

On the other hand, it became all too easy for the park to focus on farm life and crafts to the exclusion of slavery and other relevant subjects. As the park became a more popular attraction, it sacrificed substance for showmanship. The park is now in the process of getting back on track interpretively.

#### *Current Trends*

There are hundreds of living history farms where crafts such as candle-making and basket weaving are appropriate to the themes and purpose of the site. Doing generic farm interpretation would be a waste of our site's unique opportunities.

Booker T. Washington National Monument is one of a small number of African-American historical sites in the national park system. It is unique in that the interpretation of slavery is a primary theme. The significant story the park was created to tell is not about the people in the big house; it is about those who lived in back of the big house.

The park still uses costumed interpretation, but it is just one of many interpretive methods. In the summer of 1996, the park installed a new permanent exhibit in the visitor center. The exhibit, "The Great Educator," does not shy away from controversial issues nor do the newly installed wayside exhibits.

An academic symposium comparing and contrasting the philosophies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois is scheduled for the fall of 1997.

The institution of slavery, emancipation, the Reconstruction era, racism, and the African-American quest for education are important themes in our interpretation of Washington's life. These are historic issues with which many feel America has not yet come to terms.

Perspectives on American history have changed considerably since the 1950s. Critical viewpoints on Booker T. Washington continue to be revised. As interpreters, we strive to present a variety of historical perspectives in keeping with current research. Our interpretation at Booker T. Washington National Monument must continue to evolve if it is to remain useful.

We will probably always get questions about peanut butter. But now we are also getting more questions about slavery, Washington's critics, and the Jim Crow era. The current interpretive thrust has led to a more in-depth discussion of issues and to provocation.

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## **Charles Pinckney National Historic Site**

The mission for Charles Pinckney National Historic Site calls for the interpretation of the lives of all the members of the farm community, black and white, slave and free, poor and rich. That interpretation surrounds the story of Charles Pinckney, statesman, politician, signer and significant author of the United States Constitution.

In an era when politicians were unpaid and expected to support themselves on family income, Charles Pinckney was enabled by the vast wealth amassed by him and his family on South Carolina plantations which produced indigo and rice long before planters thought of turning to cotton. While these colonial aristocrats were excellent merchants and businessmen, amazingly they possessed neither the proper seed for this "Carolina Gold," as rice was known, nor the skills required to plant and harvest. They turned to Africa for both. Madagascar provided the seed and West Africa the skilled laborers who produced the foodstuff marketed by the white merchants in Europe.

Today the contributions of people of African descent are being unearthed by National Park Service archeologists. Historians, working behind the scenes, are developing the threads of African contributions in the fields of language, food, agriculture, mechanics, and craftsmanship. These are illuminated for visitors through exhibits, park literature, periodic archeological investigations, and a video presentation.

Charles Pinckney's "Snee Farm" is set apart from the bustling community surrounding it. Here a visitor is given a quiet view of a late 18th century farm and an opportunity to discover how all the people who once inhabited this site came together with the peculiar institution of slavery to unite and form a new order.

While at the park visitors may review many publications describing the black experience in the era from 1770 though the end of slavery which are available for purchase. Periodically history comes alive as a volunteer basket maker from the local community demonstrates her considerable talents in the making of sweetgrass baskets. As her nimble hands deftly sew marsh grass, pine straw, and bulrush into works of art, we learn that this skill, too, came with slavery, from Africa.

—Michael A. Allen  
Park Ranger



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