



Civic Engagement Brief

July 2005

Petersburg National Battlefield Co-Hosts Highly Successful Conference on African Americans and the Civil War

by Ilana Liebert, National Park Service

A national Conference on African Americans and the Civil War (CAACW) took place at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia from May 26 to 28, 2005. The planning and execution of the event actively engaged groups of people with varying backgrounds and viewpoints.

The mission of the conference was to:

- 1) explore the participation of African Americans in the Civil War
- 2) explore other links and relationships of African American life and history to the Civil War
- 3) facilitate an interdisciplinary discussion of the historical threads that connect the Civil War to today

Appealing to a diverse national audience, the conference consisted of four main organizational elements. The Academic Program featured presentations of papers by scholars who are leaders in their respective fields. Among the speakers were Dr. William B. Gould IV (Stanford University), Dr. Brenda Stevenson (UCLA), Mr. Robert Stanton (former director, NPS), Dr. Frank Smith (founder and director, African American Civil War Memorial), and Dr. David Blight (Yale University).

The Folklore and Folk Arts Program incorpo-

"One of the conference goals was to appeal to as broad an audience as possible."

**Bob Kirby, Superintendent,
Petersburg National Battlefield**



Freedom songs by Reanae McNeal revealed bridges to the past.

rated cultural perspectives of the African American Civil War experience into the conference, engaging attendees in less-traditional ways of sharing knowledge. This program included discussions of folklore and oral history given by Dr. Daryl Dance (University of Richmond) and Dr. Loranett Lee (Virginia Historical Society), respectively, as well as performances by Donna Washington (storyteller and author), Reanae McNeal (spirituals and freedom songs), and the Buckingham County Lining Bar Gang (worksongs).

The Education and Public History Program helped establish connections between the conference and the local community. Area high school students participated by submitting papers, artwork, and presentations resulting from their research into the role of African Americans before, during, and after

the Civil War. Students from Prince George and Varina High Schools were awarded prizes in the visual and performing arts categories. The Public History component provided the opportunity for conference participants to tour the rich cultural and historical assets in the region, including Historic Petersburg, Pamplin Historical Park, Petersburg National Battlefield, and Virginia State University.

The fourth program of Exhibits and Vendor Displays enhanced and broadened the reach of the conference experience. John L. Ford's historical exhibit, "The Underground Railroad," featured a variety of rare artifacts, books, photographs, autographed documents, and works in gold and silver, while John W. Jones' noteworthy paintings were displayed in

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"Confederate Currency: The Color of Money." Vendors were also on hand to provide products, services, and information related to the topics covered by the conference.

Approximately 255 people were in attendance, including scholars, students, NPS affiliates, artists and performers, and even a few descendants of USCT (United States Colored Troops) soldiers. Almost half the attendees were local community members. Bob Kirby, superintendent of the Petersburg National Battlefield and one of the key organizers of the event, felt the conference was a great success, meeting its goals of attracting a diverse and national audience, offering high-quality presentations and discussions, and facilitating communication through a varied but well-structured series of offerings.

Conference participants were equally pleased with the weekend's program. Attendees had high praise for the CAACW, indicating that civic dialogue of this kind was welcome and much appreciated, especially within the



Conference participants enjoy reception hosted by Virginia State University.

African American community. The city of Petersburg has expressed interest in hosting a similar event annually, the possibility of which is currently being discussed by the organizers. In the meantime, plans are underway to publish a compilation of the scholarly papers presented during the conference.

The Conference on African Americans and the Civil War was the result of a partnership between the National Park Service, Pamplin Historical Park, the City of Petersburg,

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Park/Office	Project Title	Amount Awarded	Description
ADAM	Civic Engagement Program for Presidential Sites and Libraries Conference IV	\$3,200	The American Association of State and Local History is convening Presidential Sites and Libraries Conference IV, June 20-22, 2006 at the FDR properties in Hyde Park, New York. Co-hosts are NPS and the National Archives and Records Administration. This funding will convene a civic engagement advisory team to provide critical guidance to the Conference Chair and the AASLH Program Officer. The team will recommend programs elements, an implementation strategy, and estimated costs to fully integrate the principles and practices of civic engagement in the conference design and proceedings.
BOST	Community Outreach Interpretive Programs	\$4,510	This project will develop new tours on Roxbury's colonial and revolutionary history in partnership with Discover Roxbury (DR), a local non-profit organization. Roxbury is a highly diverse neighborhood Boston whose residents seldom visit the park and with whom NPS has no relationship. The project will connect the themes of Boston NHP and Boston African American NHS with the community through the neighborhood's historic resources. DR will convene a community forum to introduce this partnership with NPS and solicit suggestions on how these new historical tours might benefit the community. DR staff, park staff, and local historians will also coordinate and present a training course on the new tours for ten docents as well as develop a resource guide for the docents.
FIIS	Pilot Roundtable Discussion for FIIS Stakeholders	\$9,300	In anticipation of the upcoming GMP revision process, this project is to organize and facilitate a pilot roundtable discussion opening a public dialogue on critical park and community issues. The pilot discussion will serve as the foundation for organizing subsequent discussions. These will enable NPS to understand the issues from different public perspectives and contribute to our 'readiness' to engage in fully informed discussions with the public during the general management planning process.
FOMC	Community Education Partnerships	\$10,000	This project will provide educational visits for inner-city school children to Fort McHenry. Currently, Baltimore's schools do not have funds to bring children to the park. Funds from this proposal will be used to facilitate transportation, enable the park to prepare teachers for visits, and provide NPS staff to instruct staff from partner non-profit organizations on interpretive techniques. This project reinforces the park's and Mayor's goals of creating demonstratable long-term benefits to the park and the community. This educational outreach effort serves to increase the park's understanding of the needs of the inner-city youth and the community's awareness of the city's history as it relates to the founding of our nation and the significance of Fort McHenry. The park will benefit by learning how to better communicate the relevancy of our history to inner-city youth.
FONE	Mount Washington Tavern Partnership Roundtable	\$2,500	This project includes conducting a one day planning meeting to determine options for future uses of the Mt. Washington Tavern in Fort Necessity National Battlefield. The park budget has required park management to close the tavern from November to April for the last three years. This planning meeting would bring together a working group that would consist of NPS management staff, concerned local citizens, National Road Heritage Corridor representatives, and private individuals with experience in operating restored historic taverns open to the public.

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INDE	Creating a Constitution Project	\$10,000	This civic engagement project will link the National park Service with the School District of Philadelphia, public television (WHYY), and local community groups to explore the challenges and the process of creating a constitution using the 1787 Constitutional Convention as a model. The formation of the United States Constitution in 1787 is a primary interpretive theme of Independence NHP. Unfortunately today, too many of us do not understand how the constitution affects us and how it relates to every aspect of life in the modern United States. This project will aid the development of new relationships with disengaged communities in Philadelphia, especially youth, creating newly aware citizens who hopefully will value the historic sites connected to the United States Constitution.
LOWE	Cambodian Oral History Project	\$10,000	NPS is seeking to establish a stronger relationship between the Lowell NHP and the city's Cambodian population. This project will begin the process of documenting and interpreting the experiences of genocide, migration and survival through oral history interviews with Cambodians in both Lowell, Massachusetts and in Long Beach, California. Lowell NHP has a longstanding oral history program, and these histories will reflect stories of immigration and refugee issues that NPS has only just begun to explore.
MABI	Pilot Citizen Science Monitoring Program for NETN Parks	\$7,600	This project will develop a citizen science curriculum to engage middle and high school students in environmental monitoring and analyzing changes in natural resources in ten parks in the Northeast Temperate Inventory and Monitoring Network (NETN) and the Appalachian Trail (AT). The curriculum will: 1.) explore why integrating monitoring and resource stewardship is important for maintaining the health of national parks; 2.) provide opportunities for students to become involved in monitoring park natural resources; and 3.) increase communities' awareness of local biodiversity and natural processes. As such, this project will advance both civic education and resource stewardship.
NERO	Baltimore City Heritage Area Partnerships Workshop	\$8,500	The purpose of this project is to conduct public workshops in coordination with the Baltimore City Heritage Area and Fort McHenry NMASHS to explore solutions for preserving, protecting, and promoting the city's rich heritage. The workshops will ask citizens to identify their key issues regarding resource management, interpretation, and visitor experience and will create a dialogue on how local, state, and federal agencies may best work with city leaders, non-profit organizations, and the general public to address these issues. The interactive workshops will create a dialogue with historic sites and museums owners and managers, as well as the interested public.
SHEN	Resource Education Seminars	\$8,000	This project will create a summer resource education seminar series to enhance relationships between Shenandoah NP and communities of interest. NPS will host a community roundtable meeting with local constituents to determine the four seminar topics. NPS has a unique opportunity to foster a constructive dialogue with a diverse array of community interests whereas, in the past, it has been unable to successfully convey research findings to local leaders and citizens. These seminars will provide opportunities to bridge the gap and foster a working dialogue with the community and place park resource issues in the context of community and regional issues.
UPDE	Upper Delaware Visioning Project	\$5,000	These funds will support the Upper Delaware Visioning Committee's three-year effort to engage Valley residents and local officials in a dialogue concerning the mounting pressures of growth and development and how to deal with change in a way that preserves resources and community values.