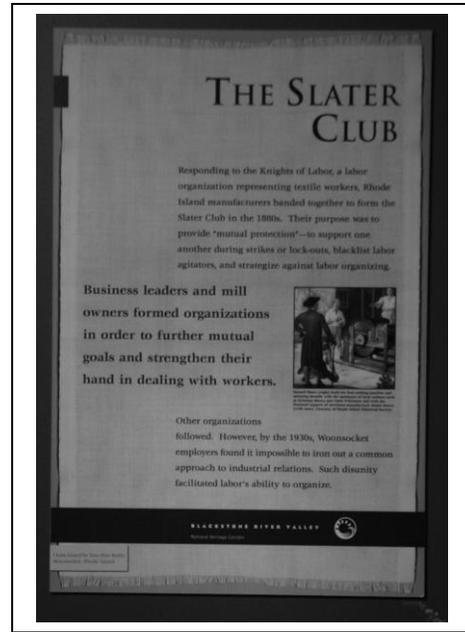
<sup>434</sup> Ibid 139.

The Factory Boardroom features a long wooden table with places for the major players of what was known colloquially as the Slater Club, or the group of factory and mill managers maintaining an economic stake in the industry of the Blackstone Valley. On the walls hang historic likenesses of elites including Slater, local religious leaders, and factory owners and each seat at the conference table

features a button visitors can push to hear quotes written or uttered by these local elites regarding labor practices and the local as well as transnational economic effects of the factory system that began in

northern Rhode Island. Just across from the triple-decker exhibit that features musical instruments, a gramophone, and a parlor suggesting the types of settings in which the members of working families might interact and enjoy “free time,” the Boardroom also includes display cases full of artifacts donated by local families. These artifacts, including lunch pails and eyeglasses, throw the corporate tenor of the boardroom into relief, pitting the overarching economic bottom line against the human-scale material experiences of the individual men, women and children whose daily lives revolved around working in the mills and factories of the most urbanized cities of the Blackstone Valley.

Similarly, the fully realized schoolhouse, replete with figures of a nun and priest teaching a class of French-Canadian students, once again draws attention to issues relating to the maintenance of cultural heritage, as this is the primary location through



*Wall panel in the boardroom exhibit discussing the key players in the “Slater Club,” the elites including mill owners, and civic leaders who pulled the cultural and economic strings of the local textile industry*

which the story of the Sentinelle  
Affair is related to visitors.  
Named for the involvement of  
local French-language  
newspaper *La Sentinelle*, the  
Sentinelle Affair was the name  
given to the political and cultural  
fall-out following the passage of  
the controversial 1922 Peck Act



*The classroom exhibit is one of the most popular exhibits, featuring a full-scale school room with blackboard, student seating, and figures of both a nun and a priest*

by the Rhode Island General Assembly. The Peck Act, written into state law during the administration of French-Canadian Governor Emery San Souci, required that the major school subjects of math, history, civics and English be taught in the English language at all private and public schools throughout the state. Interpreted as a direct attack on the cultural practices of Woonsocket's working class French-Canadians, many of whose children attended private parochial schools which conducted instruction exclusively in French, this law was a source of much controversy not only locally, but also among the French-Canadian populations throughout Rhode Island, New England, and even among relatives in Quebec.<sup>435</sup>

Those opposed to the Peck Act became known as Sentinellistes as the Affair grew to epic proportions and lent a sense of identity to the subcultures it created within the newly divided French-Canadian community of Woonsocket. As the constitutional legitimacy of the Peck Act was debated at the state level, local French-Canadian parishes

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<sup>435</sup> "Bilingual Schoolbook: New England was not Quebec, but the Church was Always Rome," *Rhode Island History* 55:1: 27.

were disrupted, with some individuals finding fault with the church hierarchy for adhering to and enforcing the new law. At stake in this controversy was nothing less than the issues of cultural identity, cultural belonging, and citizenship, as French-Canadians struggled to maintain their ethnic identities even as they gradually (and, in some cases, grudgingly) forged new American identities as well.

The Affair took a decidedly dramatic turn when Sentinellistes not only conducted campaigns to sway public opinion but also officially sued the local Catholic Church. Finally, the Vatican intervened, ruling in favor of supporting the Peck Act, and excommunicating the most truculent of the protestors. In the end, even the most hard-nosed of the Sentinellistes were persuaded that the cause of *La Survivance* was better served by remaining loyal to the Roman Catholic Church and, after signing official statements of repentance, were readmitted to the church a year later.<sup>436</sup>

If it remains the most infamous of the local battles over cultural heritage, the Sentinelle Affair was neither the last nor the most prolonged of such struggles. Instead, this initial rift with the French-Canadian community merely set the stage for later, more insidious and longer-lasting cultural schisms. As labor conditions in the mills and factories worsened (particularly in the wake of World Wars I and II, when the markets were glutted with American textiles produced in support of the war efforts), even the most devout members of the French-Canadian workforce began to turn away from church teachings and the leadership of religious officials and toward the labor unions that had been gradually organizing throughout the United States during the Progressive Era. Mobilizing this story is the seventh and final exhibit of the museum's permanent collection, the International Textile Union Hall.

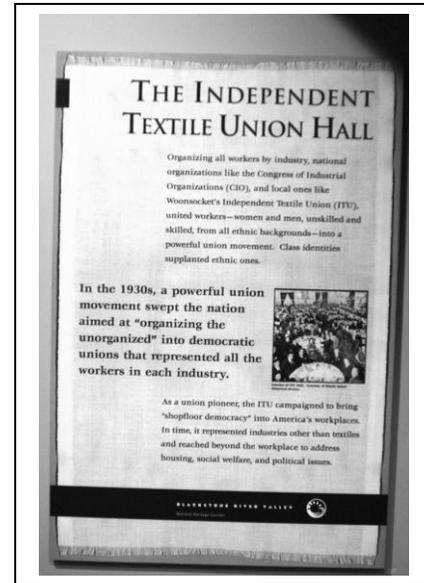
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<sup>436</sup> *Rhode Island History* 55:1: 28.

## *The Triumph of Americanism*

Outfitted with bench seating, a stage and a podium from which labor leaders would address workers, this room also features display cases with union memorabilia including placards, notices for meetings and votes, industry and labor union magazines, and photographs of union gatherings, protests, strikes and individual arrests. Though the central focus of this exhibit is to document the existence of the unions and the significance of the role they played in shifting and transforming the cultural values of local French-Canadian workers, perhaps just as important is the attention paid to the rhetoric which was used to effect this transformation of French-Canadians from immigrants and loosely-aligned members of the United States' body politic to full-fledged American citizens.<sup>437</sup>

In the hallway leading from the schoolroom to the Union Hall is a brief timeline of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, its emphasis on the perennial but nebulous phenomenon known as "Americanism." Related not only to issues surrounding immigration status and legal citizenship but also feelings of cultural belonging to the



*Wall panel explaining the formation of ITU and its cultural implications in Woonsocket and other textile towns*

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<sup>437</sup> Immigrants and their immediate descendants, first understood by themselves and by their adopted homeland as "ethnic Americans" or what President Theodore Roosevelt referred to as "hyphenated Americans" drew attention, particularly in the rhetoric of policy elites of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century to the process of "becoming" American. No longer understood as merely a legal process of conveying citizenship, Americanization was interpreted as a psychological and cultural process enacted through the performance of political and civic engagement signified by voting, working, and participating in all facets of American public life. For more on this rhetorical phenomenon, see Vanessa Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

imagined community of the national body politic, Americanism, understood within the context of the Museum of Work and Culture as a process of “becoming American,” is considered the second organizing theme of the Museum of Work and Culture and is drawn largely from the work of historian Gary Gerstle, whose 2002 monograph on the inter-related cultural economies of work and labor union organization carefully documents and examines discourses of patriotism, citizenship and work as they were mobilized by wage workers and labor leaders in Woonsocket during the early to mid-twentieth century.

Gerstle’s research was undertaken in Woonsocket, Rhode Island during the 1980s as debates about the past significance, present economic and environmental condition, and future cultural relevance of the Blackstone River Valley was being debated by civic leaders



*Wall display featuring quotes from Franklin Roosevelt regarding the values of American national identity and union membership, hanging above a timeline of union formation in the United States*

and policy elites on local and national levels. Indeed, Gerstle was involved in the original planning of the Museum of Work and Culture and contributed research presentations during the museum’s earliest planning stages on the relationship between nationalism and ethnic, working class history. His two main discoveries are “...first, that class conflict in the 1930s was expressed in a language of popular or vernacular nationalism” that Gerstle has since labeled “Americanism”; “and second, that ethnic identity was a far more potent

element in 1930s politics and culture than had been assumed and that it intersected with class and national identities in complex ways.”<sup>438</sup>

Explaining his use of the term “Americanism,” Gerstle argues that the type of feeling he is referencing is not that of Gramsci’s hegemonic “fordist” thesis. Instead, he argues,

Americanism became a class-conscious language for expressing [French-Canadians’] rights as American workers, for asserting the illegitimacy of authoritarian workplace regimes, and for mobilizing workers to exercise a power in politics that equaled or surpassed that deployed by capital.”<sup>439</sup>

This political language, he concludes, helped the workers of Woonsocket to establish a sense of communal identity outside their inherited ethnic identity, gradually assimilating French-Canadians into American culture.<sup>440</sup> Not surprisingly, then, control of this working-class rhetoric of Americanism was constantly being negotiated between the working-, middle- and upper-classes in Woonsocket (and elsewhere). Whoever could control this language, Gerstle argues, could deploy it for either labor reform (workers) or political quiescence (owners).<sup>441</sup>

Like the narrative of the museum as a whole, then, Gerstle’s text offers insight to the force and effect of the distinctly American cultural evolution from the small, interdependent network of maritime and agrarian communities throughout New England

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<sup>438</sup> Gerstle xiv.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid xv.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid 15. Besides making use of the limited extant historical archive (when the factories burned or were destroyed, so were many of their records and artifacts), Gerstle also conducted interviews with living ex-factory workers as one means of attempting to understand how French-Canadians, who had the reputation of being anti-Union and anti-assimilation, came to be the heart of a local labor movement (xx). An important note here is that the fact that this Americanism was both working-class and ethnic does not mean that it was egalitarian or inclusive. Black workers were seldom included, and Gerstle argues that the movement effectively reified ideas of white superiority, despite the fact that even French-Canadians, when they first arrived in Rhode Island, were constructed as racially and ethnically “other” by the already-entrenched Anglo population (xxiii).

and the eastern seaboard to the heavy industry of the nineteenth century and then finally, to the postindustrial service economy of contemporary American life. Like other scholars of deindustrialization and the postindustrial economy, he asserts,

The postindustrial world in which we, as Americans, live today is very different from the industrial one of the 1930s. The service sector now dominates employment, relegating manufacturing to a secondary position. Many more wage earners live dispersed in suburbs than huddled in central cities and often experience no direct connection between their work and their neighborhoods (xxiv).<sup>442</sup>

Reflecting Gerstle's conclusion is the final exhibit space of the museum: a changing gallery in which seasonal and other special exhibits are showcased. Recent projects have included photographic documentation and artifacts associated with several of the still-thriving local orchards that dot the landscape of northern Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts and with fine arts photographs of forms of labor associated with women and girls historically and in the contemporary Blackstone Valley.

Finally, the museum shop, located on the first floor by the reception desk, features a mix of historical materials including maps and scholarly texts (including some primary source materials only available from local publishers) as well as the decorative items that have become the standard fare of museum gift-shops, including thematically-related potholders and dishtowels, postcards, and toys.

### **The Museumification of Industrial Heritage:**

#### **The Museum of Work and Culture and the Economies of Cultural Tourism**

Officially recognized as part of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor project in the Congressional reauthorization legislation of 1990, the Museum of

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<sup>442</sup>Ibid xxiv.

Work and Culture was intended to function as a local visitor's center and museum, and to serve as a model for similar projects elsewhere. Deeply symbolic in its role as the primary institution organizing and presenting the heritage narrative of Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley via an explicitly tourist-friendly apparatus of immersion exhibits, the Museum of Work and culture tells the story of a local industrial past in a way that is meant to ensure a bright post-industrial future. However, its dual role as a museum and visitors center creates a tension between the goals of traditional history museums primarily concerned with knowledge production and the newer models of heritage and civic tourism explicitly associated with the cultural and economic renewal of struggling urban areas.

First proposed in 1985 by the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation (WIDC) in support of local efforts for economic redevelopment in the wake of the establishment of the Heritage Corridor, the Museum of Work and Culture soon evolved into the sort of quasi-public project associated with the urban renaissance success stories of the 1980s and 1990s, particularly those of Baltimore's Inner Harbor; Boston's Faneuil Hall, and even Providence, Rhode Island's own Waterplace Park and Capital Center, all redevelopment projects that drew heavily on themes of memory and local history and/or featured small-scale historical museums. Deeply indebted to the patterns established by these projects, the Museum of Work and Culture is located in an abandoned textiles mill and features a significant permanent collection of exhibits and artifacts, many of which were donated by members of the local community who had either worked in local mills and factories themselves or whose family members had once been employed in local textiles production. One of the most noteworthy local projects to adapt and reuse an

existing industrial structure for civic rather than private residential purposes, the Museum of Work and Culture continues to draw attention and boast a modest but reliable annual attendance level, with a sizable number of visitors coming from within the Blackstone Valley and throughout New England to learn about the industrial heritage of the northeastern corridor of the United States.

A product of the partnership between the City of Woonsocket, the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation, the State of RI Department of Environmental Management, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and finally, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Museum of Work and Culture is recognized as a valuable tourist attraction by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council specifically because it reflects an investment in the local community and encourages local engagement with the Blackstone Valley's pasts. While Slater Mill of Pawtucket is a national historic site, Woonsocket's Museum of Work and Culture is a community-scale venture initiated by local civic leaders to enhance community pride and stimulate the local economy with badly needed tourism dollars.

Accordingly, the Museum of Work and Culture tells a story that is strikingly different in both scale and scope from the narrative of industrial technology and teleological capitalist progress mobilized at Slater Mill. Like the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council as a whole, Natalie Carter, the organization's Director of Operations, celebrates the Museum and advocates similar small-scale tourism projects that integrate locals and globals in coherent historical narratives while maintaining their ties to local community. According to Carter, "The Museum of Work and Culture...definitely comes from the people of Woonsocket" and is a source of pride for the local community. With

its decidedly human scale (at only two stories, the entire museum can easily be explored in a few hours), its focus on the local and its narrative emphasis on the experiences of the working class, the museum has indeed earned the support of the local community. And according to Carter, it is not just long-time Woonsocket residents who support the museum, but also former residents and others with warm collective and individual memories of former northern industrial boomtowns. In visiting the museum, Carter concludes, these individuals support the city of Woonsocket as well as the Blackstone Valley as a whole.<sup>443</sup>

Indeed, Carter and the Tourism Council are hardly the Museum's only boosters. Even before its official opening in 1997, the Museum was heralded for its combination of three elements that marked it as a "renaissance" project. If the museum's first and most obvious cultural contribution is the synthetic narrative offered to unify the various themes of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, secondary contributions are the precedents set by the project, including the unique form the narrative takes, told through immersion exhibits, videos and oral histories, and the project's adaptive reclamation of an abandoned industrial space to support city-wide preservation efforts, cultivate a sense of civic pride in the local built environment, and exploit the availability of Historic Tax credits for public gain. Each of these three elements: narrative content, narrative form, and the historic reuse of a former industrial structure, have come together to contribute to the overwhelmingly positive view of the museum taken by local civic leaders and tourism experts. Accordingly, I explore each of these elements individually below before offering concluding thoughts on their mutually constitutive natures and the

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<sup>443</sup> Natalie Carter, Interview with author June 18, 2008.

ways in which these representational technologies establish the cultural meaning of the museum.

*Memory Lapses: the Narrative Scope and Content of the Museum and Work and Culture*

The most frequently noted of these three elements is the synthetic historical narrative presented at the museum. Since it is also this narrative which most clearly aligns the Museum of Work and Culture with the Heritage Corridor and identifies the project as a visitor's center, it is not surprising that the historical narrative mobilized at the museum is cited as the most significant of the project's cultural contributions to the Blackstone Valley and to the city of Woonsocket. Indeed, even before the museum hosted its official opening ceremony in 1997 (timed to coincide with the City of Woonsocket's annual Autumnfest celebration) the cultural value of its narrative goals had been long-heralded by the *Providence Journal*. Beginning in the mid-1990s, when the project was quickly becoming a reality, reporters interviewed Rhode Island Historical Society director Albert Klyberg and the museum project manager and city planner Nora Walsh Loughnane for details about the narrative that would be featured at the museum. According to Klyberg,

Historical museums ought to function as the looking glasses of a community and one of the things this museum will do is create that. Hopefully, visitors will be able to see their own faces in the mirror and feel their places within the context of history.<sup>444</sup>

Though the museum is admittedly focused on the French-Canadian immigrant experience in Woonsocket, project manager Loughnane, like many of the museum's past and present boosters, stated in her interview, "I think it's a story that's applicable to all

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<sup>444</sup> Marcia Green, "Workers Get Going on Workers Museum" *Providence Journal* December 8, 1995.

nationalities and all types of factory workers.” Indeed, Loughnane also explicitly linked the museum’s historical narrative to contemporaneous employment patterns and social conditions, noting that one of the goals of the museum was to “raise questions about issues related to work [in the 1990s] and what has changed and not changed.” Extrapolated broadly, Loughnane argued, “[The Museum’s narrative] is the history of work in [the twentieth] century.”<sup>445</sup>

Despite this claim, the museum was never meant to upstage the efforts of the labor histories provided at Slater Mill National Historic Site in the neighboring city of Pawtucket. While Slater Mill illustrates the evolution of the local economy from agrarian to mercantile to industrial and mobilizes a narrative of the origins of the American Industrial Revolution by showcasing an impressive collection of the machinery associated with the earliest years of the textiles industry, the Museum of Work and Culture was intended to pick up the narrative where Slater Mill leaves off. Accordingly, while Slater Mill begins its story at the turn of the eighteenth century when the mill first opened its doors, the Woonsocket museum covers from 1860 to the present and focuses on the experience of the workers, rather than on the technology with which s/he labored. According to founding manager of the Museum of Work and Culture Ray Bacon,

The thinking was Slater [Mill] told the story of the conversion from farm to factory. We were going to emphasize the story about the immigrants. And in Woonsocket the immigration was 70% French Canadian, which makes it unique, since they became the majority group.<sup>446</sup>

In addition to its emphasis on immigration, however, there is another significant difference between Slater Mill and the Museum of Work and Culture. Beginning operations in 1790, Slater Mill was once a working textiles mill and the story it mobilizes

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ray Bacon, Interview with author 26 June 2008.

is very much its own. Conversely, though it is housed in a former mill building, the Museum of Work and Culture was created explicitly for tourism purposes, and the narrative it offers is synthetic, intended to unite and summarize the themes associated with the Blackstone Valley as a whole. While the Museum is certainly meant to be an attraction in its own right, it is also meant to provide a governing narrative drawing together the already-identified vernacular historical resources of the Blackstone Valley, including Lincoln's Hannaway Blacksmith Shop, Chase Farm, and Hearthiside Mansion; Gloucester's Ruben Mason House; Burrillville's Grace Note Farm; North Smithfield's Forestdale schoolhouse; Smithfield's Smith-Appleby House and Powder Mill Refuge Wildlife Area; and, finally, Woonsocket's Stadium Theater.

Given its synthetic function, then, perhaps the most important aspect of the narrative presented at the Museum of Work and Culture is its inseparability from the rhetoric surrounding Woonsocket's 1990s-era "renaissance." Nearly every newspaper story and interview published before the official opening of the museum explicitly links the narratives of immigration and factory work presented by the museum not with new historical trends that move labor history from margin to center (though a significant number of labor history museums opened across the northern rust belt during the 1980s and 1990s), but with stories of contemporary economic rebirth in the Blackstone Valley. Indeed, despite its name, the Museum of Work and Culture was never meant to function primarily as a traditional historical museum, but rather as a celebratory heritage project combining historic storytelling techniques with local civic boosterism to lure much-needed tourism dollars to northern Rhode Island.

Often maligned by academic historians expressly because of its connection to tourism and its feel-good approach to the presentation of historical narrative, heritage, with its ethnographic privileging of oral histories and collective memory, has yet become an increasingly popular catchphrase (and cultural phenomenon) among tourism professionals as well as a much-debated area of academic inquiry. According to Rhode Island Historical Society Director of Education and Museum of Work and Culture chief curator C. Morgan Grefe, heritage and history have a vexed relationship, but their goals are not necessarily incommensurable. She admits, “[p]eople like heritage. They feel comfortable with it. They think it’s about them. And history is often seen as the less friendly, less warm version, the academic older brother of heritage.”<sup>447</sup> Still, according to Grefe, bringing together the feel-good reputation of heritage and the rigor of traditional history is not impossible, and sometimes provides a successful model for public education, especially at small local museums like the Museum of Work and Culture, where visitors welcome new information if presented in a subtle and non-threatening form.

Indeed, though she admits her own bias as a trained historian who privileges an archive of carefully documented primary sources over purely ethnographic accounts of the past, Grefe nevertheless asserts that the Museum of Work and Culture, with its celebratory narrative and family-friendly immersion exhibits, might well be a productive template for future historical projects that bring together goals of traditional knowledge production and a new emphasis on economic growth to function as historic tourism. Because even the most traditional of museum visitors express comfort with the technologies of the types of narratives produced at historic tourist sites, Grefe concludes

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<sup>447</sup> Grefe, Interview with author, 19 June 2008.

that these two forces, history and heritage, can and, perhaps, should be conjoined to create a more effective and accurate form of historic tourism. She states, “I think heritage must be informed by the history of the area and I think that history needs to be sometimes a little more anthropomorphized, and add that touch of humanity so it doesn’t strike people as cold.”<sup>448</sup>

Despite this assertion that heritage and history might work productively together at historic tourism sites, the often uncritical celebration of French-Canadian culture and the society that grew up around mill life presented at the Museum of Work and Culture remains problematic, as it is largely based on heavily sentimentalized first-person accounts of Woonsocket’s industrial past. This narrative, while providing useful information about the everyday experiences of certain Woonsocket residents nevertheless obscures other political and economic aspects of the place and period that do not qualify as what Grefe refers to as “feel-good things” or elements that lend themselves to an interpretation as a problem/conflict overcome by a tenacious and tightly-bound immigrant population. Indeed, a growing number of labor historians observing the current museumification of American industry have recently begun articulating a need for labor museums to broaden their narratives from celebratory first-person accounts of obstacles overcome to include and contend with some of the more controversial terrain of contemporary labor politics, including the effects of deindustrialization and corresponding unemployment, the collapse of labor unions, the rise of an increasingly specialized and high-tech service economy, and the evolving discourse regarding immigration and the importation of a low-wage-earning labor force. Additionally, such scholars are also interested in seeing these new museums account for the politics

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

attendant to remembering and memorializing the social, cultural and economic attributes of industrial production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Writing within an explicitly American industrial context, Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, in their 2002 text *Steeltown, U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, take this tact, and their work explicitly accounts for the role memory plays in the creation/re-creation of a given location. While Linkon and Russo, like Grefe, recognize the value of first-person accounts that emphasize the past role of work in local identity-formation, they also express concern with nostalgic and sentimental memories of a unified community identity which, if comforting as a recollection, may never have actually existed. Such collective memories, Linkon and Russo argue, present a simplified and streamlined narrative of coherent working class identity that has the potential to erase members of the community historically located along the periphery due to identitarian categories such race or ethnicity.<sup>449</sup> Indeed, even as commemorative festivals and exhibits like Woonsocket's annual Autumnfest, a celebration of local culture, may help communities to claim a sense of a shared past, they often simultaneously erase differences and inequalities within that past.<sup>450</sup> As an example of such potentially harmful erasures, Linkon and Russo note the emphasis on Italian culture in the annual celebration of the Brier Hill neighborhood in Youngstown, Ohio. Given that the neighborhood also

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<sup>449</sup> Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Additionally, S. Watson, in complicates Linkon and Russo's narrative even further, arguing that industrial sites, given their association with heavy machinery and grueling physical labor, are often remembered as gendered spaces. Indeed, despite overwhelming evidence that women often outnumbered men on mill and factory floors not only throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also in contemporary contexts, industrial spaces, even when reclaimed or repurposed in the present, are often seen as masculine spaces, and American production during its heyday is seen as an act of exclusively male production. S. Watson, "Gilding the Smokestacks: the New Symbolic Representations of Deindustrialised Regions," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1991, volume 9: 68.

<sup>450</sup> Linkon and Russo 241.

had substantial numbers of German-American and African American residents, festivals asserting a coherent ethnic identity can be harmful and perpetuate traditional erasures. Given these pratfalls, Linkon and Russo conclude that even as Youngstown attempts to memorialize the city's industrial past, its residents are not yet dealing with their memories in the most productive and inclusive way. According to Linkon and Russo,

If Youngstown is to be a real community, then, it must understand its past. It must both embrace pride in what was produced here—not just steel but also a strong working-class community—and accept the failure to deal with conflicts involving class and race. It must understand how the history of work and struggle are linked to the landscape and people's ways of remembering. It must never forget the harm inflicted by corporate irresponsibility, yet it must also accept responsibility for tolerating corruption and division.<sup>451</sup>

If the past needs to be remembered, then, according to Linkon and Russo it needs to be remembered in ways that recall but do not sentimentalize past experiences, practices and identities and which are inclusive of all of the populations which contributed to Youngstown's industrial past(s).

Supporting this contention, historians like the RIHS's C. Morgan Grefe warn about the dangers of relying too heavily (or too exclusively) on oral histories collected from local residents who claim to remember the experience of wage labor in mills and factories or to accurately recall that of their family members. According to Grefe and other critics of ethnographic historical approaches, oral histories remain an important element of accounting for the industrial past, but they are at their most effective when they are presented as what they truly are: partial accounts of the past subject to the memory lapses and limited perspectives and experiences of the storyteller/witness. While these accounts are invaluable, particularly in providing museum visitors a sense of past

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid 247-8.

events, places and people that feels both accurate and authentic, it is how they are used that matters most. According to scholars like Linkon, Russo and Grefe, it is important that visitors be presented with multiple retellings of the past so that they are able to recognize the degree to which perspective and personal biography can inform contemporary interpretations of past events, people and places.

Acknowledging the limits of the narrative of work currently presented by the museum, Grefe, in her capacity as educational director of the RIHS, wants to expand the types of sources used at the museum to complicate the narrative of work in the Blackstone Valley generally and the city of Woonsocket in particular. By consulting new sources, the current narrative, which focuses almost exclusively on the French-Canadian immigrant laborer experience, could be expanded to account for “the story beyond the mill,” or the story of the service economies that supported the mills and factories even during the earliest periods of wage labor in the Blackstone Valley. While Grefe acknowledges the extraordinary support of Woonsocket’s French-Canadian community and expresses no desire to displace the narrative of the origins of that community, she nevertheless advocates expanding that story to include narratives of work associated with other ethnic groups, including the Italian and Jewish populations that ran the bakeries and laundries which provided the services needed to sustain the mill town. Such an expanded narrative would also draw attention to the fact that recent immigrant populations, both historically and in the present, usually find work in these types of service jobs, supporting a given area’s main industry or industries before becoming increasingly assimilated and

moving toward the center of the local economy as still newer immigrants take their place on the periphery.<sup>452</sup>

Expanding the narrative of work and culture from one that is primarily about French-Canadians to one that includes the Irish workers who first cut the Blackstone Canal, as well as later populations of immigrants from the Mediterranean, not only provides the museum a new avenue through which to pursue its goal of exploring the related themes of work and immigration (and what theorist Robin Cohen would refer to as the politics related to labor diasporas), but also draws attention to the evolving demographics of the Blackstone Valley. As older ethnic populations, including those of Mediterranean origin, are steadily moving out, their places taken by newly arrived immigrants from Mexico and Latin America, many of whom have never visited the museum and have no inclination to do so. Indeed, according to Grefe, the popularity of the Museum of Work and Culture is currently limited to the strong support of the local French-Canadian community and the school-groups who comprise the largest portion of the annual visitation to the museum.

In other words, despite claims by the museum's founders that the story of the French-Canadian experience can be universally applied to all immigrants across time and place, the limited focus of the museum has actually begun to alienate (or simply fail to attract) some of Woonsocket's residents who do not share or remember the city's industrial heyday and the primacy of French-Canadian cultural practices. According to Grefe, the RIHS's recent efforts to develop a new exhibit for the Museum of Work and Culture has revealed that many local community members have very little attachment to the museum or the narrative presented there, making statements such as, "I've never been

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

and I have no intention of going. It means nothing to me. I don't feel welcome there. I don't see any reason to [go].”

Despite the claims of museum managers and other local boosters including the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, then, the Museum of Work and Culture, while currently enjoying great community support and a healthy annual visitation, may have trouble sustaining its significance as a community museum if it fails to appeal to the city's shifting demographics. In attempts to reach out to new residents (some of whom are also recent immigrants too busy pursuing economic stability to direct much attention to cultural events or attractions beyond church or other similar community functions), the RIHS is conducting research on the current demographics of northern Providence County and attempting to create alliances with local cultural and political nonprofit organizations including Progreso Latino to develop a new exhibit entitled, “Going to Work.”

According to the RIHS, the new exhibit will not only provide insight into the service industries supporting the mill towns of the Blackstone Valley during the early to mid-twentieth century, but also bring that narrative up to the current day, accounting for the newest immigrant populations associated with the area. C. Morgan Grefe states,

...we are looking at some of the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century Italians, the Jewish community, Polish community but then also taking in the African-American community that comes in during World War II. They have a very different African American community in Woonsocket than they do in [the city of] Providence and so that's an interesting juxtaposition... Then moving up to the Latino community as well as Hmong community, the Haitian and French diaspora that is attracted to Woonsocket. We're looking at going right up to the growing African community that is in the [Blackstone] Valley. So it will be mostly twentieth century, with some twenty-first century thrown in through the use of kiosks and other technologies and a changing case, the inclusion of groups as those dynamics change.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Grefe interview with author.

The new exhibit will be explicitly transnational in context, seeking to explore not only what happens to new immigrants when they leave their nations of origins to find work elsewhere, but also why they were drawn away from their homelands in the first place. Referred to by the United Nations as “push/pull factors,” the reasons for leaving one location and choosing/being forced to go to another location is one that reveals much about the evolving cultures and cultural practices of any population. Accordingly, the “Going to Work” exhibit will not only provide new information about the latest immigrants into Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley, but also help to recontextualize the experiences of the long-time French-Canadian population for a younger generation of their descendants.

Given the recent discourse on immigration and its potential impact on the allocation of employment and public welfare resources in the wake of the United States’ 2008 downward slide into recession, such an exhibit is particularly useful in abrogating potential nativist tendencies among a local population that might interpret the Museum’s broadening scope as a betrayal of the older French-Canadian population that has been so supportive of the project since its inception. Reminding long-assimilated ethnic groups (some of whom now identify as “American” and/or “white” rather than with their family’s nation of origin) of the legal difficulties and cultural prejudice they once faced when entering the United States, local public history and tourism experts Morgan Grefe and Keith Stokes hope, might well occasion a sense of solidarity with the new immigrants and refugees arriving on Rhode Island’s shores.

Indeed, when the subject of immigration and nativism comes up, Stokes, head of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, is quick to point out to even the most resistant of

audiences that most nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants entered the United States and particularly the Port of Providence without documentation of the kind now required of immigrants and refugees. Stokes has even gone so far as to remind Rhode Island's sizable population of Italian-Americans of the origins of the painful appellation WOP, a slang term disproportionately applied to Italians that stands for "without papers."<sup>454</sup> Similarly, Morgan Grefe notes how unwelcome even French-Canadians were when they arrived in northern Rhode Island looking for work. Referencing her own previous research, Grefe recalls,

I ... found broadsides from the 1880s, during the French-Canadian influx, that actually called them "the heathen Chine of the east" and the "yellow plague of the east." And we've all seen the racialization of the Irish as African American, but this is the first time I'd ever seen anyone turned into the Chinese. The French-Canadians turned into that...it's the same time period, but to use that kind of fear and that kind of xenophobia...I don't even know if many people in the French-Canadian community realize how much people didn't want them here. And this was coming from the state government. I think reminding people of that can help in some ways.<sup>455</sup>

With eyes trained on the more traditional pedagogical role of history museums as well as the tourism potential of the Museum of Work and Culture (and the financial bottom line that accompanies that potential), the RIHS, the organizational managers of the museum, are clearly dedicated to balancing the interests of history and heritage while maintaining the oft-cited strengths the museum. Continuing to emphasize the local narrative while recontextualizing it within a broader and more contemporary

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<sup>454</sup> Stokes interview with author October 16, 2008.

<sup>455</sup> Grefe, interview with author. The likening of the French-Canadian immigrants in Woonsocket to the Chinese, contextualized within the explicitly anti-Chinese climate of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is not insignificant. For more on the anti-Chinese immigration legislation of this is period, see the 1882, 1884, 1886, and 1888 Chinese Exclusion Acts passed by the U.S. Congress. For more on these acts and their repercussions, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

transnational frame, the museum managers are at once acknowledging and honoring the expectations of their traditional clientele while attempting to expand that base to include new residents, many of whom are immigrants for whom the “Going to Work” exhibit could be extraordinarily relevant and welcoming. In so doing, the RIHS is not only following closely the major tenets regarding museums and civic engagement offered by the American Association of Museums (AAM), but also the most cutting edge (and award-winning) approaches in cultural tourism championed by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. Both the AAM and the Tourism Council advocate an approach that emphasizes civic engagement over traditional attention to the financial bottom line. Governed by a spirit of collaboration that encourages “inreach,” or community input into all aspects of a given cultural heritage asset, as much as traditional “outreach” from museums to the surrounding community, this movement toward a civic engagement approach to museum curatorship and historical asset management takes as its goal the establishment of museums as not only sites of knowledge production, but also as civic centers, places where community members can gather and interact to learn from the past, discuss the present, and plan for the future. According to AAM consulting writer Ellen Hirzy,

Civic engagement occurs when museum and community intersect—in subtle and overt ways, over time, and as an accepted and natural way of doing business. The museum becomes a center where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving. It is an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven, and a trusted incubator of change.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Ellen Hirzy, “Mastering Civic Engagement: A Report from the American Association of Museums,” *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums), 2002: 9. For more the ideas of “inreach” and “outreach,” see Robert Archibald’s “Introduction” in the same text.

Indeed, Hirzy goes on to argue, “[m]useums have a civic role beyond that of cultural symbol, economic engine, and provider of educational experiences,” and suggests that smaller-scale museums have set powerful precedents in this regard. If Hirzy is right, then the Museum of Work and Culture seems to be attempting to become just such a precedent-setting museum, taking as its first step the collaboration with long-term and newer residents of the Blackstone Valley in an effort craft an expanded narrative of work and culture. However, if the AAM’s mandate of civic engagement is to become fully operational at the Woonsocket museum, the museum and its managers at the RIHS must commit to not only expanding and reframing the museum’s synthetic organizational narrative, but also reevaluating the technologies used to present that narrative to the public. Accordingly, in the next section, I examine the ways in which the Museum of Work and Culture currently presents its narrative and evaluate whether or not the museum, via its use of immersion exhibits and its location in an abandoned textiles factory, has actually created the new paradigm for museum exhibition with which it has been credited by popular critics and local boosters.

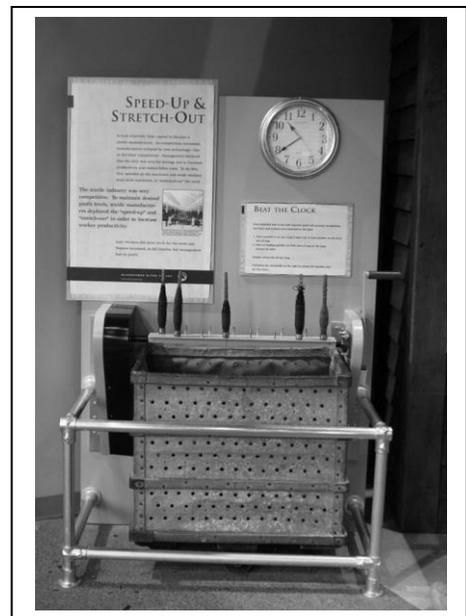
***“The Gem in Its Place”: Immersion Exhibits, Adaptive Reuse and the Politics of Authenticity***

With its emphasis on the everyday experiences of the wage-laboring working class, the Museum of Work and Culture has also enjoyed much popular praise for the gritty accuracy of the historical narrative presented within its walls. As the museum opened to public acclaim in October of 1997, *Providence Journal* reporter Joseph R. LaPlante noted that the museum “immerses [visitors] in an America most of us have only heard about” and the *Journal*’s Chris Iven supported this claim, noting that even long-

time Woonsocket residents admitted to learning a great deal at the new museum.<sup>457</sup>

Indeed, according to Ivens, local resident Judy Merritt stated, “I’ve heard some stories of the mills and sweatshops...[b]ut I didn’t really have any conception of what it was like until I saw these displays.”<sup>458</sup>

This was exactly the response the museum creators were hoping for, says Ray Bacon, both a founding and current manager of the museum. In a 2008 interview, Bacon explicitly stated that the museum was meant to be “hands on.” Accordingly, museum creators not only decided to install immersion exhibits recreating sites associated with the industrial history of the Blackstone Valley, but also to populate those exhibits with elements, including artifacts and games, that invited visitors to touch the displays and otherwise interact physically with each other and with their immediate environment.<sup>459</sup>



*This game, which challenges visitors to complete a task in a race against the time clock is only one of the “hands on” exhibits at the museum*

If the narrative presented at the Museum of Work and Culture has the ring of authenticity to it, then, it is likely because of the technologies through

which that narrative is told. In their 1998 text *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, historians David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig argue that

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<sup>457</sup> LaPlante, “Through the Working Class; The new museum, which will present a down-to-earth look at life in local textile mill communities, will open to the public this weekend,” *Providence Journal* October 9, 1997.

<sup>458</sup> Chris Iven, “Museum Tells Story of Mill Life,” *Providence Journal* October 12, 1997.

<sup>459</sup> Bacon interview with author.

Americans tend to trust heritage sites and museums more than textbooks or other traditional authorities claiming studied objectivity, a thesis upheld by the American Association of Museums in 2002.<sup>460</sup> Fearing both the potential personal agendas of professors and authors as well as the connections between textbook publishers and a free market economy, most Americans prefer first-hand accounts of the past. When witnesses are unavailable, they accept in their stead museums and historic sites incorporating oral histories and authentic artifacts, as well as those which are located on or make use of a place or structure related to the persons, events, and other elements discussed within. Accordingly, the Museum of Work and Culture, with its heavy reliance on ethnographic research methods and the locally-donated or salvaged artifacts featured in the recreated environs of the seven immersion exhibits, was destined to be a crowd pleaser. In addition, though, the museum boasts yet another claim of authenticity: it is housed within an abandoned textiles mill that might have faced the wrecking ball of urban renewal had it not been adapted expressly for the civic purpose of creating a local heritage museum and tourist attraction.

With the narrative scope and the limits of ethnography discussed in detail above, in this section I turn my attention to the technologies through which the museum's dominant narrative is mobilized, arguing that popular claims related to the supposed authenticity of the museum narrative are largely due to the appeal of the recreated sites featured in each of the museum's immersion exhibits, as well as to the fact that the museum is housed within an abandoned textiles mill. In other words, at the Museum of

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<sup>460</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen offer statistical evidence that Americans rank museums among their most trusted source of historical information, data supported in 2002 by Ellen Hirzy. For more, see Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 105. See also, and Hirzy "Mastering Civic Engagement: A Report from the American Association of Museums."

Work and Culture, Marshall McLuhan's contention that the medium is (at least part of) the message most certainly holds true.

The sites recreated within the museum, particularly the Church of the Precious Blood, the shop floor, the schoolroom, and the union hall, are all sites to which local residents maintain both symbolic and material connections, as is the former Lincoln Textile Mill itself. Just as the places reproduced within the immersion exhibits are storehouses of local collective memory, so too does the mill building testify not only to the past of the Blackstone Valley, when textiles production was the lifeblood of the local economy, but also to the Valley's contemporary economic struggles and the effects of deindustrialization on the local built environment. Only a little more than a decade ago, after all, the Lincoln Textile Mill too stood empty, a symbol of dereliction and corporate betrayal. Now, even if the museum were to close its doors tomorrow, the mill building would continue to stand, as the museum creators were successful in their application to have the building added to the National Register of Historic Sites. The Museum of Work and Culture not only preserves the past by telling the too-often marginalized stories of the working classes of the Blackstone Valley, then, but also by preserving a deeply symbolic piece of the industrial-era built environment.

In 1990, as the museum's narrative was being formulated, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based architectural firm of Christopher Chadborne and Associates was hired to "shape the overall storyline for the museum" using the types of "immersion exhibits" that have been popularized at the Smithsonian and the National Holocaust

Museum of Washington, DC.<sup>461</sup> Chadborne's firm, which had never before designed for a museum, crafted the seven permanent exhibits now on display, populating full-scale reproductions of a farm house, a church, a mill shop and factory floor, a triple-decker tenement, an executive boardroom, a school room and a union hall with period artifacts including spinning wheels and wood stoves as well as items donated by local residents, such as eyeglasses, lunch pails, shoes, and other possessions once belonging to mill workers.

On the museum's opening weekend, *Providence Journal* reporter Joseph LaPlante cites the strength of these carefully detailed immersion exhibits, providing what theorist Michel de Certeau refers to as a "touring narrative," or textual tour, of the museum in which LaPlante specifically remarks not only upon many of the types of artifacts found in the exhibits but also the sensory experience to which they contribute:

You walk inside to find a replica of Precious Blood Church where "Memay" or "Nana" and "Pepay" or "Grampa" went to Sunday Mass. You stand in the schoolroom where they spent too little time before going to work, with its tiny desks and seats bolted to the floor, ink wells at the ready, a lesson on the blackboard, the room trimmed in oak wainscoting from the now-closed Voke Street School. You touch the rough-hewn boards from the farmhouse walls in the Canadian village that they left by a train to America where they went to work in the mills to make a better life. You walk across the front porch and into the kitchen of the triple-decker where they lived, where your people ate their meals, gossiped about their neighbors and stuffed earnings into envelopes for the monthly budget. You feel the power of the mill boardroom where your ancestors never dared enter. And you feel the uplift of the union hall where they summoned the strength to face down the men in the boardroom. The Museum of Work and Culture immerses you in an America most of us have only heard about.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Julie Taylor Thorson, "Evaluating the Implementation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor: The Museum of Work and Culture and Visitor Center, Woonsocket, RI." Unpublished Master's Thesis. 1998: 149.

<sup>462</sup> LaPlante, "Through the Working Class," *Providence Journal* October 9, 1997.

Indeed, even as LaPlante assures readers that “you” will be immersed in “an America most of us have only heard about,” he nevertheless admits that the visitor is not likely to be looking at the heritage of strangers, implicitly acknowledging that the community-scale of the museum makes such a possibility unlikely. Instead, his word choice indicates that “you” will be experiencing the places and objects that have formerly been passed down through first-person accounts, seeing where “your people” ate and where “your ancestors” stood strong against factory owners and cultural elites. According to LaPlante, the narrative presented is one in which visitors will have a personal stake primarily because the museum is explicitly focused not on elites but on the working class, and tells the story of working populations with gritty accuracy.

LaPlante and other critics within the popular media were not alone in making such claims. According to the *Providence Journal*, the current managers of the museums, and even local tourism experts, Blackstone Valley residents enthusiastically attest to the accuracy of the narrative, explicitly citing the detailed reproductions of each exhibit. “Everything is duplicated right to perfection,” a Woonsocket resident whose mother worked in the mills stated, “It’s all true, every ounce of it.”<sup>463</sup> Another visitor marveled at not only the accuracy, but also the scope made possible by the combination of narrative and interactive, lifelike immersion exhibits, stating, “They didn’t hide anything... They showed all the worker’s troubles and their successes.”<sup>464</sup>

Interviewed when the museum opened in 1997, then-Executive Director of the RIHS Albert Klyberg also insisted that the museum never intended to “try to pretty up” the story of wage labor at textile mills in the Blackstone Valley. Instead, the goal was to

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<sup>463</sup> Chris Iven, “Museum Tells Story of Mill Life,” *Providence Journal* October 12, 1997.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*

hold a mirror up to contemporary working class residents, allowing them to see themselves in a historical narrative too often limited to politicians, religious leaders and other civic elites. Still, according to Klyberg, there is beauty in the true story of the strength of the working class: “This is the beautiful history of the people of Woonsocket,” he stated at the time of the museum’s opening, “their life at home, their life in the workplace.”<sup>465</sup>

According to the museum’s visitors and managers as well as local media and tourism experts, then, the immersion exhibits lend credibility to the narrative. Beyond its claims that the museum puts visitors *in medias res* (in the center of things) using authentic materials and carefully detailed reproductions of places with strong memories attached, LaPlante’s account operates on the same assumptions as the immersion exhibits themselves: that the recreated surroundings will be familiar to the observer, and will stand in for original places that have been lost or irrevocably altered. Indeed, immersion exhibits, with their careful replication of historic sites, appear “authentic” to visitors by appearing “believable” in relation to their expectations, enabling community members to encounter the exhibits and authoritatively affirm, “yes, that’s exactly how it was.” Like the oral histories which have shaped the narrative presented at the Museum of Work and Culture, immersion exhibits also trade powerfully on subjective experience for their impact, and not primarily on the strength of verifiable facts.

The technologies of museum exhibition have long been discussed by museum studies experts, with contemporary scholars in fields such as Performance Studies, English and Anthropology wrestling extensively with the attendant cultural politics of the presentation of artifacts as transmitters and symbols of human stories. In their 1991

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<sup>465</sup> Klyberg quoted by LaPlante. Ibid.

collection entitled *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, editors Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine present the work of such scholars in addition to case studies authored by museum managers and curators, many of whom acknowledge the fraught politics of authenticity that necessarily accompanies any form of exhibition. These authors also express interest in reconciling traditional approaches to representation and display with an increasing contemporary interest in interactivity and civic engagement. While Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims perceptively acknowledge that effectively providing visitors with a sense of authenticity has less to do with “factuality or reality” than it does with establishing authority over a narrative and allowing the visitor to do the same, Elaine Heumann Gurian goes one step further, asserting that museum professionals need to embrace rather than fight the performative nature of museum exhibition. Working from the premise that content and presentation are co-constitutive, Gurian argues, “somewhere in the history of exhibitions, certain nonrational strategies were deemed theatrical.” She perceptively observes historians’ and museum professionals’ reticence to be seen as in any way aligned with theatre, a profession that for much of its existence has been associated with fakery, storytelling and disreputable individuals. According to Gurian, although “[m]useum professionals do not want to be in show business; we want to be in academia” the uncomfortable truth remains that “exhibitions are in part public entertainment.”<sup>466</sup>

Despite the fact that museums, particularly those dealing with cultural history, are necessarily involved in the business of public education as well as public history and cultural tourism, many museum professionals continue to feel that recognizing all of

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<sup>466</sup> Gurian “Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities,” *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums), 2002: 182.

these roles equally and relying on explicitly theatrical exhibition technologies might somehow compromise the seriousness or apparent importance of their work.

Nevertheless, the truth remains that interactive museums and historic sites featuring immersion exhibits and other “hands-on” strategies associated more closely with “heritage” than traditional “history” are becoming increasingly popular. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Gurian concludes that museums cannot effectively teach if they fail to gain a visitor’s attention or stimulate discussion within and between the discrete and disparate populations in attendance.

If the Museum of Work and Culture is considered closer to the “heritage” end of the continuum of historical study, then, it is not only because of the type and content of the synthetic narrative it relates, but also because of the technologies via which that narrative is presented. The immersion exhibits are site-specific insofar as they feature reproductions of specific places frozen in time even as they are transported into the present by their inclusion in the museum and their location within the protective walls of the rehabilitated textile mill. Contextualized by the limits of the narrative of which they are an integral part, the exhibits not only feature artifacts performing in the present as cultural symbols, a role materials have long played within museums, but also recreations of places/environments that mobilize individual and collective memories. While some of the places recreated within the museum’s walls still exist (such as the Church of Precious Blood and parochial school classrooms), all have changed significantly and irrevocably over time. The Church burned down and was rebuilt; the schoolroom was the site of cultural struggles over language that were eventually settled, creating different types of classrooms in which English is now the only language of instruction; the shop floors have

been abandoned and their outdated industrial machinery permanently hushed; the union halls have become largely irrelevant in an economy that no longer supports widespread industrial production within the borders of the continental United States.

The immersion exhibits are performances of places which, even if they remain, are long gone, existing now only as replicas frozen and locked in time and space, reconstructed according to dominant narratives of the local past(s). Intended expressly to awaken the sensory experiences attending “original” structures and sites that performance theorists and philosophers would argue never existed outside the minds of first hand witnesses to the city’s industrial past, these exhibits are not *representations* of a documentable past as much as they are *simulations*. According to Jean Baudrillard, while “representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and the real...Simulation...stems...from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.” Collected together as an assemblage of recreated industrial sites, the exhibits of the Museum of Work and Culture memorialize industrial-era cultural artifacts, sites, communities and practices, providing simulations of sites of struggle and retuning them to match the sentimental pitch of the narrative they accompany: one celebrated for the gritty and unflinching accuracy with which it presents the oppression of immigrant laborers even as each obstacle is viewed in the sanguine light of its potential to bond together a working class community.

### ***The Politics of Place: Adaptive Reuse and Historic Preservation***

If the immersion exhibits, one of the most recent technologies associated with popular museums around the country, remain the most-often cited source of visitor’s

senses of authenticity, the Museum of Work and Culture's location in a rehabilitated textile mill certainly provides additional context for these realistic and detailed reproductions, as well as for the narrative the exhibits mobilize. While a number of the former textile mills and factories of the Blackstone Valley (and throughout Rhode Island) have recently been purchased by multi-national real estate corporations and converted into residential complexes, comparatively few have been rehabilitated for explicitly civic use by local contractors. The Museum of Work and Culture, conceptualized from its earliest stages as a source of civic pride and engine of economic redevelopment, was intended to be a project making use of extant local resources, from materials to labor.

The site selected for the museum was a mill structure now known as the Lincoln Textile Mill. Built in 1915 for the Bernai Worsted Company and used to house the production of military garments and fine menswear, the building changed hands when its owners moved operations to South Carolina in the 1960s, joining the ranks of a host of other textiles employers that relocated to the southern Sun Belt of North America. After almost a decade of abandonment, the Lincoln Mill was again used for textiles production, this time for women's wear, but closed its doors for good in 1990 after nearly thirty years of on-site production.<sup>467</sup>

While the outside façade of the building maintains much of its original appearance, the interior of the factory (featuring the open floor plan that enabled total surveillance of the workers) required subdivision to accommodate the large scale of the

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<sup>467</sup> *Rhode Island History* 55:1. The rehabilitation of the mill for use as the Museum of Work and Culture officially began in 1995, with the first phase of the project focusing on stabilizing and preserving the brick façade as well as replacing the windows and roof. The second phase involved conditioning the interior by working on plumbing, electricity, and mechanical systems. After the rehabilitation was completed and the exhibits had been created, they were installed by Hadley Exhibits of Buffalo, NY. Thorson 191.

exhibits, some of which stood two stories tall.<sup>468</sup> Such changes to the interior necessarily altered the original character of the space, transforming it from one constructed and outfitted primarily according to the needs of labor to those better suiting the display of artifacts as well as the free flow of visitors from one exhibit to another. If the narrative of the museum is about the transformation of work in the Blackstone Valley, this transformation is certainly evidenced by the conversion of an industrial work space to a site accommodating tourism, one of the strongest sectors of the postindustrial economy of the United States and throughout North America.

However, this transformation is not necessarily visible or apparent to visitors, many of whom have never experienced either an operational or abandoned factory. The “architecture of power” and the structure of organized surveillance associated with the open floor plans of mills and factories, discussed in detail in earlier sections of this chapter, are rendered largely invisible within the newly constructed walls of the Museum of Work and Culture, since all that remains of the original mill structure is the façade and some of the original hardwood flooring. Julie Taylor Thorson, who documented and explored the ramifications of the Lincoln Textile Mill rehabilitation as it was undertaken during the 1990s, concludes:

Prior, the Lincoln Textile Building exhibited an open plan, which is characteristic of mill buildings. The open plan provided flexibility in configuring space for industrial needs and enabled movement of materials, equipment, and workers. With few interior obstructions, there was greater ventilation and light. Also, in an open plan, managers could more easily supervise workers. These aspects cannot be as easily understood in the reconfigured interior.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid 191.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

Though the adaptive reuse of the building for civic purposes is an admirable goal, and one which adds to the authenticity of a museum dedicated to telling the stories of workers, very little of the historic aspect of the mill remains. Instead, it is the aura and the symbolism of the rehabilitation which signifies heavily to visitors, serving as a reminder that the past, even when painful, can be rehabilitated and re-used to make a new present and shape a new future.

Indeed, the symbolism of reusing the Lincoln Textile Mill is not lost on museum founder and current manager Ray Bacon. In 2008, Bacon, himself a long-time Woonsocket resident of French-Canadian ancestry and former mill worker, commented on the politics of adapting the abandoned mill structure into a heritage museum that tells the stories of the industrial heyday of the Blackstone Valley and the workers who have remained loyal to the cultural legacies of the textiles industry long after corporate betrayal in the form of lay-offs and relocation might have led them to view the abandoned mills as symbols of urban dereliction and their own irrelevance within a postindustrial economy. According to Ray Bacon, the reuse of the Lincoln Textile Mill for civic purposes has set an important precedent for the Blackstone Valley, and suggested new uses for elements of the built environment which can still testify to the contributions made by former industrial workers, many of whom have been pushed to periphery in the high tech climate of the post-industrial service economy. Bacon states,

This building...is a good example of how you can convert something. At least the story you tell, its...what I call, the gem is in its place. In other words if you take this story and you bring it to North Smithfield and you put it in a brand new building I don't think you're going to get the same effect as if you come in and say this is where it was. There's the river. This is only one of many. We have upstairs an overview of Market Square showing it in 1930 with all the mills that used to be here...So this kind of gives you an idea, a feel for the community.

Just as the narrative and the exhibits which mobilize that narrative have been applauded for their combined attempt to reconcile the depiction of workers as both victims and forceful agents of change within the industrial cultural economy, so too does the reuse of an abandoned factory serve to mitigate some of the negative associations the contemporary community of Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley might have in relation to the historic mill structures and the dilapidated state in which many remain today. When asked if industrial structures like the Lincoln Textile Mill, many of which were abandoned within the past sixty years, now stand primarily as symbols of contemporary unemployment and a nation-wide pattern of cultural and economic disinvestment in urban areas, Bacon is quick to point out the ways these sites, when appropriately rehabilitated, can also act as symbols of hope and powerful storehouses of memories recalling the proud industrial past of the United States. Bacon argues,

Some people look at the past and they say “well, it was awful” but people tell us what they did on a day to day basis, and I include my parents in there, was to be part of this revolution called the industrial revolution... But when manufacturing goes to other countries we’re losing a very important part of our nation: the ability to make things... I worked with people in the mills when I was in college and I saw how hard those people worked, but I also a lot of smart people who could do things. I mean who could take these spools of yarn and with your own knowledge, put them together to blend a certain color. Not everybody can do that.<sup>470</sup>

Bacon also perceptively notes that cities with more traditionally beautiful built environments, such as Newport, owe much to the industrial pasts of less tourist-friendly urban sites in northern Rhode Island. Indeed, Bacon asserts, “the [Newport] mansions were built by people who worked right here.” If the term “dark tourism,” or tourism associated with negative, macabre and/or oppressive aspects of the past, could be applied

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<sup>470</sup> Bacon, Interview with author.

to any aspect of the Blackstone Valley's industrial past, then, according to Bacon it would be the largely undocumented and unacknowledged work immigrants have done on some of Rhode Island's most famous and financially lucrative tourist attractions, both during the Gilded Age and contemporaneously, and not the representation of the well-documented factory work undertaken throughout the cities of the Blackstone Valley.

And Bacon is not alone in this assessment. Though neither the staff of the RIHS nor the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council assert as strongly as Bacon the ways in which Newport's success as a vacation spot and tourist attraction has been attained largely "on the backs" of northern Rhode Island's immigrant and working class populations, both organizations resist the idea that exploiting the tourism potential of an industrial past could be interpreted as oppressive and abusive of the working class or as constituting "dark tourism." C. Morgan Grefe, of the RIHS, asserts, "I think we shouldn't project that [the industrial past is] bad [or] that people were as horrified by it as we might think they were." While Grefe is quick to admit that she has no desire to simplistically celebrate that past either, she argues for an interpretation of former industrial practices and sites that balances a sense of worker oppression with worker empowerment, stating,

I think we know from the historical narrative how...exploitative, dangerous, [and] troubling, these situations were. But at the same time we need to allow for space that people also saw them in positive ways: first job coming to a new country, first job when you're growing up, a place where generations of a family worked.<sup>471</sup>

While Grefe also admits that some residents of southern New England, where mills and factories grew up along the various waterways wending their way through southern Massachusetts, Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut, might view these former industrial structures as symbols of corporate betrayal, most would rather see the old buildings

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<sup>471</sup> Grefe, Interview with author.

stabilized and rehabilitated for new uses. According to Grefe, despite arguments that newer buildings would be more environmentally-friendly and less expensive to build than rehabbing an older industrial structure, “[p]eople here hate seeing a mill destroyed. They are a part of this landscape that is as familiar to people as the trees are on Blackstone Boulevard.” Indeed, Grefe joins Ray Bacon and Natalie Carter of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council in asserting that even abandoned factories falling into disrepair need not necessarily call up exclusively negative associations or memories. Instead, Grefe argues that even if people have such negative associations, the factories still provide those individuals with a sense of connection to times past, when their identity was enacted largely in relation to a specific type of wage labor, the cultural practices that grew up around that work, and the communities it helped to constitute. If the technologies of heritage and history can work together to create historical tourist attractions that function effectively as visitor’s centers and traditional museums simultaneously, then, the secret to the success of such a strategy might be recognizing that “the space [is] as complicated as the history” represented within it and acknowledging the inevitable element of performativity in the exhibition of artifacts, but also the space within which they are displayed.<sup>472</sup> Indeed, Grefe seconds Bacon’s conclusion regarding the power of authority created by having “the gem in its place.” According to Grefe, “if a museum is about work, then I’d rather have it in a space that was used, that retains a kind of cosmic energy of work having been done there rather than a new kind of space.”

Joining Grefe in this conclusion regarding the authority and accompanying sense of authenticity established by setting a synthetic narrative of work within the context of immersion exhibits housed in a rehabilitated industrial structure is historic preservationist

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<sup>472</sup> Grefe interview with author.

Julie Taylor Thorson. According to Thorson's unpublished master's thesis on the evolution of the Museum of Work and Culture throughout the 1990s, "By reusing a mill building, the museum/visitor center project has the potential to heighten awareness of the importance of factory structures, particularly those from the twentieth century."<sup>473</sup>

Not all theorists agree with this interpretation however. In his influential 1976 text *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell effectively updates Thorstein Veblen's turn of the century treatment of the dynamic relationship of work and the constitution of "free time" and argues that even relying on an former or present site of labor to authenticate the tourist experience of industry and production makes little difference to observers, who view both work and the site in which it is enacted as fetish objects. Observing the European practice of touring still-operational factories, MacCannell asserts, "[w]herever industrial society is transformed into modern society, work is simultaneously transformed into an object of touristic curiosity."<sup>474</sup> He goes on to note that work in modern life has meaning only as a fetish, and can only be made sense of when observed in the bodies of others. MacCannell states,

It is only by making a fetish of the work of others, by transforming it into an "amusement" ("do-it-yourself"), a spectacle (Grand Coulee), or an attraction (the guided tours of Ford Motor Company), that modern workers, on vacation, can apprehend work as a part of a meaningful totality.<sup>475</sup>

Observing the first bloom of the postindustrial service economy now so well-documented by contemporary sociologists and economists, MacCannell was uniquely poised to comment on the role of work in modern life, and his work remains compelling

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<sup>473</sup> Thorson 210.

<sup>474</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976):

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

precisely because he rightly concludes that industrial notions of work, most notably the hard manual labor conducted by working class men, women and children in factories and mills, have become increasingly difficult for people currently living in the fully industrialized global West to understand and housing a synthetic narrative and full-scale immersion exhibits replete with period artifacts in a converted factory may do little to change this fact since the built environment of industry too becomes subsumed as fetish within the spectacular tourist economy. Referred to as the “museum effect” in which an object, once displayed within or as part of a museum, takes on spectacular significance, and the spatial performance of the factory-as-workplace ceases to exist outside of this spectacular economy of exhibition.

Following this line of reasoning, popular claims that Woonsocket’s Museum of Work and Culture offers an account of the industrial past that is somehow more unflinchingly accurate because of its narrative emphasis on the working class, its use of immersion exhibits and/or its setting within a rehabilitated textiles mill is certainly specious. This museum is no more truthful than any other, but it does succeed in offering what seems to visitors to be a more persuasive, authentic and authoritative account due to these representational technologies. In the end, it is the museum’s creators’ and curators’ willingness to rely unapologetically on the strength of those exhibition strategies more traditionally associated with heritage than history which seems to have succeeded in providing a sense of authenticity to locals. And this is no small success, since the goal of the museum is not just knowledge production but also the stimulation of civic pride. Accordingly, the Museum of Work and Culture relies on its heritage technologies not just to document past work, but to undertake its own cultural work in the present. Whether or

not it has proven as successful in realms beyond the cultural, particularly in its goals to stimulate the local economy, is considered in the next and final section.

### **“A Renaissance in Use”: Cultural Tourism as Urban Renewal in Woonsocket, Rhode and the Blackstone Valley**

If the Museum has now achieved both local community support and state-wide recognition for its celebratory narrative of local heritage and its role in attempts to rejuvenate downtown Woonsocket, it nevertheless suffered several significant funding setbacks early on that now seem to have foretold the financial struggles which continue to plague the project more than ten years after its official opening in 1997. Originally conceived as an independent tourist entity, the museum was intended to be self-supporting by re-using an existing structure to receive Historic Tax Credits and by maintaining an on-site restaurant and rented office spaces.<sup>476</sup> According to first manager of the museum Ray Bacon, the project was intended to be “40% museum, 60%” commercial,” off-setting expenses with museum admissions, restaurant profits, and commercial leases.<sup>477</sup> But as the project developed and grew in scope, plans for the restaurant and office space were abandoned, and additional partners and funding sources were sought. Without the guidance of experienced historians and museum curators, however, the National Endowment for the Humanities grant that would eventually make the museum a reality was initially denied. Finally, in 1991, the Rhode Island Historical Society agreed to contribute the required “museum expertise” needed to administer grants, work with curators and designers to make exhibits and programs, provide

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<sup>476</sup> Thorson 117.

<sup>477</sup> Bacon interview with author.

materials from the RIHS collections, advise on content and interpretation, guide general museum maintenance and operate programming.<sup>478</sup> As a result of this collaboration between civic leaders and historical professionals, the Museum received an NEH grant of \$350,000 and \$50,000 in matching funds.<sup>479</sup>

Though more than half of the \$3 million budget for museum was provided by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, the NEH, and Community Block Development Grant funds, private organizations also donated to the project.<sup>480</sup> Local corporations and civic institutions including CVS Pharmacy, Fleet Bank, the Rhode Island Foundation, Citizens Bank, the Woonsocket Rotary Club and Braear Mutual Insurance all donated significant funds.<sup>481</sup> Additionally, local labor organizations contributed \$40,000 to the project. These sizable contributions helped close the nearly \$500,000 funding deficit reported by the *Providence Journal* as late as February of 1996, just twenty months before the scheduled opening of the museum in October of 1997.

Initially heralded as an unqualified success by local boosters and the state's most significant media outlet, the *Providence Journal*, by 1999 even *Journal* reporters admitted that financial troubles continued to plague the small museum and visitor's center. When the museum was originally proposed, city officials believed it would need

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<sup>478</sup> In May 1996 the RIHS submitted a proposal to become the managers of the museum, receiving 15% of the museum budget (government share for federally run museums is usually about 38%). The estimated annual operating budget for the museum was \$128,000, according to the RIHS May 1996 publication "Management of the Woonsocket Visitor Center. Thorson 145-147.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid 126-7.

<sup>480</sup> According to several articles in the *Providence Journal*, the Heritage Corridor Commission provided \$575,000; the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, \$150,000; and the city of Woonsocket, \$1,015,000 in block grants. Originally, the local AFL-CIO committed to raising \$100,000 for the project as well, though that amount failed to materialize by the time of the museum opening. See Marcia Green, "Workers Get Going on Workers Museum," *Providence Journal* December 8, 1995. See also Joseph R. LaPlante, "Museum about \$500,000 Short of Goal," *Providence Journal* February 26, 1996.

<sup>481</sup> CVS, headquartered in Woonsocket, donated \$125,000 over five years, Fleet Bank donated \$50,000, the RI Foundation contributed 20,000 and Citizens Bank, the Woonsocket Rotary Club and Braear Mutual Insurance provided \$15,000, \$10,000 and \$5,000 respectively. Ibid 137-139.

to attract 80,000 visitors per year to operate in the black. After the Rhode Island Historical Society became involved and the project turned away from the originally-proposed commercial aspects, director Albert Klyberg reduced that number to the more realistic goal of 30,000 annual visitors.<sup>482</sup> Although \$90,000 was expected to be earned at the door, with the rest of the operating budget coming from the gift shop, retail space, city grants, and reception rentals, after its first full year in operation, the museum had attracted only 15,000 visitors, leaving the new managing institution, the Rhode Island Historical Society, to face the museum's \$70,000 deficit.<sup>483</sup>

Although most museums do not depend solely on admissions, instead relying on government grants, endowments, capital campaigns, and other private fund-raising, the Museum of Work and Culture has not been successful in applying even these strategies to ease the gap in its budget, continuing to remain an expense, rather than a financial asset, to the City of Woonsocket, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and the Rhode Island Historical Society.

To offset current operating costs, the museum's managers Ray Bacon and Anne Conway have planned a new exhibit of their own. Called the Treasury of Life, this exhibit is located at the far end of the first floor of the museum and features three walls of the type of safety deposit boxes found in banks. This imaginative "exhibit" takes the form of the other immersion exhibits but is in fact the physical manifestation of the Museum of

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<sup>482</sup> Bob Wyss, "Like Those it Enshrines, Work Museum Struggles to Get By," Providence Journal September 5, 1999. In her research on the Museum of Work and Culture before it had officially opened, however, independent researcher Julie Taylor Thorson notes that this figure also remains overly optimistic. According to Thorson even Slater Mill, a well-publicized national historic site already in operation for 76 years received 42,000 visitors in 1996, and 35,000 in each of the previous two years. Accordingly Thorson concludes that it is unlikely for a new museum with a local focus to come close attaining that level of visitorship in its first few years in operation. For more on these figures, see Thorson 218.

<sup>483</sup> For information about the anticipated revenue, see Thorson 150-151. For more on the museum's financial struggles after the first year see Wyss.

Work and Culture's Capital Campaign. The Campaign is meant to get the Museum operating in the black for the first time in its decade-plus tenure, but it is also intended to encourage Rhode Island residents and other visitors to preserve their own family histories. According to Anne Conway, who oversees the marketing strategies associated with the museum,

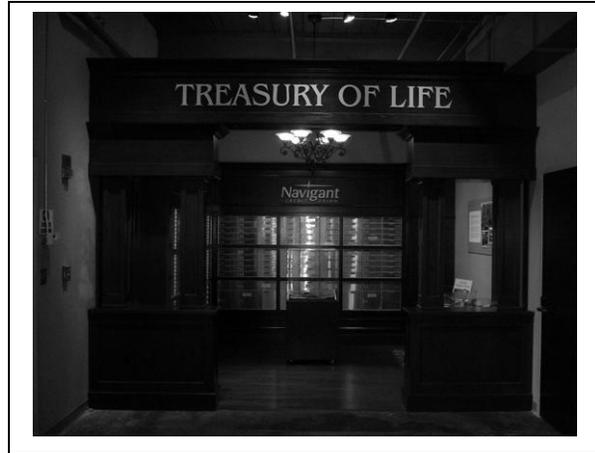
This is a program that we developed that is getting the community involved, and sort of entic[ing] them to save their own family history... On the front of each box rather than having a number like in a bank it's going to be the family names so not only will they be able to preserve their history but they'll also be remembered by having a family name on the box.<sup>484</sup>

While many capital campaigns, particularly those associated with museums and other non-profit organizations, result in acknowledgement of the donation through formal thanks or through legacies left on an element of the built environment (in the form of the renaming of a space or structure or the posting of a plaque), the Treasury of Life exhibit takes its cue from the other technologies operating within the museum. According to Conway, "it's more than just buying a brick in the wall, or a plaque...it's also an interactive project."

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<sup>484</sup> Anne Conway, Interview with author 26 June 2008.

The Treasury of Life project has already enjoyed a degree of success, with a number of boxes sold, some of which were requested even before the construction of the exhibit was completed in 2008. And this capital campaign is only the latest of fund-raising efforts intended to create enough



*The view of the new Treasury of Life exhibit from the outside*

of a surplus to establish an endowment that will in turn provide a sustainable future and independent operating budget for the museum. Besides purchasing a safety deposit box in the new exhibit or making donations directly to museum, supporters have also been

offered the opportunity to sponsor one of the seven exhibits. If these fund-raising efforts are successful, the Museum of Work and Culture will cease being a drain on the resources of the RIHS and instead serve as a boon to the organization, hopefully removing the financial strain



*Inside the exhibit, a view of the safety deposit boxes, each featuring the family name of an exhibit sponsor*

under which the Society has been operating since its involvement with the

museum and resolving the tensions between the venerable historical society and its heritage-oriented counterpart in northern Providence County.

Indeed, RIHS Executive Director Bernard Fishman and Director of Education C. Morgan Grefe admit that the relationship between the Society and the Museum of Work and Culture has been difficult for reasons beyond the differences in their philosophical approaches to historical narrative. According to Grefe, the Museum of Work and Culture has always had a very different relationship to the RIHS than does the John Brown House, which is owned and operated exclusively by the Society without the addition of public monies. And this peculiar relationship, admits Grefe, has been the cause of some tension:

There are people who want the Museum to be independent. There are people who want it to be part of the Society but almost kind of a sovereign entity. There are the people who wish that it was more merged with the Society as a whole... So now [the Museum of Work and Culture] have their own Capital Campaign that goes in and raises money for them and that money goes to them. It doesn't really go to the rest of the Society. And they have their own advisory committee and their own board that is working with that as "the friends of" the Museum of Work and Culture.<sup>485</sup>

In other words, while the RIHS has provided the financial lifeblood of the Museum of Work and Culture, first in agreeing to take on the management of the museum in order for the project to secure NEH funding and then in supplying much-needed operating funds, the museum's fund-raising projects are aimed at establishing the museum's financial independence. While the successful completion of this goal will necessarily benefit the RIHS as well, removing the added financial burden of supplementing the operating budget of the museum, it will not return the RIHS's initial (and very costly) investment—an investment that nearly bankrupted the society and embroiled the

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<sup>485</sup> Grefe, Interview with author.

organization in controversy when it resorted to selling one of its most prized artifacts to secure its own solvency.<sup>486</sup>

If the economic crisis occasioned by the Museum of Work and Culture's dependence on the already struggling budget of the RIHS and the relatively small number of visitors to the museum over its 12 year tenure has disappointed those who hoped the museum would be an unqualified boon to the city of Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley as whole, Grefe is not surprised by the fact that the museum has failed to live up to such high expectations. Indeed, museum studies experts admit that even the most successful museums cannot usually provide the stimulus for a struggling economy that civic leaders hope for. According to Grefe, many museum creators are using the wrong business model, relying too much on attendance and gate receipts, and making assumptions that the museum will constitute enough of a tourist draw to compel visitors to stay in the area overnight, to dine, or to engage in retail shopping. Grefe states,

[Museum creators] often plan things for what they hope will happen and then quickly find out that's not the case and then, if they're a new museum [they] don't have an endowment to help... So I think they're very dangerous especially in this economy, where we have a marked decrease in heritage tourism and history tourism, for years now. Museums are not doing well, so they make me nervous as something to tie hopes to financially. I think they're importance lies elsewhere and beyond—it's an intellectual and cultural commodity to me [and] that transcends the financial goal.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Facing significant financial hardships, the RIHS was forced to sell one of its collections most notable treasures, a desk valued at more than \$11 million that had previously been displayed at the John Brown House. Specifically citing the Society's financial commitments made to public history projects including the Museum of Work and Culture and the potential Heritage Harbor Museum planned for Providence, both commitments made before his arrival as Executive Director, Bernard Fishman defended their decision to auction off valuable furniture to maintain the solvency of the historical society. For more on this controversy, see Jennifer D. Jordan, "Society Faces Historical Decision," *Providence Journal* June 24, 2004 and the follow-up to this pieces authored by Cathleen Crowley, "Historic Society Ponders Selling Treasures," *Providence Journal* June 25, 2004.

<sup>487</sup> Grefe, Interview with author.

If the museum has achieved success as a cultural institution within the Blackstone Valley, attracting a modest but stable annual visitation rate, the financial success of the institution, and its role in stimulating a renaissance in the local economy, is a good deal more qualified, having relied heavily on public monies rather than private investment. According to Julie Taylor Thorson, writing before the museum officially opened in 1997, “federal dollars total over four-fifths of the project’s cost. This calculation recasts the museum/visitor center from a federally-leveraged project to one that has majority federal support.”<sup>488</sup> Additionally, state support remained sound and the RI Department of Environmental Management kept their financial commitment. The City of Woonsocket also donated a sizable chunk of money, both toward the work on the building and through annual budget support, in addition to donating the Lincoln Mill building. And according to Woonsocket Mayor Susan Menard, in a July 1996 press release, the \$5000 annual operating budget support would be appropriated from federal sources, not from local taxes.<sup>489</sup> While a great deal of public money supported the project, the museum has not yet met its goal of becoming self-sustaining, and has not necessarily had measurable success in returning the city and state’s sizable financial investment, although the project was successful in stimulating new work for local contractors and construction crews.<sup>490</sup>

If the financial benefits of the museum to the City of Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley have largely failed to materialize as yet, its role as part of the cultural tourism landscape of the Blackstone Valley remains somewhat more nebulous. According to museum founder and manager Ray Bacon, the opening of the museum, in association with the Heritage Corridor, marked the first time in history that the city of

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<sup>488</sup> Thorson 159.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid 161-165.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid 217.

Woonsocket could rightly be referred to as a “tourist destination.” Accordingly, Bacon concludes, “There’s no question in my mind that the city of Woonsocket, the citizenry, the people around here now take pride because this is a community museum. We have more volunteers in this museum than any other segment of the Historical Society.

Similarly, Natalie Carter of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is loath to judge the Museum of Work and Culture according to the traditional logic of the financial bottom line. Instead, she argues that projects like the museum should not be seen as “renaissance projects” akin to those undertaken throughout urban environments throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While many of those projects (including the ones undertaken in downtown Providence, RI, discussed in detail in the next chapter) have relied on creating new tourist attractions such as civic centers, shopping malls and sports stadiums, Carter asserts that the Museum of Work and Culture should be viewed as part of the “renaissance in use” that is occurring throughout the Blackstone Valley. Reticent to use the culturally-loaded term “renaissance” at all in relation to the projects undertaken in northern Providence County, Carter states, “I think what we’re building toward is a sustainable industry. And I think sustainability really is our buzzword for here... it’s not a renaissance in building. It’s a renaissance in use...”<sup>491</sup>

The difference, according to Carter, is an emphasis on using what currently exists to benefit the local community rather than creating tourist attractions to woo visitors from elsewhere. Citing the theories and successful efforts of Dan Shilling and the Civic Tourism movement to which the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is closely aligned, Carter believes that a “renaissance in use” is about “working with our communities...to make [them] realize [that] what’s good first for the residents will attract the visitors...”

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<sup>491</sup> Carter interview with author June 18, 2008.

For Carter and the BVTC, this approach constitutes a more organic and “resilient” type of tourism, as well as one that can adapt when there are changes to the region, its economy, its built environment and its populations.<sup>492</sup>

As part of the tourism efforts undertaken throughout the Blackstone Valley, the Museum of Work and Culture is one attraction among a diverse range of other cultural and environmental attractions. Besides drawing attention to the museums and other site-specific cultural tourism attractions, the BVTC, under the leadership of founder and local resident Bob Billington, has also participated in or spearheaded efforts to clean and revitalize the Blackstone River for recreational and educational purposes, building boat ramps and bicycle paths to increase access to the river, and offering ranger-guided environmental tours to local school children on its privately operated boat.<sup>493</sup>

In addition to efforts at environmental clean-up, the BVTC and the city governments of the Blackstone Valley have also attempted a renaissance in land use management, reclaiming the Blackstone River for recreational use as well as establishing clean and safe public open space throughout urban downtown locations in Woonsocket and Pawtucket.<sup>494</sup> Observing the combined efforts of the city governments and the BVTC, Thorson concludes, “While not maintaining an industrial use, the Museum of Work and Culture and Visitor Center does support the land use goal of reinvesting in existing urban areas.” Attracting a modest visitation of 10,000 visitors per year, the museum and visitor center has also helped to reestablish Market Square as a dynamic center of the community.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Thorson 213.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid 206.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid 208.

While it has certainly not (yet) achieved all of its goals, the Museum of Work and Culture as an individual cultural institution can be considered only a qualified success. However, perhaps the more significant contribution made by the project is the re-scaling and re-conceptualization of “urban renaissance” it has helped suggest in its role as part of a larger, regional revitalization project centered around community-based cultural tourism. Rather than evaluating one institution, particularly a cultural history museum, the type of institution that has a notoriously limited ability to achieve financial solvency on its own merits, it is perhaps more useful to conceive of urban renaissance not as a series of large-scale independent projects, but as a thematically linked group of small-scale attractions which do not shy away from representational strategies explicitly intended to attract locals and instill a sense of civic pride. Within smaller communities or other locations with limited traditional tourist attractions such as sandy beaches, convention centers and four-star restaurants featuring valet parking, it is perhaps better, suggests the template organized by the cities and towns of northern Rhode Island and the BVTC, to stimulate the economy through smart-growth strategies that become sustainable over time rather than offering a quick boost to the economy. That quick boost, suggests the BVTC and other civic tourism experts, can sometimes be hard to sustain, as it is usually based on the influx of federal and other public monies such as the kind which originally financed the Museum of Work and Culture. While that museum might have foundered (and still might) as a stand-alone institution, its role as part of a larger cohesive narrative governing an entire region might be enough not only to sustain it as a single institution, but also to lend it long-term credibility as the one site that links together and provides a coherent narrative for the others located throughout the Blackstone Valley.

**Chapter 7:**  
**From Shipping to Shopping:**  
**The Urban Waterfront as a Spectacle of Post-Modern Leisure**

It will be our purpose to show to the outside world, that the city of Providence, situated at the head of Narragansett Bay, entered through a harbor not excelled by any on the Atlantic seaboard, with railroad terminal facilities, affording close and direct connection with all parts of the world, with its healthy sea breezes and salubrious climate, its well regulated sanitary laws, clean streets, and abundant supply of pure water, its low death rate, a city well governed and amply protected by a most efficient fire and police department, its great number of churches, its educational opportunities, consisting of public and private schools, a free public library. Brown University, and Friends School; its great banking capital and many charitable institutions; with all these combined, we shall try to prove that this city is more desirable for a place of residence and for business purposes than any other.<sup>496</sup>

“We’ve gone from being a blue-collar city to a white-collar city and a visitor destination.”<sup>497</sup>

In this chapter, I examine the contemporary cultural landscape of Waterplace Park in downtown Providence, Rhode Island. This urban water park opened during the mid-1990s as part of a downtown “renaissance,” decades in the making that involved moving train tracks, re-routing the Providence River and excavating the remains of the Great Salt Cove, which was originally a central geographical feature of colonial Providence. This urban park, located in the valley joining the east and west sides of the city, was intended to geographically reunite the central business district with the city’s downtown edges and create a valuable civic space at the foot of the majestic State House located on Smith Hill, just north of the park. The 77-acre parcel of land of which Waterplace is the centerpiece is known as Capital Center. In addition to housing the urban water park, this parcel now

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<sup>496</sup> *Board of Trade Journal* Volume 1, No. 1 November 1889: 5

<sup>497</sup> Mayor Vincent “Buddy” Cianci quoted in a *USA Today* article. Quote reprinted in Jonathan Saltzman, “*USA Today* Recognizes Providence’s Renewal,” *Providence Journal* 31 December 1996.

also features a high-rise luxury housing complex, the new national headquarters of GTECH, a leading gaming technology and services company, and a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse. The parcel also backs against the Providence Place Mall, a "festival marketplace" featuring upscale retail shopping as well as a movie theatre and several full-scale restaurants. The new Capital Center now serves as the jewel in Providence's renaissance crown, creating an outdoor civic center and urban water park from the giant asphalt parking lots that dominated the cityscape and obscured the rivers during midcentury. Post-Renaissance Providence, it seems, has achieved the very goals set in the nineteenth century by the Board of Trade, recreating the city as an ideal place to both live and do a booming business. Indeed, at a recent conference for the Society of American City and Regional Planning Historians, plenary speaker Ann Breen, of the DC-based national non-profit, The Waterfront Center, specifically cited Providence as a success story of urban redevelopment.<sup>498</sup>

Drawing on the small body of extant scholarship on the Providence renaissance as well as similar studies of locations including Syracuse, New York and Baltimore, Maryland, I question whether this downtown redevelopment has been as overwhelmingly successful at creating civic space in Providence as its boosters would suggest.<sup>499</sup> While I am interested in adding my voice to the chorus of urban studies scholars whose critiques complicate the decidedly pro-tourism, pro-business rhetoric of urban renaissance, my

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<sup>498</sup> In 2003 Providence received the Rudy Bruner Silver Award for Urban Excellence "in recognition of the city's resurgence and its success in the complex process of urban placemaking." Leazes and Motte xix.

<sup>499</sup> The only text offering a detailed chronicle the Providence renaissance is Francis Leazes and Mark Motte's *Providence, the Renaissance City* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004). For work on Baltimore, see Marc Levine, "Downtown Redevelopment as an Urban Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Baltimore Renaissance" *Journal of Urban Affairs* 9.2 (1987): 103-123. See also, John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889-1943* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006). Finally, see Judith Walton "Landscapes of Fun: Rewriting Downtown Syracuse" Unpublished dissertation, Syracuse University, 1997.

work here moves beyond accounting for the material inequalities occasioned, exacerbated or simply ignored by urban renaissance planning. Focusing exclusively on Providence, a city whose European settlement dates back to 1636, I examine the historical narratives referenced by city planners in their proposals as well as in the built environment their work has produced. In this chapter, I pose a series of questions related to the politics of urban redevelopment in a historic city, and the creation of new urban landscapes that are meant to function as performative monuments to certain aspects of the past. First, what are the politics of transforming water routes that once bustled with domestic trade into contemporary sites of urban leisure? Second, what/does this landscape of leisure, which finds a new commercial use for a derelict urban waterfront, signify about contemporary local and national urban culture and the populations which visit these types of sites and/or call them home?

According to geographers Francis Leazes and Mark Motte, the authors of *Providence: the Renaissance City*, Rhode Island's capital city makes a valuable case study regarding the processes of contemporary urban renaissance for at least five reasons. First, Providence shares many characteristics of other urban areas throughout the United States; second, its size and population define it as a mid-sized city, making Providence a more nationally-applicable model of urban renaissance than traditionally-referenced cities including New York, Chicago, Boston and even Baltimore. Since most US cities are mid-sized, Leazes and Motte argue, Providence is a valuable example. Third, the city's governmental structures and uses of federal monies are akin to those of other urban areas of comparable size. Fourth, it was largely those public monies which cleared the path for Providence's "rebirth." Finally, because Providence's urban redevelopment was primarily

enabled by federally-funded physical manipulation of both the built and natural environments (in the form of nineteenth-century train tracks and historic waterways that have enjoyed continuous maritime industrial use for nearly three hundred years), this often-overlooked northeastern city can provide valuable information about how to manage and make use of such historical resources.<sup>500</sup>

While each of these five reasons for studying a mid-sized rustbelt city located precariously between the flashier urban expanses of New York and Boston are certainly valuable independently, it is the cultural implications of the entire set which primarily inform the research questions shaping my particular project. As Leazes and Motte note, it is precisely because of Providence's traditionally limited significance in comparison to larger urban areas in the northeast that it escaped the wholesale clearance of buildings and entire city blocks associated with post-World War II urban renewal.<sup>501</sup> The maintenance of Providence's historic cityscape, characterized by architectural anchors including the Providence City Hall, State House, and Union station of downtown, the colonial and Victorian structures of College Hill to the east, and the triple-decker tenements of Smith Hill located just northwest of downtown, has enabled contemporary Providence to boast a visible historical legacy stretching back to the city's eighteenth-century founding by exiles from Massachusetts Bay Colony, if not even earlier.<sup>502</sup> If it has indeed become a tourist-friendly "destination city," Providence's success is based on

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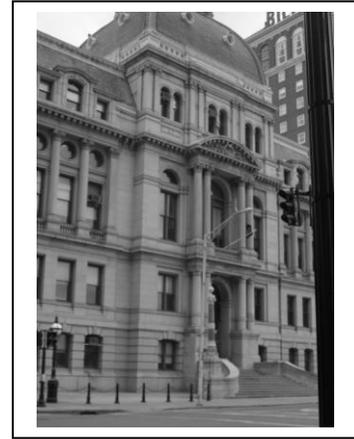
<sup>500</sup> Leazes and Motte 9-10.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid xxiv. For more on the urban renewal of the 1940s and 1950s, see Jon C. Teaford's *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990). For more on the causes of dereliction which often lead to more contemporary demolition in the name of urban renewal, see John A. Jakle and David Wilson's *Derelict Landscapes: The Wasting of America's Built Environment* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992).

<sup>502</sup> Though the American Indian placenames associated with most areas downtown have long since disappeared, the rivers coursing through the landscape are still known as the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck, which come together to form the Providence River.

the usable pasts articulated through the cultural landscapes of the present, particularly the new centerpiece of downtown, the urban water park known as Waterplace.

Waterplace Park was officially dedicated in 1994, though construction on the park began in 1991 and the land on which it is located, known as Capitol Center, is a product of planning struggles that dating back to the late 1970s.<sup>503</sup> Indeed, it was during this period that a



*Providence City Hall*



*State House*

confluence of policy elites began researching the viability of moving the train tracks that effectively bisected downtown.<sup>504</sup> Almost ten years later, after the track relocation was complete, planners, architects and politicians turned their attention to the rivers which similarly carved Providence's

downtown into lots deemed too small for substantial development.<sup>505</sup> By the 1990s, federal monies had been applied to move the rivers and train tracks and create new pedestrian walkways, clearing the way not only for a new urban park, but also for commercial office high-rises, luxury domestic dwellings, and a massive retail and

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<sup>503</sup> Leazes and Motte 77.

<sup>504</sup> Among the decidedly pre-renaissance plans for Providence were the *College Hill Plan* of 1959, the *Downtown Providence 1970* plan, the *Civic Center Plan* of 1970 and *Interface Providence*, published in 1974. For more on each of these plans and how they informed the earliest renaissance efforts, see Leazes and Motte 53-66. The *Downtown Providence 1970* plan did suggest the relocation of the train tracks that cut through downtown, but also advocated the demolition of much of the architecture of the downtown core. For this reason, the plan was not adopted.

<sup>505</sup> The *Interface Providence* plan of 1974 did not suggest moving the rivers, but it did advocate creating a new traffic pattern throughout downtown. The need for new patterns was eventually the impetus behind moving the rivers in the 1990s. Leazes and Motte 64.

entertainment complex now known as the Providence Place mall. By the time the mall opened in 1999, Capitol Center had become a kind of “tourist bubble” in the center of a rejuvenated (and much cleaner) downtown Providence, forming a complex cultural landscape that both serves and employs local residents and workers as well as tourists staying at the new hotel and Convention Center attached to the Providence Place mall via a skywalk. The goal of this chapter, then, is to consider the ways in which this location functions as a performative cultural landscape that preserves traces of Providence’s past industries and populations. I argue that the “tourist bubble” encompassing Waterplace Park and the Providence Place mall presents a dominant narrative of Providence’s pasts, but also note the vibrant ways in which traces within the contemporary cultural landscape, when contextualized by the vernacular practices of specific populations, can also challenge those dominant narratives.<sup>506</sup>

**Waterplace Park as a  
Contemporary Cultural  
Landscape**

According to French  
philosopher Michel de Certeau,



*Contemporary Waterplace Park*

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<sup>506</sup> Drawing on statements made by public officials including mayors and governors, Leazes and Motte make clear that creating Capital Center as a tourist area was intentional. Though they refer to Capital Center as a “tourist bubble” only after the completion of the Providence Place mall, the authors also cite Governor Joseph Garrahy regarding the tourist potential of the area, making clear that tourism was indeed on the state’s agenda as early as the 1980s, while Capital Center was still in the design phase. For more on Capital Center as a tourist bubble, see Leazes and Motte 145. For more on Garrahy and planning for tourism, see Leazes and Motte 113.

there are two ways to tell “spatial stories,” or narratives of places as they are practiced by humans and other agents.<sup>507</sup> A touring narrative of Capital Center in downtown

Providence might look a little something like this:

*Start at Kennedy Plaza, where the buses are lined up belching exhaust, where working class teenagers argue violently about custody of their young children alongside local college students plugged into iPods. The post office will be at your back. Remember when the river went underneath it. Walk along the plaza to City Hall. Think back to the 1980s, when you could get a quick hamburger or hot dog at Haven Brothers, the mobile diner that used to be parked outside, offering a respite from winter nights for a mixed bag of locals: city officials in suits ducking out for a quick bite during or after work; working stiffs in thermal shirts, fiberfill vests and steel-toed boots; young punks from suburbia in garish plaids and safety-pinned jackets, tattoos and piercings barely visible under mismatched layers of winter gear. Haven Brothers was a fixture for years, and aptly named. A haven for locals. Take a right. The Biltmore Hotel, once Providence’s only luxury accommodations, will be on your left, across from the Fleet Bank ice-skating rink. Keep walking straight, past the new Westin Hotel on your right and the Convention Center on your left. If you can afford it, stop in at the new Ruth’s Chris steak house in the bottom of the GTECH World Headquarters and have a drink before wandering back out onto the Riverwalk. This tree-lined concrete walkway can take you north to the State House, east to College Hill or west to the Providence Place Mall.*

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<sup>507</sup> For more on his definition of “spatial stories,” see Certeau , *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984): 115-130. Certeau also provides helpful definitions of “space” and “place” which differ from those advanced by other scholars of cultural landscapes. According to Certeau, “[a] space exists when one takes into consideration the vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of mobile elements” (117). He goes on to argue that while place “is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence,” space “is a practiced place” whether that place be a written or other type of text (117).

This type of touring narrative takes the traveler on a journey that, even if undertaken alone, nevertheless traces a path someone else has trod before. This narrative is *experiential* (based on past experience and predictive of present experience) and *performative* (insofar as it is based on the notion of committing an action), but it is also *directional*, and makes explicit reference to bodily engagement and physical activities including walking and looking.<sup>508</sup> This strategy of telling place not only relates how to get somewhere, but also what one can expect to see and experience on the way.

The second type of narrative associated with Certeau's "spatial stories" is the "mapping narrative," which describes the cityscape according to proximity and relational place: A police officer could tell a weary tourist, "Waterplace Park is across the street from the Providence Place Mall. You can't miss it."<sup>509</sup> As this example makes clear, mapping narratives rely on the fact that a given site can be documented and represented by specific latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates—that the site, in this case Waterplace Park, can be pointed to on a map: X marks the spot. You are here.

The reason these types of narratives matter, according to Certeau, is because they demonstrate how vernacular spaces can be practiced, documented and told by the people who use them. Cities are not constituted by independent sites that coldly determine the activities taking place in their environs. Instead, they are dynamic locations, always in the process of coming into being through the practices of agents in the space. It is this reliance on practice found in Certeau's work which so clearly points to one of the most problematic aspects of identifying and interpreting cultural landscapes: it is difficult to figure out where they are, and even more difficult to determine how to "tell" those sites,

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<sup>508</sup> Ibid 119.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

or communicate their cultural significance to those who might be unfamiliar with them. As John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski's edited collection entitled *Everyday Urbanism* makes clear, one person's parking lot might be another person's place of business.<sup>510</sup> An alley can be a homeplace, and the curbs of an affluent neighborhood on trash day can be a shopping center.

But perception is not the only complication in cultural landscape studies. As scholars have noted, when it comes to cultural landscapes, there may be no one physical site to point to and exclaim, "there is the cultural landscape." The landscape may be recursive (only occurring in certain seasons or for certain occasions), or it may be temporally specific (a cultural landscape obvious in the morning may well disappear by the afternoon). According to geographer Richard Schein, a cultural landscape is "a geographically specific exercise that requires interrogating the role of landscape in social and cultural reproduction, as well as understanding the landscape within wide social and cultural contexts."<sup>511</sup> But Schein does not stipulate that geographical specificity entails the identification and documentation of one singular point on a map or given terrain. Instead, as Jeremy Korr notes, a cultural landscape may be cognitive or have a physical presence, and often, it will exist in a number of manifestations—in people's memories, emotions, thoughts, bodies and practices, as well as in locations that can be charted via traditional means.

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<sup>510</sup> John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999). See also, *Everyday Urbanism: Margaret Crawford vs. Michael Speaks: Michigan Debates on Urbanism: volume 1* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004).

<sup>511</sup> Richard Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87:4 (1997): 660.

## **Water Routes for Work and Play: The Self-Guided “Riverwalk” Tour**

Though the Rhode Island Historical Society offers “Riverwalk” tours on spring and summer evenings before scheduled Waterfires are lit, most visitors and residents experience Providence’s recently uncovered and rerouted rivers independently, as they make their way to and from local restaurants, government buildings and architectural attractions or as they run the most rudimentary errands. While such informal walks along the Moshassuck, Woonasquatucket and Providence Rivers are easily undertaken in these piecemeal forms, it is no easy task to take a more formal and comprehensive self-guided tour that will offer a complete narrative of downtown Providence’s evolution with a clear beginning, middle, and end. There exists no authoritative map outlining the best approach to traveling the scenic walkways that line Providence’s three rivers, and locals working outside the tourist industry do not seem to recognize the term “Riverwalk” in relation to their city. Indeed, though Waterplace Park and its constitutive series of concrete walkways were completed by 1994, when I returned to the city more than a decade later in 2008 specifically hoping to take a tour traditionally made available to visitors, even Rhode Island Historical Society personnel were not exactly sure what I meant when I said I wanted to tour the “Riverwalk.” Though this term is used in the *Providence Journal* and by real-estate developers to refer to the interconnected series of walkways wending their collective way along the Moshassuck, Woonasquatucket and Providence Rivers as they pass through the city’s downtown, it is clearly part of the tourism lingo rather than the local vernacular.<sup>512</sup> Indeed, despite attempts made in the mid-1990s to establish a heritage

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<sup>512</sup> Much of the tourist terminology associated with urban renaissance throughout the 1980s and 1990s overlapped, with terms used in Baltimore, Syracuse and other waterfront areas experiencing vast changes in their waterfront built environments adapted for use on other locations such as Providence. Accordingly, it is

trail that would guide visitors through downtown Providence and offer views of some of some of the city's most significant architectural structures, such a tour still has not been officially established and made accessible to visitors or residents.<sup>513</sup>

By 1996, however, the *Providence Journal* reported the permanent placement of 21 fiberglass panels that would deliver the story of Providence its cultural, architectural and civic development. According to *Providence Journal* reporter Richard C. DuJardin, by 1996 Waterplace Park had become “more than a place to contemplate the city’s waterways.” Instead, DuJardin argues, the park and its series of connected walkways are also a genuine element of historic tourism. DuJardin argues,

[the park] has also become a place to learn more about the remarkable transformation of Providence from a small farming village to a city that regularly sent scores of trading ships on voyages around the globe—a city that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could also boast of being a major industrial center, with 1,200 mills and manufacturing plants that sent their finished goods throughout the nation.<sup>514</sup>

If a tour-able “Riverwalk” exists in Providence, then, it is largely as result of these strategically-placed panels, designed by architect William D. Warner from materials including maps and historic images furnished by the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS). According to Albert Klyberg, president of the Historical Society in 1996 when the panels were constructed and posted, the placards have effectively become “an outdoor exhibit for [the RIHS]. They are extraordinarily well done, and the placement is good.”

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not surprisingly that Providence planning and tourism elites would adopt for their own use the language associated with one of the most oft-cited renaissance projects, the Riverwalk of San Antonio, Texas.

<sup>513</sup> In 1995, the *Providence Journal* reported the creation of a heritage trail through Providence that still has not materialized. See Katherine Imbrie, “A Providence Promenade Heritage Trail is a Civilized Stroll Through the City, Past and Present,” *Providence Journal* 31 March 1995.

<sup>514</sup> See Richard C. DuJardin, “Riverwalk Retraces City’s Steps,” *Providence Journal* 3 October 1996.

Walking along the rivers and reading the panels, Klyberg asserted in a 1996 interview, is “almost like coming to one of our lectures.”<sup>515</sup>

The particular benefit of the panels, of course, is that it enables visitors and residents alike to take a self-guided tour of any part of the riverwalk at any time, and to do so at their own pace. The panels are easy to read and include clear illustrations of the evolution of the city’s water routes since the first Anglo settlers arrived in 1636, as well as demonstrating the inextricable connection between those water routes and the development of cultural and civic life in Providence. Though the panels are site-specific, not chronological, and can therefore be read or experienced in any order, I began my own 2008 “riverwalk” where the “Mile of History” tour leaves off, at Roger Williams National Memorial (the site of Williams Providence homestead) on North Main Street. This grassy, shaded park plays host daily to Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design students who recline on the lawn to read or sketch, but at night it is home to Providence’s itinerant population, some of whom leave their blankets and belongings, the only proof of their residence, under benches during the day.

This park, located east of the Moshassuck River, is still technically part of the East Side of Providence, as the rivers that flow through the city constitute the line of demarcation between the flat plane of the downtown financial core and the hilly terrain of “The Neck,” the site of Roger Williams’ original settlement. If a visitor starts at Roger Williams National Memorial, as I did, they will find Providence defined as “a thoroughfare town” on a panel depicting a Rhode Island stone-ender, the type of small house that was so often constructed throughout the state during the colonial period. The

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

panel also documents the original town center and tells the story of the town's destruction in 1676 during King Philip's War.

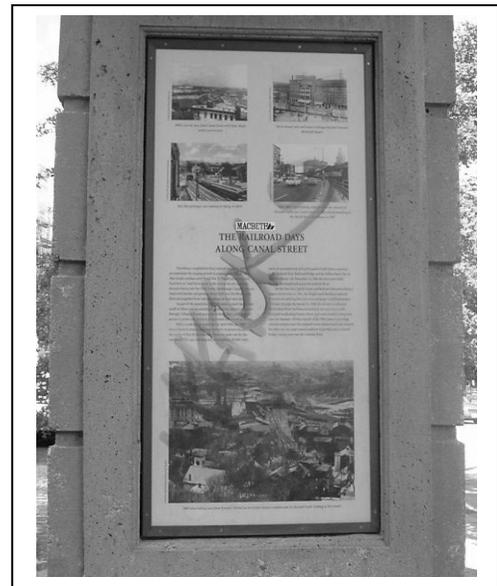
Proceeding along the Moshassuck River, however, the visitor is confronted by one of the most recent additions to downtown Providence, a strikingly modern 8-storey residential complex

located just across the street from the site Williams originally called home. Developer Capitol Cove promotes these new condominiums (with units starting at \$300,000) for their view of the "riverwalk," but this is the only place a visitor will see the term "riverwalk" in print as they make their way towards downtown.

The next panel visitors will find as they approach the central confluence of the three rivers is posted along Canal Street, just over the river from the downtown core, and it tells the story of the "Railroad Days Along Canal Street," when Canal was considered the center of downtown, before the core was moved west across the river. This placard documents the arrival of the railroads in the nineteenth century, and offer pictures of the changes to the built environment that resulted. Additional panels that follow explain the cultural and economic ramifications of the construction of the



*Panel at Roger Williams National Memorial Park, arguably one starting point of the Providence Riverwalk*

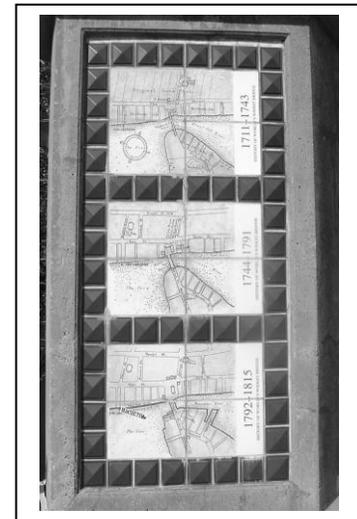
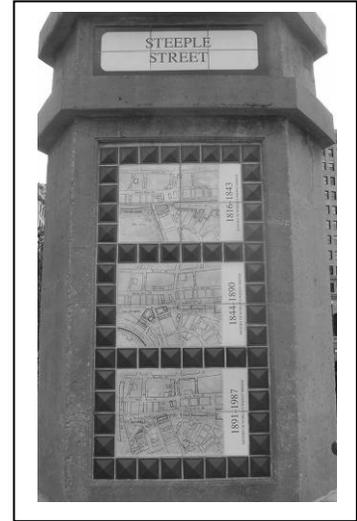


*Panel explaining the entrance of the railroads into Providence, and their effects on the built environment of the nineteenth-century city*

Blackstone Canal (discussed in chapter 7), particularly noting the evolution of domestic and international trade in Providence County.

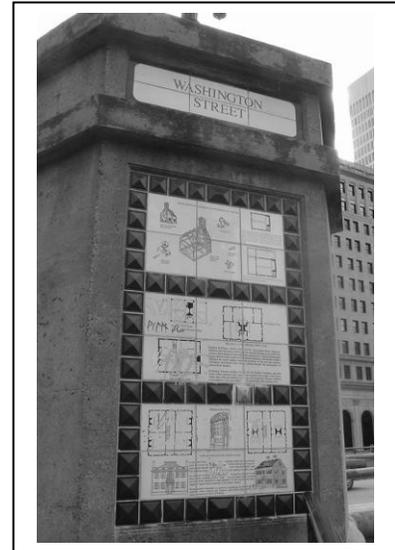
Not surprisingly, given their placement over the rivers, the bridges that cross to downtown at Steeple Street and Washington Street feature panels that specifically pertain to the role of Providence's waterways in the development of Providence from a town to a full-blown nineteenth century city. At Steeple Street, historic maps are set against handsome glass bricks and depict views of the rivers as they bisected Providence from 1711-1743, 1744-1791, and 1792-1815 respectively. At the other end of the bridge, this visual story continues, with images depicting views of the rivers from 1816-1843, 1844-1890, and 1891-1987. These images clearly demonstrate the impact of human interaction and trade on the natural environment, as the waterfront in Providence evolved to suit the needs of capitalist enterprise.

Also on the Steeple Street Bridge are placards offering detailed textual histories of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers, as well as maps that show the towns through which the rivers flow on their way down to and through Providence. These maps contextualize the connections between Providence waterways (and the fortunes they made possible) and other areas through the state.



*Historic maps furnished by the RIHS depicting the water routes through Providence as they evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*

On the Washington Street Bridge, the vernacular residential element of Providence is represented, with architectural renderings of the typical middle-class dwellings found on the original Providence home lots during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Also accounted for is the evolution of building styles as the town developed and experienced increased wealth.



*Washington Street panel detailing the architecture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Providence homes*

Smaller houses were abandoned (or had burned in King Philip’s War) and residents gradually moved uphill and across “The Neck” (see chapter 6), building stately two- and three-storey homes in which they raised their families as well as entertained visitors and business associates and clientele.

As the walkway crosses the river toward the contemporary downtown core, the panels shift toward architectural history, providing information about some of the most



*Panel presenting the evolution of Providence’s downtown architecture as it occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

significant structures built in Providence during the nineteenth century, most of which are banks and office buildings. But the first panel that greets visitors on western side is entitled “Across the River from Market Square” and documents the shifting of the downtown core from the East to the central plane of contemporary Providence. Offering

images from the eighteenth century to the present, and even documenting the 1980s and 1990s excavation of the rivers, this panel demonstrates the enormous change in Providence's economic interests as the city which made its livelihood from the rivers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries abandoned them for much of the twentieth. Only in the last quarter of the century did Providence turn its attention back to the rivers as a potential tourist attraction, following the trend of urban renaissance throughout American port cities.

### **Planning Waterplace and its Walkways**

Waterplace Park and its series of constitutive walkways exists as a set of material structures and built environments, to be sure, but it also exists as a memorial to eighteenth-century mercantile and nineteenth-century industrial pasts that are easy to overlook in daily experiences of the contemporary built environment of Providence, Rhode Island. As Korr makes clear, however, it is not only the site-as-product that can tell the types of spatial stories explicated by Certeau. Instead, the planning and development of the park (the series of choices made and not made) also signal the importance of local or "nearby histories" to the more overarching fabric of national and transnational identities in an increasingly global cultural economy.<sup>516</sup> The long planning history of Waterplace Park certainly elucidates this point.

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<sup>516</sup> See David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You: Second edition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

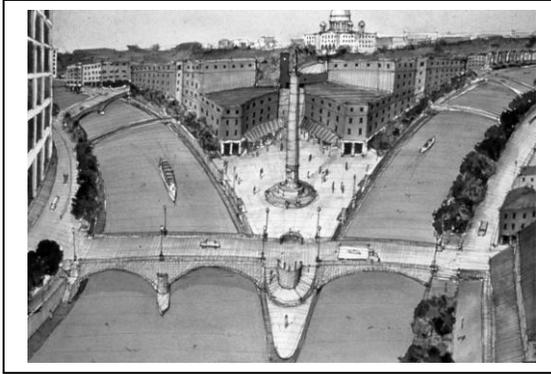
Detailed at length in Leazes and Motte’s *Providence: the Renaissance City* (and well-documented in proposed city plans including the “Old Harbor Plan” of 1992, the “Providence 2000” plan of 1993, and the Capitol Center Development plan) the planning history of Waterplace Park is bound up with a number of public and private figures, including policy elites such as Vincent “Buddy” Cianci, the mayor of Providence from 1974-2002, several state governors, Antoinette



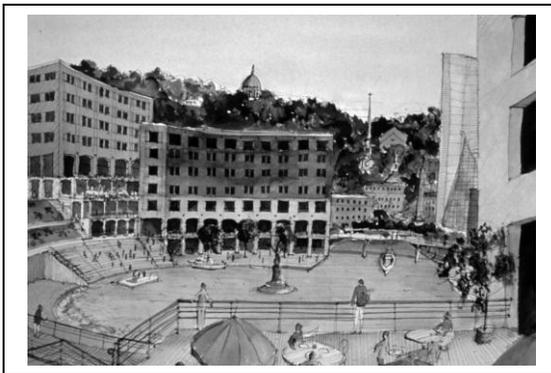
*The river relocation plan for Capital Center. Plans by Williams Warner. Photo courtesy of the Rhode Island Foundation.*

Downing and the influential Providence Preservation Society (which eventually spawned the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission, the RIHPHC), and an architect named William Warner, who is credited with the idea to move the Providence rivers in the first place. The interplay of these individuals, local business leaders including future governor Bruce Sundlun (Outlet Communications), Louis Hampton (Providence Gas), Terrence Murray (Fleet Bank), J. Joseph Krause (Textron), Richard Oster (Cookson America), and even a handful of academics and union representatives finally led to the creation of the park.<sup>517</sup> These individuals came together to form the first Capital Center Commission (CCC) and as early as 1980 identified the main tropes to which the newly created downtown acreage was expected to contribute. According to Leazes and Motte, Capital Center needed to help the city of Providence function as a historical and cultural center, a symbol and center of government power, and as an

<sup>517</sup> Leazes and Motte 92-93. Though these individuals comprised the first board of Capital Center Commission, initial feasibility studies regarding various aspects of the redevelopment of Capital Center were funded by a variety of local business leaders.



economic engine.<sup>518</sup> Given that Providence’s downtown core served all of these functions during its nineteenth-century heyday, the CCC was clearly committed to using urban redevelopment to recreate Providence’s formerly vibrant downtown core by integrating the city’s maritime and industrial pasts.<sup>519</sup>



*Architect William Warner’s sketches of the new downtown Providence. Top left: the redesigned cove basin. Top right: riverwalk and river bridges connecting downtown to the East Side. Lower left: the confluence of the Providence and Mossashuck Rivers. Images courtesy of the Rhode Island Foundation.*

Though Providence blossomed during the late colonial period and joined the neighboring cities of Pawtucket and Woonsocket in leading southern New England into the Industrial

<sup>518</sup> Leazes and Motte 94.

<sup>519</sup> Though historians cannot necessarily agree on the specific years of Providence’s dominance of Rhode Island’s financial and cultural economies, the long nineteenth century has been identified as its productive heyday. See George Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, “Providence: A Century of Greatness” in *Rhode Island History* 41.1 (1982): 3-18. See also William G. McLoughlin’s “Providence: The Confident Years, 1890-1920” in *Rhode Island History* 51.2 (1993): 39-66. Another testament of local business and cultural leaders’ commitment to the celebration of Providence’s pasts is the struggle to establish a heritage Harbor Museum which would offer exhibits on the city’s past industries and the immigrant and minority populations which supported them. Though the museum has secured an executive board and a converted warehouse near Providence Harbor (located just south of downtown on Point Street near the newly constructed I-95 overpass), funding for the museum’s operations has been voted down by Rhode Island residents repeatedly.

Revolution, Rhode Island's capital city was also one of the first locations in the northeast to suffer the effects of deindustrialization in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Considered by historians to have been the first fully industrialized of the United States, mainland Rhode Island was once the home of lucrative textile mills as well as metal-working factories.<sup>520</sup> Although for the most part, these now-derelict mills and factories remain perched alongside the waterways carving their way through the state from Narragansett Bay to the south, and from the Blackstone River to the north, the urban landscape of Providence in the 1970s and 80s was increasingly haunted by the material byproducts of economic recession: non-functioning ports and brown fields dotted the shores and decrepit municipal structures lined the streets. When the workday ended, the downtown core emptied out as those who could afford it commuted back to the suburbs while the less affluent headed to the triple-deckers and dilapidated Victorians of surrounding neighborhoods including Elmwood, Silver Lake, Smith Hill and even South Providence, once one of the most celebrated architectural centers in the state.<sup>521</sup>

Like Baltimore's Inner Harbor, the Port of Providence contributed to the circulation of domestic goods, particularly between the industrialized northeast and the more agrarian mid-Atlantic and southeastern regions of the United States. But, as evidenced by my work in chapters 5 and 6, Providence and its surrounding areas also

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<sup>520</sup> George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The independent State* (Woodland Hills, CA: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1982).

<sup>521</sup> The Providence Plan, a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and maintenance of Providence's neighborhoods, provides demographics and descriptions of each of these areas. As of the year 2000, Elmwood, Silver Lake, and South Providence all had significant levels of unemployment (10% of the total population or above). See [http://204.17.79.244/profiles/maprnks/cen\\_mr/mr\\_unemp\\_1g.gif](http://204.17.79.244/profiles/maprnks/cen_mr/mr_unemp_1g.gif). Accessed 13 December 2006. Each of these areas also hosted a large number of Providence's foreign-born population in the year 2000 (29.9% of the total population or above). See [http://204.17.79.244/profiles/maprnks/cen\\_mr/sf3/cw\\_forborn.gif](http://204.17.79.244/profiles/maprnks/cen_mr/sf3/cw_forborn.gif). Accessed 13 December 2006. Finally, all ranked very high according to their percentages of violent crime in 2005. See [http://204.17.79.244/profiles/mrprnks/crime/mr\\_vcrm\\_02\\_05.gif](http://204.17.79.244/profiles/mrprnks/crime/mr_vcrm_02_05.gif). Accessed 13 December 2006.

looms large in transnational historical narratives, as vast numbers of Mediterranean immigrants were delivered to its shores between 1880 and 1920 by a French steamship line known as the Fabre Company.<sup>522</sup> Indeed, Providence still numbers among the top-twenty U.S. cities for its percentage of newly emigrated populations according to the 2000 census, and now ranks as a major destination for immigrants and refugees from Liberia and Ghana; from locations in Central and South America; and from nations dotting the Pacific Rim.<sup>523</sup> Though it is no longer a major locus of water-based domestic trade or a major site of manufacturing, Rhode Island's capital city and its immediately surrounding environs maintain their transnational credentials almost solely on the basis of the postmodern flow of bodies (and their attendant cultural practices) into the city.<sup>524</sup>

In the place of historic landscapes of industry and immigration exists a new urban landscape of leisure—a Capital Center parcel dedicated to providing a safe space for middle-class local families and tourists to gather and view outdoor performances and exhibitions including the Gravity Games and X-treme Games, to walk the dog on a Sunday morning or grab a drink after work. Waterplace Park is meant to draw people back downtown to appreciate Providence's pasts, its architectural heritage and its natural resources. Located in the northern end of downtown Providence, Capital Center abuts neighborhoods including Smith Hill to the northwest, College Hill to the east, and the

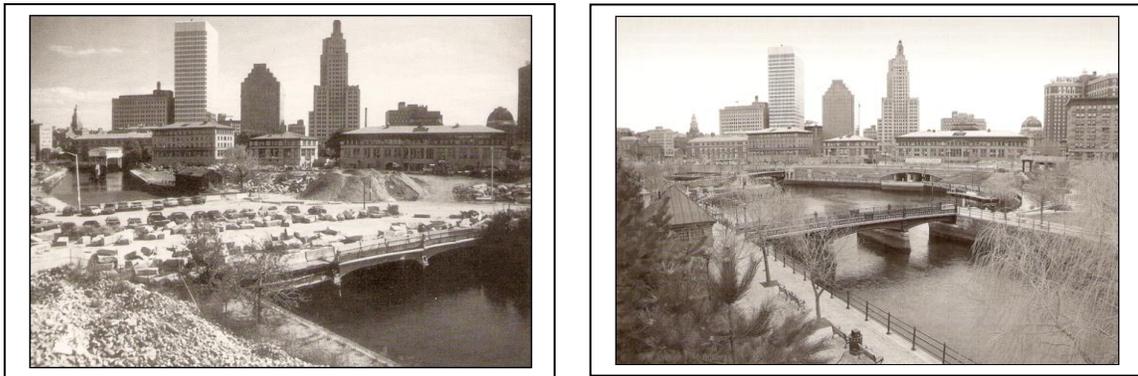
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<sup>522</sup> A number of full-length histories of Rhode Island and its immigrant populations were published as the American bicentennial approached in the 1970s, but particularly helpful are several texts by William McLoughlin, George Kellner and Stanley Lemons. See McLoughlin, "Providence: The Confident Years, 1890-1920," *Rhode Island History* 51.2 (1993): 39-66. See also, Kellner and Lemons, "Providence: A Century of Greatness," *Rhode Island History* 41.1 (1982): 3-18.

<sup>523</sup> Though this demographic information is certainly obtainable through the US Census, the Providence Plan, also maintain data broken up not only by city but also neighborhood. The Providence Plan, [www.providenceplan.org](http://www.providenceplan.org). This organization also works with the Department of Planning and Urban Development to maintain its neighborhood profiles, each of which includes population demographics as well as brief narrative descriptions of the local landscapes.

<sup>524</sup> This flow of bodies is monitored and recorded by non-profit associations including the state affiliate of the International Institute ([www.iiri.org](http://www.iiri.org)) and the Rhode Island ACLU ([www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org)).

downtown business core to the south. Along the west side is the Providence Place Mall and Interstate 95. Located on this parcel, Waterplace Park features classical wrought-iron-accented concrete riverwalks, retro Victorian-styled lampposts, a boat dock for the fleet of gondolas available for rent, and several examples of public art.<sup>525</sup> In the



*Top left: Providence in 1990, before the excavation of the rivers. Top right: Providence in 2000, after uncovering and re-routing the rivers and removing the paved parking lot (known as the “pork chop”) above.*

interstitial spaces between walkways are small gardens and foliage which break up the endless panels of grey graffiti-resistant concrete.

Connecting the water park to the abutting neighborhoods is the Providence Riverwalk, described in detail by *Yankee Magazine* reporters Patricia Harris and David Lyon in a 2005 article describing the transformation of downtown Providence and its once-industrial waterfront.<sup>526</sup> Harris and Lyon provide a touring narrative of the Riverwalk, a series of pathways connected by bridges featuring historic placards detailing Providence’s mercantile past. Suggesting a two-day itinerary, Harris and Lyon travel the walkway only as far as the East Side, though the pathways stretch all the way down the

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<sup>525</sup> Leazes and Motte 132.

<sup>526</sup> *Yankee Magazine* November 2005 Volume 69: 94-100.

river toward the Point Street Bridge, effectively connecting the downtown core to Fox Point and the historic jewelry manufacturing district.

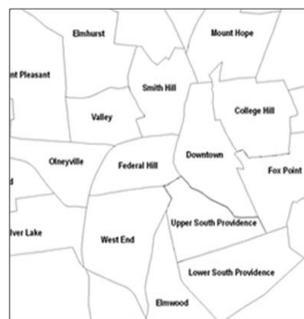
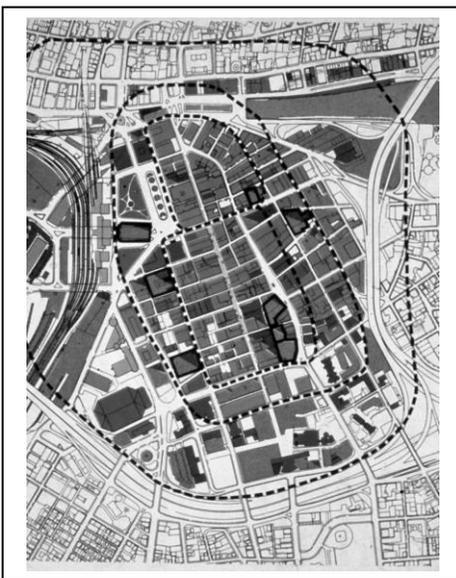
At the southernmost entrance to the park, connecting Waterplace to the newly named Memorial Parkway and the old downtown core is the Wall of Hope. Dedicated as a memorial to the local victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, this series of short decorative walls bisects one of the arched walkway connecting the business district and the waterpark. Made of concrete and faced with colorful mosaic tiles painted by local schoolchildren, each wall celebrates courage, hope, and triumph over despair. A recent addition to the park, this Wall of Hope further marks Waterplace as a site of memory, not only of historical landscapes, but also of a relatively recent event which has connected Rhode Island to a nation-wide consciousness of mourning.

A contemporary touring narrative of Waterplace so seamlessly integrates the older areas of the city that it can be hard to remember when the park was not there—when the three rivers that break through the city, the Providence, the Mossashuck, and Woonasquatucket, were simply an inconvenience and the land that would become Capital Center was merely a parking lot spanning and obscuring the water. But this is indeed the landscape of downtown Providence that greeted residents and visitors up until the early 1990s, well after Senator Claiborne Pell and a number of local boosters and public officials succeeded in having the city's train tracks moved as part of the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project (NECIP).<sup>527</sup> Indeed, although some of the first plans suggesting the redevelopment of Providence's downtown were formulated in the late 1970s, ground was not broken for Waterplace Park, now the signature feature of the Providence "renaissance" until 1991.

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<sup>527</sup> Leazes and Motte 77-103.

While the influence of local preservationists and the economic impetus to recreate Providence as a tourist attraction (a “destination city”) certainly had an impact on the plans commissioned by and submitted to the city of Providence, local public officials and business leaders were also clear regarding their goal to create parcels of land that could be developed into commercial office space. Though the creation of Capital Center enhanced access to and reunited certain areas of the city, contemporary development of the land (particularly the placement and design of the Providence Place Mall, the new GTECH office tower, and the luxury condominium high-rise) has arguably negated some of the CCC’s other goals, including the creation of open public space and increased access to all areas of the city. As cross-referencing the figures below makes clear, the Providence Place Mall and interstate 95 restrict access between downtown and Providence’s once highly-industrialized west side, as well as further marginalizing lower-income neighborhoods located on the outskirts of the city, including South Providence, Olneyville, Elmwood and Silver Lake, all areas featuring high percentages of recent immigrants and black Americans.



*Left: the area of downtown Providence known as Capital Center. Above right: the location of Capital Center in relation to the rest of the city. This plot of land, the center of Providence as a “tourist destination,” is effectively separated from the rest of the downtown business core, as well as difficult to access from the poorer, increasingly peripheral neighborhoods of the city.*

If the downtown revitalization strategy has proven overwhelmingly successful, then, critics of the Providence renaissance argue that only already-privileged local and state-wide populations are able to access or make use of Waterplace Park and Capital Center as “civic space,” an issue referencing the types of conflicts over equal access to leisure areas that have plagued downtown Providence since the first Gilded Age, when the cove lands which would later become Capital Center and house Waterplace Park were sodden marshes whose future sparked heated debates between elites and the city’s working class populations.

### **Providence’s Cove Lands and the Creation of Leisure in Gilded Age Providence**

In a thesis frequently consulted by William Warner, the chief architect of Providence’s redesign, former Brown University student Michael Holleran chronicles the long and fraught history of the Providence cove lands, making clear that to write about the cove lands is to write about the development of railroads in Providence, especially since the cove basin was created by the Providence and Worcester railroad from 1846-1849.<sup>528</sup>

The fight over the fate of the covelands was an intense one, particularly significant in the wake of historical progression that has seen a greatly diminished railroad presence not only in Providence and the increasingly deindustrialized northeast corridor, but also nationally. Meanwhile, the covelands and other similar open areas have not only maintained their original significance, but gained value in the increasingly urbanized built environment. After all, even in the developing capital city of Providence, the railroads were not immediately embraced, as many city residents remained

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<sup>528</sup> Michael Holleran, “The Providence Cove: Image in the Evolution of Urban Form,” Unpublished Honors thesis (Providence: Brown University, 1979): 13-14.

unconvinced of their convenience in relation to the stagecoach already in operation from Market Square.

While the railroads did not come to Providence until 1844, commissioned and financed by elite members of the Providence business community, the cove had always existed (though the basin was constructed later), and was the location from which the original town settlement stretched east in the seventeenth century. The Cove gained the affection of the citizens not only because it had always been there and was sacred space associated with the early settlement of Roger Williams and other religious exiles, but also because of memories attached to it, such as those of the local swimming hole near the state prison on the banks of the cove. There was also a fish market at the corner of Cove and Canal Streets where people gathered and did their marketing.<sup>529</sup> When the railroads came to town, parts of the cove were filled until only a basin remained but this was achieved only on the contingent that the railroad provide a park on the surrounding lands for the citizens of Providence, which they did.<sup>530</sup> The city, it should be noted, did not initially sell the lands to the railroad company, but merely granted them use of the land. Unfortunately the Providence & Worcester Railroad did not build the cove basin according to their agreement with the city:

It skimped on the foundations to the retaining walls, leaving their weight partially supported by the muck in the bottom of the basin; as a result the Cove could never be dredged to its intended depths around the edges. In time, each of the other stipulations of the grant—maintenance of the basin, reversion of the land to public uses, and the city's right to use it without compensation—were to be violated.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid 51-53.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid 56-57.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid 58.

For all its inadequacies, the basin was finished in 1849 and the city bought the cove lands from the state, paying \$200,000 in installments made between 1870 and 1875. In 1873, a commission was created to propose a plan for the lands. The plan recommended keeping the cove basin, but dredging it and using the muck to fill an area around the perimeter to widen Promenade Park and enable the building of new retaining walls. Additionally, the plan suggested removing all the railroad tracks around the basin to make the basin accessible to people. The railroads would be relocated to reunite the city, with a new terminal located on Gaspee Street and much-needed freight yards flanking the terminal on the cove lands.<sup>532</sup>

Interestingly, this is close to what finally came to pass in the 1980s and 1990s. But at that time, the plan was virtually ignored when the railroads faced economic hardship and the depression of the 1870s took over. Still, the basin was dredged between 1876 and 1878 and although that was basically futile it was expensive, costing the city \$60,000. As the 1880s approached, the U.S. Engineers weighed in with their opinion about the cove and surrounding lands, stating in an 1875 report that the cove basin was basically useless unless it could be dredged much more extensively. Additionally, the American Society of Civil Engineers reviewed a sewage plan submitted to the city by the City Engineer. They argued that the Cove basin was necessary for health and that proper sewers, while expensive, would clean the cove and make it useful again.<sup>533</sup> By the 1880s, however, this argument was facing significant opposition from city and state policy elites as well as the powerful railroad corporations. Additionally, there was an overlap in these interests, as many of the railroads had members of the influential local Goddard family

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid 61-63.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid 64-65.

on their boards (the director of the Boston and Providence was a family member, as was the director of the Providence and Worcester, and a Goddard sat on the board of the Providence, Warren and Bristol line as well). Accordingly, the “Goddard Commission” was put together on December 14, 1881 to hold hearings regarding railroad terminal facilities and the fate of the cove.<sup>534</sup> One of the major factors was the condition of the cove itself. By 1881, the basin had been polluted by local manufacturing interests and was increasingly considered a threat to public health and in near-constant need of costly dredging.<sup>535</sup> By this point, the cove lands were essentially vacant lands that could have been used as parkland but for want of resources and a well-organized parks association. Lacking such resources, they were just vacant lands where itinerant populations could gather, and were not even accessible to most people without a dangerous trek across the railroad tracks. The other argument for filling in the covelands was clearly economic: while railroads brought money into the city and had the potential to pull the city of the depression it experienced during the 1870s, the Cove did not.<sup>536</sup>

While Providence Mayor Thomas Doyle argued strenuously in favor of creating a new sewer system and advocated tougher anti-pollution restrictions on local manufacturing concerns to preserve and restore the covelands, railroad magnates, other local commercial interests and even Governor William W. Hoppin encouraged the expansion of the railroad system at the Cove and a report was commissioned to exploring

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid 18.

<sup>535</sup> One respected physician, Dr. Snow (“a national pioneer in the field of public health”) defended the cove as a help to the circulation of fresh air (26). But another Providence physician, Dr. Charles V. Chapin, also respected, advocated filling the cove because it was too polluted, in his opinion, to fulfill such potential . See Holleran 26.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid 19.

filling, rather than recuperating, the vacant marshland.<sup>537</sup> The state-supported report was produced in December of 1882 by the Goddard Commission (named for its chair William Goddard, manager of Brown & Ives textiles). The report, entitled the Goddard Plan, recommended filling the cove basin and covering the rivers; building a new railroad station on the filled cove and widening Exchange Place; creating freight yards on the cove basin; and building two bridges over the tracks. Toward these ends, the Commission would sell the land at \$1/foot for the cove basin and promenade, and \$0.75/foot for the surrounding cove lands.<sup>538</sup> The cove basin would be filled at the city's expense.

Although this plan would effectively isolate Smith Hill, the most active industrial area of the city with an accompanying population of immigrant workers, the Commission's plan was approved by a 4 to 1 vote.<sup>539</sup> In response to this report, the Providence Franklin Society, a scientific society founded in 1869 which included women, created a Parks Committee, and in 1883 Dr. Timothy Newell, a physician, joined Mayor Doyle in advocating the preservation of the Cove for health reasons. He argued that "breathing spaces" were needed in urban areas, an idea that was gaining currency during the latter years of the nineteenth century. Newell argued that Roger Williams Park, created in 1871 from lands left to the city by Betsy Williams was in fact too far away (about 3.5 miles) from the factories of Smith Hill to be of use to working families of

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<sup>537</sup> Thomas Doyle, "16<sup>th</sup> inaugural, January 7, 1884," Providence Press Company 1884. Providence City Archives. Interestingly, Doyle, who served for nearly 20 years, appears to have been the last mayor to resist the power of the railroad interests. By 1887, his successor Gilbert Robbins' main concern was creating a centrally located terminus and by 1889 Henry Barker advocated the consolidation of four railroad companies into two. The final sale of the cove lands was overseen by Providence Mayor Frank Olney in 1894. Not until 1902, when the City Beautiful movement had gathered national support, did Mayor Daniel Granger turn his attention toward making Providence beautiful and healthy again, advocating the planting of trees, restricting the amount of smoke produced by factories and other industrial concerns, and purchasing tracts of lands exclusively for recreation use. Providence City Archives collection.

<sup>538</sup> Holleran 28-30.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid 35.

central Providence.<sup>540</sup> Similarly, the public parks of the East Side were equally inaccessible for Providence's far-flung working class.

After the unveiling of the Goddard plan, though, an official Parks Committee was formed, which then led to the organization of the Public Park Association (PPA) in 1883. The PPA published pamphlets on sanitation and the cove lands subtitled "Parks for the People" and worked with physicians who argued that urban areas with dense populations are the most likely to be unhealthy and in need of intermittent green space.<sup>541</sup> The closing text of the pamphlet provides a sample of the rhetoric used in support of the preservation of the cove lands mobilized by the PPA:

Fill up our Cove Basin and give it to the railroads and where can you take the clerk of our stores, the girl of our shops of manufactories, by and by, for a daily walk to give them fresh air. Our Roger Williams Park is too far away. They can neither afford the time or money to go there except on special occasions...It is painful to hear men talk seriously of destroying the Cove Park by giving it to the railroads. They can have abundant land without it. It is exceedingly valuable. It is worth millions for business purposes and vastly more for health and ornament. Whatever amount the city may spend in retaining, improving and beautifying it, will soon be returned in increased revenue from the rise of surrounding property. When a proper system of sewers is constructed, we can have pure water in our rivers and Cove Basin. Properly preserved and improved, the Cove Park must be the means of saving a multitude of lives and a vast amount of sickness.<sup>542</sup>

Accordingly, the PPA countered the Goddard Commission's report. They invited Horace William Shaler Cleveland to speak on July 20, 1883 and he presented a plan for the center of Providence that advocated retaining the Cove Basin while reducing it to a ten acre pond and making the rest a park; cutting a tunnel through Smith Hill for

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<sup>540</sup> John S. Gilkeson, Jr, *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986): 228.

<sup>541</sup> Holleran 36-37. Throughout the later years of the nineteenth century, cities were increasingly viewed as akin to human circulatory systems, requiring easy passages of air and materials through unclogged arteries.

<sup>542</sup> PPA Tract no. 1, "Sanitation. The Cove Park" (Providence Press Co., 1883): 3, cited in Holleran 38.

passenger trains, allowing a terminal close to the city center while keeping the tracks away from the Cove Lands; constructing much-needed new freight yards on the Cove Lands; placing a major public building on Smith Hill, across from the Cove downtown (this eventually happened, as the State House is now located here); and creating boulevards along either side of the Woonasquatucket River.<sup>543</sup>

The filling of the cove, then, was a source of much controversy during the 1880s, and this is hardly surprising, given that this period saw a massive influx of Mediterranean immigration, crowding Rhode Island's capital city and its neighboring environs with a new working class even as a long-time Providence residents developed into an increasingly powerful middle-class with interests in recreation and the leisure time and financial capital to engage in primarily cultural pursuits. Just as Holleran notes the import beginning to be attached to a city's self image during this period, historian John Gilkeson documents well the rise of a middle-class in Providence that jealously guarded its access to the local resources its labor had produced between 1820 and 1890, resources that particularly included not only cultural institutions such as libraries, clubs and voluntary associations based on shared interests and ethnic heritage, but also public space in which families could enjoy and display their increased leisure.<sup>544</sup>

“Residential attractiveness,” then, was starting to matter to policy elites and citizens as well, though for strikingly different reasons. For policy elites, fact, or the actual state of the local built environment, was increasingly less important than potential,

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<sup>543</sup> Holleran 41-42.

<sup>544</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the evolution of the middle class in Providence throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see John S. Gilkeson Jr.'s *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940*. Gilkeson's book is a survey of activities, practices and organizations associated with middle-class Providence citizens. Gilkeson is particularly interested in the ways people seemed to identify themselves as they shifted from “working class” to “middle class” in social and financial strata.

or the image of what could be. Interested primarily in expanding the city's commercial potential, elites focused their attention on the improvement of railroad facilities, and were specifically interested in creating a centrally located new terminal: "With a head station the city was a destination of a journey, even if the traveler stayed in his seat an[d] immediately embarked on another one; with a through station the city was only a stop along the way."<sup>545</sup> But to local residents, the cove made Providence unique, and gave the area a specific identity even as the developing railroad systems that passed through the city provided an increasingly regional and national context. Accordingly, the PPA, acting in defense of the cove in the 1880s, argued that Providence would never be on the scale of New York or Boston, but could instead be a neat, small city held in high esteem for its unique attractiveness. They advocated a more restrained approach to city planning based on building from what already existed. If the cove, important in maritime trade "until deeper drafts and the precedence of land travel over Weybosset Bridge drove shipping down to the Providence River" became primarily ornamental when traffic from the Blackstone Canal finally ceased, it nevertheless remained a decidedly important ornament:

It was the spot to which one was directed by all the landforms of the city, toward which streets, tracks, rivers and canals pointed. No matter that all the rivers turned away just as they were about to reach it, nor that one seldom actually went to the Promenade; the Cove was "the heart of the city."<sup>546</sup>

Holleran even draws on the testimony of one citizen who essentially argued that the cove was "a kind of stage on which all the city's actions were set."<sup>547</sup> The cove basin was also all that was left of the Great Salt Cove, so influential to Providence's colonial

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<sup>545</sup> Holleran 84.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid 92.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

settlement. It was considered sacred for this reason as well. When the cove basin was gone, finally filled in 1892, Providence needed a new center around which to focus.<sup>548</sup>

## **Nature and the Built Environment**

An urban water park resulting from the bureaucratically orchestrated manipulation of historic rivers including the Providence, Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket, Waterplace Park of Providence, Rhode Island is an exemplary illustration of yet another of the major conflicts in cultural landscape studies—the definition of nature in contradistinction to that of the built environment.

While it would be impossible to claim Waterplace as an example of the natural environment unadulterated by human intervention, the park's main attraction *is* its symbolic use of water to signal the “rebirth” of a mid-sized postindustrial city. Indeed,

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<sup>548</sup> Even after the covelands were filled, however, it is important to note that they were not forgotten, nor were the other plans for what might have been. Holleran cites a 1933 radio broadcast which suggests that the cove and the river system could have aided in the development of the city as another “Venice” replete with gondolas, rhetoric which enjoyed a rebirth during Mayor Vincent Cianci's tenure. See Holleran 113. Additionally, Philemon F. Sturges III had been involved in the formulation of the Downtown 1970 plan, and on August 10, 1969 the *Providence Journal* unveiled his altered ideas for a new downtown:

...I would rebuild the Cove, which would serve a function similar to that of the pond in the Boston Public Garden, complete with swan boats, and which would be a reflecting pool for the State House. It would restore the sense that Providence is a city built by, on, and over the sea... The Cove was once the crown jewel of Providence and a source of great pleasure to her citizens. It was plundered in the name of progress a century ago and ultimately destroyed. I think it would be a fitting sign of our advanced civilization of this century to restore it once again for all the people of Rhode Island (*Providence Journal* August 10, 1969: T1 quoted in Holleran 126).

Among his other plans, Sturges would not move the train terminal, but he would lower the train tracks, and he envisioned all of downtown as a “pedestrian zone.” Interestingly, Sturges also advocated ringing the restored cove with large buildings, to create a decidedly urban cityscape (128). Although this plan joined the multitudes of others never implemented, its major features were reiterated in the RISD Interface Providence plan that was proposed 5 years later, in 1974. This plan called for the recreation of the Cove as well as a downtown pedestrian zone via “meandering paths,” and envisioned a boathouse and bandstand. According to Holleran, this plan most closely realizes the visions of the nineteenth century Providence Parks Association. Whichever plan was eventually implemented, it appeared that the Cove was going to reappear in the cityscape. See Holleran 127-132.

just as the emphasis on waterways has proven a tourist boon to cities including Syracuse, Baltimore, San Antonio, and New Orleans, Providence has built most of its recent marketing strategies around its reconstituted waterfront, encouraged in this approach by a comment made in 1982 by James Rouse, one of the developers associated with Baltimore's Inner Harbor success as well as the Providence Place Mall. In attendance at a conference sponsored by the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, Rouse remarked simply, "People love the water" and strongly advocated plans to excavate Providence's downtown river routes.<sup>549</sup>

Similar strategies have also been noted by Judith Walton in her dissertation on the late-1980s Lakefront Project of downtown Syracuse, New York. As is the case in Providence, Syracuse has a long history of working waterways and waterfront lands that were left derelict in the wake of deindustrialization. Neglect of these waterways led to extraordinary levels of pollution that needed to be resolved before redevelopment could occur.<sup>550</sup> Even after significant clean-up, visitors to the redesigned Lakefront area still complained about the foul smelling water and elected to stay indoors on warmer days.<sup>551</sup> Though pollution has not been as significant an issue in the redesign of downtown Providence (indeed, Rhode Island has some of the cleanest water on the eastern seaboard), it remains an accepted truism that the state's industrial past did lasting damage to local rivers, which were used not only as sources of power for local textile mills, but also as the primary dumping ground for the harsh chemicals used in bleaching and dying processes.

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<sup>549</sup> Leazes and Motte 106.

<sup>550</sup> For more on the tropes of water as purifying in the discourse surrounding the Syracuse project, see Judith Walton "Landscapes of Fun: Rewriting Downtown Syracuse."

<sup>551</sup> Walton 281-284.

Given the role natural resources play in urban waterfront redevelopment, it is not surprising that bringing together terms such as “culture” and “landscape” has proven problematic. While the term “culture” has often been associated with products and practices related to human agents, “landscape” has traditionally referenced a style of perspective painting or the type of natural vista that attracts tourists to national parks, waterfalls, and other locations largely seen as untouched by human hands. But the field of cultural landscape studies problematizes such traditional and clear-cut designations. Indeed, Jeremy Korr argues that the kind of “nature” referenced above is itself a cultural construction, “a conception of an autonomous world framed by our cultural systems” which nevertheless does have a material corollary. Put most succinctly by Michael Barbour, “nature is real, of course, but we can experience and relate to others only a filtered, personalized version of nature.”<sup>552</sup>

The “nature” of Waterplace Park, then, is articulated in a variety of ways, all of which make use of the “magic” of water referenced in other waterfront renewal projects. As is clear in the examples of Syracuse, Baltimore and Pittsburgh, the presence of water, even if it is dirty and smelly, calls up associations with renewal, purification and cleansing, all tropes illustrated in the practices and media coverage associated with Providence’s Waterfire. The most famous event showcasing the “new and improved” Providence, Waterfire was designed by local artist Barnaby Evans and lit for the first time for New Year’s Eve in 1994. Deemed a failure by Evans for its small scale, the event nevertheless secured necessary funding and is now staged recursively as a summer fest for which downtown streets are cordoned off for pedestrian traffic, local restaurants

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<sup>552</sup> Barbour quoted in Jeremy Korr, “Washington’s Main Street: Consensus and Conflict on the Capital Beltway, 1952-2001,” Unpublished dissertation (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, College Park, 2002): 480.

open street kiosks, and performance artists ranging from fire-eaters to living statues line the riverwalk connecting Waterplace Park to the rest of Capital Center.<sup>553</sup>

While downtown Providence languished after dark during the 1970s and throughout most of the 1980s, Waterfire has been largely credited for attracting older people and families back to the city in the evenings and creating a safe space (heavily patrolled by Providence police) for people to mingle, greet neighbors, shop, view local architecture, and taste the delicacies served up by local chefs. It has also put Providence back on the map, at least regionally, as northeastern newspapers including the *Boston Globe*, *USA Today* and the *Washington Post* have all published recent profiles in which Waterfire is invoked as symbolic proof of the rebirth of downtown Providence.<sup>554</sup>

The event itself is simple enough despite its profound cultural effects. A crew of volunteers dressed all in black and riding in gondolas donated by Venice, Italy, Providence's Mediterranean sister city, stack wood in the permanent metal pyres located in the center of the river and the circumference of the new cove basin, the "memory piece" marking the location of Providence's long-since-filled-in eighteenth century Great Salt Cove.<sup>555</sup> Though the wood is stacked earlier in the day, the actual festivities do not begin until after dusk, when the volunteers return to ignite the pyres, usually to the vociferous cheers of the already-assembled crowds trolling the streets looking for spaces to sit, lay down blankets and have picnics. When the pyres are lit, music begins to boom from centrally-located speakers and cotton-candy and pretzel vendors make the rounds

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<sup>553</sup> Initially funded by FirstNight Providence for \$3000, Waterfire secured additional funding from Providence booster Buff Chace and has since grown into a full-scale non-profit corporation called Waterfire Providence, Inc. Leazes and Motte 135.

<sup>554</sup> Only one of a number of articles on Waterfire, see Carlo Rotella, "The Elements of Providence" *Washington Post Magazine* September 17, 2006: 51-53.

<sup>555</sup> Local architect Friedrich St. Florian coined this term in an interview with Leazes and Motte. See Leazes and Motte 130-131.

through the crowds around the riverwalk. Performance artists continue their work in various locations, but there is usually a main musical or theatrical event showcased in the outdoor amphitheatre set along the north side of the cove basin.

Perhaps one of the most often emphasized elements of Waterfire is its artistic diversity. Besides offering spaces for a variety of performance artists to engage Rhode Island residents and visitors who might otherwise never darken the door of a local theatre, art gallery or dance studio, Waterfire Providence, the planning committee for the event, takes pains to provide cross-cultural spectacles, with featured performances by local musicians whose repertoires include West African drumming techniques, reggae, calypso, and hip hop as well as Cape Verdean capoeira demonstrations and nontraditional performances of Shakespeare staged outdoors by the students of the Trinity Repertory Conservatory. Finally, the music pumped through the speakers as the pyres are lit and people mill around the riverwalk taking in the sights, sounds, and smells, is often far-eastern and central Asian in origin, with the repertoire of Pakistani recording artist Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan featured prominently during Waterfire's earliest years.

While the sights and smells of Waterfire produce the kinds of multi-sensory experiences referenced by Korr in his field work model, the soundscape of non-western music in particular provides an exotic mood of secular spirituality. Similarly, the foods showcased include cuisines from local Italian and Indian restaurants as well as cosmopolitan bistro fare emphasizing gourmet fusions. The "diversity" of Waterfire, then, is in many ways its specific "brand" and way of gesturing to Providence's high percentage of immigrant populations and the fact that the city officially became "majority minority" for the first time in 2000 according to the U.S. Census. Long a destination city

for immigrant and refugee populations, Providence is no longer considered the central homeplace of the Irish, Italian, Sicilian, and Portuguese populations which occupied its neighborhoods during the nineteenth century. Long since assimilated into mainstream Anglo American culture, these ethnic groups have scattered throughout the state as newly emigrated populations from nations along the Pacific Rim, the west coast of Africa and Central and South American have become the newest inhabitants of Rhode Island's capital city.

While Waterfire's auditory nod to the diversity of Providence's population could be interpreted as a positive step toward the establishment of a truly inclusive civic space, a different perspective could understand this "branding" as part of an orientalist discourse which makes use of "difference" as an aestheticized product to be consumed in a location and time of leisure.

Indeed, such features are clearly marked within the "tourist bubble" of Providence's Capital Center by the spatial interplay between Waterplace Park and the Providence Place Mall, which employs workers in retail sales, food preparation and service, and custodial engineering.

### **The Renaissance Faire: Retail and Urban Redevelopment**

At the heart of the renewal projects of Providence and similar post-industrial cities are the retail and entertainment complexes known as "festival marketplaces," a term first coined by James Rouse to reference the pleasure pavilions created by quasi-public corporations. In his 2001 article on the redesign of Manhattan's South Street Seaport, John Metzger defines the festival marketplace as a phenomenon largely characteristic of the 1970s and 80s. Metzger notes the ways in which the festival

marketplace both adheres to and diverges from the traditional design of suburban shopping malls. He articulates the ideal (though certainly not the only) traits of this retail palace as follows:

Festival marketplaces were distinguished from other shopping centres by the absence of ‘anchor’ department stores, their unique locational advantages (such as urban waterfronts) and the distinct and colorful shopping environments, comprised of a critical mass of food vendors and restaurants, a creative mix of tenants, attractions for tourists and special events.<sup>556</sup>

Described by former Mayor of Atlanta Andrew Young as “public interest capitalism,” festival marketplaces were considered valuable potential boons to run-down city centers lacking a strong retail presence. In his 1997 genealogy of urban retail, Kent Robertson notes that these marketplaces “represent an approach to downtown redevelopment that attempts to take advantage of historical buildings” and other elements not found in the suburbs.<sup>557</sup> Not surprisingly, then, these marketplaces have traditionally been the centerpieces of downtown redevelopment plans that attempt to revitalize the warehouse districts and expansive brown fields bordering the historic ports of eighteenth and nineteenth century cities. These festival marketplaces are expressly intended, then, to offer cultural landscapes replete with waterfront views, outdoor amphitheatres and “river/lake walks.”

Making use of dilapidated port areas, urban waterfront redesigns anchored by festival marketplaces effectively transform spectral landscapes of maritime trade and industry from sites of dereliction, absence and loss to cosmopolitan spectacles of postmodern leisure. Once the site of trade, ship-building, and other forms of industry

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<sup>556</sup> John Metzger, “The Failed Promise of a festival Marketplace: South Street Seaport in Lower Manhattan.” *Planning Perspectives* 16 (2001): 26.

<sup>557</sup> Kent Robertson, “Downtown Retail Revitalization: A Review of American Development Strategies,” *Planning Perspectives* 12 (1997): 390.

(including twentieth-century steel production, paper-pulping and textile-milling), the waterfronts of an increasing number of eighteenth and nineteenth century cities, Providence included, now exist primarily as commodities to be consumed by both local and regional tourists, a function wholly in line with the rest of the cultural landscape H.V. Savitch has referred to as “post-industrial.” Citing Savitch’s 1988 text, Richard Marshall articulates the characteristics of the post-industrial city and, specifically, the potential meanings that can be extrapolated from an analysis of these cities’ respective waterfront areas. He states:

...the post-industrial city deals with processing and services rather than manufacturing, intellectual capacity rather than muscle power, and dispersed office environments rather than concentrated factories. These changes manifest themselves into the building of a new physical environment constructed specifically to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. Examining the redevelopment of the urban waterfront tells us a lot about what we as a culture believe those needs to be.<sup>558</sup>

Besides crafting a concise definition of “post-industrial,” Marshall’s phraseology also offers some valuable insight to the politics of urban waterfront renewal, noting a shift from the “muscle power” which has traditionally characterized factory work to the “intellectual capacity” required for jobs in the financial and service sectors of the contemporary city.<sup>559</sup> Clearly, then, one of the tensions in urban waterfront renewal is the conversion of sites of labor (populated primarily by a blue collar and largely ethnic working class) to locations Veblen famously referred to as “sites of conspicuous leisure,” or spaces occupied and used primarily by elites for recreational purposes and to

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<sup>558</sup> Richard Marshall, ed., *Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities* (London: Spon Press, 2001): 8.

<sup>559</sup> Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). John A. Jakle and David Wilson, *Derelict Landscapes: The Wasting of America’s Built Environment* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 1992). Local Museums of Industry also retell powerful narratives of the effects of factory closures on communities. This is poignantly documented in video footage of interviews with the former textile workers of Woonsocket, RI, part of the exhibits of the Rhode Island Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

demonstrate or perform class status within the public sphere.<sup>560</sup> While some might argue, and indeed, have argued, that these new waterfronts have rescued post-industrial sites from the oblivion of dereliction and transformed them into the types of democratized gathering spaces imagined by philosophers from Rousseau to Habermas, I wonder if the central role played by the festival marketplace in these waterfront projects is actually resulting in what social geographer Denis R. Byrne has referred to as “nervous landscapes” fraught with cultural tension.<sup>561</sup>

According to Byrne, who coins this phrase in reference to the extant racial tensions between aboriginal and settler populations in New South Wales, Australia, “nervous landscapes” result not from the success of identity-based policies of containment and practices of segregation (such as apartheid), but from their failure.<sup>562</sup> The anxieties produced within such landscapes are especially heightened, he argues, when “the separating space reduces to zero—when [different types of] bodies actually touch.”<sup>563</sup> Accordingly, I draw on Byrne’s work to support two general conclusions regarding the urban waterfront redesign of Providence. First, I do not believe that urban port areas have necessarily been “cheapened” or robbed of their historical significance by the encroachment of spectacular commerce. Indeed, both North American aboriginal and European settler populations grew up around waterways specifically for their resources and/or their commercial potential, and were often considered socially sordid locations even by elites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is neither the commercial

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<sup>560</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: Modern Library Paperback Edition* (New York: The Modern Library: 2001).

<sup>561</sup> See Denis R. Byrne, “Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3.2 (June 2003): 170-193.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid* 188.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid* 170.

focus nor the spectacularity of these waterfront redesigns that establish these sites as “nervous landscapes” in my view. Instead, it the ways that these sites bring together disparate populations under the guise of democratization which renders invisible the spatialized power dynamics of sites such Providence’s Capital Center “tourist bubble.” While ethnic, immigrant and working class populations dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century commercial waterfronts, leisured elites, particularly affluent Anglo women, were largely absent from such locations of industry and commerce.<sup>564</sup>

Redesigned waterfronts with shopping malls functioning as centerpieces do not displace the working class, but they do consign such individuals to more peripheral occupational locations including underground or internal loading docks, parking garages, food courts, and custodial closets. The building of luxury condominiums and/or apartment complexes with waterfront views also come dangerously close to abrogating the very public space that was originally created by establishing these urban parks.

While racialized and classed uses of space are certainly productive of the “nervous landscapes” within these urban waterfront redesigns, so too does gender produce anxiety. As is noted by a number of feminist and labor historians alike, deindustrialization has had a significant impact on the gender politics of urban built environments. While feminist historians including Mary Ryan, Gail Bederman, and Sarah Deutsch have documented well the late nineteenth century rise in the social acceptability of women laboring in urban environments outside the home (with specific populations of women engaged in specific types of work, of course), urban studies scholar Lynn Appleton notes that as of the mid-1990s the majority of America’s women-headed

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<sup>564</sup> I use the term “Anglo” here to make clear the changing designations of certain immigrant populations as “white” over time.

families were living in cities.<sup>565</sup> Among other cultural forces, the shift from an industrial to a service and tourism economy has rendered the city “emasculated” (largely considered devoid of the kinds of itinerantly “masculine” muscle power so symbolic of industrial labor) and gendered the city explicitly female. This critique seems especially appropriate to Providence, RI, whose major contemporary industries are no longer fishing, trade, or even textiles manufacturing but healthcare and tourism. Rather than exporting materials to the world, the United States’ most historical ports now serve as the locus for retailing goods manufactured elsewhere, often by non-white, non-western female bodies. Additionally, the very retail establishments making such products available rely on an infrastructure supported by local populations marginalized by identitarian categories including ethnicity, immigration status, gender, class, etc.

It is not a new idea to understand urban environments, set apart from the traditional rugged American mythologies attendant to farming and/or ‘working the land’ as cosmopolitan sites of leisure, tourism, and other enterprises that have traditionally been consider “non-productive,” effete, and feminized. But I am suggesting that this idea needs some revising in the wake of new scholarship which suggests the dynamic interplay between urban space, waterways, work, global capitalism and conceptions of American citizenship. The ways in which Americans define and identify work and its power to shape local, regional, and national identities are shifting; particularly, I would argue, in rural and urban areas where entire populations are experiencing or anticipating

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<sup>565</sup> Lynn Appleton, “The Gender Regimes of American Cities” in *Gender in Urban Research*, Judith A. Garber and Robyne S. Turner, editors (London: SAGE Publications, 1995): 44-59. See Mary Ryan, *Women in Public, Between Banners and Ballots: 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992). See Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also, Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

the devolution of their professions or industries—and, by extension, the possibility of their own irrelevance within an increasingly expanding global economy in which local landscapes are often operated and influenced by off-site organizational forces.

Owned and operated by just such an off-site real estate giant named General Growth Properties, which completed a merger with the Rouse Companies in 2004, the Providence Place Mall illustrates the type of national and global politics of urban American retail establishments.<sup>566</sup> Opened in 1999 by the Chicago-based company after an excruciatingly long and contentious planning period (the mall was first proposed in 1985 and has had a number of developers associated with various phases of the project), Providence Place has recently made local headlines for two reasons: the opening of the upscale Tiffany's & Co just in time for the 2007 holiday season, and the discovery, in October of that same year, that a group of artists had been squatting in a make-shift apartment in the mall's adjoining parking garage since 2004 (figure 23).<sup>567</sup>

The mall, which cost nearly \$500 million to build, not only constituted the single most expensive quasi-public project of Capital Center (by comparison, Waterplace Park cost only \$169 million).<sup>568</sup> It also sparked significant controversy given the proximity of retail hubs and malls in Warwick, located just south of Providence; North Attleboro, Massachusetts; and even in downtown Providence itself, which features the historic Providence Arcade, oldest indoor shopping mall in the United States. According to

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<sup>566</sup> General Growth Properties' website. <http://www.ggp.com/company>.

<sup>567</sup> See Paul Grimaldi's article "Providence Mall Gaining a Gem: Tiffany" *Providence Journal* November 11, 2007. Accessed online at [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com) 9 December 2007. For full coverage of the artists and their life at the mall, see Gregory Smith and Philip Marcelo, "Providence: 1 Room, No View" *Providence Journal* 3 October 2007. Accessed online at [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com) 9 December 2007.

<sup>568</sup> Leazes and Motte 73.

Leazes and Motte, the Providence Place mall was able to overcome complaints of superfluity by functioning as a kind of post-modern community center:

Providence Place is very much designed to be a center of community activity. The mall has 1.35 million square feet of retail space occupied by 150 retail stores and anchored by Lord and Taylor, Filene's, and Nordstrom. About 2,500 people work in Providence Place. A seven-hundred-seat food court, with a variety of fast-food venues that feature American and ethnic cuisines, is located in a third-level "wintergarden," a high-ceilinged, glassed area that links the "Cityside" of the mall (the south) to its "Stateside" (the north) and provides a spectacular view of sunsets to the west and of Capital Center to the east. Above this area is a sixteen-screen stadium-seating Hoyts cinema complex and an IMAX theater. There are also several full-service restaurants, ranging from the Napa Valley Grille to Joe's American Bar and Grill. Dave and Buster's supplies arcade fun and food... The mall is linked physically by a skybridge walkway to the Westin Hotel/Rhode Island Convention Center complex. The Friedrich St. Florian-designed skybridge is the symbolic link between the old and new retail centers of the city.<sup>569</sup>

Despite the multiple services associated with the mall, including the Providence Skills Center, a non-profit corporation "dedicated to improving the lifestyles of individuals from a variety of backgrounds" that offers GED classes, pharmacy technician and customer service training, Providence Place is recognized by locals as an upscale shopping center. Of the original flagship stores Nordstrom, Lord and Taylor and Filene's, only Nordstrom remains of this original up-market triumvirate, as the others have since abandoned the mall, allowing more affordable stores such as JC Penney and Macy's to take their places. Additionally, while the mall originally offered a selection of locally-owned boutiques (such as the Oop Gallery, a purveyor of quirky novelty items and handmade crafts), the mall now features the standard fare of suburban shopping complexes, including the Gap, Old Navy, and American Eagle alongside pricier options

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid 147.

such as J. Crew, LUSH handmade cosmetics, Crate & Barrel, Williams-Sonoma, Restoration Hardware, and Brooks Brothers.<sup>570</sup>

### **Mallife: Structural Inequalities of Urban Development and Vernacular Uses of Retail Space**

The reputation of the mall as an upscale location for shopping and other leisure activities not only belies the demographics of the surrounding neighborhoods of Providence, Rhode Island, but also those of the mall's employees. As part of her efforts to document the inequalities represented in the spatial politics of the Providence Place Mall, graduate student Adriana Yoto, her husband, artist Michael J. Townsend, and several of their friends took up residence in the mall in 2004 and recently presented an exhibit entitled "Mallife" which detailed their existence in the alternative spaces and temporalities of the mall. Augmented by videos posted on popular internet site YouTube which detail the dimensions and boundaries of the mall as well as documenting the outfitting of their "apartment," the exhibit featured a reproduction of the mall apartment at the 5 Traverse Gallery in Fox Point until January 14, 2008.<sup>571</sup>

The Mallife exhibit, which I viewed after the installation moved to a smaller more centrally located venue behind Providence's City Hall in late January 2008 recreated elements of the apartment including a workspace, denoted by a desk, and a living area including a couch. The exhibit also featured some of the press coverage the artists received after the apartment was discovered. Additionally, the exhibit was supported by online video created by Yoto and posted on YouTube. The video, entitled "Providence

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<sup>570</sup> Providence Place homepage. [www.providenceplace.com](http://www.providenceplace.com). Accessed 17 August 2007.

<sup>571</sup> Bill Van Siclin, "Mall Living as Artform" *Providence Journal* 8 December 2007. Accessed online at [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com) 9 December 2007.

Place: Demographics Entrances” features Yoto’s narrative analysis of the spatial politics of the mall’s location and the demographics of the neighborhoods which are privileged with ease of access to the festival marketplace. According to Yoto:

The architects of the mall intentionally excluded pedestrian access and street level shopping on the sides of the mall facing the poorer neighborhoods, which are entirely dismissed based on their low household income in relation to the rest of the city. In addition to being deprived of direct pedestrian access the western side is strictly utilitarian and lacks any attractive architectural feature. Its windowless walls and raw concrete parking structure sends a message to the bordering neighborhoods that the mall is not interested in associating its image with their residence. By permanently turning its back on the poorer neighborhoods and openly embracing the rich ones the mall not only defines itself and its desired clientele but also defines the neighborhoods around it as either worthy or unworthy of its attention<sup>572</sup>

While the secret apartment and analytical video has gained Yoto, now a graduate student at the New School for Social Research in New York City, and Townsend international notoriety, some members of the online audience remain unconvinced. Although local pundits and counter-cultural activists critical of the mall have largely embraced the analysis, the video has received a fair amount of online criticism, with some commentators arguing that what Yoto categorizes as unequal access is nothing more nefarious than “good marketing.” Still others insist that Providence’s working poor population seems to have little trouble accessing the structure, as the mall is “filled with wanna be ganstas and thugs spending their welfare money every single day” and wonder about the validity of Yoto’s critique.

Not surprisingly, the mall’s owner, General Growth Properties does not view the apartment as performance art, social protest or academic critique. Instead, the company has deemed the apartment constitutive of trespassing and has brought legal suit against

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<sup>572</sup> Adrianna Yoto, “Providence Place: Demographics Entrances” posted on YouTube May 1, 2007. Accessed online 3 November 2007 and 9 March 2009 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz1TGzIBjPU&feature=related>.

Townsend, who has emerged in the press as the primary occupant of the space. Nevertheless, other locals and pundits have found the secret occupation of the mall garage entertaining or even politically poignant. *Providence Journal* columnist Bob Kerr argues, “The artists have been good for everybody” and claims that squatting in the mall should be seen as a “celebration” of space and artistic genius, not as a “violation.”<sup>573</sup> And artist Townsend agrees. Quoted by journalist Gregory Smith, Townsend argues that there is a clear analogy between the artists’ actions and those of developers which tear down historic buildings and destroy neighborhoods while claiming to “create communities where none exist.” By creating an alternative homestead inside the mall’s garage, the artists were doing the same thing, they argued.<sup>574</sup> Additionally, James Mercer, another artist who lived in the space off-and-on over the four year period, argues that by bringing suit against Townsend and banning him from the mall, General Growth Properties, which articulates the mall as a main cultural center of Providence, has essentially made Townsend “an outsider in his own city” and revoked the local citizenship of an artist whose work has augmented the downtown cityscape for years.<sup>575</sup>

Though Townsend, a former Rhode Island School of Design student and Yoto, a Brown University graduate are hardly among the city’s most marginalized populations, their adaptation of an interstitial space in the Providence Place Mall as a home does shed light on the spatial politics of the retail leisurescapes so prevalent in urban redevelopment. It also signals the vernacular uses made of Capital Center which challenge the dominant narratives associated with Waterfire and Providence Place mall,

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<sup>573</sup> Kerr, “The Artists Have Been Good For Everybody” *Providence Journal* 3 October, 2007. Accessed online at [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com) 9 December 2007.

<sup>574</sup> Gregory Smith, “Inside Looks at Life in the Mall” *Providence Journal* 4 December 2007. Accessed online at [ww.projo.com](http://www.projo.com) on 9 December 2007.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

and suggests the existence of vibrant cultural spaces located in Providence outside the confines of the new “tourist bubble.” Though an in-depth analysis of such spaces is outside the scope of this investigation, such sites could certainly include music clubs such as the historic Lupo’s Heartbreak Hotel and the Met Cafe, the art galleries located throughout downtown and College Hill, and the downtown theatre district including Trinity Repertory Company, the Providence Black Repertory Company, Perishable Theatre, and the multi-use art venues such as AS220. Vernacular cultural spaces might also include the sidewalks outside these venues, the new outdoor market on Washington Street, and the World War I monument, which several disabled veterans call home.

### **Performative Dimensions of Cultural Landscapes**

Accounting for the “nervous landscapes” produced by the overlapping strata of labor and leisure in Providence’s Capital Center calls attention to extant frictions between representational and non-representation philosophical approaches to cultural landscape studies. While a number of scholars work with a type of representational theory which, according to academic Nigel Thrift, relies on a view of the world as if the scholar is not “slap bang in the middle of it, co-constructing it with numerous human and non-human others,” Thrift instead aligns himself with phenomenological scholars Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu. Like these philosophers of human practice, Thrift advocates abandoning traditional representational approaches, particularly those which take the view that space is “built” by the overlay of the discursive onto the physical.<sup>576</sup> He refers

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<sup>576</sup> See Nigel Thrift, “Steps to an Ecology of Place” in Massey et al, *Human Geography Today* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1999): 296-297.

to this as the “building perspective” according to which “space and time are neutral grids, or perhaps containers, over which and in which meaning is ‘placed.’”<sup>577</sup>

Since this type of theory would divide culture and nature, Thrift dismisses it and instead prefers a “dwelling perspective” (also supported by geographer Tim Ingold), in which nature and culture must be understood as mutually constitutive and developed through the performance of some kind of activity, be it intentional or not, observed or not.<sup>578</sup> This phenomenological approach brings together geographical studies with cultural studies and performance studies to create a rich intertextual web within which spaces and places may be interpreted as both practically and theoretically significant. Indeed, performance theorist and theatre director Richard Schechner makes clear that spaces, not just people, are performative—they collaborate with bodies (and vice versa) to produce site-specific performances. For Schechner, space is fluid, an agent in its re-creation through use and practice. To enable a given human performance (any action in space and time), Schechner concludes, space must be organized, but not necessarily controlled.<sup>579</sup> He suggests that people need to know how a space works before they can use, apply or harness the power of that space and draws on his work as a theatre director to argue that any given space has properties and energies which should be respected and understood apart from the performance which will occur in it..<sup>580</sup>

Accordingly, my analysis of Waterplace Park and the other features of Capital Center’s built environment has brought together a field work method and philosophical genealogy that attempts to interpret the cultural landscape as a series of performances

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid 301.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid 309

<sup>579</sup> Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater: An Expanded New Edition including “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater”* (New York: Applause, 1994): 20.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid 31.

turned in by Waterplace Park, its surrounding structures and their attendant spatial and social politics, but also by specific performances associated with each of those structures and landscapes, including Waterfire, developed by Barnaby Evans, and Mallife, the exhibit produced by Arianna Yoto and Michael Townsend. Together, the performativity of the spaces and the performances happening within them, I argue, enable the “tourist bubble” encasing Waterplace Park, Capital Center, and the Providence Place Mall to serve as what philosopher and historian Pierre Nora refers to as a “*lieu de memoire*,” or a “memory place.”

Indeed, Waterplace Park, and its constitutive performances (among which I absolutely include the structures, exhibits and plagues of Capital Center as well as the Providence Place Mall) stand as sites of memory which create usable pasts in two significant ways: first, by showcasing a state-sponsored heritage narrative of the city of Providence, and second, by preserving enough traces of Providence’s eighteenth and nineteenth-century pasts to allow for vernacular and explicitly resistant performances of citizenship within the downtown centerpiece of Providence’s “renaissance” landscape. Though Waterplace Park hardly signifies the unified downtown trumpeted by its local, regional and national boosters it has succeed in revitalizing particular areas of downtown and made it possible for the current political administration of Providence, under the leadership of Mayor David Cicilline, to turn its attention toward implementing a new comprehensive plan for Providence. Entitled “Providence 2020” the new plan picks up where “Providence 2000” and “Providence Tomorrow” left off, and focuses explicitly on neighborhood rejuvenation and re-connection to downtown and its new renaissance-era resources.

## Conclusion

### “The Ultimate Recycling Program”: Living (in) Labor History at Rhode Island’s

#### Rehabbed Textile Mills

Along a serene riverfront, Royal Mills offers incomparable mill living in a masterfully restored 19<sup>th</sup> century mill. From the soaring clocktower to each individual plank, the entire campus is filled with a sense of character and story.<sup>581</sup>

The central project of this dissertation has been to consider the role that narratives presented at cultural heritage sites can and do play in the ways contemporary public historians, museum curators and private citizens craft “usable pasts” to give their lives and identities cultural meaning in the present. I have specifically attempted to account for the interaction of local and global factors affecting the flow of capital in the form of money and other resources, including goods and services, while maintaining a critical perspective regarding the human populations which make these resources and are involved or implicated in their unequal distribution. To undertake this project, I have examined, documented and analyzed a number of heritage sites for their constitutive narrative and material elements, seeking to understand the role they play as cultural products that tell stories binding together populations into imagined communities with shared values and practices, as well as shared pasts, presents and futures. Particularly of interest to me in this project, then, is the ways in which physical/geographic locations (locals and globals) interact with temporal locations (pasts, presents, and potential futures) and the events and/or cultural practices that are believed to have occurred there. Remembering, reimagining, and reinterpreting the places, people, and practices of the

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<sup>581</sup> See Royal Mills’ promotional brochure, produced by leasing and management company HallKeen Management.

past help to provide meaning to contemporary life, particularly in postindustrial cities whose built environments have undergone relatively rapid changes in the wake of the deindustrialization that has swept across North America (particularly the port towns and cities of the Northeast and northern Midwest) since the 1960s. As industry gradually abandons the global west for the cheaper labor and lower overhead costs of doing business in developing nations, the taskscapes that once constituted America's built environment become specters of the past, the landscapes from which they were constituted falling into disuse and dereliction and standing as symbols of the bankruptcy of former cultural values and practices. In the absence of the industrial work once undertaken in these urban locations (work which was integral to the development of the United States as a political, economic and cultural superpower), Americans conceptualize labor and leisure differently, increasingly viewing labor not as a public or semi-public act (or collection of acts) but as a thing of the past: a performative mythscape to be remembered and recreated in private venues as an aesthetic style involving aged and scarred hardwood flooring and exposed beams or the remainders of derelict wharfs, somehow beautiful in their abandonment. Finally, these new conceptions of labor and leisure, of the increasingly permeable boundaries between private and public, influence contemporary senses of self and social belonging/ social citizenship, particularly in locations like the United States, where work outside the home has so often been understood as constitutive of modern identity.

While these overarching issues have certainly informed and shaped the inquiries throughout this dissertation, in chapters 2-7 I consider specific tourist attractions including walking tours and museums that are explicitly marketed to local residents and

to visitors “from away” as cultural heritage “destinations.” Accordingly, my investigation in those chapters focused closely on the ways in which cultural heritage narratives have shaped the built environment and vice versa, and the impact or potential impact of heritage tourism on the local economic redevelopment of postindustrial urban areas.

Using specific case studies, these chapters have answered the following questions:

5. Which mythologies of Rhode Island’s rich histories have been distilled into and mobilized by the state’s heritage sites and other elements of the built environment?
6. When and why have certain mythologies been foregrounded as others have receded to the periphery or disappeared altogether, particularly in relation to contemporaneous sociopolitical events and debates?
7. Which individuals and groups (including agencies or governing bodies) have created these heritage sites? How have they done so, when and why?
8. Finally, who benefits and/or profits from these site-specific heritage performances and their use values?

Additionally, in these chapters I have accounted for the first of the two theoretical questions posed early on in this dissertation, relying on specific case studies to examine how the stories told about Rhode Island’s past(s) in brochures, on guided tours, in specific cultural landscapes, and during commemorative events organize and contextualize local, national and transnational histories for both producers and consumers of the sites. The purpose of this conclusion, therefore, is to examine the final query posed in chapter 1: How/does heritage tourism and/or the adaptive reuse of abandoned mercantile and/or industrial sites in Rhode Island tell (and sell) narratives of

postindustrial America? How are the stories of Rhode Island, as told through the heritage sites of the state's built environment, similar to those of other eastern and northern midwestern rust belt cities such as Syracuse, Worcester, Detroit and Baltimore?

I argue here that while the heritage tourism sites associated with Rhode Island's cultural tourism network have each passed through the stages of identification, preservation/stabilization, and adaptive reuse/re-purposing for tourism and the economic redevelopment of struggling urban environs, another type of heritage site has appeared on the horizon that collapses the boundaries between labor and leisure (also, as we have seen, tenuous designations even at traditional tourist attractions), but also between private and public. Indeed, the next frontier of cultural heritage is not within the cultural tourism and/or public history sector at all, but instead in the creation of private residential dwellings including artists' lofts, apartments and luxury condominiums which explicitly attempt to bring the past into the present by celebrating and/or recreating former taskscapes and other cultural practices that once occurred within a given structure or at a particular site.

Accordingly, in this conclusion I briefly examine the cultural politics of this newest set of cultural heritage sites: contemporary real estate projects which transform former sites of industry into private domestic structures, explicitly contextualizing such rehabilitative projects against the backdrop of Rhode Island's eighteenth and nineteenth century maritime and industrial histories. Using recent mill and factory rehabilitations in West Warwick and Providence as examples, I provide several observations regarding the uses that are made of Rhode Island's former industrial sites (and their accompanying

labor histories) to promote these new loft style residences as part of an “ultimate recycling program” as well as a creative alternative to traditional apartment living.<sup>582</sup>

First, it is important to note that just as former maritime and industrial locations and taskscapes have been reimagined as tourist spectacles and converted into heritage sites as part of the traditional cultural tourism sector, so too have many derelict structures of urban environments been recently converted into private dwellings, promoted as charming residential locations rife with the mythscapes of an aestheticized (and often nostalgic) local past in which former cultural landscapes of commerce and industry are reduced/simplified to symbolic specters and rendered as artifacts more than monuments to/of a thriving past filled with people and activity. Indeed, the brochures for Royal Mills, a complex located in the working class city of West Warwick, just fifteen minutes south of Providence, promises “riverfront views,” on-site waterfalls, and a convenient commute to Rhode Island’s capital city in addition to completely refurbished loft-style homes featuring soaring ceilings, exposed beams and a plethora of quirky, unusual floor plans. To customers fed up with standardized apartments (but still desirous of conveniences including 24-hour emergency maintenance service and fully equipped fitness centers), these new complexes offer “the past reborn” and are attractive because of their efforts to preserve extant industrial structures and transform them into communities “filled with a sense of character and story.”<sup>583</sup> Like the promotional materials associated with cultural heritage attractions including museums and walking tours, then, the advertising campaigns for these textiles mills-turned-residences lean heavily on narratives of an aestheticized and reimagined industrial past to establish the kind of local color required to

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<sup>582</sup> “The Past Reborn,” Royal Mills promotional pamphlet (Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, 2007).

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

make these dwellings desirable to creative young professionals tired of contemporary cookie-cutter housing options.

Second, these redevelopments are celebrated by many tourism and economic development officials as positive ways to “save” the extant built environment of postindustrial cities hoping to re-establish themselves as centers for the new “creative economy” championed by Richard Florida and others, since they take these hulking derelict sites of labor and imbue them with new life. But these conversions from mill to dwelling do not result in mass-marketed sites accessible to the public at large. Instead, these real estate projects repurpose former semi-public sites of corporatized labor and recreate them as essentially private locations to which only renters or owners have access. Since the rehabilitation of industrial structures and/or derelict port areas has long been associated with urban renaissance, particularly in mid-sized postindustrial cities such as Syracuse, Baltimore and Providence and other rust-belt locations, what is at stake here is an evaluation of the local politics set in motion when an external corporation (in this case, the Baltimore-based Struever Bros, Eccles and Rouse, the company renovating the Royal Mills of West Warwick as well as several mills in Providence) buys a structure which a given community still remembers as a site of work and makes that site useful once again—but for another purpose and another population.

Accordingly, the politics of repurposing former industrial sites for private residences catering to middle-class and affluent populations rather than long-time locals brings me to my final observation regarding the potential of gentrification, a phenomenon often related to the politics of preservation and adaptive reuse, both of which are discussed in detail in chapter 6. Many of the former sites of industry at which blue-collar

workers labored (and around which grew blue-collar and often ethnic neighborhoods) have been converted into luxury one- and two-bedroom condominiums and apartments catering primarily to young single professionals and/or their small families. Accordingly, while these developments are intended to attract new upper-middle-class and affluent populations to struggling urban neighborhoods, with apartments renting for between \$1500 and \$2000 per month and condominiums starting at almost \$200,000 (the median value of a three-bedroom stand-alone home in Rhode Island), these new dwellings are well out of financial reach for most long-time neighborhood residents.

Given these observations, it is my contention that there are two dominant strategies combining the technologies of cultural heritage and economic redevelopment in play now in many postindustrial urban areas throughout the United States. The first option is private and involves the conversion of former sites of commerce and industry into private residential dwellings associated with for-profit real estate companies. The second is public and involves the conversion of such sites (and collections of sites) into “whole place” cultural heritage attractions associated with non-profit civic tourism. Though both strategies share the goal of urban economic redevelopment and embrace the notion that the renewal of the built environment can imbue economically-depressed urban areas (and the populations that live and work there) with a “pride of place” that eventually translates into sustainable tourism and other economic opportunity, the technologies used in the public and private sectors do so using different types of financial and cultural capital, resulting in very different types of products. While both seek to reverse the damage of deindustrialization in urban areas, one harnesses the corporate resources of a private company to create private spaces with the potential to transform

their surrounding environs over time, while the other uses public means to produce public spaces and relies on community and governmental involvement in every aspect of the project, from funding to day-to-day operation. While these strategies are examined only briefly in what follows, the ultimate question posed here is whether or not these strategies can or should be reconciled in some way to affect the greatest possible public good by effectively harnessing the power of cultural heritage and the mythscapes discussed throughout this dissertation.

### **The Creative Economy of the New Gilded Age and the Cultural Bankruptcy of American Industrial Landscapes**

Defined by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison as “a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s productive capacity,” deindustrialization hit the cities of central and northern Rhode Island particularly hard, resulting not only in job loss, but also the “displacement of industry and industrial workers to the cultural periphery” of areas in which they once occupied the center of society.<sup>584</sup> Indeed, scholar of deindustrialization Steven High and photographer David W. Lewis note in their 2007 text *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* that workers formerly associated with heavy industry throughout the port towns and cities of North America have gradually come to identify with their displacement as they once identified with their work.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Bluestone and Harrison quoted in Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007): 2. For more on the decentralization of heavy industry and the workers associated therewith, see High and Lewis 25.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid 9.

Beyond these cultural effects of deindustrialization there are also the oft-cited statistics. According to High and Lewis, “[b]etween 1969 and 1976, the United States lost 22.3 million jobs.”<sup>586</sup> Lest this initial job loss, which led to the identification of a “Rust Belt” stretching up through New England and reaching west across upstate New York and Michigan, be considered a one-time phenomenon confined to the period between the 1960s and 1980s, High and Lewis also note a second staggering period of deindustrialization during the period now recognized as the new Gilded Age. Indeed, between 1995 and 2002, even as a booming service economy and high tech infrastructures were being developed, another two million manufacturing jobs were sacrificed within the United States.<sup>587</sup> Cumulatively, these two periods of deindustrialization have also seen the reduced power and, in some cases, total dissolution of labor unions due to decreased membership, leading to potentially unsafe working conditions in the comparatively few industries that remain. Yet High and Lewis, like other critical scholars of industry, are careful to note that the deindustrialization of one area in no way signifies the end of industry altogether. Conversely, they argue, the deindustrialization of one location necessarily leads to increased industrialization elsewhere, in places where the cost of doing business is less expensive.

While the attitude within the United States toward heavy industry tends to be dismissive, suggesting that “[i]ndustries that once symbolized modernity and progress have come to represent an antiquated and polluted past that should be put behind us,” newly postcolonial states and nations around the globe do not necessarily share this feeling. According to High and Lewis,

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<sup>586</sup> Ibid 3.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid 3.

It is not as if the world is becoming any less industrialized. Rather, capital continues to move from one location to the next in search of competitive advantage through cheaper labour [sic] costs and reduced environmental obligations.<sup>588</sup>

Within the United States and Canada, however, the abandoned landscape of heavy industry now signals loss and dereliction, as does the absence of the corporations and industries that left town and rendered entire communities jobless and ill-suited for employment in the service and technology economies that have risen in their wake. Just as the workers interviewed in the first few minutes of the Museum of Work and Culture video shown in the recreated Precious Blood Church emphasize the symbolism of the increasingly dilapidated mills and factories lining the Blackstone River of northern Rhode Island, so too do most contemporary North Americans see these hulking shells of former industry as representative of loss and the bankruptcy of once-powerful industrial culture. According to High and Lewis, whose work expressly considers the leftover human-made landscapes of abandoned industry,

Industrial landscapes were once proud symbols of human progress and modernity...With its multi-storey red brick buildings, blast furnaces, great chimneys, water towers, and conveyors, the industrial landscape evoked a way of life and its rhythm, as well as a specific economic and cultural order.<sup>589</sup>

Left to gradually return to the earth or become victims of arson, these industrial landscapes are now simply seen as the titular “wastelands” of High and Lewis’s 2007 text on deindustrialization, the raw materials for adaptive reuse and repurposing by private real estate corporations “from away” and the public cultural tourism resource managers operating locally.

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid 2.

## **Private Cultural Heritage Strategies for Urban Economic Redevelopment in the New Gilded Age**

Even a cursory evaluation of the Struever Brothers, Eccles and Rouse (hereafter referred to as SBER) mill rehabilitation projects in West Warwick and Providence reveals that the types of narratives traditionally associated with historic tourism and heritage sites are now being used in the corporate real estate sector. Via on-site and on-line museums, tours of the facilities, and promotional materials, national companies like SBER, via independent projects as well as partnerships with local organizations such as the Providence-based Armory Revival Company, have cultivated the tropes associated with the lifestyle economy of the new Gilded Age and successfully co-opted the language of local pride-of-place organizations such as the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council (discussed in greater detail in chapter 7 and returned to below) in order to recreate the private sphere of residential life as a substitute for (or, some might argue, a new form of) civic community engagement. The examples of the SBER properties known as the Royal Mills of West Warwick and the Rising Sun and Calendar Mills of Providence are only two examples of this phenomenon.

Located in the small ethnic enclave of West Warwick, Rhode Island, the water-powered cotton mills known as the Royal Mills were built from 1889 to 1890 and served as one of the major employers of the town's population until 1935. Constructed alongside the powerful Pawtuxet River, these mills were the production headquarters of the B.B. & R. Knight Company, best known for their mass-marketed brand, "Fruit of the Loom." By 1903, the Knight Company, founded by long-time Rhode Island textile dynamos the Knight brothers, was the largest cotton fabric manufacturer in the world. By 1913, the

company employed 7,000 workers across 22 mills, and the Royal Mills was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest of these complexes. By the time the company went bankrupt and closed the doors to this complex in 1935, the Royal Mills had weathered one of the most historically significant industrial strikes in the nation, as New England textile workers remained away from their machines for 33 weeks in 1922. After the Knight Company finally vacated the premises, a variety of other manufacturing concerns occupied the mills until the site was officially closed in 1993. For just over a century, the mills housed heavy industry and acted as an economic anchor for the town and people of West Warwick, also helping to build the town's image as a working class enclave where immigrants, particularly of Italian and Portuguese ancestry, could find work that would enable them to build lives in North America.<sup>590</sup>

Purchased in 2004 by SBER, the Royal Mills buildings have been remodeled and adapted into 250 one- and two-bedroom apartments and 50,000 square feet of potential retail space. Though the retail space was not yet completed when I toured the site in June of 2008, the apartment complex itself was at 70% occupancy according to the leasing agents, and boasts all the amenities of the most modern luxury domestic complexes, including climate-controlled on-site parking, a fitness center, concierge service, business center, guest suite, 24-hour maintenance and free wireless internet in community areas. But brochures and on-site tours reveal the real perks of living in a converted mill: a riverfront barbeque area, kayak launch, bike paths and a "riverwalk," a turbine hall community room outfitted with textiles, advertisements and machinery from the original

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<sup>590</sup> "Mill Timeline," Royal Mills History by Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse accessed at <http://royalmillshistory.com/mill-timeline/> 12 August 2008.

buildings, and even a waterfall used to provide power to some common areas for “greener” living.

Tours of the complex also reveal the care taken by SBER in the adaptive reuse of the site. The company is partially named for James Rouse, the real estate and redevelopment mogul whose work on the “festival marketplaces” of Boston’s Faneuil Hall and Baltimore’s Harborplace have made his name synonymous with the conversion of derelict urban waterfronts into contemporary tourist-friendly “destinations.” Indeed, before his death in 1996, Rouse was no stranger to Rhode Island and its working waterways, as he not only attended conferences and weighed in on various plans for the redevelopment of downtown Providence, but was also one of the major developers involved with the early planning of the Providence Place Mall, lauded by boosters as one of the city center’s most significant economic assets. Given SBER’s reputation, I was hardly surprised to hear from current Royal Mills staff that the developer worked closely with the local preservation community to collect, remove and/or reuse the historic fabrics of the buildings, including not only machinery and tools, furniture, marketing materials such as signs, billboards and posters, and even scraps of fabrics and fibers, but also structural elements such as wooden beams, laths and planks. These materials were salvaged, some given over to the local historical society, some used in the redesign of apartments and common areas, and some stored in the on-site museum maintained by the leasing and management company. Indeed, this careful adaptation of an industrial site into a collection of domestic dwellings has been well-documented by Struever Brothers, included in hard copy and online marketing materials for the complex. Touted as “the

ultimate recycling program,” this mill rehabilitation sought to preserve more than just the mill’s historic character. According to Struever Bros.:

...more than 50% of all demolition materials and artifacts were salvaged and reused in innovative ways. So as you explore the property you’ll find looms, gears, planks and stones tastefully repurposed in the signage, railings, public seating, pathways, décor and public areas throughout.<sup>591</sup>

While Struever Bros may be dedicated to “green living” and adaptive reuse, their approach to this project also allowed them to make use of historic tax credits, as is the case with a number of other real estate companies rehabilitating Rhode Island’s large collection of derelict mill buildings. Indeed, though many of Rhode Island’s textile mills and factories have long stood derelict along the state’s mainland waterways, several of these hulking specters of Rhode Island’s industrial past, particularly those in Providence and Providence County, have been recognized as historically significant and are currently enjoying second lives as residential dwellings, and many as luxury housing. New apartment and condominium complexes are taking shape (or have already been completed) in abandoned industrial structures throughout the Blackstone River Valley of northern Rhode Island, Providence, and other centrally-located cities such as Warwick and West Warwick. Well-known for their work rehabilitating the former industrial structures of Baltimore, SBER have also recently undertaken two new projects in the Olneyville section of Providence and other developers have followed suit, renovating the mills and factories in decidedly more suburban locations. Pontiac Mills of Warwick, Rhode Island, also located along the Pawtuxet River, is the potential site of residential lofts, as well as housing the upscale NYLO hotel already in operation.

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

While SBER worked independently on the Royal Mills project in West Warwick, they have partnered with the Providence-based Armory Revival Company to renovate the Rising Sun and Calendar Mills of Providence. Located in the Olneyville neighborhood of Rhode Island's capital city, an economically-depressed area home to Providence's poorest ethnic minorities, including Rhode Island-born Latin/Iberian and Black populations as well as recent immigrants, an increasing number of whom are refugees and members of African and South Asian diasporas, the Rising Sun and Calendar Mill complexes date back to 1887 and 1845 respectively.<sup>592</sup> Described by SBER as "one of Providence's most eclectic and active neighborhoods" Olneyville is also characterized by the nationally-renowned urban real estate company as "a place where entrepreneurs celebrate the spirit of commerce, artisans revel in spaces that promote artistic vitality and a new creative class lives in a place like no other."<sup>593</sup>

Situated on the banks of the Woonasquatucket River and fronting on the "fast-developing" Valley Street, the Rising Sun Mills boasts more than 600 residential units, the contribution (or future contribution) of \$20 million in new taxes and the potential of 10,000 new jobs.<sup>594</sup> Additionally, although the complex is located on the west side of Providence, divided from downtown and its recent "urban renaissance" redevelopment projects by train tracks and highways, desirable locations including the downtown business core, Waterplace Park and the Providence Place Mall are still easily accessible, as are west side attractions including the restaurant district of Federal Hill, and the small

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<sup>592</sup> The Rising Sun Mills were established on the grounds of Charles Fletcher's wool manufacturing mill, constructed in 1795. Fletcher's mill was destroyed by fire and replaced by the current structure, according to the promotional materials furnished by SBER in association with the project. See the "Project History" of the Rising Sun Mills, <http://www.risingsunmills.com/history/mill.php>. Accessed online 25 March 2009.

<sup>593</sup> See the project description of the Rising Sun Mills, accessible via the SBER website: <http://www.sber.com>. This website offers information on each of SBER's residential projects, organized by geographic location. These promotional materials were originally accessed online in March of 2009.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

commercial pocket of the West Broadway neighborhood, with its locally-owned businesses, seasonally-operated fresh produce stands, and an unofficial dog park known only to local residents.

Similarly situated are the Calendar Mills at the corner of Valley and Delaine Streets, only one mile west of the Rising Sun Mills. Both complexes, argues SBER in their promotional materials and site profiles, are meant to be seamlessly integrated into the Olneyville neighborhood, as well as being a constitutive part of the area's economic and cultural rejuvenation. Founded in 1974 and dedicated to "conquering challenging locations," SBER has cultivated a profile of "corporate, social, and environmental responsibility," partnering with local organizations as part of their mission to "revitalize our cities, neighborhood by neighborhood." Unlike some real estate developers concerned primarily with profit margins, SBER advocates what they refer to as a "triple bottom line" which relies as much on profitability as a measure of success as it does on the creation of community and respect for the planet.<sup>595</sup> Commenting specifically on their work in Rhode Island, SBER notes their many contributions to the neighborhoods of the state:

In our short time in Rhode Island, we have forged many productive and wide-ranging partnerships—partnerships that embrace the community priorities integral to our neighborhood revitalization initiatives. Since 2002, SBER has contributed more than \$2.25 million in Rhode Island, including direct contributions and in-kind services. We have also organized thousands of volunteer hours to benefit Rhode Island organizations—helping rebuild the economy, confidence, and spirit of the neighborhood in which we work.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> "Corporate Citizenship and Social Responsibility in Rhode Island: A Report to Our Partners," (SBER February 2007). Accessed online at [www.SBER.com](http://www.SBER.com) March 2009.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

According to SBER, the initiatives undertaken in Rhode Island include supporting public schools and other educational institutions; working with community service organizations; contributing affordable housing; creating open space in urban environments; establishing green communities and using responsible environmental policies; encouraging community leadership; enhancing local employment opportunities; and contributing philanthropically to establish or maintain the fiscal health of local organizations.

If it sounds as though SBER embraces the very same types of holistic policies as the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, this is not surprising, since SBER, like other urban real estate developers of its ilk, have recently embraced the language of advocates of what the BVTC has referred to as “whole-place development,” an economic redevelopment strategy that emphasizes “story” (i.e., the production of a mythscape to accompany a given location and to create what I call in my prefatory and introductory materials a “monumental present”). While this type of narrative, which attempts to bring a variety of locations and sites into conversation with each other via a shared past, set of practices or other context, has not been successful in some established tourist locations such as Newport, it did work on the East Side of Providence to develop the College Hill neighborhood into a tourist destination and attractive residential address, and it has also been productive, if on a subtler scale, in the Blackstone Valley of northern Rhode Island. The major difference between these strategies as they are practiced by real estate moguls such as SBER and their local partners and by the BVTC, however, is the direct benefit offered to the public at large. SBER and other real estate developers offer a “trickle-down” or associational solution to urban neighborhoods whose populations and built

environs are suffering from postindustrial economic and cultural decline. These corporations establish attractive community residences to woo new populations of upscale professionals and businesses to depressed area arguing that an economic upswing for the entire area will result. According to this argument, the fact that locals have no access to the actual adapted mill complex matters little, as they may have the opportunity to work in the service industries supporting the new residence. SBER creates *private* spaces that will supposedly have a positive public impact.

Despite the documented efforts of SBER to engage in activities that explicitly benefit the local communities in which they undertake residential industrial-conversion projects, many local critics still have reservations regarding the politics of a national corporation converting a former site of industry into a contemporary site of luxury residences. Besides the troubling nostalgic aestheticization of labor that renders such former blue-collar sites attractive to contemporary white-collar workers, there exists significant material disconnects between the new dwellings and the communities in which they are located. The Rising Sun and Calendar Mills, for example, are located on Valley Street in the heart of Olneyville, where a steadily increasing population earns a median family income of only \$19,046, a figure that is not only 43% lower than the median family income of the rest of Providence, but 70% lower than the national median family income of the United States. Between 1990 and 2000 the population grew from 5,866 to 6,495 people, with the white population decreasing by half while the Latino/a/Iberian population more than doubled. Additionally, during this period the non-English-speaking population went from 70% from 1990, resulting in 65% of the neighborhood being populated by people who spoke a language besides English at

home. Other vital information provided by the Providence Plan, a local non-profit corporation dedicated to the economic revitalization of Rhode Island's capital city, presents a portrait of Olneyville that is quite different than the one championed by SBER:

Less than half (47.7%) of all persons of age 25 or older had completed high school in 2000. Almost a third (31%) of all employed residents in Olneyville in 2000 were employed in the manufacturing sector, the single largest source of jobs for Olneyville residents. The unemployment rate in Olneyville was 12 percent, three percentage points higher than the citywide rate [itself significantly higher than the national average].

Additionally, by 2000, 4 out of 10 residents of Olneyville were classified as "poor" (as was more than 50% of the youth population), and 41% of families reported living in poverty. Yet as the people of this area struggled, the neighborhood remained a source of stability, as the number of owner-occupied dwellings dropped only marginally during this ten-year period, and at the time of the 2000 census, 25% of Olneyville's resident reported having lived in their current dwellings for more than 10 years.<sup>597</sup>

The bottom line here is that despite SBER's policies of corporate responsibility and neighborhood engagement, Olneyville residents have yet to benefit from the redevelopment of the Rising Sun or Calendar Mills. These residences offer only studio, one- or two-bedroom units, making them too small for many local families, and each of the units rents for more than \$1000 per month. Since most Rhode Island renters pay nearly 30% of their annual income to lease their dwellings, renting a one-bedroom apartment at the Rising Sun Mills would require an annual income of \$40,000. Living at the Royal Mills in West Warwick is even more costly, with rents starting at \$1500 per month and requiring an income of \$60,000 to live relatively comfortably according to the state mean. If these new residential complexes have brought new life to old structures,

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<sup>597</sup> "Olneyville: A Neighborhood Analysis," by the Department of Planning and Urban Development.

helped to preserve and repurpose the local built environment and provide the potential for local economic redevelopment, the largest impact on the community so far have actually come from SBER's private fiscal efforts (including monetary contributions and in-kind donations) to persuade community members and organizations that their presence will eventually be a positive factor. What remains to be seen is whether or not young professionals, even those who purport to enjoy the bohemian "artist loft" atmosphere offered by the rehabbed textile mills, will select a majority-minority neighborhood with significant economic difficulties as their home, and whether or not they will spend their time and money there if they do.<sup>598</sup>

### **Public Cultural Heritage Strategies for Urban Economic Redevelopment in the New Gilded Age**

Meanwhile, the BVTC is a tourist organization specifically created to encourage civic pride and sustainable growth in *public* venues. And according to the Travel Industry Association of America, their strategy is working, wooing a small but steady flow of travelers to northern Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts at the same time as the type of "whole place development" advocated by Executive Director Bob Billington and civic tourism scholar and practitioner Daniel Shilling establish these locations as livable communities for residents.

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<sup>598</sup> Important to note here is the fact that these complexes offer indoor parking for residents, effectively establishing the rehabilitated mill as a private cocoon in which residents are shielded from contact with the neighborhood and community in which they live. Residents at the Rising Sun Mills can leave their apartment, walk to their cars and drive to other locations for dinner and/or a movie, defeating the very notion of "walkable communities" or the idea that new residents will necessarily circulate their financial assets in the neighborhoods in which they live.

The urban environs of northern Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley would have provided an excellent case study for High and Lewis during the 1980s and 1990s. Although Blackstone Valley cities Lincoln and Smithfield have become known as bastions of white upper middle-class affluence and still feature rolling acres of primarily decorative farmland, the Blackstone Valley as a whole, despite its noteworthy industrial history, hardly qualified as a tourist destination by the mid-1980s. Indeed, according to Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Director of Operations Natalie Carter, “[p]eople would laugh when Bob [Billington, the Council’s Rhode Island-born head and founder] first went out to talk about a tourism industry here.”<sup>599</sup>

But all this changed when the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, officially founded in 1985, gained its footing and began to inspire hope for a new kind of tourist industry in northern Rhode Island. Since its founding, the Tourism Council has taken a holistic approach to the Blackstone Valley, attempting to stimulate national interest in some aspect of each of the individual cities and towns of northern Providence County. Woonsocket, Rhode Island, especially, saw its fortunes change as national attention focused on creating the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and community block development grant money began to flow into the city in support of urban renewal projects, one of which eventually evolved into the Museum of Work and Culture.

As noted by Julie Taylor Thorson in her unpublished master’s thesis “Evaluating the Implementation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor,” a heritage area is different from a national park, and thus regulated by a different set of government-issued guidelines. While a heritage area, as defined by the United States

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<sup>599</sup> Interview with author.

National Center for Heritage Development (NCHD) “could be any expanse of land that makes contributions to history and culture,” Thorson notes that it is usually defined in much more specific terms:

A heritage area usually involves more than one jurisdiction; is guided by regional management; combines public and private sector leadership; and develops economic, social, and environmental benefits to the region that it serves. Typically, a regional heritage area fosters a balanced commitment for the protection of environmental and cultural resources while also encouraging development for tourism and other economic opportunities.”<sup>600</sup>

Additionally:

...heritage areas have a broad-ranging geography yet possess a cohesive thematic unity through a set of overarching historical and cultural motifs. Often the themes are related to an economic activity that has been significant to the region, such as manufacturing, mining, or agricultural production... [and typically feature] a large-scale natural resource or man-made feature such as a river or a roadway [that] physically defines and unites the area.”<sup>601</sup>

Finally, “national heritage areas [must be] significant to the nation’s past and culture” rather than serving or representing only one specific area or region.<sup>602</sup>

Unlike national parks, heritage areas are not overseen by the Secretary of the Interior and are characterized instead as “a patchwork of...privately held parcels” akin to those created as elements of urban renaissance in cities such as Providence, Baltimore and Pittsburgh.<sup>603</sup> Additionally, heritage areas are different from national parks because their management structure involves a mix of collaborators that are both public and private, with strong and long-term lobbying efforts usually required at the federal level to

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<sup>600</sup> Thorson 13-14.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid 15-16.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid 16.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid 17-18.

establish heritage areas meeting the fairly strict criteria.<sup>604</sup> These characteristics combine to suggest that the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, as a broad and multi-site project, has more in common with the urban renaissance ventures (and their associated politics of economic renewal and redevelopment) of the 1980s and 1990s than with more traditional approaches to environmental and cultural asset management such as national parks and stand-alone history museums.

Indeed, the seven specific goals identified by the Commission for the Corridor project in their Interpretive Plan of September of 1989 further highlights the mix of cultural and economic agendas supporting the project. These goals included: 1) operating through partnerships; 2) engaging in historic preservation; 3) promoting environmental conservation by cleaning and enhancing the area; 4) supporting a plan of land use management that would promote the preservation of traditional settlement patterns and the historic “fabric” of the area; 5) encouraging and creating new forms of recreation; 6) supporting local efforts for economic development throughout the Blackstone Valley; and 7) interpreting the Blackstone Valley by linking it to the Corridor’s related themes.<sup>605</sup> The themes identified in the interpretive plan were threefold. While the theme of work derived from the Blackstone River was identified as primary because it remains the “unifying theme” of all the cities included in the Corridor, secondary themes included the role of the Blackstone Valley as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution and

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<sup>604</sup> According to Thorson, there are different models available that have established the criteria for heritage areas, ranging from the park model (made famous by Yellowstone National Park) to the heritage area model established in Lowell’s newest national park. Because the Lowell model is urban and has a focus on “community revitalization, a mix of public and private ownership [and] partnership between multiple levels of government,” Lowell is seen as the most direct inspiration for the Blackstone Valley project.<sup>604</sup> Indeed, the value of the Blackstone Valley to the national narrative, as it has been championed by the Tourism Council as well as national boosters including Rhode Island Senator Lincoln Chafee, Sr., is its industrial history, particularly its role in the origins of American textile manufacturing and the development of the “RI system of manufacturing” at Slater Mill in Pawtucket. Ibid 48-49.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid 68-89.

the national precedent that would be set in the identification of a holistic heritage corridor.<sup>606</sup>

With the establishment of the Heritage Corridor and the increasing organization of the Blackstone Valley into a cohesive and identifiable area with shared histories, demographics and values, came much-needed national attention and federal funding to support tourism efforts, environmental clean-ups and urban renewal throughout the northernmost recesses of Providence County, including some of the most economically-damaged areas of Woonsocket, Central Falls and Pawtucket. By the time a master plan for the area was unveiled in 1992 by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, all nine towns and cities of Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley had worked collaboratively with the Tourism Council to develop a comprehensive plan for identifying and promoting specific elements and sites within each town and city in a manner that made effective and sustainable use of the available historical and natural resources.

Since the individual historical attractions of each of the cities and towns had long-since been identified and stabilized, the Tourism Council focused on unifying the attractions with the themes of the Heritage Corridor and marketing the existing resources, most notably taking steps to reclaim and restore the Blackstone River for safe recreational use. Given the vast damage done to the Blackstone River during Providence County's industrial heyday, reversing the environmental degradation of the river and its shoreline were no small task, yet it was necessary for the economic rebirth of northern

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid 76. Persuaded by the Blackstone Valley's well-documented industrial heritage, the United States Congress authorized an initial 5 years of funding in 1986, at \$250,000 per year. In 1990, funding was reauthorized, at \$350,000 annually and in 1996 it was extended yet again, at a slightly decreased funding level of \$324,000 per year. Although federal funding was set to terminate in 2006, extensions have been approved upon each application, and federal funding of the Corridor has been maintained through the present.

Rhode Island.<sup>607</sup> The different geographic, topographic and demographic characteristics of the Blackstone Valley also make traditional urban renewal strategies impossible. Unlike Newport and Providence, the Blackstone Valley has nothing to gain by building hotels and or relying on a “[convention and visitor’s bureau] type of system, where [local tourism officials] go out and sell space and hotel rooms.”<sup>608</sup> With limited traditional tourist attractions and a location just thirty minutes’ drive from Providence and roughly an hour south of Boston, building convention venues in northern Rhode Island simply did not make sense or seem sustainable. Indeed, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council remains wary of the benefits of traditional and business tourism (“hospitality tourism”) models generally, and has gained both national and international recognition for creating a new model of civic tourism that emphasizes a renaissance in use of the extant built and natural environments instead of advocating traditional “renaissance” construction projects including stadiums, convention centers or urban shopping and recreation facilities. While SBER argues that “building more creates more,” the BVTC vehemently disagrees, and instead advocates using the already extant elements of the built and natural environments to create livable communities with story, substance and charm.<sup>609</sup>

And according to the Travel Industry Association of America, the efforts of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, combined with the national recognition that has come in the wake of the establishment of the Heritage Corridor, have made a significant

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<sup>607</sup> Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Executive Director Bob Billington summarizes well the damage done over the years: “With the success of manufacturing in the Blackstone River Valley in textiles, machinery, jewelry and other industries, the valley turned away from protecting the Blackstone and subsequently let it become a catch-all for chemicals, dyes, metals, sewage and eventually household goods and automobiles. Anything that was not wanted went into the river, or on its banks. This abuse continued long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” See Billington, “The Glorious Rebirth of the Blackstone Valley,” *The Providence Journal*, April 15, 2008.

<sup>608</sup> Natalie Carter, interview with author.

<sup>609</sup> “Corporate Citizenship and Social Responsibility in Rhode Island” SBER February 2007: 1.

difference in the shared economies of the cities of northern Providence County. In a 2006 report entitled “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Main Nine Communities in Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island in 2004” the DC-based Research Department of the Travel Industry Association of America assesses the role and economic impact of tourism in the Blackstone Valley in Rhode Island, accounting for “domestic traveler spending, travel-generated employment and payroll income, and travel-generated tax revenue for state and local governments.”<sup>610</sup> The study only includes information on travel trips of 50 miles or more and/or a trip that involves a stay of at least one night away from home, excluding “[t]ravel commuting to and from work, travel by those operating an airplane, bus, truck, train or other form of common carrier transportation, military travel on active duty, and travel by students away at school.”<sup>611</sup>

Using the Travel Economic Impact Model (TEIM), which helps to estimate travel expenses based on local and national averages, the Travel Industry Association of America prepared its report on the economic impact of tourism in the Blackstone Valley for the Tourism Council and on behalf of the Blackstone River Valley Tourism Collaborative for the National Heritage Corridor Communities.<sup>612</sup> Accordingly, the report covers 16 communities and zip codes in Rhode Island and provides the most significant information in its executive summary. The report concludes that 2004 saw 2.3 million

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<sup>610</sup> See the Travel Industry Association of America, “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Main Nine Communities in Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island in 2004” (Washington, DC: Research Department of the Travel Industry Association of America), August 2006: 1. While these data may seem out of date, they are in fact the latest statistics available regarding the economic impact of travel in and through the Blackstone River Valley.

<sup>611</sup> See the Travel Industry of America, “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island/Massachusetts in 2004” (Washington, DC: Research Department of the Travel Industry Association of America), February 2006: 1.

<sup>612</sup> This information is accrued by sampling and estimation, with 25,000 households surveyed in a given area each month to figure out the number of trips of 50 miles or more away from home. Ibid 24.

total person-trips to the Blackstone Valley (both Rhode Island and Massachusetts) and a combined travel expenditure of \$474.4 million. Of that total, \$99.2 million (or 21% of the total expenditure) was earned by the communities in Rhode Island:

**Table 1**

	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>Total jobs</b>	<b>Total payroll</b>	<b>Total Payroll Tax</b>
<b>Blackstone Valley (MA and RI combined)</b>	474.4 million	6400	124.5 million	39.6 million
<b>RI only</b>	99.2 million	1240	24.4	2.3 million

*2004 Tourism expenditures; total 2.3 million person-trips.<sup>613</sup>*

The report also breaks down the total expenditure into 6 categories, including public transportation, auto transportation, lodging, foodservice, entertainment and recreation, and general retail.

**Table 2**

	<b>Public Transportation</b>	<b>Entertainment and recreation</b>	<b>Gen. retail</b>	<b>Auto Expenses</b>	<b>Lodging</b>	<b>Food</b>
<b>Blackstone Valley (MA and RI combined)</b>	33.6	46.2	47	105.7	117.5	124.4
<b>RI only</b>	13.6	8.6	12.9	29.7	8.5	25.9

*2004 tourism expenditures by category. Amounts in millions.*

<sup>613</sup> All tables created by author combining the data found in “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Main Nine Communities in Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island” and “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island/Massachusetts in 2004.”

When it comes to the actual payroll generated by this rising tourism industry, these categories can also be assessed. According to the report, “[t]ravel-generated payroll is the wage and salary income paid to employees directly serving the traveler within the industry sectors from which travelers purchase goods and services.” These jobs can be full time or part time positions, or seasonal employment.<sup>614</sup> The report provides information about the number of jobs produced in each sector of the travel industry as well as the percentage this number of jobs represents to the total regional economy:

**Table 3**

	<b>Total Blackstone Valley (RI and MA combined)</b>	<b>Total % local economy Blackstone Valley</b>	<b>Total RI only</b>	<b>Total % local economy RI only</b>
<b>Lodging</b>	1400	21.9%	90	7.3%
<b>Entertainment and Recreation</b>	1100	17.2%	220	17.7%
<b>Travel Planning</b>	700	10.9%	180	14.5%
<b>General retail</b>	300	4.7%	80	6.5%
<b>Foodservice</b>	2400	37.5%	510	41.1%
<b>Auto and Public Transportation</b>	500	7.8%	160	13%

*2004 tourism job created per category (and % represented in local economy) in 2004.*

<sup>614</sup> “Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island/Massachusetts in 2004,” 20.

The report also offers a useful summary conclusion regarding the actual amount of money earned by Blackstone Valley residents working in these fields:

On average, every dollar spent by domestic travelers produced 26.3 cents in wage and salary income for the residents of the region. In the region, the average annual wage and salary income in the travel industry was around \$19,500 during 2004.<sup>615</sup>

If the financial bottom line is the most economically significant, however, perhaps the most culturally significant data identified in the report relates to the types of trips taken in the Blackstone Valley. Unlike Newport and Providence, which attract a significant number of visitors that arrive for business and stay on to sample the areas' respective historic and environmental tourist attractions, the Blackstone Valley (throughout both Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts) saw only 12% of these 2.3 million person-trips attributed to business travel, or trips "taken for general business, convention, conference, seminar, and combined business/pleasure purposes." Instead, 88% of the total trips were identified as "leisure trips," defined by the report as those "taken to visit friends or relatives for entertainment, for outdoor recreation purposes, or for personal pleasure/other purposes." If the Blackstone Valley does not enjoy the overwhelming numbers of tourists that flock to Newport and Providence each year, its boosters can assert that the travelers who do come do so not for work, but pure pleasure and recreation. Without the added draw of business or professional conferences to lure them to the area, visitors to the Blackstone Valley's natural and historic attractions have identified northern Rhode Island as a "destination" location, an interpretation supported by the fact that 63% of the total trips documented by the Travel Association involved an overnight stay. Additionally, since 68% of the total trips were identified as auto-trips, the

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid 20.

report's data suggests that many visitors to the Blackstone Valley are either residents of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, or other neighboring states, a population that is not regularly wooed to the Gilded Age mansions of Newport or the colonial streetscapes of Providence's East Side.<sup>616</sup>

According to Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's President Bob Billington, the secret to the Tourism Council's success is the emphasis on "whole-place tourism development," an idea whose origin he traces back to the early 1980s. He argues that tourists "seek places that seem authentic" and that the Blackstone Valley is able to deliver such a product because it is a place that has historical significance and contemporary meaning to both residents and visitors.<sup>617</sup> This idea is seconded by the Tourism Council's Director of Operations Natalie Carter, who explains,

This is authentic history here. In the soil. Slater Mill, that's the authentic place. The authentic site...It's not Sturbridge, it's not Plymouth, it's not Mystic. It's *the* place. You walk along the river here, in the soil is the innovation that came from here.<sup>618</sup>

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's emphasis on "whole-place development" and feelings of authenticity, while clearly aligned to the holistic corridor approach to historic preservation and the exhibition of local heritage, nevertheless sets the Council apart from tourism models that emphasize "hospitality" over tourism. Author and community development consultant Daniel Shilling, who works closely with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and is largely responsible for the movement toward "civic tourism" in the Blackstone Valley and other locations seeking smaller-scale

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<sup>616</sup> "Economic Impact of Domestic Travel on the Blackstone Valley at Rhode Island/Massachusetts in 2004," 13-14.

<sup>617</sup> Robert Billington, "The Glorious Rebirth of the Blackstone Valley." *The Providence Journal* April 15, 2008.

<sup>618</sup> Natalie Carter, interview with author.

sustainable tourism industries suggests that while “hospitality” might involve building or updating local hotels and other accommodations, retooling marketing brochures and websites, tourism is concerned primarily with creating or developing the narratives associated with a given place. Asserting that sustainable tourism models, which should be based on “the poetry and politics of place,” must be crafted by asking difficult questions about which stories are told, how and why—and correspondingly, which stories are not told and why.

Additionally, Shilling suggests that tourism models need to be financially reconceptualized to incorporate nontraditional funding sources as well as organizational structures that rely more on local community-based decision-making than the bureaucratic authority of state-wide departments of tourism. According to Shilling, tourism, which is “among the top three economic drivers in every state in the nation,” is simply too important to local cultural, political and financial economies to be left to traditional sources and old-fashioned approaches. Instead, he advocates a threefold policy in close keeping with the goals established by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. According to Shilling, good tourism models involve: 1) rethinking traditional approaches and economies, 2) connecting with the public (both residents and visitors), and 3) investing in the story of the place at hand, rather than trying to create one by altering the built environment with amusement parks, shopping malls, sports stadiums, convention center and luxury hotels.<sup>619</sup>

Taking a similar approach, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, whose slogan is “Changing the Valley through Tourism,” clearly states its mission “[t]o create positive

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<sup>619</sup> Shilling 17.

change with regard to community values by developing and promoting coordinated, responsible and sustainable tourism in Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley communities."<sup>620</sup> Like close collaborator Shilling, the Tourism Council and Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission emphasize tourism as an engine for economic redevelopment, but have done so by expanding their focus from the traditional parameters of the tourism industry and focusing closely on the cultural rejuvenation of the area. If tourism can change the culture of the Blackstone Valley, these authorities suggest, such a transformation will not be affected only by attracting visitors to the area, but also by stimulating pride of place and a politics of civic engagement among local residents.

Indeed, according to the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan submitted by the Heritage Corridor Commission, the heritage corridor was intended to be of significant cultural and economic benefit to the local residents, who the Corridor Commission felt suffered from a lack of appreciation for the "importance of [the Blackstone Valley's] vernacular architecture, particularly...structures related to industry." According to the published Plan, "[m]any residents have felt forsaken by industry and society and do not view the structures and landscapes associated with their industrial past in a positive light."<sup>621</sup> Accordingly, creating the Heritage Corridor, boosters hoped, would inspire feelings of local pride and acts of civic engagement, as well as stimulating economic growth from local tourism, recreation and the potential of attracting new businesses to the area. According to Natalie Carter of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, this new approach signals an urban renaissance not in form (i.e.,

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<sup>620</sup> <http://www.blackstonevalleytourismcouncil.com/values/htm>. Accessed 28 May 2008.

<sup>621</sup> Thorson 86.

the creation of new structures and attractions such as shopping malls and stadiums), but a renaissance in use.

## **Conclusion**

While the brief nature of this conclusion does not allow for the kind of in-depth analysis required to pronounce either the private or public strategies of economic redevelopment profiled here the most successful or beneficial, it is intended to suggest that both exist and must be acknowledged and reckoned with by any scholars or practitioners of cultural heritage tourism, urban theory or local and/or regional economic redevelopment. If it is still too early to tell which strategy, the public or private, will prove the most successful in the long run, what should be considered is whether or not these two can work together (or can work separately in the same place) toward a common good for not only visitors or potential residents, but also for long-time local dwellers with strong ties to a given area as well. Only by taking an interdisciplinary approach (considering the power of cultural heritage narratives as well as statistics and demographics, for example) and thinking outside the proverbial box of tourism studies, museology and traditional economic redevelopment approaches can a truly sustainable and socially equitable postindustrial urban environment be established.

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