

Bicentennial Memory:
Postmodernity, Media, and Historical Subjectivity, 1966-1976

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INTRODUCTION: The Historical, Transformed

The National Museum of History and Technology tells the story of America and studies the story of America. From household goods the colonists brought from their native lands--to weapons, military and otherwise, that made them free--to technology that helped make them wealthy and strong,--to memorabilia of men and women who led them--the museum's collections comprise a tangible biography of the Republic. The depth and scope of these collections are unparalleled.”
-Smithsonian Institution Office of Public Affairs, *Increase and Diffusion: A Brief Introduction to the Smithsonian Institution*, 1970¹

The National Museum of History and Technology recaptures and interprets the American experience from colonial times to the present; from man's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, to modern social and technological developments. It chronicles the lives of the men and women who have contributed to America's heritage, and relates two centuries of progress in political, cultural, and military history, industries, applied arts, and science and technology.
-Smithsonian Institution Office of Public Affairs, *Increase and Diffusion: A Brief Introduction to the Smithsonian Institution*, 1975²

The above quotes are taken from two editions, published five years apart, of an introductory pamphlet issued by the Smithsonian Institution. Both convey the same general information: they open the section describing the National Museum of History and Technology, which, in 1980, would be renamed the National Museum of American History, and was then--and continues to be--the nation's primary repository of historical artifacts and its most prominent history museum. Each outlines the museum's mission and indicates the nature of its holdings. However, the transformation in language between the two is striking: while the 1970 edition begins by noting that the museum *tells the*

¹ Smithsonian Institution Office of Public Affairs, *Increase and Diffusion: A Brief Introduction to the Smithsonian Institution*, 1970, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Office of Public Affairs, Publications, 1970-1998, Accession 99-054, Smithsonian Institution, 31.

² Smithsonian Institution Office of Public Affairs, *Increase and Diffusion: A Brief Introduction to the Smithsonian Institution*, 1975, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Office of Public Affairs, Publications, 1970-1998, Accession 99-054, Smithsonian Institution, 48.

story of America and studies the story of America, by 1975, the Museum's activities are described in radically different terms: the National Museum of History and Technology *recaptures and interprets the American experience*. The earlier account discusses historical knowledge production in terms of narrative information, while the second suggests experiential engagement. The remainders of each description are likewise different, while the first focuses on collections, evidence, and artifacts that have been left behind by people of the past, the second centers on those people themselves.

This comparison illustrates, on a minute but still-significant register, what will be the central claim of this dissertation: that in the 1970s, the predominant mode of historical ideation in the United States--that is, how we understand and describe the past--changed significantly. History-based cultural production can take many forms: museum exhibition, history television, living history, building preservation, and oral history, to name just a few. In the following pages, I examine a series of case studies loosely organized around the 1976 American Revolution Bicentennial, a national commemoration that came at precisely the moment that cultural understanding and use of the past was changing. By looking at how various individuals, groups, and institutions made meaning around the Bicentennial in the context of a larger cultural preoccupation with the past, I will argue that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Americans placed the past in a new proximity to the present, seeking to experience and empathize with the lives of historic individuals.

That the 1970s represent a transformative moment in American culture is not itself a new observation. Following the turbulent 1960s, the 1970s continued to see social, political and economic changes, which, in turn, had profound influence on

American culture's relationship with the past, a development noticed by and worried over by commentators at the time. Writing in 1970, the social critic Alvin Toffler observed, "Not only do *contemporary* events radiate instantaneously—now we can be said to be feeling the impact of all *past* events in a new way. For the past is doubling back on us."³ By the end of the decade, historian Christopher Lasch published his bestselling *The Culture of Narcissism*, which charged that self-absorbed Americans could not relate to the past in any significant way, "Americans seem to wish to forget not only the sixties, the riots, the new left, the disruptions on college campuses, Vietnam, Watergate, and the Nixon presidency, but their entire collective past, even in the antiseptic form in which it was celebrated during the Bicentennial."⁴ In 1985, historian David Lowenthal extended Lasch's diagnosis; "Recognition of the past as a foreign country now colors our view of antiquity from primeval times down to yesterday. We have partly domesticated that past, where they do things differently, and brought it into the present as a marketable commodity. But in altering its remains we also assimilate them, ironing out their differences and their difficulties in the process."⁵ These accounts came from wide-ranging sources and their diagnoses were made over fifteen years, but they all charged that Americans could no longer comprehend the past, locating this change in the 1970s.⁶

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, historians and cultural critics continued to comment on a significant shift in historicity: the way in which we understand the past and

³ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970) 17.

⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979) 5.

⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) xxv.

⁶ For similar accounts, see also Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Thomas Wolfe, "The Me Generation," in *Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine, and Other Stories, Sketches, and Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976).

the progression of time, and its impact on American historical consciousness.⁷

Postmodern theorists Fredric Jameson and David Harvey, writing about the realignment of global capital and the subsequent end of the forward-looking modernist project, argued that these changes registered on the cultural level as both an inability to fathom history as a grand narrative (and so a tendency toward a fractured conception of history) and as the end of a fascination with the future and the beginning of a preoccupation with the past, albeit one that misunderstood historical change.⁸ As Jameson noted of history in the postmodern era, “we no longer experience it in that way, and, indeed, perhaps no longer experience it at all.”⁹ For Jameson and others, history represented depth; the postmodern interpretation of the past was all surface.

What these disparate accounts have in common is that they uniformly describe this development in negative terms; as an evacuation of an authentic understanding and a movement towards a history characterized by pastiche, nostalgia, and a misconception of the true nature of the past. This transformation has consistently been pathologized as a loss or degradation. Transposed into discussions of the foreclosure on political and social

⁷Related to this critical strain is the development of Memory Studies at this moment, which takes as its foundational imperative the field of “memory” cast in opposition to the historical. The history/memory binary at the core of many of these texts is important, but echoes and extends postmodern formulations of history in that it often assumes that “history” falls into the realm of the objective and the “true”, whereas memory is considered to be constructed and negotiated. For observations on this tendency and arguments that complicate the binary, see Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26, Spring 1989, 7-25; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer, eds. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: Dartmouth Press, 1999).

⁸ See David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991). For similar accounts, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988).

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 283-4.

awareness and progressive potential, the transformation speaks to the importance of history as a building block of identity and consciousness throughout our culture. Yet the majority of these analyses focus on engagements with the historical as a series of cultural texts, discussing them as evidence of a shift in historicity but not accounting for changes in historical subjectivity, in other words ignoring the importance of the historical subject's relation to the historical narrative. It is this distinction that is crucial; critics tend to describe external cultural manifestations of this rupture without accounting for how they are underwritten by a more fundamental shift in the way we figure ourselves *within* them. Looking closely at the continuum of production and reception of different modes of historical engagement during this period shows a more complex story.

The recognition of a transformation in historical ideation and its connections to larger changes in cultural, political, and economic reality stands at the beginning of my inquiry. With this dissertation, I examine and qualify these developments through close investigation of cultural production by organizations and individuals who used historical narrativization to articulate ideologies and make meaning for themselves. My analysis of these projects leads to a refinement of previous accounts of historical ideation. I contend that in this period, new histories that focused on emotive identification and that formed re-enactive relationships with the past, created spaces where audience-subjects could identify with and interact within the past to consider and evaluate contemporary events.¹⁰

¹⁰ That historical ideation has moved towards the embodied and emotive has not escaped contemporary scholarship in history, memory, and performance studies. However, history's "affective turn" has not been sufficiently historicized, and is also commented upon in language similar to that of the other critics I discuss. The pathologization of this mode of interaction has been taken up more recently by scholars like Vanessa Agnew and Alexander Cook, who, like Lasch and Lowenthal before them, worry about the problems of reenactive engagement. On the other hand, some theorists are interested in the potential of affective interaction; that is, the feelings that emerge with performative interaction with the past. See Vanessa Agnew, "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present," *Rethinking History* 11, (2007), 299-312; Alexander Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment:

I align my argumentation with the work of historians like Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, who argue that the past, and forms of everyday activity they call “popular historymaking” (foregrounding interaction and production on the past of subjects), remains critical in how Americans create identities and think of themselves in relation to their families, their communities, and their nation.¹¹ Significantly, the *kinds* of engagements Rosenzweig and Thelen describe in their extensive study, undertaken in the early to mid-1990’s, are participatory, affective engagements. Americans today look to understand history in emotional terms, forming identification with the past based on these empathetic connections. I trace the genealogy of such identifications to the 1970s.¹²

This dissertation argues that this decade saw a change in and a movement away from what I call a *logic of preservation*; an understanding of history underwritten by material evidence and articulated by a sense of the past as monumental and foundational to, yet still separate from, the present. Preservation locates the subject outside of the historical narrative and relies on stable and uncontested material evidence (usually produced by those who hold power or embody the dominant ideology) for the representation and articulation of that narrative. Yet in the 1970s, in the context of a weakening of the cold war-era “consensus” or “top down” history via social movements, many Americans questioned these traditional interpretations, a development that resulted

Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History.” *Criticism* 46. 3 (2004), 487-496. For an excellent critique of these positions and of reenactment in general, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹¹ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹² Alison Landsberg likewise argues for the positive potential of such engagements with the past. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

in new kinds of preservation, and ultimately, in a movement away from it.¹³ Because of a transformation in subjectivity effected by a shift in our understanding of temporality, a *logic of reenactment* replaced preservation as the dominant mode of historical ideation. Reenactive engagement privileges an affective and experiential production of historic knowledge, placing the subject *within* the past and sometimes even *between* the past and the present. While this development represents a markedly different understanding of the past, it would be erroneous to see it simply as a loss that could lead only to conservative representations of history that do not account for the realization of difference that leads to potential for positive change.

The case studies undertaken in this project illustrate how changes in actual preservations and reenactments reflect the movement over these broad cultural logics. While new objects (buildings, mass produced commodities, the ephemeral) were selected for preservation, reenactive practice in the form of experiential engagements with history (such as immersion and first-person interpretations at history museums or reprints of historical catalogs and guidebooks) became more popular in both institutional and individual historical cultural production. This was by no means an even or a total development; preservations and reenactments have existed and continue to exist in

¹³ Gary Gerstle, "Blood and Belonging," *Tikkun* 9 (November, 1994); Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For general accounts of political, economic, and social transformations of the decade, see Peter Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); see also Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Holtzbrinck Publishers, 2006); Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the American New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

various forms throughout history.¹⁴ Yet, in the 1970s, Americans took up both practices as means of gaining knowledge and creating connections with everyday people of the past. Because the past came to be a site for negotiating contemporary identities and ideologies, reenactment, as a strategy of historical ideation, came to overtake preservation as the foremost mode of historical activity.

Reenactment, in its collapse of temporality and its focus on sensory surface forms (costume, ambiance) as a means of contact with the past, is in some ways similar to the postmodern historicity described by critical theorists. Yet rather than emphasizing a tendency to see the past in the form of the present, my framework focuses on reenactment's liminality. In other words I argue that, by underscoring embodied, affective interpretation of history and by encouraging different identifications between the past and the present, re-enactive history was and remains a potential space of political possibility. By describing the continuum of production and reception that formed historical cultural productions during this decade, I hope to put pressure on contentions that new forms of historical ideation represented a lack of understanding, instead demonstrating how new forms of historymaking activity produced a range of meanings.

¹⁴ Examples of preservations and reenactments in support of civic identity include the history of the monumentalization of such landmarks as Independence Hall in Philadelphia and Plymouth Rock, as well as Wild West shows of the late nineteenth century and the increase in historical pageantry of the early twentieth century. See John D. Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Richard Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," both in Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 164-184, 237-291.

Preservation and Reenactment Defined

To understand and theorize this epistemic break, it is first necessary to step back and consider the relationships that preservation and reenactment have to historical evidence and source material. I turn here to the work of Diana Taylor, who has identified two epistemological frameworks for the transmission of knowledge and the maintenance of hegemonic power, the *archive* and the *repertoire*. Preservation and reenactment may be seen as strategies of engagement that operate within the dialectic of the archive and the repertoire. Taylor places the material, the discursive, and the written in the realm of the archive, while the repertoire concerns articulated tradition and knowledge production that is performative and embodied. Examples of the archive include state histories, buildings, artifacts, and laws; more than the repertoire, it can be codified and organized. The repertoire, in contrast, is made up of embodied forms like performances, sports, games, services, and rituals. The archive and the repertoire exist simultaneously, but the repertoire, especially the repertoire of the colonized, has often been effaced by those in power, overtaken by the archive, which acts as a means of both governance and knowledge-transmission.¹⁵

Echoing Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and others who emphasize the ways that archives are deployed as mechanisms of regulation, Taylor argues that Western civilization has historically privileged the archive because the archive is made up of visible evidence; it is easier to control and to use for the exertion of power.¹⁶ In Taylor's

¹⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," and "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). See also Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996);

study of the colonization of the Americas, she notes that colonizers used written (archival) culture in the suppression of native embodied culture. Colonial power that operates from an imperial logic (and one can categorize American power as functioning in this way) because it is overtly concerned with dominance and subjugation, is explicit in its use of the logic of the archive—both its own in the form of law and in the appropriation of structures and artifacts of native peoples.¹⁷ In the case of the United States, one needs only to look to the centrality of interpretations of the Constitution in U.S. political culture or its history of the representation of Native American culture and artifacts in American institutions to see this illustrated.¹⁸

But because the repertoire is embodied, and because bodies are unruly, there is room for slippage, transgression, and agency. The repertoire, as a tradition and a lived experience that is transmitted through alternative systems, is by nature unmanageable and can never be entirely suppressed. Colonial power attempts to contain native repertoires; yet it also *uses* repertoires, like ceremony and religious ritual. For example, flag ceremonies and ticker tape parades are repertoirc activities in support of U.S. ideology.¹⁹ Taylor thus emphasizes that the archive and the repertoire are both deployed as strategies

Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 1-52.

¹⁸ For examples of the cultural and political uses of the Constitution, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For uses of Native American artifacts, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

¹⁹ See Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

by a range of power-seeking organizations such as the state, cultural organizations, and corporate entities, as well as by individuals as a way of making meaning for themselves.

My project explores the currents of meaning in these interactions with the past and how they may be marshaled to reflect or shift cultural categories. I am interested in two related historical practices that operate within the dialectic of repertoire and archive: preservation and reenactment. It is my contention that these two modes of engagement are the two chief means of engaging with history available to individuals and institutions in the twentieth-century United States. But preservation and reenactment are opposites in the way that they place the historymaking subject in relation to the historical narrative, and in the kind of knowledge they produce. Further, the two represent very different kinds of activity and thus are mobilized in different cultural contexts and for different purposes.

In the preservation, both the narrative (symbolized by the preserved object) and the subject (that which is doing the preserving) exist within the contemporary moment. The preservation stands for the arresting of history, but also for the invocation of the potential of the historical narrative through some kind of communion (looking, touching) with the object which, in turn, reinforces the sense of difference and distance between the subject and the object. Examples of projects governed by the logic of preservation include museum exhibitions, historic houses, and documents in archives. Preservation, an expression of the archive, has been used in the assertion and maintenance of hegemonic American power, both within and outside the nation, through such activities as the celebration of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence as documents *and* ideologies, the perseverance of such symbols as the Liberty Bell, and the state-sanctioned

anthropological activity and exhibition of the cultures of native peoples in American (internal and external) colonies. Preservation rests firmly within the scope of the archive—it places the same importance on longevity, classification, and a uniform and unbroken historical narrative, realized within the physical form of the object that is being preserved.

The reenactment also uses the archive as its source material; it is an expression, by contemporary people often with no historical tie to that which is being reenacted, of information found in an archive—an account, a history, a film. Reenactment's aim (at which it is self-consciously never quite successful) is to place the subject *within* the historical narrative, and it privileges experiential and affective knowledge production in the same way that the preservation privileges the visible and the material through informational knowledge production. In its emphasis on embodied practice, the reenactment resembles the repertoire. But unlike the repertoire, the reenactment is *not* the result of a past tradition of embodied performance; instead, it is a simulacrum of sorts; it involves a nontextual archival practice that appropriates the richness of the scenario, which is the main advantage of the repertoire over the archive. The reenactment can make new meanings through embodied, affective, historical expression, but it also represents the archive's attempt to seize some of the emotional/subjective registers of the repertoire for the purpose of expression of power. The preservation and the reenactment, as strategies and as cultural logics are always both present, yet they are enacted at different historical moments and for different (often political) means. The purpose of this project is to investigate how each practice makes its meaning, and to historicize the

emergence of the reenactment as the primary mode of historical engagement in the United States.

Bicentennial Memory: An Overview

This project explains and theorizes the transformation in historical ideation through a close examination of historical cultural production in the 1970s.

Methodologically, it stands at the intersection of historical and theoretical inquiry, and it puts forth an approach that attempts to combine the two in order to produce an account that attends both to concrete changes in practice and to the larger scale shifts in subjectivity that these changes reflect and inform. In other words, I try to historicize the theoretical, and theorize the historical. Often, change over time and causality are demonstrated on theoretical registers, and supported by historical examples, rather than the other way around. Likewise, historical examples provide the material for theorizing the meanings of temporality. The following chapters thus use symptomatic examples to explain the cultural developments that informed a realignment of both historicity and historical subjectivity.

Chapter One looks at history-based television programming to examine the shift in cultural understanding of temporality: changes in how people thought about the passage of time reoriented both historicity and historical subjectivity. I look at how, in the 1970s, American popular culture became fixated on the historical but engaged the past in a new way, as a means of interrogating the present—a result of a movement away from a linear, progressive mode of temporality. An analysis of the proliferation of historical television in the 1970s, compared to a relative lack of historically-based programming in the 1960s, suggests that U.S. television and mass media capitalized on these changes by

proffering a medium which focused on experience, authenticity, identity, and the real. Television introduced genres like the miniseries that helped to position it as a primary source of historical information. The chapter describes cultural conceptions of temporal progression as the project of modernity waned, framing these observations in the context of television's own relationship to temporality and history.

The second chapter traces state planning of the Bicentennial through the administrations of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford to examine how the state organized the commemoration in order to accommodate a rapidly changing perception of history symptomatic of the breakdown of archival logic. The state remained invested in commemoration as a means of encouraging normative patriotism, solidifying citizen consent for state projects, and maintaining hegemonic power. The different tactics with which presidential administrations sought to orchestrate the commemoration testify to the state's continued investment in the historical as a technology of control. Yet, this effort had to be continuously realigned as a progress-based cold war consensus fractured in the face of political, social, and economic turmoil throughout the decade.

The first two chapters examine changing ideas of historicity and explain how the transformed position of subjects interacting with and within historical narratives reflected the large-scale movements towards affective and immersive engagements. The next two chapters examine historical subjectivity more closely. Chapter Three describes shifts in preservation activity on a variety of fronts, from an expansion in the field of historical preservation, to different uses of artifacts in historical knowledge production by both institutional and independent actors. Historical objects, previously used as evidence of the past, were instead put into the service of tracing daily life in the past and creating

immersive environments in which subjects could experience history. I argue that in the 1970s, the preservation of and interaction with historical objects in archives, museums, and communities reflected a heightened cultural concern with the everyday experience of the past as well as the beginnings of a desire to act directly within, as opposed to outside of, the historical moment. While this first development led to new forms of collecting and preservation, the second led to uses of historical objects that sought to create historical environments.

In Chapter Four, I turn to the reenactment, examining historical expression that sought to recreate the past by affecting a subjective and temporal connection between the past and the present. A range of Bicentennial activities illustrate both the experience and contingency of reenactive practice, and with the multiplicity or excess of meaning that is made through these activities. Reenactive knowledge production came to be the dominant mode of all historical ideation at this moment. A wide variety of institutions, groups, and individuals, took up reenactment and generated historical knowledge and consciousness that sometimes reinforced and sometimes disturbed canonic or hegemonic narratives of history.

The final chapter returns to the politicized use of history, but this time from the perspective of counterhegemonic activity. I look at a selection of history-based protest movements to show how these shifts in understandings of, and engagements with, history influenced consciousness-raising and activism during the Bicentennial. While some groups called for inclusion in the archive, others reoriented the already established canon of American history to their own purposes, using reenactment to generate and publicize reinterpretations of the colonial past. The case studies within this chapter demonstrate the

very real way that knowledge of the historical can affect political consciousness and how history was, and remains both a language for and a means towards political realization.

As the change in language by the Smithsonian between 1970 and 1975 demonstrates, over a few short years, in the midst of other cultural, social, political, and economic developments that are now being traced back to the 1970s by historians and theorists, the way that American culture thought of the past--its evidence, its uses, and our places within it, also underwent a remarkable shift. The following pages illustrate and explain this transformation.

CHAPTER ONE:
“The New Nostalgia” and Past as Present:
Postmodern Time, Television History,
and Reflective Culture

“Every day for the next two years—July 4th, 1974 through July 4th, 1976—CBS will unfold another chapter in the momentous story of our nation’s struggle for independence. Exactly as it happened “200 years ago today.” These “Bicentennial Minutes,” 732 one-minute programs in all, are unique in broadcasting history. Tremendous in scope, authentic in every detail, the series is a special part of CBS’s salute to the Bicentennial celebration.

Notables from every walk of American life will participate. Bringing you both great moments and little known incidents in America’s surge toward freedom. The brave acts of heroes...the impassioned words of statesmen...the everyday lives of citizens caught in the steadily mounting tide—all are brought thrillingly to life in a gigantic historical mosaic that encompasses the full drama of our nation’s birth.”
—Advertisement for *Bicentennial Minutes*²⁰

On the evening of July 4th, 1974, CBS concluded its nightly news broadcast with the first installment of a new program entitled *Bicentennial Minutes*.²¹ Each *Minute* described life in the American colonies in the years leading up to the 1776 Revolution and detailed an event that had occurred exactly two hundred years prior. Segments began with a montage of illustrations of Revolutionary-era people and events, then cut to the evening’s host in a colonial domestic setting (a kitchen or study, for example). Celebrity narrators described the featured event as the camera slowly panned over an illustration of the event. The subject matter was diverse; sometimes the *Minutes* showed occurrences that led directly to the Revolution; other segments addressed innovation in medicine,

²⁰ Full page advertisement in *Washington Post*, July 2, 1974.

²¹ Cecil Smith, “CBS Will Air 731 Bicentennial Spots,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1974; John J O’Connor, “TV: CBS Begins Variety and Mini-History Shows,” *New York Times* July 3, 1974.

technology, or the arts.²² The *Bicentennial Minutes* were extremely popular with the press and the public, generating local and regional versions as well as parodies.²³ The response to the *Bicentennial Minutes* demonstrated the growing position of television as a primary site of historical information; a relationship that was undergirded and activated by changing cultural conceptions of temporal procession. Within an American culture increasingly dominated by mass mediation, the “modernist” view of time as progressive and linear was at this moment superseded by a much more complex model of temporality.²⁴ Television’s influence on historical understanding reflected and capitalized upon these new developments.

This chapter examines television’s representation of the historical during the high tide of cultural investment in modernity and progress in the 1950s and 60s, through the 1970s, the moment at which these beliefs began to weaken as Americans stopped anticipating and imagining the future and began looking towards the past.²⁵ While television is often said to be a primary space of formation, articulation, and reflection of culture in the United States, I argue that looking closely at how television has turned to the historical will help identify larger-scale transformations in American culture and

²² Not many examples of the *Bicentennial Minutes* have survived for public viewing, but a few are available on YouTube: *Bicentennial Minute*, August 31, 1975, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUoto1lsX50>, [accessed November 8, 2008]; *Bicentennial Minute*, December 31, 1976; <http://youtu.be/M1o1Mc6Yujw>, [accessed May 5, 2011]. Additionally, see *Bicentennial Minute*, November, 30, 1974; December 22, 1974; March 31, 1975; Television Archive, CBS June Regional Meeting: Bicentennial Minutes & Sports (Reel 2) B:50048, The Paley Center for Media.

²³ See for example, “Pepper...and Salt,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 14, 1977.

²⁴ For discussions of “modernist” conceptions of time, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-17, 177-186; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁵ In defining, “historically-oriented television,” I mean a program which portrays characters interacting with or within the historical past, but as we will see, the definition itself is a contested one and continually changing.

show how, reacting to these developments, television put itself forward as a substrate for these changes. As the cultural sense of the passage of time was transformed and historical engagement moved towards a desire to reconcile and reconnect the present and the past through finding empathetic commonalities across time, television responded by generating historical programming that made use of the medium's mode of address to forge these connections. In these new programs, family dramas like *Little House on the Prairie* and miniseries like *Eleanor and Franklin* and *Roots*, "realistic" depictions of the past hinged not on an informational depiction of the past, but on an affective identification between audiences and the historical figures portrayed on television. The prevalence and popularity of history programming shows television's influential position in the formation of popular conceptions of the historical and reveals how these conceptions extended to consideration of contemporary political and social issues. By the 1970s, television not only embodied new cultural attitudes towards the past, but was also instrumental in forming and extending these understandings, informed by new conceptions of temporality.

As they charted the day-to-day of colonial life, the *Bicentennial Minutes* performed the passage of historical time as analogous and synchronous to contemporary time, advancing a new and closer relation between the past and the present and creating a space for active viewer identification with, and participation in, the "making" of history. In publicity interviews, *Bicentennial Minutes* producer Lewis Freedman noted the particular relationship between time, history, and television: "It seemed to me that television is an ideal medium to handle history because like history, it goes on every day

very slowly. We decided to do a minute a day to show the process of history.”²⁶ The *Bicentennial Minutes* traced the *processes* of history by spectacularizing the sensation of the passage of time and bringing this sensation into the present. Freedman's statement helps us to understand and underscore the association between certain properties of television (flow, continuity, immediacy) and this new conception of history: the past had become connected to the present, and history was something to experience empathetically rather than to observe from a distance. In their adherence to a systematic calendar and their news-like format, the *Bicentennial Minutes* took advantage of television's sense of “liveness” and sutured it onto a new understanding of the progression of history.

The *Bicentennial Minutes*' preoccupation with temporal development expressed an affinity between television and time that has been a salient topic among media critics. This line of argumentation posits television's defining characteristics as its instantaneousness, its forgettability, and its emphasis on presentness, and rests on Raymond Williams's description of television “flow”--which, like time, has no beginning and no end--as emergent from specific historical conditions.²⁷ Following Jane Feuer's observation of television's ideological investment in liveness as a means of affirming its own capacity to communicate the real, Mary Ann Doane has argued that television's main category is that of time.²⁸ In recent years, these characterizations have been complicated by theorists like Mimi White, who has suggested that television's

²⁶ “Minute Man to the Bicentennial,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1974; Mary Knoblauch, “Bicentennial Minute is 12 hours long,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 22, 1976.

²⁷ For discussions of television's “flow,” see Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974); Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology,” in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television* (Frederick, MD: AFI, 1983) 12-21; Mary Ann Doane, “Information, Crisis, Catastrophe,” in Patricia Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 222-239.

preoccupation is as much with history as with the live and that the two impulses, rather than being opposed, function in a dialectical manner. Television's liveness, in these readings, is used to guarantee television's "historical" status (reconfiguring monumental events as historical, even as they are happening) and to inform our perception of the past and of the circulation of history.²⁹ White's ideas have been expanded upon by Steve Anderson, Gary Edgerton, and others, who argue that television is a primary site through which we gain historical knowledge and make historical meaning, both because of its cultural prominence and because of its representational capability.³⁰ But for all of these scholars, television's multivalent connection to the historical rests on its expression of temporality. I will argue that this connection was expanded at a moment during which perceived time began more closely to resemble televisual time, thus allowing television to stake new claims on the production of historical knowledge.

Television's unique relationship with history can be further explained by the observations of theorists of the postmodern regarding a transformation in cultural understandings of temporality in the 1970s, a development precipitated by and extended through mass media, most explicitly television. Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean- Francois Lyotard have all argued that as a result of changes in global capitalism, most notably in mass mediation, "modernist" cultural perception of the passage of time as progressive and linear was at this moment replaced by a temporality described, like

²⁹ Mimi White, "Television: A Narrative—A History," *Cultural Studies* 3.3 (October, 1989), 282-300. See also Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory After Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

³⁰ Gary Edgerton, "Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether," in Gary Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memories* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 1-18. Steve F. Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricity of the Past* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2011); Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

television itself, as presentist and schizophrenic.³¹ This postmodern sense of temporality is marked by a highlighted awareness of experience in the present, a quality that is shared and exacerbated by television. For Baudrillard and for Andreas Huyssen, the medium of television in particular both impels and illustrates this shift.³² Television's relationship with the historical is thus always seen as intimate, complex, and co-constitutive. Here, I will examine key moments at which it changed and developed, in order to shed further light on the shifting place of the past in American culture at large.

Specifically, I want to suggest that television programs like the *Bicentennial Minutes* and the miniseries represent a critical site for cultural negotiation of these turns, reflecting and ultimately helping to form new relationships with the American past. Starting in the 1950s, television's new affinity for the historical might have been kindled by its generic and institutional qualities, but this correlation was further consolidated when American society became more interested in the past, and, in response, television developed formats that explicitly attended to these interests. If television helped to eviscerate "real history," television was also the primary rescue operation for efforts to resituate the historical by orienting itself towards a new cultural interest in history and by producing programming that highlighted new understandings of temporal change in which the past could be used to contemplate the present. The *Bicentennial Minutes* are just one example of how television worked to generate and model new forms of historical ideation. Their production of historical narratives can sketch out some of the critical ways

³¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (New Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Press, 1991).

³² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*; Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

that a new sense of time in this decade influenced the modes in which history was understood within American culture.

The *Bicentennial Minutes*, in their insistence on moving through Revolutionary history in “real time,” presented a novel mode of engagement with the past. They produced a temporal experience of events that were sometimes unconnected and seemingly random (i.e., a segment about political history would be followed by one about something very different) but that introduced important information that could eventually be put together to help viewers understand the larger cultural context of the American Revolution. Offered diverse strands of knowledge, viewers were placed *within* the historical narrative and asked to do their own historical work to explain and connect for themselves the events leading up to the revolution of 1776. Because it is not likely that any one viewer would see all 732 *Minutes*, the way individual audience members assembled this information varied. The history produced by the *Bicentennial Minutes* was flexible and depended both on one’s own responses (i.e., while some viewers might be especially interested in segments concerning scientific innovation, others might change the channel at those times) and on the happenstance of watching the news on a particular evening. The segments evidence several qualities of historical ideation that I will argue were new in the 1970s: a sense of the past as somehow *present* in the contemporary moment; a newfound interest in the everyday life and experience of earlier times; and an idea of history as contingent, flexible, and permeable. All of these developments, I contend, were mutually constitutive with new modes of identification with the past which were themselves animated and reproduced by television’s expressions of temporality and history.

Cold War History Television: Pedagogy and Phobia

In the 1950s and 60s, the majority of television programming was concerned with the American present and future, not the past.³³ In these forward-oriented decades, television programming mirrored American culture at large, which, informed by the progressive, teleological, and linear sense of temporality which was endemic to the project of modernity, was more concerned with the present and the future.

Representations of the historical past expressed these perceptions of temporality and history. Television typically depicted history using two modes: the pedagogical, which expounded upon past persons and events that shaped the present; and the pathological: staging encounters that highlighted the inflexible nature of linear temporal development and the inferiority of the past to the present. In both of these modes, the past was kept separate from the present through the mediation of narrators who were coterminous with audiences. Temporal distance was often underscored through spatial metaphors, casting the past as a distant and terrifying, yet contained, place.

³³ It is important to note that Western programs will not be discussed at length in this project, as their engagement with the past is quite different. As Richard Slotkin, Fred MacDonald, and others have noted, the American Western genre has long been deployed to mediate issues of the American experience, but these engagements more often than not minimize the historical. For example, while the television program *Gunsmoke* was set in the 1870s, it rarely referenced any historical moments outside of its immediate surroundings. Other shows took this confusion further. For example, MacDonald has described the historical ambiguity of *The Roy Rogers Show*; Rogers rode a horse and frequented a saloon but his partner drove a Jeep. On the same program, Dale Evans worked as a waitress in a modern café but was also a sharpshooter in the model of Annie Oakley. This tendency of the Western has been present since the origins of the genre; frontier characters like Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickock appeared as showmen in Wild West revues and were the stars of fictional dime novels while still operating as U.S. agents in the “real” West. The Western operates as a parable, an aesthetic, and a genre—it cannot be considered a historical program in the same vein as others which attend to the past in more significant ways rather than introducing some elements as part of a motif. The Western demonstrates the importance of the past in U.S. culture, but does so in a completely different way—by taking events *out* of, as opposed to placing them within, a historical trajectory. The tendencies of the Western, from its beginning, towards temporal confusion do, however, serve as an early portent of what later became a dominant logic of history programming. See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992); J. Fred MacDonald, *Who Shot the Sheriff? The Rise and Fall of the Television Western* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Horace Newcombe. “From Old Frontier to New Frontier” in Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn’t Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 287-304.

Historical television that can be described as “pedagogical” worked to show viewers how important events in the past had led to the present. These programs emphasized the linear progression of history and made a claim for television’s ability to relate these narratives by highlighting the superiority of television’s visual representation, and its discursive, or conversational abilities. From 1953 to 1957, CBS aired *You Are There*, in which the newscaster Walter Cronkite and his correspondents simulated broadcasting from politically significant moments in Western history such as the Boston Massacre, the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, or the assassination of Julius Caesar.³⁴ Steve Anderson has observed that *You Are There* appropriated the feeling of journalistic integrity associated with news broadcasts to its advantage: on the one hand, working to legitimate television news by reflecting it back into the past and by locating CBS reporters at all important moments in history, and, on the other, presenting a seemingly “objective” version of history that was as authentic and impartial as the news itself.³⁵ The interview format of the program also foregrounded the agency of individual actors like Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln in precipitating important events—in this text, historical change was not the result of combinations of political, cultural, or social factors, but propelled by individuals, usually powerful white men. *You Are There* can thus be described as pedagogical in two different ways: first, by educating the viewing public about great events spearheaded by great men in American history, in the manner of a school text. But *You Are There* also worked to establish and articulate the importance and omnipotence of television newscasters, at a moment when television news was still

³⁴ *You Are There*, dir. John Frankenheimer, CBS, 1953-1957.

³⁵ Steve Anderson, “Loafing in the Garden of Knowledge: History TV and Popular Memory,” *Film and History* 30:1, March 2000, 14-23.

developing and had not yet reached the levels of importance that it would gain in the 1960s.



Figure 1. Walter Cronkite listening to report from the Boston Tea Party. Still from “Boston Tea Party,” written by Shirley Gordon, directed by John Frankenheimer, *You Are There*, CBS, February 15, 1953.

Because the model of historical thinking articulated in such pedagogical television programs depended on a perception of causality and difference between the present and the past, they consciously worked to maintain temporal distance through devices like narrators and other intermediaries. The reporters in *You Are There* kept the presented historical moment separate from their audiences, maintaining viewer subjectivity in the vantage point of the present and assuming the past as a necessary but separate precedent. The viewer was therefore positioned as a witness to history, but not an actor. The visual contrast between Cronkite’s modern CBS studio and the historic milieu of its past narratives also reinforced the gulf between past and present, emphasizing the orderly progression of time through distinct periods. Through this relationship of exposition and separation, one can characterize this type of history programming as pedagogical in the

sense that it presented an official or hegemonic narrative meant to teach Americans about their national past in a straightforward or conventional manner. Shows like *You Are There* and *Profiles in Courage*, another program foregrounding the role of the individual actor in history, based on John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize winning book, were typical of the dominant mode of historical programming in the 1950s and '60s.³⁶

Although the narrator is a hallmark of programming that purports to describe "real" events, it is noteworthy that this narrative device was used in historically-based programming that can also be read as pedagogical, but that put forth a fictional, as opposed to a factual account of the past.³⁷ George Lipsitz has read *I Remember Mama*, a program about an immigrant family living in San Francisco at the turn of the century as offering a history of consumer culture, an advocacy of the superiority of store-bought technologies and innovations over home-constructed ones, and a depiction of the turn of the century in the context of 1950s domesticity and the superiority of its technology.³⁸ *Mama*, on the air from 1949 to 1957, cast the family sitcom format into the past; episodes were narrated by Mama's grown daughter Katrin from the vantage point of the present as she told stories of her childhood. Thus, in *I Remember Mama*, like in *You Are There*, interactions with

³⁶ *Profiles in Courage*, dir. Sherman Marks, NBC, 1964-65. For discussions of *Profiles in Courage*, see Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Daniel Marcus, "Profiles in Courage: Televisual History on the New Frontier," in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001) 79-102. For more general discussions of television in the 1950s and 60s that touch on historical programming, see Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1997); William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁷ For the relationship between narration and documentary see Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 32-75.

³⁸ *I Remember Mama* (also called *Mama*), dir. Ralph Nelson, CBS, 1949-57; George Lipsitz. "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 71-110.

history were often moderated by an intermediary, who, along with the viewer-subject, was experiencing and relating the diegetic events from the vantage of the present. This interaction was fueled by the sense of “liveness” produced by the television apparatus, which, while maintaining television’s eyewitness status, also helped reinforce viewers’ subject position in the present—the narration was live, but the historical moment was not. Pedagogical historically oriented television emphasized and validated the medium’s visual expositive properties. Television was put forth as a preferred medium for the historical because it could “show” as well as “tell.” However, the “tell,” which emphasized the pastness of the past via narration, was just as important as the “show” because it kept this past separate. Pedagogical programs of the era assumed a teleological position—in viewing the past as both inferior to and logically preceding the superior and separate present, they also adhered to the always progressive rhetoric of modernity.

A different strain of historical television was also present in the 1950s and 60s, though in an unusual form: science fiction. The science fiction program’s depiction of history worked from many of the same assumptions, but it articulated the present’s correlation to the past in a phobic, as opposed to pedagogical or expository, way. Overwhelmingly, these were the two dominant narratives available for history television. If history, for the pedagogical programs that I discuss, was a way to understand and explain the circumstances that had led up to the present, orienting the past as foundational to the present, then science fiction shows like *The Twilight Zone* and *Star Trek* made the past strange, casting the historical as a threatening milieu. These programs frequently introduced storylines involving accidental or planned bodily travel to the past. Time travel has long been a trope of science fiction, but, in these shows, it was used to

underscore modernist notions of temporality: the narratives suggested that the stable, linear development of time is best left alone, that history *and* its interpretation are fixed and immovable, and that the present is infinitely better than the past.

For example, in “Walking Distance,” an episode that aired in 1959 during the first season of *The Twilight Zone*, Martin Sloane, an advertising executive, takes a drive near his home town and finds himself in the town, but twenty five years earlier.³⁹ Sloane wishes for a joyful reunion with those he knows but he frightens his boyhood self as well as his parents who initially do not recognize him and, finally, implore him to return to his own present. The damage done to him is bodily as well as emotional: Sloane ends up permanently injuring himself as he chases his child self around a carousel. By the logic of the episode, then, encounters with the past are painful and have a lasting impact not desired by its denizens. Martin Sloane’s parents not only fail to identify their son (a failure that perhaps is contrary to the recognizability and innate belonging that seems emblematic of the logic of family that dominated television at the time), but they actively fear him.⁴⁰ Although Sloane is eventually able to leave the past--which, in phobic programming, is geographically specific in that it is always bounded by and associated with an explicit location--and return to his own time, he does not escape unscathed; his lasting injury signifies the permanent damage that heightened interest in and tampering with the past might enact. As this episode indicates, in the rhetoric of the forward-looking early 1960s, history is something to be left behind as it is worse and more threatening than the present. The nostalgic impulse: the desire to return to a time and place in the

³⁹ “Walking Distance,” wr. Rod Sterling, dir. Robert Stevens, *Twilight Zone*, CBS, October 30, 1959.

⁴⁰ For more on familial models in the 1950s, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal In Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

past, is recognized, but rejected. Clearly, this type of history programming is very different from *You Are There*; though this perspective fits within the generic conventions of science fiction at large, the generic dominance of the representation of the past as phobic, as opposed to being seen as a normative antecedent to the uncertain present, is noteworthy.



Figure 2. *Martin Sloane's parents are afraid of him.* Still from "Walking Distance," written by Rod Sterling, directed by Robert Stevens, *Twilight Zone*, CBS, October 30, 1959.

In subsequent episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, individuals who, like Martin Sloane, view the past as idyllic are soon proved wrong. In "A Stop at Willoughby," aired in 1960, Gart Williams, an advertising executive, is harassed at work by his boss and at home by his critical wife.⁴¹ Williams is haunted by his boss' constant admonitions to "push push

⁴¹ "A Stop at Willoughby," wr. Rod Sterling, dir. Robert Parrish, *Twilight Zone*, CBS, May 6, 1960. This choice of employment for both Williams and Martin Sloane is significant. The advertising executive in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the quintessential 'organization man,' modern but perennially anxious and always searching for escape. This type was also detailed in books like the popular *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and its sequels. Lynn Spigel, Jeffrey Sconce and others have noted that this dual quality of

push.” Several times during his daily commute, he falls asleep and dreams of a train station called “Willoughby,” a peaceful small town that appears to be stuck in the year 1888. Each time, Williams attempts to disembark at the village, but finds that he cannot. He becomes preoccupied with Willoughby, asking his regular conductor about it and telling his wife that he would like to live there and swearing that “next time,” he will get off the train. After a particularly stressful day at work, Williams again falls asleep but finally exits the train at Willoughby, intending to make the bucolic town his refuge. As a band plays in the town center, some young boys invite Williams fishing and a local man welcomes him to town. In the next scene, it is revealed that in reality, the anxious man has thrown himself from the train and “Willoughby and Sons” is the name of the funeral home that sends a hearse for his body. Instead of the idyllic and timeless village, “Willoughby,” becomes a hallucination that ultimately drives the harassed protagonist of the episode to suicide, and perhaps even a premonition naming the hearse that will be the material evidence of his death.⁴² The past, then, is quite literally death. Like in “Walking Distance,” in “A Stop at Willoughby,” those who long to escape into the past are punished or revealed as delusional. While the episode acknowledges the stressful nature

cold war modernity as both superior and catastrophic, or at least neurosis-inducing, is evident across much of 1950s and 60s popular culture. For example, in Spigel’s “fantastic sitcoms” as well as *Twilight Zone* itself, the faith in progress and commerce is always paired with anxiety about the hustle and bustle of the modern business world and the anticipatory trauma of nuclear war. The figure of the advertising executive is often a badge for these tensions on a personal or familial level. In these shows, the advertising executive is also the figure most prone to pathological thinking (i.e. thinking that deviated from belief in the superiority of the present and future), desiring instead to escape *bodily* into the past. Lynn Spigel, “From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sitcom,” in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 107-140; Jeffrey Sconce, “The ‘Outer Limits’ of Oblivion,” in Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn’t Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 21-46. Eric Hodgins, *Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946). For a discussion of fiction concerning the advertising profession see Susan Smulyan, *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 116-155.

⁴² This latter reading is particularly intriguing as it posits that historical thinking is, in actuality, future-oriented thinking. Both modes rely on a progressive or linear sense of temporality.

of modern life, it again cautions against dealing with it through nostalgic escapism. Again, we see the association between the dangerous past and a specific locale, emphasizing clear, territorial distinctions between the past and the present, perhaps a reflection of the cold war doctrines of containment, which also operated through metaphors that clearly distinguished between “safe” and “unsafe” spaces.⁴³

Another common storyline in 1960s television concerned individuals returning to the past and attempting to change it. *The Twilight Zone* presented several of these episodes, the first of which, “Back There,” aired in 1961 and featured a man who travelled to 1865 and tried unsuccessfully to prevent Abraham Lincoln’s assassination.⁴⁴ The protagonist of “No Time Like the Past,” broadcast two years later, uses a time machine to travel back in time and attempted to stop Adolph Hitler, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the bombing of Hiroshima.⁴⁵ The lesson is finally learned as, in the process of attempting to stop a schoolhouse fire, he discovers that instead he has in fact started it. Again, because *The Twilight Zone*’s address is that of the narrated cautionary tale, the viewer is positioned as witnessing, not enacting the historical interaction. As the protagonists of these episodes find out, the past cannot be changed and it must be kept separate from the present.

Yet, despite the separation of past and present, both phobic and pedagogical programs rested on affirmations of causality and teleology; that the past led directly and logically to the future. The strength of this belief can be seen in “The City on the Edge of Forever,” an episode of *Star Trek* that aired in 1967. In this episode, members of the crew

⁴³ For more about how the logics of containment operate within the domestic sphere, see May, *Homeward Bound*.

⁴⁴ “Back There,” wr. Rod Sterling, dir. David Orrick McDearmon, *Twilight Zone*, CBS, January 13, 1961.

⁴⁵ “No Time Like the Past,” wr. Rod Sterling, dir. Justus Addiss, *Twilight Zone*, CBS, March 7, 1963.

of the starship *Enterprise* travel to New York in the 1930s. Captain Kirk meets and falls in love with an idealistic social worker named Edith, who is fated to die in a traffic accident. It is revealed that if Edith does not die, she will begin an antiwar movement and delay U.S. entry into WWII long enough for Nazi Germany to develop a nuclear weapon. Although Kirk has strong feelings for Edith, he must allow her to perish so that history can run its familiar and ‘natural’ course and the U.S. discover nuclear power and establish postwar dominance.⁴⁶ As this suggests, in the forward-oriented 1950s and 1960s, looking backward (much less trying to interact with the past), except as a way to explain or consider the trajectory of the present, was considered abnormal and even dangerous. The logic of ‘historical programming’ during this time, then, was that the past was something orderly and separate—worth contemplating but necessarily kept apart from, and ultimately in service to, the present. This logic extended over different genres of programming and reaffirmed the commitment to technology and modernization so important in the postwar period.

Even the “fantastic” sitcoms of the period, which accepted supernatural activity like ghosts and magic as common and normative fare, presented a negative and phobic view towards interacting with or within the past.⁴⁷ For example, a *Bewitched* storyline that was repeated more than once during the program’s eight year run concerned its protagonist, modern-day witch Samantha Stephens, journeying back to 17th century Massachusetts only to be found out as there a witch (usually not as the result of her use of witchcraft, but of a presentist slip up, such as being in possession of a ballpoint pen) and

⁴⁶ “City on the Edge of Forever,” wr. Harlan Ellison, dir. Joseph Pevney, *Star Trek*, NBC, April 6, 1967.

⁴⁷ On the “fantastic” sitcom, see Lynn Spigel, “From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sitcom,” in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 107-140.

put on trial, with the program then constantly revisiting the trauma of Salem.⁴⁸ In other episodes of the program, figures from the distant past, like Paul Revere or a Civil War general, were inadvertently called into the present, wreaking havoc and upsetting the Stephens' idyllic suburban existence. Interestingly enough, the errant visitors were usually explained to outsiders as advertising schemes invented by Darrin Stephens, Samantha's advertising executive husband, despite the fact that at this moment, the historic was rarely featured in advertising, which was much more preoccupied by the new.⁴⁹

The linear and progressive sense of temporality was expressed in the un-aging figure of Samantha herself, a witch who, according to the narrative, has lived unchanged for over three hundred years but felt no desire to live among humans until the present moment. The *Bewitched* storylines which occasionally dealt with Samantha's immortality reaffirmed the superiority of the present to the past. In "Eye of the Beholder" from 1965, a seventeenth-century painting of a young woman closely resembling Samantha is found and eventually determined to be of Samantha herself. Upon this discovery, Samantha's nervous and hapless husband becomes upset at the idea that his wife will remain young as he ages. Over and over again, in this episode and others, this conflict arises and then resolves itself with Samantha assuring Darrin that she has chosen to remain with him and that her present life as a suburban housewife is superior to any previous experience of her

⁴⁸ The most prominent of these is the "Salem Saga," several episodes which were filmed in Salem in 1969 and aired during the 1970 season. See Peter Alachi, "The Salem Saga, 1970," <http://www.harpiesbizarre.com/salemsaga.htm>, [accessed July 13, 2011].

⁴⁹ It was not until the 1970s that the past began to be used as a marketing tool in advertisements that emphasized the heritage of longevity of certain products and arguably, as a response to the more general "nostalgia culture." See for example, selections of advertisement in the Roland Marchand Image Archive, <http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/>, [accessed February 9, 2012].

supernatural life.⁵⁰ In her choice, Samantha functions as an affirmation of the linear path of history and of the superiority and singularity of the present moment. *Bewitched*, like other television programs in the 1950s and 60s, puts forth a conception of the past as inferior to the present. However, this modernist affirmation of progress would change drastically by the next decade.

“No More Nostalgia”

While the cultural productions and discourses of the 1950s and 60s were oriented towards imagining or contemplating the future, by the beginning of the 1970s, popular culture had become interested in the past. Film, television, the performing arts, and consumer culture all reflected this newfound preoccupation.⁵¹ As we have seen, many historians have traced the contemporary boom in “heritage” to the 1970s, connecting the impulse to remember to the upheavals of the 1960s.⁵² In the first two years of the decade, *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and other magazines ran cover stories on what was deemed “the nostalgia trend,” with headlines such as “The New Nostalgia...Many Happy Returns” in articles that described this fascination with the past. These articles attributed the “new nostalgia” to a fear of or disenchantment with the present after the various upheavals and

⁵⁰ “Eye of the Beholder,” wr. Sol Saks, dir. William Asher, ABC, February 25, 1965.

⁵¹ In making this generalization, I cite cultural preoccupation with the House of the Future, the World of Tomorrow found in exhibits at the New York 1964 World’s Fair, the 1967 Montreal Expo, Walt Disney’s EPCOT center, the futuristic styles of midcentury modernism and programs like *The Jetsons*. See Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Robert Rydell, John Findling, and Kimberly Pelle, *Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See also, Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*.

⁵² Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

social unrest of the 1960s and the disappointments of Vietnam.⁵³ Paul Showers, an author of children's books, vividly summed up the current opinion of the time in the *New York Times*:

The store has been pretty thoroughly looted; once-splendid cities, crime-ridden stand half in ruins; rivers and lakes are running sewers; the open countryside, cut to ribbons by concrete is sitting up with airports, parking lots and shopping sprawl, while an important segment of the population depends for its livelihood either on sending men to the moon or building devices to wipe out life here on earth.⁵⁴

Showers located the cause of contemporary ills in the very recent past—suburban overdevelopment, industrial pollution, and the military-industrial complex. In a direct repudiation of Cold War technological innovation, he mocked the space program, suggesting its irrelevance in these times. Another columnist put the 1960s in apocalyptic terms, writing that those years were “shuffling along behind us like zombies...unless we do something to stop them, they'll come at us again.”⁵⁵ The events of the 1960s, commentators speculated, had made Americans fearful of looking into the future and led to heightened interest in the past. As the work of social critics shifted from the relatively tame critiques of suburban ennui (*Organization Man*, *The Feminine Mystique*) toward the more apocalyptic (*Beyond Belief*, *The Population Bomb*), the future began to be imagined as a decline, as opposed to a realization, of progress.⁵⁶ Both the movement away from a

⁵³ Gerald Clarke, “The Meaning of Nostalgia,” *Time*, May 3, 1971; Jonathan Rodgers, “Back to the ‘50s,” *Newsweek*, October 16, 1972; “The Nifty Fifties,” *Life*, June 16, 1972; Barbara Klaw, “The New Nostalgia...Many Happy Returns,” *American Heritage*, June, 1970.

⁵⁴ Paul Showers, “Up-to-date, Out-of-date,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1972.

⁵⁵ Clark Whelton, “The 60s: A Sense of Doom, Anger,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1971; Donal Henahan, “What Has the Hunt For Novelty Brought Us?” *New York Times*, August 15, 1971.

⁵⁶ William Whyte, *Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963); Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968); Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: HarperCollins, 1970); Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970). For an excellent analysis of social critique in the postwar period see Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939 – 1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

sense of the passage of time as progressive and forward-moving and new fears about the present and the future can be seen as manifestations of the transformation in cultural understanding of temporality, in which time was no longer presumed to move forward in positive ways and progress was not ensured.

Yet like the historians and theorists who were to follow, contemporary opinion took this investment in the past as inertia and an inability to deal with the present and maligned the nostalgic impulse as escapist and unproductive. For instance, in a column entitled “No More Nostalgia,” *Los Angeles Times* editor Art Seidenbaum bemoaned what he considered to be a new and dangerous cultural preoccupation:

We mark out lives in memory, but we do not live there. I don't like the way America is opening its attic, dragging out all kinds of junk and dressing up as if it could be young again just by playing the old songs. When the kids do that, I'm afraid they're afraid, and a sense of future doom is moving them rather than a sense of history. When middle-agers try it, they look as desperately foolish as the fat drunk at the fraternity. . . . Nostalgia, I think, should be folded carefully in the gut and carried quietly for comfort. It wears quite poorly in the street.⁵⁷

This representation of “nostalgia” suggested that current cultural interest in history signified an idealized and emotional yearning for an inaccessible and irrecoverable distant past. Another commentator, Martin E. Marty, noted the persistence of the trend, writing that “the past is in favor because the present is too unattractive to provide a base for looking with hope into the future.”⁵⁸ Cultural critics writing during the decade shared the characterization of 1970s popular culture as paradoxically both overly interested in history *and* prone to rendering an unrealistic version of it. Journalist and writer Tom Wolfe noted in his 1976 essay, which famously named the 1970s as the “Me Decade,”

⁵⁷ Art Seidenbaum, “No More Nostalgia,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1971.

⁵⁸ Martin E. Marty, “Looking Backward into the Future,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1975.

that the current generation had no connection to either the past or the future.⁵⁹ This idea was expanded by cultural historian Christopher Lasch in a series of essays inspired by Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and collected in the bestseller, *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch echoed Wolfe and others in noting "a collapse of historical faith" and "the waning of the sense of historical time." For Lasch, this erosion meant the creation of a cultural persona that was at once self-obsessed and insecure—in other words, a generation that was completely unable to relate to either its past or its future.⁶⁰ In a society that had been accustomed to looking forward with optimism, popular culture's perception of the past signaled a dramatic rupture, and one that worried its contemporaries.

But critiques that pathologized the nostalgic were perhaps themselves residual of the modernist logics of the postwar decades. The kind of problems that 1970s commentators saw in preoccupations with the historical at the expense of the present and the future replicated the emphasis on futurity that informed 1950s and 60s television; the *Twilight Zone* protagonists discussed in the previous section are emblematic of the problems of "nostalgic" yearning within a progress-oriented temporality. The worries that developed in the context of this transformation underscore that transitions are never total; often elements, especially critique, remain as intermediate spaces, functioning as commentary and identifying sites of stress and change.⁶¹ The prevalence of these modes of critique must be read in this way; they are indices of an epistemic break and function

⁵⁹ Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976) 117-156.

⁶⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: WW Norton, 1977) xiv, 5.

⁶¹ For a useful discussion of "structures of feeling," as well as dominant, residual, and emergent culture, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-135.

to note and describe a significant change using the language and frameworks of that which no longer existed in the very register—the historical—at which this shift was most apparent. While these critics were correct in their observations of a new preoccupation with the American past, their diagnosis of “nostalgia,” we shall see, requires closer analysis and consideration. While I continue to use the decade’s own self-characterization of “nostalgia culture” to describe the cultural mood, I wish to complicate and qualify its dimensions.

New Identifications: Past as Present

Commentators in the 1970s correctly noted new attention to the past as a reaction to the changes in the present but they characterized historical engagement as reflective of a sense of loss and a longing to return to “simpler times.” Instead, popular mobilizations of the historical at this moment posited a new, close relationship with the past that was facilitated by a reorientation of temporality which brought the past and the present closer and which made the historical available as a site of emotive and identificatory interaction. The prevalent diagnosis styled the nostalgic impulse as a search for a safe space that was secure from the ills of the 1970s, but, in American historical ideation at this moment, specific eras were taken up by a popular culture that sought to use them to comment upon or evaluate the present. “Nostalgic” thinking, as described by 1970s commentators, implied a desire for a time or space different from the present and an inability to return. However, Americans found new ways to return to the past by interacting with, and thinking about, earlier decades in ways that extended conflations between the past and present made possible by shifting perceptions of the passage of time.⁶²

⁶² Fredric Jameson also employs a characterization of “nostalgia,” which he connects with an aestheticization of the past and a “waning of affect” with regards to interactions with and understanding of

Rather than longing for bygone eras, Americans were identifying and interacting with particular historical elements in novel ways, focusing on aspects of the past that held some kind of relevance to the present situation. Similarity, not difference, delineated these engagements. This can be illuminated through Alison Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory," defined as "a sensuous memory produced by an *experience* of mass mediated representations." This manner of interaction is characterized by more flexible modes of identification, which, as Landsberg notes, can lead to new ways of understanding subjectivity and personhood. Critical attention to experiential knowledge production takes account of the pervasive role of mass mediation in subject formation, but rather than dismissing it as evidence of a lack of "real" insight, accounts for the possibility of heightened consciousness and, occasionally, social change through these new identifications. It also foregrounds affective or empathetic rapport, a perception of commonality of feelings or experience that can bridge radically different historical circumstances.⁶³ This account of the complex relations of historical ideation is a closer approximation of the cultural activity of the 1970s. What was described as the "nostalgic impulse" actually embodied diverse perspectives and resulted in many different types of interaction, all of which cannot be defined simply as wistful for a lost past.⁶⁴ Rather than evidencing a preference for the *entire* past as opposed to the present, nostalgic culture

"real history." Linda Hutcheon and others have observed that this position is itself curiously "nostalgic;" it does not account for the deep identifications that individuals formed with the ideas and people of the past. Jameson, *Postmodernism*; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

⁶³ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 20. In some ways, my project is an attempt to trace the origins of "prosthetic memory" by periodizing the impulse through examining the circumstances of its genesis.

⁶⁴ For other accounts that complicate postmodern engagements with nostalgia, see Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000); Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (London: Routledge, 2007); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

sought out particular decades and took them up in ways that underscored not only different modes of ideation but also reconsiderations of the character and the role of history.

Rather than embracing the entirety of the American past, nostalgic culture focused on historical events and aspects that could help to evaluate the contemporary scene, making comparisons facilitated by a new sense of the past as a fruitful site for contemplation of the present. For example, media commentators frequently referenced the 1930s as a way to appraise and comment on the economic problems of the 1970s, an association that was stimulated by the popularity of television programs like *The Waltons*, a drama about a rural family during the Depression, and *Eleanor and Franklin*, a miniseries about the Roosevelts.⁶⁵ The two decades were often compared in news stories, the 1930s were valorized as a moment of make-do and strength of character. Cultural fascination with this era did not emphasize a desire for return, but instead sought modes of identification and commonality, looking to the 1930s as a potential source of insight about the current decade. In retrospective articles about the decade, journalists also praised a time when the United States government used a financial crisis as an opportunity to make enormous advances in modernization and prosperity.⁶⁶

In the same manner, interest in the 1920s functioned as a way to reevaluate the 1960s, not only by finding analogues in earlier eras, but also in highlighting the positive characteristics and changes precipitated by these analogues. Elements of the 1920s returned with the popularity of silent film, Art Deco, the athletic silhouette, cloche hats,

⁶⁵Earl Hamner, Jr., *The Waltons*, CBS, 1972-1981; David Susskind, *Eleanor and Franklin*, ABC, January 11, 1976.

⁶⁶Frederick M. Winship, "Nostalgia Business in Full Bloom," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1970; John Bartlow Martin, "One Nation, Indomitable," *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1975.

and long beads of flapper fashion.⁶⁷ Indicative of the ways in which this decade was seen in the context of an affinity with the 1960s, the bell bottom pants, long beads, and platform shoes that we now associate with the 1970s were then introduced as “Roaring Twenties” throwbacks.⁶⁸ In these conceptions, the upheavals of the 1920s were never connected to a large-scale political transformation, and the decade’s generation gap resulted in the rapid modernization of the older generation rather than alienation of the younger. The youth culture of the 1960s was by the 1970s seen as responsible for continuing social unrest, but ongoing interest in the “flaming youth” of the 1920s found ways to continue investment in the positive aspects of generational conflict by enacting them as displaced onto a different decade. 1920s enthusiasts experimented with the look and the feel of the decade, moving beyond simple aesthetic or “surface” forms. To dress like the 1920s was to seek to form affective identification with that decade, rather than it indicating only the empty longing denoted by a negative description of “nostalgia.” In other words, the nostalgic impulse of the 1970s brought together a variety of decades, putting them into conversation in interesting ways—and, importantly, the past was seen as holding important lessons for the present.

By far, the most prominent object of nostalgic thinking at the time was the 1950s, since considered to be an idyllic decade of peace, prosperity, and innocence. Films like *Grease* and *American Graffiti* celebrated teenage life during the period, and many Americans took up collecting midcentury ephemera or dressing in the manner of the

⁶⁷ Jack Clayton, *The Great Gatsby*, Paramount Pictures, 1974.

⁶⁸ Jean Murphy, “70s Audience Hails Musicals of the 30s,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1970; John Peacock, *Fashion Sourcebooks: the 1970s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

decade.⁶⁹ The 1950s revival has been read as a repudiation of the 1960s, partly because of the way that affinity for that decade was subsequently mobilized by the New Right, particularly in the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan.⁷⁰ While there is no doubt that conservative political projects venerated the Cold War consensus era as an American ideal, it is again a mistake to write off all aspects of 1950s revivalism, even those that initially seem the most celebratory, as uncomplicated idealizations of the period. The popular program *Happy Days* has been read as the epitome of the nostalgia for a more idyllic period in the American experience, but some episodes dealt with the darker side of the period, and signaled social problems that were unresolved and ongoing, including episodes that touched upon racism, protest, and youth culture. In this way, the show reversed and problematized its own claim of the 1950s as “happy days.”⁷¹ At the same time, the *Happy Days* spinoff *Laverne and Shirley* introduced lead female characters, who, rather than presiding over suburban families, worked on the assembly line in a Milwaukee brewery and whose close friendship took precedence over occasional romantic entanglements.⁷² *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley* seemed to embody nostalgia for the 1950s, but actually presented a more complex depiction of the decade. The ways that both, and other

⁶⁹ Randal Kleiser, *Grease*, Paramount Pictures, 1978; George Lucas, *American Graffiti*, Universal Pictures, 1973; Garry Marshall, *Happy Days*, ABC, 1974-1984; Garry Marshall, *Laverne & Shirley*, ABC, 1976-1983. It is also worth noting here that the characterizations of “nostalgia” that commentators used to explain the popularity of such cultural fare have remained intact, despite the fact that many of the films portrayed the 1950s in a far more ambivalent manner. For example, *American Graffiti* is often depicted as a “nostalgia film,” although its vision of youth in the “fifties” is far more complex.

⁷⁰ See Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Lawrence Grossberg, *Dancing In Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁷¹ For examples of episodes of *Happy Days* that problematize the 1950s, see “Great Expectations,” wr. Bob Brunner, dir. Jerry Paris, April 9, 1974; “The Best Man,” wr. Joel Kane, dir. Jerry Paris, April 16, 1974; “The Not Making of a President,” wr. Lloyd Garver, dir. Jerry Paris, January 28, 1975; “Fonzie’s New Friend,” wr. Sid Arthur, dir. Jerry Paris, November 25, 1975.

⁷² Garry Mashall, *Laverne and Shirley*, ABC, 1976-1983.

1950s ephemera, have since been cited as indicative of nostalgia for the 1950s is itself symptomatic of a rereading of the 1970s.

New interest in the past also found expression in interactive and performative engagements with the Victorian period. Victorian staples such as the Gibson Girl, the Victorian Christmas, and the horse and carriage all enjoyed a certain prominence in the 1970s' American imagination and in the popularity of books such as E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which seamlessly mixed historical characters, such as Evelyn Nesbit, Harry Houdini, and Emma Goldman, with fictional ones.⁷³ Men cultivated handlebar mustaches and sideburns while the advent of the maxi skirt as an alternative to the miniskirt was often described as suggestive of residual Victorian modesty.⁷⁴ The unisex nightshirt, a staple of old timey imagery, also came back for a brief moment to great fanfare.⁷⁵ A reissue of the 1897 Sears Roebuck catalog was a surprise entry on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and it prompted the subsequent reissue of the 1902 and 1927 catalogues as well as catalogues from retailers Montgomery Ward and Johnson Smith, the venerable 1893 travel guide *Baedeker's United States* and the 1907 *Temperance Songbook*.⁷⁶ Readers could flip through newsprint pages that advertised everything from farm machinery to corsets. These kinds of engagements have been pejoratively read as merely "aesthetic" and "surface," with no meaning other than as trivial images but they are perhaps more accurately defined as experiential or performative.⁷⁷

⁷³ E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Random House, 1975).

⁷⁴ Henry Allen, "Yesteryear Shock," *Washington Post*, March 7, 1971.

⁷⁵ Lawrence Van Gelder, "Nightshirts, for Fashionably Cozy Sleepwalkers," *New York Times*, February 24, 1976.

⁷⁶ Paul Showers, "Up-to-date, Out-of-date," *New York Times*, December 5, 1972.

⁷⁷ For more on "scriptive objects," or how material artifacts help form and reform subjects through interaction, see Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," *Social Text* 27 (2009) 67-94.

Americans who dressed in the manner of the 1890s or the 1950s or who surrounded themselves with objects from these eras were often interested in evoking not only the look, but also the *feel* of these times, seeking to learn about the past by placing themselves within it. If some nostalgic ideation sought to compare the past and the present for commonalities of experience (such as poverty or youth rebellion), object or aesthetic-oriented interaction was a way to experience the past in different way. All of these models attested to a different understanding of the past and the present as close to one another, proximate, and permeable, as opposed to separate or linear. Interactions identified as “nostalgic” exhibited both a new interest in the historical and a new mode of identification that privileged affective or performative engagement with the past as means of understanding and commenting upon the present. New understandings of and relationships with the past, which relied in a large part on visual representation of the historic, were shaped by and reflected in the mass media—it was not a coincidence that nostalgic culture found its most prominent expression in film and especially on television.

The Empathetic Past: History Television in the 1970s

The new affective modes of historical knowledge production were expressed and, in some ways, fueled by television programming in the 1970s. If 1950s and ‘60s history television conveyed a modernist, linear conception of temporality in which the past and present were different and separate, by the 1970s, the omnipresence of historical television echoed the nostalgia culture. Responding to as well as helping to constitute the terms of nostalgia culture, network television during this decade featured many television shows set in the past. These, like other forms of historical ideation at this moment,

modeled affective identifications with the historical that posited commonality and correspondence between past and present. While programs like *Bewitched*, *The Lucy Show*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* had dominated entertainment television during the 1960s, by the 1973-74 television season a significant portion of network primetime was occupied by shows set in the American past. In 1976 and 1977, the years that marked the height of the national fascination with the past, the top programs were *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*. Equally popular were *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Waltons*, programs about families living, respectively, in the 1870s and the Great Depression.⁷⁸ In contrast to the shows of the 1960s, the historical was portrayed as banal and everyday, not phobic or exceptional, and characters acted supportively and cohesively as opposed to in a pathological or unfamiliar manner. Demonstrating new understandings of the connections between past and present, history programming in the 1970s used emotive identification to emphasize similarities between the past and the present. Indeed, the immense popularity of historical programming on television in this decade, as well as the way that the form would evolve, point to the centrality of history in this era, and raise questions about how the cultural fascination with the past was taken up and expanded by network television.

Television's attention to and appropriation of nostalgia culture was so prevalent in the 1970s, that even programs that were set in then-current times introduced storylines that dealt with the past. For example, in a two-part episode of *The Brady Bunch* that aired in 1971, "Ghost Town, U.S.A." the Brady family travels to the Grand Canyon and stops at an abandoned ghost town, coming across a crazed miner who locks the family in the town

⁷⁸ Television ratings from 1960s, http://www.entertainmentscene.com/top_tv_shows_60s.html, [accessed September 12, 2008].

jail from which they must stage a dramatic escape.⁷⁹ The episode places what would have been read as a traumatic supernatural encounter on 1960s television into the banal context of a suburban family's vacation. The Bradys' visit to the ghost town becomes an experiential and entertaining locale in which they are able to live out their own historical experience. In meeting the deranged prospector (himself a bizarre anachronistic apparition) and being temporarily imprisoned, the Bradys are presented with an authentic and immersive experience. Like the episodes of *Twilight Zone*, a connection between past and place is established, but this time without the associated emotional disturbance. The safety of the experience is further ensured through the repetitive conventions of the sitcom; even at the initial stages of the potentially dangerous encounter, the audience is assured by the generic status of *The Brady Bunch* that whatever happens, the family will be intact and unscarred by the beginning of the next episode.⁸⁰ This safeguard allows the encounter with American history to be read from the beginning as experiential, entertaining, and sometimes even comedic. The Bradys' understanding of the Old West, then, becomes lived rather than imagined: through the figure of the miner who acts and reacts presumably as an 1840s prospector would and seems to be of indeterminate temporal origin, the family can directly commune with the past. The episode teaches the Bradys, and by extension, their audience, about life in frontier times. The authenticity of the lesson is reinforced by the Brady's immersive experience. The episode illustrates the disjuncture in temporality that marked historical ideation in the 1970s and making literal that the historical was available in the present.

⁷⁹ "Ghost Town, U.S.A.," wr. Sherwood Schwartz, dir. Oscar Rudolph, *The Brady Bunch*, ABC, September 17, 1971.

⁸⁰ On sitcom repetition, see Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 213-268.

Like new forms of nostalgic engagement, the programs of the 1970s emphasized permeability between the past and the present, introducing scenarios where not only could audiences participate in the past, but the past itself could be brought into the present. One program which evinced this temporal ambiguity was *Meeting of Minds*, a public television program created in 1976 by Steve Allen, the first host of the *Tonight* show.⁸¹ The show presented a roundtable discussion among historical figures from all over the world and from all eras of history. The first panel introduced actors portraying Theodore Roosevelt, Cleopatra, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Paine. Subsequent episodes would pair Ulysses S. Grant with Marie Antoinette, and Karl Marx and Charles Darwin with Attila the Hun.⁸² These guests were omniscient; they were aware of the experiences of figures who followed them chronologically (or who had lived in different parts of the world) as well as of current events, which they would discuss and on which they could impart opinions. However, guests still spoke from their own perspective, rendering them both inside and outside of their historical moments.⁸³ In comparison to *You Are There*, which assumed stasis in one time period (except for the presence of the reporters, who were heard but never seen) as well as a predictable and closed narrative of events based on already-present historical interpretation, *Meeting of Minds*' sense of temporality was porous. Not only could historical characters travel into the present without repercussion, but they were also involved in debate and decision making about present issues; for example, Karl Marx and Ulysses S. Grant discussed communism in

⁸¹ Ginny Weissman, "He Belongs in the Yellow Pages; Steve Allen Does it All," *Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1977.

⁸² Steve Allen, *Meeting of Minds*, PBS, 1977-1981.

⁸³ For full scripts, see Steve Allen, *Meeting of Minds* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978) 69-122.

China and the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ Guests interacted across time and space, and used their expertise to provide commentary on the present-- sometimes, as in the case of Marx, on their own legacies. Most fascinatingly, panelists were aware of the medium of television itself—they spoke directly to the television audience and occasionally referred to being able to converse with “millions.” In this spectacular fashion, the program posited that experiential interactions with denizens of the past could address contemporary issues. *Meeting of Minds* thus firmly rejected the past as inaccessible or unrepresentable; panelists were bodily present in the television studio, and on television itself. *Meeting of Minds* displayed the new relationship between the past and the present; history had become an active agent in the contemporary, and historical events were perceived as parallel and relevant rather than foundational to the present. Further, *Meeting of Minds* performed television itself as it demonstrated and exaggerated the medium’s sense of historical exposition through spectacularization: because new historical ideations were posed as experiential and visual, television put itself forward as the ideal medium for its representation.

As this suggests, commercial television interests benefitted from cultural interest in history, which it also exploited by emphasizing the medium’s ability to represent the real and introducing programming that purported historical verisimilitude in its costumes, sets, and characterizations.⁸⁵ For example, *Little House on the Prairie*, one of the most popular programs of the decade, was based on a series of autobiographical children’s

⁸⁴ Steve Anderson makes this observation but does not note significant differences between the two programs. Steve Anderson, “History TV and Popular Memory” in Gary Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memories* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 19-36.

⁸⁵ For an industrial history of U.S. commercial television, especially in the way that the medium has capitalized upon concurrent cultural developments, see Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

books by Laura Ingalls Wilder which told the story of her pioneer childhood in the 1870s.⁸⁶ The program positioned itself as a family drama on the one hand, and, on the other, as an accurate account of life on the frontier. The producers of the program asserted the show's historical accuracy in two ways: by detailing their extensive research in visually recreating the look and feel of Minnesota in the 1870s, and by reinforcing the real, historical status of Wilder and her family.⁸⁷ Although the program was a fictional drama, its basis in real historical events gave it currency as an accurate depiction of the past. The "reality" of the characters and the sets, and the way that producers of the show insisted on this truthful representation, highlight television's growing reputation as a conduit to the past: it had the capacity to relate the *look* as well as the *feel* of bygone eras.

But the realism of *Little House*'s assertions of historical authenticity was bolstered by an emotional realism which used expanded characterization to present relatable storylines and to seek affective identifications in viewers.⁸⁸ *Little House* was informed by concurrent development in network television: programs that emphasized characterization to introduce relatable protagonists and which took as their subject current political and social issues. The most prevalent of these were Norman Lear's *All In the Family* and its multiple spin-offs, including *Good Times*, *Maude*, and *The Jeffersons*. Lear's shows were characterized as "relevance" programming because of the way that they oriented their plotlines to address some of the realities of life in the 1970s. These shows were seen by viewers as "realistic" not only because they addressed contemporary

⁸⁶ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1935). Michael Landon, *Little House on the Prairie*, NBC, 1974-1983.

⁸⁷"Little House on Prairie 'Reel' Authentic Prairie Town," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1974; Jake Newman, "Little House Divided," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1980.

⁸⁸ For more on emotional realism, see Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (Methuen: London, 1985) 1-85.

values, but also because they used these issues to promote emotional affinity between the program and the audience.⁸⁹ In this programming context, *Little House* made similar avowals of realism, thus moving audience understanding of historical information from material to emotional terms. This shift extended television's capacity to portray emotional reality over the historic axis as well as the contemporary one. The program presented itself as historically accurate, but its "relevant" storylines dealt with issues that were relatable to contemporary audiences, bringing the pastness of the show's mise-en-scène and Laura Ingalls Wilder's status as having-lived into the service of putting forth a history of frontier America that suggested commonality between the experiences and emotions of its characters and audience.

In *Little House*, the historical quality of the program acted as a substrate upon which viewers could make identifications between the emotions experienced by its characters and similar situations in their own daily lives. As one critic observed, the show "dishe[d] up today's hardships as 1870s hardships."⁹⁰ If relevance programming sought to advance television's position by emphasizing its ability to represent and attend to social issues, shows like *Little House* took the additional step of placing these issues within a historical milieu—offering up television as a source of historical information, delivered in emotional terms. *Little House's* authenticity was two-pronged: it was based on historical events and people that were also relatable to its contemporary audiences. Underpinning the identifications thereby placed viewers directly within the past. That is,

⁸⁹ See Kirsten Marthe Lentz, "Quality vs. Relevance: Feminism, Race, and the Politics of the Sign in 1970s Television," *Camera Obscura* 15.1 (2000) 45-93. For more on how fictional texts appeal to "the real" in ways that are themselves informed by cultural contexts and developments, see Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1-14. Although Kaplan writes about literature at the turn of the twentieth century, her association between fictional realism and historical context is valuable here.

⁹⁰ Jake Newman, "Little House Divided," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1980.

unlike the programs of the 1960s, there was no voice-over or CBS news team mediating the audience encounter of the past; instead viewers were invited into the diegetic space of the narrative and asked to empathize with characters and events, as opposed to treating them as historical figures. While the 1960s shows emphasized distance, *Little House* foregrounded identification, which, along with the historical accuracy of the mise-en-scène, worked to cement the show's claim to truthful history.

In *Little House*'s reorientation of frontier life, emotional concerns took precedence over material ones. Wilder's *Little House* books, which had been written in the 1930s and were perhaps themselves reflective of the scarcity of resources faced by many Americans at that time, focused less on developing individual characters and more on describing material life on the frontier—entire chapters were devoted to minute descriptions of farming, cooking, and sewing techniques employed by the Ingalls family.⁹¹ As a television program, *Little House on the Prairie* introduced storylines and characters that dealt less with material than social issues, focusing, for example, on racial and gender inequality, class difference, and political concerns. Interestingly, producer and star Michael Landon insisted that the emotional complexity made the show realistic, noting that “our show is hardly a kid's show. We're much more adult.”⁹² In fact, both the book series and television program dispelled idealized images of frontier life: Wilder's books complicated notions of the American west as a land of plenty, rich in material resources, while the televised version called attention to social problems which it posited as always having been present in American life.

⁹¹ See Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, for comparison. For media commentary on disparity between the books and the television series, see Anita Gold, “Michael Landon Defends His Little House on the Prairie,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 27, 1975; “Too Many Egos in a Little House,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1974.

⁹² Jerry Buck, “Landon Proves His ‘House’ Not Made of Cards,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 7, 1978.

Indeed, the televised *Little House*'s simultaneous attestations to social relevance and historical accuracy put forth a portrayal of the past which was markedly different from older depictions of the frontier. On one hand, viewers saw a chronicle of frontier life that seemed familiar, yet that was packaged as a realistic representation of the past. On the other, issues like racism and sexism were shown to have been present in the 1870s as well, dispelling notions of an idealized frontier life. *Little House* straddled these two positions: professing accurate and realistic description of the past, *and* positing commonalities between two eras a century apart. By maintaining this dialectic, the program pointed to a new cultural understanding of the present as proximate to the past, as well as asserting history's ability to serve as a substrate for identifications and consciousness-building in the present.

By placing these issues within the frontier past, *Little House on the Prairie* created a way for viewers to work through present day problems by viewing them as a part of a longer historical trajectory. For example, in a 1976 episode of *Little House* entitled "Soldier's Return," a Civil War veteran named Granville Whipple comes back to the Ingalls' Walnut Creek community after a prolonged absence. Although the character seems sympathetic and friendly, it quickly becomes apparent that he is haunted by memories of the War, and, in attempting to cope with his complicated emotions, he has developed an addiction to morphine and is plagued by flashbacks in which he is lost in a forest during battle and watches his best friend die.⁹³ Ultimately, Whipple is unable either to productively rejoin society or to overcome his addiction, and so he commits suicide. The episode is ostensibly about Civil War veterans; however, the connections to

⁹³ "Soldier's Return," wr. Blanche Hanalis, dir. William Claxton, *Little House on the Prairie* NBC, March 24, 1976.

the growing problem of alienation and addiction among returning Vietnam veterans are unmistakable.⁹⁴ In the flashback scenes, the soldier Whipple is shown amid dense, disorienting vegetation, a type of landscape more associated with the jungles of Vietnam than the battlefields of the Civil War. His post-traumatic stress disorder is a hallmark of the Vietnam experience, as is the fact that he chooses to deal with it through narcotics. Particularly grim is what seems to be the ultimate message of the episode: that the (Vietnam) veteran cannot be reintegrated into society. While Martin Sloane's traumatic experience in *Twilight Zone* seemed to have little bearing on current events, here, Granville Whipple's certainly does.



Figure 3: Granville Whipple is lost in the woods. Still from "Soldier's Return," written by Blanche Hanalis directed by William Claxton, *Little House on the Prairie*, NBC, March 24, 1976.

⁹⁴ Television addressed issues of Vietnam through another show which purported to be about a different era: *MASH*, a program that was ostensibly about medics in the Korean War, but which audiences and critics assumed to be about Vietnam. Hal Himmelstein "Television's Social Comedies" in *Television Myth and the American Mind* (Westport: Praeger, 1994), 163-195. For more on the experience of Vietnam veterans in the postwar U.S., see Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Robert Jay Lifton, *Home From the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans* (New York: Other Press, 1973).

The historic found expression on television in many different ways in the 1970s, but all of the new programming demonstrated television's ability to adapt and animate cultural interest in the past. If nostalgia culture necessitated visual representation and emotive identification, television was well-positioned to address this cultural need. Television, as it often does, both reflected and helped to create the terms for larger American culture. Historically-based television put forth modes of engagement which, on the one hand, offered television as a prominent site of historical cultural production and, on the other, modeled close interactions and identifications with the past. In this way, television revealed and arguably helped to perpetrate larger changes in cultural understandings of both historicity and historical subjectivity.

History and/as Miniseries

In the wake of the enormous success of *Little House on the Prairie* and other historical shows, television introduced a new genre that both reflected and employed American interest in the past, using the medium's construction and exposition of temporality to broaden its growing association with historical knowledge production, as well as to extend the medium's ongoing self-legitimization project.⁹⁵ In 1974, ABC announced the introduction of "Novels for Television," which, according to Martin Starger, the President for ABC Entertainment, showed the network's commitment "to pioneering a new dramatic form for television."⁹⁶ The miniseries foregrounded particular characteristics of the novel: narrative immersion, character development, and change over time, all of which were becoming increasingly present in serialized television, but which were intensified in this new form, which also bolstered television's claim to the

⁹⁵ John J. O'Connor, "TV's Miniseries—Refreshing Change or Just Less of the Same?" *New York Times*, March 27, 1977.

⁹⁶ Les Brown, "ABC-TV Plans to Stress Serialization of Novels," *New York Times*, December 14, 1974.

historical. In the press, television executives discussed an intrinsic link between the two mediums, “The novel. . . is a natural source of material for television, which could make for superior programming.”⁹⁷ The novel was also considered to be a higher cultural form, and thus an opportunity for television, which was still dealing with its “vast wasteland” problem, to profess a new gravitas which rested in part on its ability to relate realistic historical narratives. Significantly, the novels to which network executives looked as source material; books such as Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* trilogy and Gore Vidal’s *Burr*-- were particularly apt for adaptation because, in their experimentations with fractured temporalities, they manifested qualities that were emblematic of the new mode of temporality, a development that was arguably itself mobilized by the televisual.⁹⁸

The first miniseries capitalized not only on public fascination with the past but also on a growing interest in the emotional experiences of historical figures. The miniseries was a new form, but adapted many of its emergent generic traits from the soap opera. Like soap operas, miniseries were serial in form, and focused on intrapersonal and familial relationships, often presented as melodrama. However, while the soap opera continues to be denigrated as low culture, the miniseries, because of its historic content, was seen as “upscale” television. But like soap operas, miniseries focused on the private experiences and emotions of famous historical persons, providing information about the sentiments that might have influenced their historic actions and how in turn they were emotionally defined by historical events, thus reflecting the affective connection between

⁹⁷ “ABC to Develop ‘Roots,’ ‘U.S.A.’ as TV Novels”, *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1975.

⁹⁸ Lawrence Laurent, “Rich Man, Poor Man in 12 TV Hours,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 1976; Les Brown, “TV Is Again Looking to Books for New Specials,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1975.

past and present and television's own emotional realism.⁹⁹ Miniseries like *Sandburg's Lincoln* and *Eleanor and Franklin* recast significant political events as personal dramas, connecting the historical with individual development and foregrounding the ways in which these individuals negotiated their private and public lives.¹⁰⁰ In the same way that *Little House on the Prairie* extended relevance programming to express historical authenticity, the miniseries adapted seriality and connected character development with historical development and change over time, foregrounding the way in which personal development in the characters worked in relation to larger historical events. *Eleanor and Franklin*, for example, traced the life of Eleanor Roosevelt from an awkward girl to a leader in her own right through an investigation of her marriage to Franklin, focusing on how the discovery of his infidelities made her a more independent person, which in turn, had consequences for her public presentation. This attention to Eleanor's inner life created modes of affective identification for audiences, who might not have been able to place themselves within her impressive career but could empathize with her reactions to significant events and the feelings that underpinned the choices that she made. This chronicle of the Roosevelts' private relationship therefore focused on their emotional experiences but showed the impact of these experiences on their public lives.

⁹⁹ Jane Feuer has traced the origins of television's prime-time serial form as an appeal to a "higher class" audience who would supposedly appreciate the character development and characterization that seriality allowed, and this can be seen too in the miniseries, which lined emotionality and identification to both history and "upscale" commodification. Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi, eds., *MTM: "Quality Television,"* (London: British Film Institute, 1984), 4. For more on the soap opera, and relationships between the soap opera and the miniseries, see Elayne Rapping, "TV Movies as History: Class, Race, and the Past," in *The Movie of the Week: Private Stories, Public Events* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 118-146. On soap opera's temporality, see Ang, *Watching Dallas*; Tania Modeleski, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas: Notes on a Feminine Narrative Form," Annette Kuhn, "Women's Genre's: Melodrama, Soap Opera, and Theory," in Charlotte Brundson and Lynn Spigel, eds. *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, second edition (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2008) 29-40, 225-234.

¹⁰⁰ David Susskind, *Eleanor and Franklin*, ABC, January 11, 1976; David L. Wolper, *Sandburg's Lincoln*, NBC, May 1, 1974.



Figure 4. Franklin Roosevelt proposes marriage to Eleanor. Still from David Susskind, *Eleanor and Franklin*, ABC, January 11, 1976.

In its investigation of the public and the private, the miniseries also highlighted the effect of large-scale historical change on the development of individual identity. In programs like *Rich Man, Poor Man* and, later, *Roots*-- programs that followed the experiences of a familial line-- the succession of protagonists were emotionally and materially defined by their presence and participation not only in familial rituals but in events like wars and migrations.¹⁰¹ This emphasized the importance of the historical on the formation of personal identity, as opposed to the effects of personal identity on historical change. In 1960s shows like *Profiles in Courage* and *You Are There*, individual and exceptional agents had a profound impact on large-scale historical change, yet the private or inner lives of these individuals were rarely probed. By the 1970s, even “great men” like Abraham Lincoln were depicted as acting and reacting within historical contexts and circumstances—again, historical change often registered in emotional terms. This development mirrored new interest in everyday people and everyday lives of the

¹⁰¹ *Rich Man, Poor Man*, wr. Dean Riesner, dir. Bill Bixby, ABC, September, 1976-March, 1977; David L. Wolper, Stan Margulies, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, ABC, January 23-30, 1977.

past, and a movement away from historical accounts that focused on the activities of powerful individuals. If the new proximity of the past to the present led to the notion that the past could be used to evaluate the present, this notion became internalized in television's conception of character in that it presented individual identity as determined by historical events. Like other historical fare, the miniseries proved to be popular with audiences, who enjoyed new perspectives on historical figures.¹⁰²

The new prominence of the miniseries helped crystallize the tendency to seriality and linked it to larger ideas of history. Like the soap opera, in the miniseries form the passage of time itself became an important focus of the show; this shifted the serial quality of television from one axis to another. The miniseries used seriality in an attempt to reinscribe a sense of temporal progression as history. On one hand, the miniseries was organized around the premise of temporal change, but on the other, even temporal change was confused as television's depiction of generations of the same families showed repetition, parallels, and continuities of personality traits, scenarios, and situations over generations. As one reviewer stated of the promise of the miniseries, "they realize that there exists in the country a great hunger for the continuity of narrative."¹⁰³ The miniseries exaggerated temporal change, tracing lives and generations through decades. However it also posed similarity and legibility between different generations. If American culture in the 1970s could no longer trace historical change through the collective (grand narrative), television could demonstrate historical development through

¹⁰² Joyce Haber, "Bringing Books to the Small Screen," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1975; Dick Adler, "The Book-to-Movie Trend: TV Starts to Roll its Own," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1975; Cecil Smith, "More About Mrs. Roosevelt," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1976; Percy Shain, "Rich Man, Poor Man Tops Emmy List," *Boston Globe*, April 16, 1976.

¹⁰³ Sander Vanocur, "Filling America's Need for the Continuity of 'Storytelling,'" *Washington Post*, March 28, 1976.

the individual and the family unit, a form that had its own internal sense of continuity over time and, moreover, that was already well defined by television. If part of television's rearticulations of historical identification rested on a new emphasis on individual agency in understanding and formulating interpretations of the past, the miniseries foregrounded interpretation through a succession of individuals, tracing historical change over time through the familial line.

The miniseries was extremely successful and further extended television's growing claim as a site for historical knowledge production. Like television programming which adapted "relevance" to the historical, the miniseries used seriality and characterization to suggest that large scale historical events were best grasped through the individual, but also that the individual was defined by historical events, and that, in order to understand the present, you must understand the past. This closer relationship between history and identity reflected concurrent cultural interest in the past. These ideas, and how they were taken up specifically by television, were symptomatic of shifts in temporality—past and present were conceptualized as being in close proximity, and history was absorbed through empathetic identification. The introduction of this genre mirrored not only the concurrent cultural preoccupation with history, and the new, more permeable ways in which the past itself was understood, but also how television itself was a critical part of this preoccupation, both expressing and creating new ways of interacting with the historical.

The *Roots* Phenomenon

The miniseries consolidated television's ability to relate the present and the past in affective terms and to demonstrate historical change through seriality. No mini-series

was more successful or made a more significant cultural impact than *Roots: The Saga of An American Family*, the adaptation of journalist and author Alex Haley's book about the experiences of his ancestors in Africa and as slaves in the antebellum South.¹⁰⁴ *Roots*, which aired on eight consecutive nights in January of 1977, was an immediate sensation, setting ratings records and generating enthusiastic responses from the media and the public.¹⁰⁵ By the time that *Roots* aired, television was already well-established as a premier source for popular historical knowledge. *Roots* drew upon this already-present connection and expanded it by foregrounding the importance of historical and familial knowledge to individual identity in the present and by presenting a model of historical activity for audiences who were eager to look to their own familial pasts. The adaptation of Haley's novel took the miniseries' new expression of history to its fullest potential, relating an account of slavery that, in its appeal to the emotional, was different and more compelling than any popular history before it and which revealed and enhanced new cultural interest in life under slavery.

Part of *Roots*' success as a new historical articulation was that Haley's book itself both represented a new perception of the past and argued that this perception was critical to identity and consciousness in the present. *Roots* was the culmination of twelve years of research and recreated a narrative about the experiences of Haley's ancestors in Africa and in the United States. Using "African" terms that had been handed down through his family as a beginning point, Haley worked with linguists and historians to identify the likely origin of his ancestors, and searched archives in the United States and in England

¹⁰⁴ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Doubleday, 1976).

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline Trescott, "An Emotional Preview of Haley's *Roots*—It All Came Alive," *Washington Post*, January 13, 1977; "Deep Are the Roots in Television's Finest Hour," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 29, 1977; Vernon Jarrett, "An Epic TV Tale of Our Heritage," *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1977; "Roots Finale Most Watched Show in History," *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1977.

to find evidence of the slave ship that had transported his forebear to America.¹⁰⁶ The result and apex of Haley's research was a trip to the Gambian village of that ancestor, Kunta Kinte, and an emotional reunion with his African "family."¹⁰⁷ In interviews and in the book itself, Haley discussed this research in affective terms, connecting knowledge of the past to political consciousness, a theme that had been prevalent in the Civil Rights movement and that remained important in cultural nationalist movements in the 1970s.¹⁰⁸ Haley's emotional attachment to his research material extended to an empathetic affinity with his ancestor—again and again, Haley stated that he felt connected to Kinte, and he strove to discover how "The African" might have felt during his captivity. Haley famously crossed the Atlantic in the dark basement of an ocean liner in an attempt to replicate the emotional conditions of a slave ship, and he often spoke of Kinte's spirit dictating his writing of *Roots*.¹⁰⁹ In this emphasis on the emotional, *Roots* was a book about the process of discovery as much as it was about the history it related. Haley took as his central principle that people could not understand themselves until they understood their familial history, and conflated personal identity with family identity in a way that at once echoed the logic of the miniseries and reflected the restructuring of temporality that emerged during this period. In this construction, the past and the present worked in

¹⁰⁶ Mary Knoblauch, "From Africa to America—One Man's Search for his Roots" *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1976; Jacqueline Trescott, "The Guest," *Washington Post*, February 22, 1977; Margot Hornblower, "Haley: A Black Perspective on the Bicentennial," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1975.

¹⁰⁷ Cecil Smith, "Haley's Comet Still Streaking Across the Literary Skies" *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1977.

¹⁰⁸ Alex Haley to 'Tony' Oursler, December 27, 1967, Fulton J. Oursler, Jr. (FJO) Papers, folder 51: "Haley Correspondence, 1966-69," GU.

¹⁰⁹ See Fath Davis Ruffins, "Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990," in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 506-611; Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁹ Described in Mary Seibert McCauley, "Alex Haley, A Southern Griot: a Literary Biography," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University, 1983.

tandem, creating identifications across time and informing identity and actions in the present.

As a result of Haley's affective engagement, *Roots* related the history of African Americans from a different perspective than had previously been offered. The Civil Rights movement and new academic and popular interest in documenting the lives of those under slavery provided a context for academic books like Herbert Gutman's *The American Family in Slavery and Freedom* and Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, which used the WPA slave narratives to reconstruct the daily experience of life in bondage. Haley's book took as an imperative the same urgency of discovery but highlighted the personal and individual as opposed to the social and collective, and he emphasized the emotional impact of slavery.¹¹⁰ Haley wrote in novelistic form, introducing historical information as character and plot development, yet also purporting to tell an accurate and truthful history. In response to critique from scholars and journalists, Haley eventually coined the term "faction" to differentiate this new form, but it is significant that, despite academic doubt about Haley's research and his narrative, the public continued to see *Roots* as an accurate and rigorous history.¹¹¹ This is a result of the expanding terms of the historical and of how these terms foregrounded the importance of emotion and the transformation of individual subjectivity, categories that, according to this view, could be traced through research but that were best shown in narrative form. Both in its background and its investments, *Roots* exemplified and constructed emerging attitudes towards the historical. Haley's attitude as well as the enormous response to his

¹¹⁰ For examples of new historical inquiry into the everyday experiences of slaves, see Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family In Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

¹¹¹ Dorothy Gilliam, "Roots: History Off Balance," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1977; Ellen Goodman, "Haley Never Insisted He Wrote Pure History," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1977.

work foregrounded the new stakes of the historical: the past's ability to formulate the present.¹¹²

Haley's innovative research methods and engagements with the historical past had captured attention long before either the novel or the miniseries entered the public sphere. Even before Haley finished his manuscript, *Roots* was a popular property--at multiple points during the decades long writing of the book, Haley presold rights to different versions (publishing, paperback, serialization) in order to fund his research.¹¹³ As his project grew more lengthy and unwieldy, Haley found new sources of funding, one of which was lecture tours in which he discussed the process of the discovery of his familial lines. These lecture tours were so exhaustive that by 1972 and 1973, *Reader's Digest* executives worried that Haley would never finish his book.¹¹⁴ However, Haley's time on the circuit and the publicity his story brought paid off in 1974, when *Reader's Digest* finally published a serialized version of the "African" chapters of *Roots*. Thus, many readers were already drawn to, and familiar with, Haley and his story.

Haley's personal popularity and his project's appeal also caught the attention of network executives who were looking for properties that were well-suited to television adaptation. As early as December of that year, only a few months after the serializations

¹¹² For accounts to critical and audience responses to *Roots*, see Leslie Fishbein: "Roots: Docudrama and the Interpretation of History" in Alan Rosenthal, ed. *Why Docudrama: Fact/Fiction on Film and TV*. (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) 271-295; Elayne Rapping, "TV Movies as History: Class, Race, and the Past," in *The Movie of the Week: Private Stories, Public Events* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 118-146; Rolland Murray, "Black Crisis Shuffle: Fiction, Race, and Simulation," *African American Review* 42.2: (2008): 1-19.

¹¹³ Marty Bell, "Debts, Stubborn Faith Drive Alex Haley to write 'Roots'" *Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 1977; Alex Haley, "Roots: memo detailing particular arrangements of contract," [n.d. ca. 1967], FJO, folder 51: "Haley Correspondence, 1966-69," GU.

¹¹⁴ By 1970, *Reader's Digest* had forwarded Haley over \$25,000 in expenses and had not seen any progress on *Roots*. Two years later, Haley had run out of money again and was engaging in extensive college lecture tours as a means to raise more. *Reader's Digest* executives speculated that Haley did not intend on committing anything to paper, instead preferring the lecture circuit. Michael Blow to Tony Oursler, May 30, 1972, Tony Oursler to DeWitt Wallace, May 31, 1972, FJO, folder 52: "Haley Correspondence, 70-74," GU.

were published, ABC and David Wolper, a producer who had previously worked on *Sandburg's Lincoln* and many television documentaries, began publicly discussing the adaptation of *Roots* for television.¹¹⁵ The television adaptation of *Roots* began before the book was finished, and it can be said that the story of *Roots* is almost without medium: that its televisual form was influenced by written serialized form and vice versa.¹¹⁶ At the time of the television adaptation, Haley was still finishing the book; in fact, the script of the televised *Roots* was written almost concurrently, with Haley passing rough drafts and galley prints to the screenwriters.¹¹⁷ This close back and forth between Haley and script writers ensured that *Roots* was not only a novelistic miniseries but also perhaps a uniquely televisual novel, as at least parts of it were written with this adaptation in mind.



Figure 5. *Alex Haley's family in Roots.* Still from "Part VII," written by James Lee and Charles Cohan, directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, *Roots*, CBS, January 29, 1977.

¹¹⁵ Les Brown, "ABC-TV Plans to Stress Serializations of Novels," *New York Times* December 14, 1974; "ABC to Develop 'Roots,' 'U.S.A.' as TV Novels," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1975.

¹¹⁶ John Camper, "Lots of First For Haley Film," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1976.

¹¹⁷ Haley to Stan Margulies [n.d. ca. 1975], David J. Wolper (DJW) Collection, Box 106, Folder 1: Alex Haley-Outlines; University of Southern California (USC).

With historically based television programs and especially the miniseries, television continued to proclaim itself a source of historical information. Because of its extensive representation of the historical past and its status as a narrative shaped by archival research, both the producers and the audiences of *Roots* framed the television program as a new kind of history and television as the primary site of this kind of history.¹¹⁸ In interviews, Wolper declared that the television miniseries was superior to the television documentary which, he explained, was “the creative interpretation of reality, not reality.”¹¹⁹ The miniseries, on the other hand was real. At one point, Wolper suggested a disclaimer to *Roots* that would read: “What you are about to see is a recreation of a segment of the past. It is as authentic as years of research can make it. It is harsh; as harsh as the world it depicts. It has not been sensationalized nor has it been sterilized.”¹²⁰ While this preamble was ultimately not used, it illustrates the terms of television’s privileged stake in the relating of history: authenticity supported by research, accurate representation, and affective depiction.

To reinforce the status of the miniseries as a historical document, ABC worked with Miami Dade Community College to develop a college course around the program, and it licensed video distribution rights to a company that specialized in educational programming. Much of the publicity around *Roots* focused on the Miami Dade course and on other college educators who offered course credit for viewing the miniseries.¹²¹

Two years later, for *Roots: the Next Generation*, the National Council of Churches sent

¹¹⁸ Lisa Drew of Doubleday to Stan Margulies February 2, 1976, DJW, box 104, folder 25: “Correspondence: Doubleday,” USC.

¹¹⁹ Kay Gardella, “TV Networks Give Up on Documentary,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1976.

¹²⁰ David Wolper, “Roots: Suggested Viewer Advisory,” October 6, 1976, DJW, box 282, folder 9: “Letters from Public: Criticism,” USC.

¹²¹ “3 Universities to Offer Classes on TV’s ‘Roots,’” *Los Angeles Times* January 22, 1977.

out 100,000 copies of a six page Interfaith Discussion Guide, and Prime Time School Television released 145,000 copies of a 16 page color teacher's guide. Press kits were sent not only to the press and to local affiliates, but to librarians and schools.¹²² The marketing of *Roots* as pedagogical is significant not only because it shows that television had begun to expand its assertion of effective representation of the past, but also because it advanced an idea that television was the *best expression* of the historical.

In interviews, Haley and Wolper discussed the benefits of television history, and many audience members shared their positive view.¹²³ Many of the letters written to ABC and Wolper by viewers commented on this new 'history' and its advantage over older models. For example, man wrote from California: "*Roots*, in my opinion, must be somehow preserved, not only as a monument to art, but as a monument to history as well. It is evident now, that history, when combined with art, drama, color, and acting talent, can be realigned by the use of television."¹²⁴ A student from Bergenfield, New Jersey put it more bluntly: "Learning history from television is better than learning about it in school. Are there going to be more shows like *Roots*? I hope so!"¹²⁵ As these comments suggest, audience members believed television history not only to be an accurate rendering of the past, but also a superior account, significantly, one that itself was a historical record that "must somehow be preserved."

Pointing to the centrality of television in informing and generating historical knowledge and discourse, the impact of *Roots* was immediate and impressive and

¹²² Teacher's Guide, DJW, box 304, folder 4: "Roots: The Next Generation," USC.

¹²³ Gregg Kilday, "Sprouts a Film Sequel, *Los Angeles Times* July 27, 1977; Lee Margulies, "Haley Ascribes Success to God, *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1977.

¹²⁴ Colin B Campbell, Fullerton CA to David Wolper, September 17, 1978, DJW, box 288, folder 1: "Letters from Public: Praise," USC.

¹²⁵ Stacie Gerken Bergenfield NJ, to David Wolper, February 16, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 1: "Letters from Public: Praise," USC.

resulted in both informational and emotional knowledge production in audiences. While the former helped to give viewers a new sense of life under slavery, the latter worked to make new identifications, which might change ideas about racial relations in the contemporary moment. What made the emotional identifications of *Roots* especially powerful was that they occurred simultaneously in the millions of viewers who watched every night. *Roots* was what has been called by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, a “media event,” a program that interrupted the schedule and flow of broadcast television, and one that was viewed by audiences in an almost ceremonial fashion.¹²⁶ While, in the days before cable television and the home video recorder, it was a given that large segments of the population watched the same television programming, for the eight nights that the miniseries aired, it seemed as if everyone in America was watching. Newspapers reported on riveted audiences; on empty stores, bars, and restaurants every evening; and of impassioned water cooler conversations each morning.¹²⁷ Several schoolyard fights broke out over *Roots*; one man who had put a baby up for adoption twenty years earlier drove from Detroit to a halfway house in Cincinnati and held its workers hostage hoping to gain information about his son. When interviewed later, the man said that he had been inspired by *Roots* and had hoped to reunite with his son and together take a trip to Rhodesia.¹²⁸ As this demonstrates (even in an extreme way), *Roots*’ account of history moved viewers to reconsider present situations and to take action. Moreover, the frenzied

¹²⁶ See Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹²⁷ Jacqueline Trescott, “Alex Haley: The Author Astride Fame’s Moment,” *Washington Post*, January 28, 1977; Cecil Smith, “Roots Reaps Vast Harvest,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1977.

¹²⁸ Charlayne Hunter, Gault, “Roots’ Getting a Grip on People Everywhere,” *New York Times* January 28, 1977; Jerry Buck, “Viewers Pulled In by ‘Roots’,” *Los Angeles Times* January 28, 1977; Larry Lane, “Roots’ Sparks Race Conflict in Lynwood; Police, School Officials Working to Avert Black-White Confrontations,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1977.

“Coulter says ‘Roots’ was his ‘spiritual awakening,’ *Cincinnati Post*, undated (Feb, 1977) clipping found in DJW, box 288, folder 3: “Letters from Public: Criticism,” USC.

reactions to the miniseries and their simultaneity pointed to television's other relationship with the historical: not only was the miniseries itself an important expression of the past, but its airing itself was a historical event, creating a sea-change in popular ideas about the power of television and American ideas about race.¹²⁹ It was television's alliance with the historical, made possible by the fact that the historical itself had become televisual, which had significant impact in positioning television as an important and worthwhile medium.

Indeed, several hundred viewers immediately wrote to Wolper and ABC, and from these letters we can begin to understand more of how 1970s audiences made sense of *Roots* and what qualities made the miniseries particularly evocative. Letter writers connected the emotional identifications generated by the miniseries to contemporary problems, particularly racial conflict. These letters pointed to the capacity of history to stimulate contemporary political sentiment and displayed a strong connection between issues of the past and of the present.¹³⁰ Several writers accused Wolper and Haley of inciting racial hatred, while others used *Roots* to discuss their own beliefs about current issues in the ongoing push for civil rights and equality. A letter signed "the Concerned

¹²⁹ Bob Wiedrich, "Roots Deserves a Page in History," *Chicago Tribune*, February 3, 1977. The long and complex relationship between television and the representation of race and racial difference is worth noting here, as both the production and reception of *Roots* was informed by this history. While civil rights activists understood and used television to bring attention to their struggle, representation of African American life continued to be absent from commercial television. Notable exception, like *I Spy* and *Julia* were sometimes critiqued as unrepresentative of the African American experience, while the "ghetto sitcoms" of the 1970's often relied on problematic racial stereotypes for their comedy. Because of television's central role in depicting and helping to inform American culture, its representation of race was paid close attention by both black and white audiences. Given this complicated relationship, it is no surprise that *Roots* made the impact that it did, not only because it featured some of the most prominent African American actors on television, but also because it stood alone as a primetime broadcast that took African American culture seriously and featured a mostly black cast. For more on representations of race on American culture, see Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Aniko Bodroghkozy, "Is This What You Mean by Color TV?" Race, Gender, and Contested Meanings in NBC's *Julia*," in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 143-168; Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness,"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Marlon Riggs, *Color Adjustment*, California Newsreel, 1991.

¹³⁰ This was echoed in media accounts. Sander Vanocur, "Roots: A New Reality," *Washington Post*, January 19, 1977.

Public” referred to “more bad feelings between the blacks and whites. . .to the extent of murder to retaliate against their treatment 200 years ago by whites who did not bring them here in the first place. This type of treatment as shown did not happen to all of them and today they get far more assistance and benefits than the whites and if anyone is discriminated against it is us.” The correspondent enclosed a clipping about a fight at a high school in Hot Springs, Arkansas that was apparently instigated by remarks about *Roots*.¹³¹ Another anonymous correspondent, this one from Columbus, Indiana, wrote, “It was the same old story looking for pity and also sympathy for something three or four hundred years ago. And they are still looking for someone to cry over it. What they are looking for is more food stamps, welfare and handouts.”¹³² Echoing this sentiment, another writer emphasized television’s social influence: “What a crime for the network to stir up so very much hatred of blacks against whites--to completely undo the good that has taken 100 years to come about. How can you ever undo the harm that this has caused?”¹³³ These letters took for granted that television was an important source of history and extended that position to another longtime worry, that of television’s undue influence on society. Interestingly, for these viewers, television’s ability to make emotional connections between racist injustices of the past and those of the present was seen as threatening, pointing to some of the potential of these new views of history. For viewers who were invested in maintaining white supremacy, the power of *Roots* to bring the past into the present by making connections between slavery and current situations,

¹³¹ “Concerned Public”, Oakland CA to VP-Programming, ABC NY, February 2, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 3: “Letters from Public: Criticism,” USC.

¹³² Anon to ABC, from Columbus, Indiana, February 21, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 3: “Letters from Public: Criticism,” USC.

¹³³ E. C. Mc Lachlan of Jacksonville FL to David Wolper, February 8, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 3: “Letters from Public: Criticism,” USC.

was frightening. Viewers understood *Roots* as an important historical intervention, but also connected its narrative and its circulation as a media text to contemporary contexts.

In addition to connecting past to present, many of the viewers commented on the program's ability to relate "realistic" history. Significantly, audience letters defined "realistic" as emotional, further expressing an elision that had begun earlier with emotional reactions to programs like *Little House on the Prairie*, and which was coming to characterize the majority of cultural engagement with the past. *Roots'* impact as "truthful" history rested on its ability to portray and elicit feelings in its characters on one hand, and audiences on the other. A woman from Eldridge, Iowa wrote: "I'm a student of history myself and yet none of the books I've read managed to bring home the reality of the 'black experience' as well as *Roots*. I cried every night. It was simply incredible."¹³⁴ A homemaker from Omaha, Nebraska shared a similar sentiment: "It almost made us ashamed to think anything so cruel could have taken place in our country and yet it brought back true history to us."¹³⁵ Other correspondents sent emotional letters, several pages long, describing, in detail, their reactions to the miniseries. An African American woman living in Los Angeles wrote, "Watching *Roots* is such a frightening experience that I have decided to let the past remain the past--to let the 'dead bury the dead,' so to speak." Yet she also recounted bigoted white coworkers stopping to speak to her. She noted that, although she considered herself accomplished, she was still seen as nothing but a "belly warmer" (a term used in *Roots* for the female slaves aboard the slave ship

¹³⁴ Linda Hender Wallerich, Eldridge, IA, January 31, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 1: "Letters from Public: Praise," USC.

¹³⁵ Mrs. Harvey E. Pitts of Onawa Iowa to ABC network, Omaha, Nebraska January 31, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 1: "Letters from Public: Praise," USC.

Lord Ligonier) by some. For those reasons, *Roots* was too painful for her to watch.¹³⁶ All of these letters spoke of emotional reactions: shame, weeping, fright. At least in part, it was television's ability to engender these identifications that made *Roots* so powerful.¹³⁷ *Roots* was --and, in some ways, remains-- television's most successful response to, and adaptation of, new relationships with the American past.

Everyone's Roots: Popular Genealogy

One of the more remarkable effects of the *Roots* phenomenon was the new interest in genealogical research that it precipitated. Thousands of people, African American as well as other ethnicities, sought to discover their own roots through researching their ancestors, a development that was a part of a larger revival in ethnic identification, itself symbolic of the new way in which individuals were using the historical as a way to forge meaningful identities.¹³⁸ After the airing of *Roots*, the National Archives reported record numbers of visitors searching for traces of their forbears, while local genealogical and historical societies likewise saw a surge of interest.¹³⁹ Stories of Haley's research emphasized the importance of "finding oneself" and highlighted the availability of materials in repositories such as the National

¹³⁶ Irabelle Childs to KABC, January 27, 1977, DJW, box 288, folder 1: "Letters from Public: Praise," USC.

¹³⁷ Significantly, the emotional appeal of *Roots* extended to those portraying Haley's characters in the miniseries—in interviews, actors discussed being profoundly moved on set, forming identifications with their historical roles that far exceeded the ordinary. Michael Kirkhorn, "A Saga of Slavery That Made the Actors Weep," *New York Times*, June 27, 1976.

¹³⁸ See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹³⁹ Phillip E Lothyan, "In the Aftermath of Roots: The Experience of the Seattle Archives Branch," [of the National Archives]; Jim Gordon Manchester, "The Genealogical Gold Rush...It All Started with TV's Roots," October 6, 1977, Society of American Archivists Salt Lake City, session: Reference Services for Genealogists, both found in DJW, box 304, folder 37, USC; Thomas Grubisich, "Register of Freed Slaves Bares Fairfax County 'Roots'; Register of Freed Slaves Bares Fairfax 'Roots'," *The Washington Post*, February 1, 1977.

Archives.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, social history initiatives in academic scholarship, the consolidation of public history programming in museums, and oral history projects in communities indicated that *Roots* was symptomatic of a renewed cultural attention towards personal and familial history and suggested how these histories coalesced around and blended with larger narratives.¹⁴¹

Part of the reason for the profound influence of *Roots* on popular historical practice is the way in which it spoke to the heightened interest in history and a sense of the importance of the past to the present, and especially how both the book and the miniseries suggested that the individual was the agent of historymaking and discovery. These were aspects of an historical consciousness that had been highlighted in television's engagement with the past and its emphasis on individual involvement. This historical consciousness rested not only on an understanding of the historical past as directly relevant to the present, but also on a feeling that history itself was malleable, as opposed to static, which was the way it had been perceived in earlier decades. As the discussion in this chapter has elaborated, the genealogy impetus worked in two directions: not only could the past inform the present, but the present could act upon the past: genealogical research could discover new histories and thereby change assumptions. Thus, the surge of interest in genealogy must be read in the context of two related developments: the realignment of temporality which led to new types of identifications with the past, and, as I will discuss in the following chapters, as an expansion of what was recognized as historical evidence: as new artifacts, documents, and narratives that

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Johnson, "Roots Has Widespread and Inspiring Influence," *New York Times*, March 19, 1977.

¹⁴¹ Rebecca Sharpless, "The History of Oral History," in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* (Lanham, MA: Alta Mira Press, 2007), 9-32.

came to be seen as making up the archive that constitutes American history. The practice of genealogy was energized by interest in *Roots*, but it was also a sign that added investment in knowing history was also an investment in rewriting history.

The eventual effect of new popular interest in the historical alongside new conceptions of temporality is best seen in the production and reception of history-based television. While television has long been considered a central index of American culture, it is a particularly apt site for the consideration of the transformation of popular historical ideation, not only because many changes emerged in televisual terms but also because television itself was a central part of these shifts. The popularity of historical television programming in the 1970s and the miniseries in particular attest to this close relationship. Most importantly, new perceptions of temporal change alongside new cultural interests in the historical, particularly the personalized, identificatory historical, led to a large-scale reevaluation of the national past in the context of the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. It is this reevaluation that is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: The Commemoration Revolution: The Federal Bicentennial, 1966–1976

On July 4th, 1971, President Richard Nixon declared the beginning of the Bicentennial Era in a televised appearance at the National Archives in Washington DC. In his speech, Nixon invoked the relevance of America's past to its present, "The American Revolution is unfinished business with important roles still open for each of us to play."¹⁴² It is no coincidence that Nixon chose to make his proclamation from the United States' repository for the official record of its own existence; in both subject and expression, state-generated commemorations like the Bicentennial express the histories created by and contained within archives. Both archives and commemorations are part of hegemonic rule in that the state owns and influences interpretation of the material and legal artifacts that legitimate and narrate its existence and actions. Archives also manifest power, in that they visibly articulate and celebrate the stability and resources needed to preserve and safeguard documents and artifacts. The collection and exhibition of evidence by archives works to validate the present state by evoking its past, operating on a temporal axis which privileges an ordered and visible expression of backwards continuity.¹⁴³ In the United States, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution-

¹⁴² Eugene L. Meyer, "Proclaiming a 'Bicentennial Era,' Nixon Urges Leadership and Peace," *Washington Post*, July 4th, 1971.

¹⁴³ On archives, knowledge, and power, see Walter Benjamin, "Theses On the Concept of History," in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255-264; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989), 7-24; Michel Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston:

-the artifacts that are the cornerstone of the National Archives--are invested with the whole of the past of U.S. history *and* are simultaneously “living documents.” The mandates of their authors (who are called “founders,” underscoring the connection between these written documents and the continued existence of the nation-state) are still taken and interpreted as literal. National commemorations center on these objects and are thus especially important because our understandings of “democracy,” “freedom,” and “liberty” continue to be undergirded by the conditions of their original establishment.

This chapter looks at how the United States, an “archival” state whose legitimacy is guaranteed by popular support of a consensus interpretation of the past as both informing actions of the present and creating an unbroken trajectory of progress, attempted to plan and manage the 1976 Bicentennial in ways that would reconcile the imperatives of the past with the initiatives of the present. But these notions of continuity and stability were becoming problematized; by the time of the commemoration, the type of forward progress that commemorations usually celebrate was no longer assured. Not only was the United States undergoing a particularly turbulent political, economic, and social period, but as we have seen, cultural perceptions of the passage of time had also changed. The relationship between the past and the present--as understood by American society, and as articulated by new modes of engagement with the historical--was transforming; becoming more complex as Americans neither believed in a present that emerged logically, orderly, and progressively from the past, nor looked forward to a future that could guarantee the same. If commemorations, by their very association with the passage of time through their status as “anniversaries,” represent an ordered and

Beacon Press, 1995); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 74-77.

uncomplicated celebration of the past realized in the present, the Bicentennial came at a moment at which this could not be the case.

National commemorations like the Bicentennial typically celebrate events that are best evidenced and narrated by archival materials that are held by the state, such as legal documents or material evidence of state actions like wars or colonization. They celebrate the linear progression of the past into the present, precisely the logic that also undergirds the archive. Nixon and other agents of hegemonic power used the Bicentennial as an opportunity to consolidate citizen support for an increasingly fractured United States by evoking patriotic feelings for the nation's mythic history. Historians like John Bodnar and Michael Kammen have shown how commemorations are used by democratic nation-states (i.e. states that rest on the centrality of participatory and representational citizenship to their sovereignty) as a periodic form of spectacular legitimization. Through participation, subjects are inspired by a communal sense of pride and patriotism to normative nationalistic sentiment that ideally extend to support of the state's current project.¹⁴⁴ Inherent in this practice is the idea shared by the logic of the archive: that celebration of the past authorizes state sovereignty in the present, since this conception of temporal progression suggests that the contemporary state is the realization and linear extension of the ideals of the past. This understanding presumes that past ideals and achievements have been realized and are being expanded in the present, and

¹⁴⁴ See John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-20, 206-244; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Karel Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

implicitly will continue to be expanded in the future. Nixon's 1971 proclamation reflected foundational ideas about the triangulated relationship between hegemonic power, archives, and commemorations at a moment when this relationship was in the process of being transformed.

Archives shape and maintain national histories, and thus underwrite official commemorations like the Bicentennial, which depend on a consensus interpretation of the evidence within for the terms of their celebration. When a commemoration expresses a history informed by an unchanging archive with undisputed conditions of inclusion and interpretation and an accord about the linear connection between the past and the present, it typically focuses on the present and the future. The past is used as a motif but is not itself under question—what is actually being underscored in the celebration is the current state's embodiment and realization of past ideals that are highlighted in material evidence like founding documents. Commemorations like these depend on the modernist notion of the passage of time as described in the previous chapter; the past is foundational to the present but itself not under review. Thus, many modes of historically-based commemoration (expositions, traditional monuments) use the past only nominally, in support of the accomplishments of the present, because the two are seen as having a logical and progressive relationship wherein the realization of ideals in the present is a logical development of the foundation of those ideals in the past.¹⁴⁵ But the Bicentennial

¹⁴⁵ Critical work on memorials and monuments underscores the way that memorial activity addresses the present through invoking the past. This is especially evident because memorials are permanent structures, and their meanings and interpretations change with every new generation. For examples, see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). At the same time, when a monument addresses a history that is contested, the monument itself will also be contested. See Marita Sturken,

came at a uniquely fraught moment, during which the state of the union, the meaning of citizenship, and the future of the nation were all being questioned.

Although it seems simple that commemorations celebrate the past, they usually do so in terms of the present. The Bicentennial did not begin to engage the historical until the connection between the past and the present became problematized. The hiccups and failures in this project became a way for U.S. subjects to articulate political, economic, and social frustrations within the symbolic context of patriotism. Patriotism provided the language of the Bicentennial, opening up spaces of debate that shifted the concrete political issues surrounding Bicentennial planning into a symbolic realm, allowing discussion of fundamental questions of nation, belonging, and governance. In the ways in which they understood the purpose of the commemoration, how they discussed (or didn't discuss) the celebration, and in the kinds of Bicentennial projects they organized, the American people also exhibited changing ideas about commemoration, national identity, and the relationship between the two. The Bicentennial remained, on one hand, a site at which the federal government attempted to encourage normative patriotic behavior in citizens, and on the other, a way for Americans to not only voice their own discontent with the way that the current state failed to live up to its legacy, but also to plan Bicentennial projects which emphasized growing interest in the past, and new modes of engaging with American history. Through its decade-long history, the Bicentennial remained a central site at which to consider the relationships between nation and commemoration and between past and present.

Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

A close look at the trajectory of the planning of the Bicentennial by federal interests will show both how the state remained invested in the commemoration as a means to seek support from Americans, and how the terms of the commemoration changed in tandem with larger political, economic, and cultural developments. Official planning for the 1976 celebration spanned a decade and was undertaken by three presidential administrations, all of which approached the commemoration in ways that reflected larger cultural and political shifts, from Johnson's Great Society to Nixon's New Federalism, from the Keynesian to the neoliberal state. While Johnson attempted to use the celebration as a way to bolster the domestic project of the Great Society and the global position of the U.S., for Nixon, the Bicentennial and its planning became an apparatus of the "imperial presidency," an effort to manage a rapidly fracturing state from a sovereign position, and to consolidate political support through appeals to nationalism via plans for a traditional commemoration which ultimately could not be realized. After Nixon's resignation, Gerald Ford presided over a Bicentennial that looked to grassroots celebration and foregrounded free enterprise as one of the founding ideals. Bicentennial planners introduced a new mode of commemoration that appeared decentralized yet was still governed by federal standards and oversight.

Johnson's Bicentennial: Celebrating the Great Society

Discussions about the 1976 commemoration began in 1963, when John O. Marsh, a Democrat from Virginia, made a speech before Congress calling for a federal agency to organize and coordinate the celebration: "The purpose of a Bicentennial Commission is to observe the events of 1776 as not primarily a historical commemoration but rather a re-

examination of the issues and idea forces which produced the American Revolution.”¹⁴⁶

Marsh characterized the Bicentennial as an opportunity for a “renaissance of the concepts and ideas of the American Revolution and the application of the same to the problems of a changing world,” most notably, communism and its “lamentable” cooptation of the “ideas and ideals of our revolutionary past.” Marsh downplayed the history of the Revolution; instead, he spoke of an ideological tradition that was most clearly alive in the present. “After all,” Marsh pointed out, “the words ‘liberty,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘justice,’ that are crudely painted on the posters carried by those who riot today through Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa, do not have their origins in the Communist Manifesto but rather have their inspiration in the American Declaration of Independence.”¹⁴⁷ Marsh considered the Bicentennial to be an opportunity to assert American ownership over the privileges of democracy established in the past but upheld in the present. This was contingent on a shared understanding of the American past and present, one that was based on the endurance of the values of the Declaration of Independence and that saw the current United States as the result of a direct progression from its founding moment.

By 1966, the year that planning for the Bicentennial began in earnest, the United States was in the midst of the Vietnam conflict and the ideology and the rhetoric informing the celebration were deployed to reaffirm America’s position in the foreign sphere and to assert the government’s and the people’s commitment to extending the

¹⁴⁶ Rep. John O. Marsh, Jr., “A Proposal for the Current Establishment of a Federal Commission in Connection with Appropriate Observance of the Bicentennial of the Period of the American Revolution”[n.d., ca. 1963], Records of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1, folder: “Organization & Management,” National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

ideals of freedom and liberty around the globe.¹⁴⁸ While consensus on U.S. involvement in the conflict was deteriorating, the national mood was still one of universalism abetted by a conviction that the actions of the current state embodied the ideals of its past.¹⁴⁹ In January of 1966, Congressman Charles Mathis, Jr., a Democrat from Maryland, introduced a bill calling for a national commission to coordinate national celebration of the Bicentennial.¹⁵⁰ President Lyndon Johnson supported the bill and noted that the purpose of the commission would be to “help state and local groups in their commemoration, encourage school studies of the history of the Revolution and plan national celebrations and recall to America and the world the majestic significance of the Revolution.”¹⁵¹ This language affirmed the international position of the United States and echoed Marsh in emphasizing contemporary American ownership of the concept of “revolution.” Significantly, Johnson consigned the *history* of the Revolution to “school studies;” the President’s rhetoric assumed a continuity between the American past and the American present and a desire to move the “majestic significance” of American ideals forward and into the future.

¹⁴⁸ This impulse can be read in the context of other Cold War cultural projects designed to reaffirm America’s position both domestically and abroad. See for example, Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 203-249. For an account of cold war internationalism in a slightly earlier period, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁹ See Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 571-617; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 248-346.

¹⁵⁰ “Coordinators for Revolution Event Sought,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 1966.

¹⁵¹ “Revolution Anniversary Commission Requested; House Chairmen Asked To Talk With President,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 1966.

On July 4th 1966, Johnson signed the bill, which called for a 34-member American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC).¹⁵² The first appointees embodied a wide variety of perspectives and interests, indicating that at this early stage of planning, Johnson's administration was not concerned about the potential for conflict over either the meaning or the nature of the commemoration. Johnson named Carlisle Humelsine, the head of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Chair of the ARBC. Humelsine worked with the White House to build a nonpartisan Commission made up of equal numbers of public officials and private citizens. Communication between Humelsine and Johnson Special Assistant John Roche shows efforts towards equal party and regional representation, a concern that underscored the atmosphere of Cold War consensus evident in these stages of Bicentennial preparation.¹⁵³ The final list of appointees included Democratic and Republican Senators John Pastore and Edward

¹⁵² Johnson used the opportunity to once again signal the foreign implications of the ideologies supporting the celebration, particularly against the circumstances of the larger backdrop of the escalating military action in Vietnam. In the same proclamation that announced the formation of the ARBC, Johnson declared the third week of that month Captive Nations' Week, as per a little-known 1959 congressional resolution giving the Chief Executive power to declare the Week until "such time as freedom and independence have been achieved by nations under Communist domination." Johnson was able to make these rhetorical connections because mainstream opinion assumed that U.S. actions abroad embodied the legacy of principles established in the past; "freedom" and "independence" were central tenets of the American Revolution and the Bicentennial celebration. At this moment, the way that politicians placed the Bicentennial and its planning within overtly political and international frameworks was supported by popular consensus about the way that America's revolutionary ideals existed in the nation's present actions. Captive Nations Week, Public Law 86-90 (1959); Don Irwin, "President Signs Plans on July 4 Bicentennial," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1966; Carroll Kilpatrick, "President Looks Ahead To Our 200th Birthday," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1966; Robert Young, "Lyndon Signs Order to Mark Bicentennial," *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1966. For more on Johnson and Vietnam, see David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁵³ Humelsine wrote to Roche in November, 1966, "The list as we had it when you saw it last was made up largely of Democrats, which (while great) would probably appear to be somewhat inappropriate for a national non-partisan commission." Carlisle Humelsine to John Roche, 21 November, 1966, ARBA RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1, folder: "Organization & Management, Commission Members," NARA II.

Brooke, as well as John O. Marsh, all of whom had been instrumental in the formation of the Bicentennial Commission. To round out this first ARBC, Johnson also appointed Aline Saarinen, an art critic and widow of modernist architect Eero Saarinen, Ralph Ellison, author of *Invisible Man*, Professor Richard Morris of Columbia University, and General Lauris Norstad of the U.S. Air Force, among others.¹⁵⁴ These Commissioners reflected a bipartisan accord over the ideals of the American Revolution and the realization of those ideals in the present. Although the Vietnam conflict and increased social turmoil would compromise this consensus, the U.S. at this moment was still marked by the feelings of optimism, abundance, and national unity.

While the ideological purpose of the Bicentennial called attention to the United States' place in the world, proposed programming emphasized the Johnson administration's domestic efforts at an unprecedented expansion of rights coupled with welfare programming and economic growth, again reinforcing the celebration's focus on the present. A linear understanding of the progression of history underwrote the Bicentennial's focus on the present and the future—if the American Revolution, informed by ideals of equality and representation, had improved the lives of its participants, the programming supporting its commemoration would extend those principles to contemporary Americans. In early press conferences Humelsine stated that he wished to use the Bicentennial as a moment to consider not only the U.S.'s position as an international leader, but also to draw attention to and “launch a head on attack” against domestic issues such as the growing urban crisis, rhetoric that echoed Johnson's Great

¹⁵⁴ “Unit Named to Plan 200th Anniversary of U.S. Revolution,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1967; American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration, *American Revolution Bicentennial: A Final Report to the People*, Vol. 2, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 10-12.

Society.¹⁵⁵ Humelsine wanted a strong national commemoration but railed against more conventional approaches, noting that he wanted to avoid the “hackneyed approach of battle reenactments and carnival like exploitations . . . we ought to think of ways to present to the rest of the world our concepts of the modern relevance of the ideas which made us citizens of the world's first great modern republic.”¹⁵⁶ Planning proposals circulating at this time within ARBC and in popular discourse foregrounded this potential, imagining the Bicentennial as an opportunity for domestic funding, social programming, and urban redevelopment, a chance to address injustice and assure a better future.¹⁵⁷ Its commemoration would emphasize the accomplishments of the contemporary United States while creating a framework for expanding these ideals.

Because of the celebration’s emphasis on the present and future United States, the actual history of the Revolution was not a significant component of early conversations about the Bicentennial. Humelsine and other ARBC members agreed that the Bicentennial would feature social programming, and not pageantry.¹⁵⁸ In internal

¹⁵⁵ For more on Great Society programming see David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994); Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1995); A. Calvin McKenzie and Robert Westbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ “Goals Cited for Bicentennial of Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1968. This stage of Bicentennial planning must also be read in the context of the Civil War Centennial, see Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ “Cities Salvaging Proposed by HHH,” *Washington Post*, February 24, 1969; Wolf Von Eckardt, “Mission '76: A Spanking New Capital; Goal for Bicentennial Sense of Belonging,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1968.

¹⁵⁸ In part because the visibility of the Vietnam conflict through television and other media coverage, “sham battles,” the reenactments which had been the bulk of popular engagement with the history of the Civil War, suddenly had a new and more problematic context. In a letter to Humelsine, Republican Senator and ARBC appointee Edward Brooke wrote, “in view of the world situation, I would prefer fewer reenactments of battles than occurred during the Civil War Centennial.” Edward Brooke to Carlisle Humelsine, March 31, 1967, ARBA RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1,

communications, ARBC employees noted a desire to move the orientation of the Bicentennial “not towards historical events of the Revolutionary period, but rather toward a time for reappraisal of the principles on which the Country was founded; recommitment by every institution and individual.”¹⁵⁹ Suggestions for a few historical endeavors, such as a plan to publish the writings of Loyalists during the Revolution, usually came from specialists like antiquarians and academics.¹⁶⁰ For the ARBC at this moment, the American past was relevant only inasmuch as it provided the foundations of the American present; the commemoration would celebrate the realization and expansion of these values rather than examining their genesis. It sought to generate patriotic identifications with contemporary, not historical politics. It is precisely because the progression between the past and present was not yet in question, that actual attention to the past could be minimized.

The first plan seriously considered by the Commission was an International Exposition that would reflect the emphasis on present accomplishments.¹⁶¹ The world’s fair was an obvious choice, not only because of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, but also, because the Exposition’s model of knowledge production is undergirded by and in dialogue with many of the same assumptions about temporal

folder: “Meeting: Theme Committee, 1967,” NARA II. For more on commemorations and battle reenactment, see Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*.

¹⁵⁹ ARBC timeline, 1970, ARBA RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 7, folder: “Organization & Management,” NARA II; Lauris Norsted cited in Wolf Von Eckardt, “Mission ’76: An Idea Vs. Frameworks,” *Washington Post*, April 20th, 1969.

¹⁶⁰ Harry Gilroy, “Scholars Plan to Publish Papers of Loyalists to 1776 Revolution,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1968.

¹⁶¹ ARBC, working with other federal agencies, took steps towards the International Exposition by joining the International Bureau for Expositions (IBE), a measure that was approved unanimously by the U.S. Senate. Membership in the IBE meant that federal monies earmarked for expositions could not be used to fund local or regional fairs, a distinction that demonstrated the desire for a federally organized and centralized International Exposition. “International Exhibitions,” *Washington Post*, May 17, 1968.

progression and material evidence as the archive-informed commemoration. Robert Rydell has characterized international expositions as a mode of spectacular pedagogy that teaches subjects about their place in the world through display of artifacts, peoples, and innovations. The accomplishments of the hosting nation are displayed in material terms and placed in relation to both its own past and the pasts and presents of other nations.¹⁶² Like the archival commemoration, the nationalist discourse of the world's fair also depends on the exhibition of artifact in order to trace a history that assumes linear progress and looks to the present and the future, not the past. Especially in the twentieth century, world's fairs had been used to show off America's material abundance and introduced technological innovations that would soon assure more comfortable living.

Although a "credibility gap" continued to grow between the people and the government, in 1968, American leaders still remained confident of wide popular support for projects that reflected and worked toward material and economic growth. The International Exposition, informed by the language of Great Society, seemed like an ideal articulation of the type of commemoration they sought to put forward. Under Johnson, the Bicentennial was planned to celebrate the American present as a realization of the ideals of the American past. In its ideological imperatives and its programming, the Bicentennial exemplified a stable and uncontested cultural perception of the terms of the American past, as well as the past's relationship to the present.

Nixon's ARBC and the International Exposition

¹⁶² Robert Rydell, *All The World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 1-8. Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 61-217; Robert Rydell, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000) 100-131; Lawrence Samuel, *The End of the Innocence: The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

As Johnson's presidency moved into Nixon's, larger changes in the American political, economic, social, and cultural landscape began to inform conversations about the Bicentennial, which became a site for both politicians and the public to navigate these developments. Historians have depicted the 1968 election, a close and contested race which saw perennial also-ran Richard Nixon upset Hubert Humphrey for the first Republican victory in eight years, as a sea change in American party politics; a shift in consciousness and a spatial restructuring of the United States which realigned both parties and saw the emergence of the Sunbelt region as a new center of political and economic power.¹⁶³ By 1968, the U.S. had become progressively divided over both foreign and domestic policy, and the incoming administration faced an increasingly unpopular war and social unrest, especially in urban areas. Most importantly, in the late 1960s, the cold war consensus, specifically trust in and support of government actions and unflagging confidence that the future would be an improvement over the past and present, wavered.¹⁶⁴ With this crisis of confidence, the conception of the present as a progression of the ideals of the past that had underpinned earlier understandings of the commemoration began to transform. Planning for the Bicentennial under Nixon must be examined in the context of a growing sense in all parts of American society that the

¹⁶³ For more on the realignment of American politics at this moment, see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mark Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America a History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1986).

present was out of step with the past, and that the past needed to be reexamined in order to understand this rupture.

While party politics had been absent from Johnson's Commission, the new administration, perhaps recognizing the increasing polarization in the social and cultural climate of the United States, almost immediately oriented the coordination of the Bicentennial towards its own political ends. When Nixon was elected president in November of 1968, Humelsine and the rest of the Johnson-appointed members of the ARBC dutifully submitted resignations according to protocol. Because they had initially been appointed to the Commission in a context that placed commemoration outside of political partisanship, they assumed that their resignations would not be accepted, and they would be allowed to continue under the new President.¹⁶⁵ But when Nixon finally announced his appointments in June of 1969, almost none of the 1967 appointees remained. Nixon named Stanford University Chancellor Wallace Sterling as Chair of the Commission. Other appointees included Dr. Paul Smith, President of Nixon's alma mater, Whittier College, George Lang, of the Restaurant Associates of New York, Republican backer Hobart Lewis of *Reader's Digest*, and James Copley, the publisher of the *San Diego Union and Evening Tribune*, one of the news outlets most friendly to the new

¹⁶⁵ In December of 1968, Humelsine wrote S. Dillon Ripley, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, "I have just succeeded in making a good contact with the incoming Administration and have every reason to believe the Commission will soon be in a position to move ahead," and suggested that the two "discuss the Bicentennial in the near future." In April, historian Richard Morris wrote to Humelsine, asking, "Are we still on the Commission and do you know what the President's intentions are in that respect?" Humelsine responded that he himself had not been able to make satisfactory contact with the White House. Carlisle Humelsine to S. Dillon Ripley, December 12, 1968, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 6, folder "Dillon Ripley," NARA II; Richard Morris to Carlisle Humelsine, April 22, 1969, Humelsine to Morris, April 30, 1968, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 23, folder "Richard Morris", NARA II..

President.¹⁶⁶ All of these Commission members were political allies of Nixon, and some, especially Copley and Smith, had been instrumental in his election. As one commentator would write after Nixon's resignation, "to them, allowing an independent, nonpolitical ARBC to plan freely for the Bicentennial was like fomenting a revolution against the government."¹⁶⁷ Johnson had sought to create a nonpartisan Commission because he felt assured of a commemoration with a fixed and unproblematic meaning. Nixon's actions suggest that he came into office believing that there would be contention over the Bicentennial; from the moment of his close and contested election, he wished to use the national commemoration to cement his own party's interests.

By late 1968, the International Exposition was garnering attention in the press and while interested cities began to submit their proposals.¹⁶⁸ Evidence suggests that Nixon waited for the cities to develop their bids, so his new appointees would be well positioned to plan a Bicentennial that was concerned less with domestic welfare and more with building political alliances and actively encouraging citizen patriotism.¹⁶⁹ In the context of the increasingly turbulent political and social atmosphere and the concurrent reorganization of party politics of the late 1960s, the President realized that the kind of

¹⁶⁶ "Nixon Appoints 17 to Plan Activities for Bicentennial," *New York Times*, July 4, 1969.

¹⁶⁷ Susan Dworkin, "The Bicentennial: Is it Slowly Sinking into the Potomac?" *Ms.* June, 1974, 46-51.

¹⁶⁸ John Fenton, "Two Cities Seeking '76 Bicentennial," *New York Times*, March 16, 1969; "Boston Enters Bid for '76 Exposition," *New York Times*, January 19, 1969; "Competitor: Boston Expo Plans 'Trite'," *Boston Globe*, January 25, 1969; "2 G.O.P. Governors Back Philadelphia for Bicentennial," *New York Times*, March 1, 1969.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Powers, "Boston Opens Drive for '76 World's Fair," *Boston Globe*, January 16, 1969; Ronald DeGraw, "Philadelphia And Boston Are at War," *New York Times*, June 22, 1969; Robert M. Smith, "Boston, Philadelphia and Washington Put In Bids for Site of American Expo in 1976," *New York Times*, September 25, 1969; William Ecenbarger, "Boston, Philadelphia Vie for Bicentennial," *Washington Post*, April 3, 1969; Jeremiah J. Mahoney, "Cities Vie for Fair that May or May Not Take Place in Seven Years," *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 1969; "Rocky Spurns Boston Expo," *Boston Globe*, March 1, 1969; Memo from Wallace Sterling to all Governors, October 17, 1969, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1, folder "International Exposition 1969," NARA II.

national consensus that would support a state-organized Bicentennial was weakening, and acted to rebuild this consensus by shifting its meaning to ideological as opposed to material regeneration. In Nixon's thinking, an international exposition was critical in solidifying citizen consent, but would need to be engineered by his own allies.



Figure 6. *The press closely followed competition between cities vying for the International Exposition.* "Philadelphia and Boston are at War," editorial cartoon, *New York Times*, June 22nd, 1969.

Yet even Nixon's designated Commissioners soon realized that an International Exposition celebrating American progress and power might be out of step with an increasingly fragmented society. Internal correspondence, through late 1969 and early 1970, showed ARBC personnel worried about the appropriateness of the celebration given the escalating protests against Vietnam and the rising frequency of conflict in urban areas and on college campuses.¹⁷⁰ The ARBC's doubts stemmed, in part, from the

¹⁷⁰ "Lead-In for a discussion of the whole matter of an international exposition as an activity associated with the Bicentennial," draft, July 26, 1969, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1, folder "International Exposition, 1969," NARA II. For accounts of unrest and protest at this time, see Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kenneth Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State*

media's questioning the suitability of the International Exposition. The press articulated its concern in a language that signaled that the forward-looking temporality that underpinned world's fairs was out of step with the current cultural landscape of the United States.¹⁷¹ Ada Louise Huxtable of the *New York Times* wrote in March of 1970, "Are gaudy, extravagant, technological displays obsolete? Is a World's Fair-type Bicentennial festival appropriate for a country racked with social, racial, and environmental agonies?"¹⁷² Citizens of Boston and Philadelphia had begun organizing against the proposed expositions as it became evident that rather than bringing in infrastructure improvements, the influx of visitors the Exposition promised would put pressure on the already-fragile resources of each city.¹⁷³ In May of 1970, the Executive Committee of the ARBC met and decided against recommending an exposition because it would be too expensive; frontrunner Philadelphia projected costs that reached \$1 billion for the exposition itself and up to the same amount for other urban improvements such as highways and airport improvement.¹⁷⁴ Only a few years earlier, the International Exposition has been a popular and uncontested idea, not only because of the resources that it promised but also because Americans believed in the superiority of their nation.

Universities in the Vietnam Era. (New York: New York University Press, 1993) Rhodi Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now! American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁷¹ Paul J. C. Friedlander, "The Spirit of 1976 May Mix Fusillade on Pollution with Colonial Hoopla," *New York Times*, April 5, 1970; Wolf Von Eckard, "After 200 Years, is there Still a Spirit of '76?" *Washington Post*, June 14, 1970; Eric F. Goldman, "Topics: The Real Revolution—Or Doodle Dandy?" *New York Times*, September 27, 1969.

¹⁷² Ada Louise Huxtable, "Whither World's Fairs," *New York Times*, March 29, 1970.

¹⁷³ Richard Grayson (Boston) "Give 1976 to Philadelphia," letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, July 6, 1969; Mrs. John A. Salkowski, "To Save Boston Harbor," letter to the editor, *New York Times*, August 10, 1969.

¹⁷⁴ Jeremiah Murphy, "Is Expo 76 To Be Scratched? Panels Reported Ready to Recommend no Single Celebration," *Boston Globe*, May 26, 1970.

The ambivalence that came from the cities in question, the press, and the ARBC itself testified to the fact that the meaning and purpose of commemoration were coming into question.

Nixon was ready to overrule the ARBC's hesitations because he remained committed to the International Exposition as a political tool that could be used to solidify influence in his party, and to the Bicentennial as an ideological tool that could help the nation regain the confidence that it was losing.¹⁷⁵ On July 2, the *Washington Post* reported that at the behest of the two powerful Republican senators from Pennsylvania -- minority leader Hugh Scott and Richard Schweiker -- the Commission had reversed its original decision against an Exposition and was now petitioning the international body for Philadelphia's classification as a "Class II" (that is, somewhat smaller, but still internationally recognized) World's Fair. Alluding to the backroom politics that had begun to characterize ARBC dealings with other branches of the Federal government and within its own ranks, *The Post* described an internal debate over the suitability of a fairground exposition.¹⁷⁶ Other news outlets, recognizing that Nixon was instrumentalizing the celebration, began hinting at the President's campaign obligations: "the President has a lot more to take into consideration than the commission report," one Congressional source observed in the *New York Times*, "important people still have to be heard from."¹⁷⁷ Although commemorations, especially those planned on a national level, always have political stakes, Nixon's direct involvement signaled the fact that this

¹⁷⁵ Donald Janson, "Bicentennial Decision May Be Revised," *New York Times*, June 13, 1970.

¹⁷⁶ William L. Claiborne, "D.C. Loses Bid for Bicentennial; Document Obtained Philadelphia Awarded Bicentennial Program," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1970.

¹⁷⁷ "76 Backing Goes to Philadelphia; Bicentennial Panel Said to Urge Exposition There," *New York Times*, July 3, 1970; Donald Janson, "Senator Scott Appears Far Ahead in 3rd Term Bid; Lack of Identity and Lack of Funds Hurt Democrat in Pennsylvania Campaign," *New York Times*, October 9, 1970.

commemoration's ideological purpose was coming under fire, and would have to be closely managed by the President himself.

The Bicentennial Plan and Introducing “Heritage”

Faced with growing controversy and dissent, the ARBC spent 1969 and 1970 working on a report that both reflected and attempted to codify many of the cultural and political transformations informing discussions of the Bicentennial; most importantly, the new ambivalence about the present that had hitherto been absent. The Bicentennial Plan was to be a report to the President that would outline the terms of the celebration and that ultimately served as a turning point in conceptions of the commemoration. A draft generated in 1969, in the midst of planning for the International Exposition, contained two major components: “Festival USA” and “USA Redirected.” While “Festival USA” was represented by the International Exposition and other special events, “USA Redirected” was “an opportunity to concern ourselves with the ideas and ideals of the Declaration of Independence, and to consider where we have made progress in meeting those concepts and where we have not.”¹⁷⁸ Although the Bicentennial's focus on the present and the future remained a constant, the wording of this draft, in its acknowledgment of shortcomings, indicates a significant shift and a growing unease about both the state of contemporary America and the purpose of the commemoration itself. “Festival USA” continued in a celebratory tone, but “USA Redirected” was not, as Johnson had planned, about expansion of ideals, instead focusing on reflection. For the first time, the organizers of the Bicentennial showed a desire to look back to the past in order to make comparisons with, and assessments of, the present. Significantly, the

¹⁷⁸ “Outline for the National Bicentennial Plan,” November 4, 1969, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 3, folder “Organization and Management,” NARA II.

possibility of the disjuncture was signaled through a call for the reexamination of the Declaration of Independence, the archival founding document which had previously ensured continuity between the past and the present.

In the six months between the 1969 draft and the completion of the document in July of 1970, the ARBC again restructured the Bicentennial Plan around the new sense of reflection and this time directly addressed the past.¹⁷⁹ The final version of the document introduced three themes: “Heritage ‘76,” “Festival USA,” and “Horizons ’76.”¹⁸⁰ With these categories, ARBC structured the Bicentennial along a temporal axis: the past, the present, and the future, a development that can be read as symptomatic of the new need to make sense of the progression of time, and to relate the past to the present. The “Horizons” and “Festival USA” components of the Bicentennial resembled earlier conceptions of the commemoration in their attention to, respectively, the future and the present, but “Heritage” was a new element. The 1970 Bicentennial Plan represented a critical moment in the history of the Commission. On one hand, it treated the Bicentennial as a celebration of the contemporary, but on the other, it looked backward by establishing “Heritage ’76” as an equal category. Although in retrospect it seems obvious that a commemoration should focus on the past, until 1970, planners, the press, and the people did not think of the Bicentennial in this way. It was not until popular

¹⁷⁹ “Bicentennial Report Handed to President,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1970; “... And Six Years From Today,” *Washington Post*, July 4, 1970. In a November 1970 memo, Charles Williams of the White House had noted: “There is a pervasive crisis of confidence in America today. Surveys show that more and more average Americans are pessimistic about their personal future because they are pessimistic about the nation's future.” Memo from Charles Williams, White House to Melbourne Spector, November 17, 1970, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 8, folder: “Horizons 76,” NARA II.

¹⁸⁰ Shirley Patterson, “Open House USA, Inc, A Definition,” March 17, 1972; Eugene Skora to Jack LeVant, March 24, 1972; “ARBC, Chronology of Open House USA,” March 31, 1971; ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 27, folder: “Open House, USA,” NARA II.

opinion came to focus on the disjuncture between the ideals of the past and the actions of the present that attention to history became central. The 1970 report, and the way in which it underscored the historical aspects of commemoration as a means of identifying and thinking about social and political problems acknowledged of that fissure, and laid out a framework for including it.

While the ARBC was the most visible group involved in Bicentennial planning, individual states were also planning for 1976, and began to use their own regional histories to find relevance in the commemoration.¹⁸¹ These projects expanded the object of celebration from only the period of the American Revolution, to the *whole* of the American past, signaling the commemoration's evolution into an opportunity to examine the entire history of the United States in an effort to find relevant meaning. In 1971, the ARBC's Communications Committee noted that thirty one states already had commissions working to put on their own Bicentennial celebrations. These initiatives represented an effort to make the Bicentennial meaningful in a local context, what John Bodnar has called "vernacular celebration." For Bodnar, this is a more local and personal expression of commemoration, but one that is often appropriated for the purpose of "official celebration," or the kind of civic education and patriot-building that the ARBC hoped to accomplish.¹⁸² In this case, local celebrations that reflected new interest in the past slowly began to shape the form of the national commemoration. Yorktown, Virginia, renovated homes and shops to make the town look as it did in 1776, and officials contemplated events to commemorate British General Cornwallis' surrender and the

¹⁸¹ John Pierson, "The U.S. Needs Help In Throwing a Party," *Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 1972; ARBC Communications Committee, "A Report on the American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration, 1976: Highlights of Progress to-date." November 1971, ARBA, RG 452- A1-06: Correspondence with Federal Agencies, 1969-1973, box 42, folder: "National Trust for Historic Preservation," NARA II.

¹⁸² Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 13-20.

drafting of the Articles of Capitulation. Other state projects looked to more recent history; the state of Vermont refurbished an 1870's train and readied it to run again.¹⁸³ The Texas Technological University Museum in Lubbock, Texas built historic ranching structures on a twelve acre site. Planners in Phoenix proposed a 550 acre Pioneer Park with a permanent historical town depicting life in the state's pioneer days.¹⁸⁴ In its initial stages, the celebration had been an expression of the continuation of Revolutionary history but now programming, especially in states that had not been directly involved in the Revolution, shifted to an investigation of all of American history. It is important to note that ARBC was originally resistive to this shift, as late as November of 1972, David Goodman, ARBC's coordinator for Heritage '76 wrote to a correspondent in Illinois who was planning a program on the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, that nationally-recognized commemorations must be "limited to those events in the era 1776-1789."¹⁸⁵ However, the Commission soon came to reverse this opinion. Although this was most prominent in states that had not been directly involved in the Revolution, even the thirteen colonies began planning programming that moved forward from the colonial era. This impulse began on the local level, but was acknowledged by, and implemented into, the federal celebrations through measures like the change in direction in the 1970 Bicentennial Plan.

From International Exposition to Bicentennial Parks

Although Nixon's reversal of ARBC's decision about the International Exposition resulted in public and media scrutiny of ARBC's operations, this added attention did not

¹⁸³ Vermont Bicentennial Report, Boston 200 (B200) Collection, box 43, folder "Public Relations and Advertising: Brochures," Boston Public Library (BPL).

¹⁸⁴ ARBC Communications Committee, "A Report on the American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration, 1976: Highlights of Progress to-date." November 1971, ARBA, RG 452- A1-06: Correspondence with Federal Agencies, 1969-1973, box 42, folder: "National Trust for Historic Preservation," NARA II.

¹⁸⁵ David Goodman to Leonard Locke, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 26, folder, "Heritage '76", NARA II

stop the President from continuing to exert strong influence over the Commission.¹⁸⁶ The White House's management of the Commission can be seen as equivalent to other moves that characterized what came to be called an "imperial presidency." But Nixon's investment in this opportunity to both stimulate and shape patriotic sentiment also reflects his larger political initiatives, particularly what Jefferson Cowie has described as an effort to build a new political constituency by appealing to cultural, as opposed to material issues through the invocation of nationalistic feelings.¹⁸⁷ Nixon's chief focus during his presidency was the creation of this new bloc, called first the "Silent Majority" and later the "New Majority," as part of an endeavor the President called "The New American Revolution."¹⁸⁸ Reading the commemoration as a small but critical part of Nixon's larger strategy helps explain the extraordinary measures undertaken by the President to maintain control over the ideological imperatives of the Bicentennial, particularly at a moment of deterioration of public opinion about both the celebration and the support of the American project that underpinned it.¹⁸⁹ While commemorations always do the double duty of expressing and reinvigorating nationalistic sentiment, the primary purpose of the Bicentennial was moving from the former to the latter, a shift that required careful oversight and planning on the part of those who were invested in this role.

¹⁸⁶ for examples of media attention to the ARBC in this period see Howard Taubman, "1976 Bicentennial Group Is Planning a Varied, Year-Long Celebration for Entire Nation," *New York Times*, August 1, 1971; "Around Town: '76' - '71=5," *Washington Post*, April 12, 1971.

¹⁸⁷ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010)

¹⁸⁸ Allen J. Matusow, *Nixon's Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars, and Votes* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998) 214

¹⁸⁹ On Nixon's politics, see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1993); Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 1990); David Farber, "The Silent Majority," in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 291-316.

After the 1970 resignation of Wallace Sterling, Nixon appointed a new Chair, a political ally who would also be able to oversee the complex maneuvers necessary for the International Exposition, which continued to be plagued by opposition and inefficiency on both the local and the federal levels.¹⁹⁰ David Mahoney was the protégé and longtime friend of Nixon cronies Bob Halderman and Robert Finch.¹⁹¹ While Humelsine and Sterling had been scholars, Mahoney was a businessman, a former president of Good Humor and Palmolive, among others.¹⁹² With this appointment and additional maneuvers that placed members of Nixon's cabinet as voting *ex officio* members of ARBC subcommittees, the White House secured its hold on the ARBC and assembled a Commission that would be able to gain support for a rapidly deteriorating commemoration, and by extension, Nixon's own administration.¹⁹³

Nixon's consolidation of Bicentennial planning parallels developments in other government agencies at the time and points to reorganization along new lines of governance. Under Mahoney and his associate Jack LeVant, who was appointed director in November of 1971, ARBC began to act more like a corporation, and commissioned

¹⁹⁰ "Bicentennial Head," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1970.

¹⁹¹ Transcript of White House Press Conference with David Mahoney, released by White House Press Secretary, September 11, 1970, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 5, folder: "White House Release, 1970," NARA II.

¹⁹² Marilyn Bender, "Will the Real Norton Simon Please Stand Up" *New York Times*, June 16, 1974; Melborune Spector to R. Lynn Carroll: "memo re: Purposes and Functions of Commission Itself", September 21, 1970, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 7, folder: "Organization & Management 1970," NARA II.

¹⁹³ There was a lengthy debate within ARBC about the voting rights of these ex-officio members, who were often not able to attend meetings but who often sent subordinates to vote as surrogates despite the fact that regular ARBC members (both private and public) were explicitly forbidden from this practice. Patricia H. Collins to Melbourne Spector, October 24, 1969, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 4, folder: "Organization and Management: Commission Members," NARA II.

efficiency studies by private consulting firms in order to help streamline operations.¹⁹⁴ Mahoney and LeVant wanted to make the Bicentennial a completely privatized celebration, the planning of which was no longer accountable to other sectors of the federal government, and by extension, the public. The rhetoric behind this decision resembled other conversations around the Nixon administration, which was restructuring governance in other sectors by decentralizing power and forming semi-private corporations, a hallmark of the neoliberal economic policies that had begun to take hold of state policy, replacing older Keynesian models.¹⁹⁵ By the end of 1971, LeVant and others at the ARBC had proposed a support corporation that could solicit funding, “without the stigma of requesting the checks be made payable to the Treasurer of the United States.” This new venture, echoing Nixon’s New Federalism, was to be called Federalism ‘76, and would be comprised of current ARBC executives as well as the *ex officio* subcommittee members from Nixon’s cabinet.¹⁹⁶ Looking for other ways to expand ARBC’s power and to make it less accountable to representative government and by extension, American citizens, Mahoney and LeVant also worked to amend PL 89-491, the joint resolution that had created the ARBC, to give more power to the chair and director, at the expense of other Commission members. Interoffice memos on the proposed amendment included a draft of a letter to be sent from Nixon to the Commission members assuring them the current stage of Bicentennial planning required

¹⁹⁴ Jack LeVant, “Director’s Report to the Commission,” December 9, 1971, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 17, folder: “Directors Report to ARBC 12/9/71,” NARA II.

¹⁹⁵ For more on Nixon-era privatization see Herbert Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); Dean Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights: Politics, Principles, and Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002); Matusow, *Nixon’s Economy*.

¹⁹⁶ Barry Gidley to Jack LeVant and Hugh Hall, “Memo re: Support Corporation for the Commission,” December 9, 1971, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 10, folder: “Corporation-Foundation, 1971,” NARA II.

this new centralization of authority.¹⁹⁷ The ARBC operated along the trajectory of other Nixon era initiatives in government, introducing a privatized corporate model that transferred power and accountability from the representative federal government to private corporations.¹⁹⁸

Despite the best efforts of the Nixon administration at consolidating power over the ARBC to generate a strong, centralized celebration, it had gradually become apparent that the Philadelphia exposition would not happen. This was a result of lack of support from not only citizens but the U.S. government itself, which was both unwilling and unable to bankroll such an endeavor.¹⁹⁹ Although under Johnson, the International Exposition had been conceived of as a means to revitalize urban areas, under Nixon, its function as an ideological tool took precedence, and planners looked to suburban sites that were ill-suited to any kind of permanent economic or structural revitalization.²⁰⁰ The movement away from urban redevelopment in Philadelphia enraged local community leaders who had originally backed the city's proposal because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in urban renewal funding promised in the exposition plan.²⁰¹ Lack of community support for the Exposition plan resulted in mounting protests of Bicentennial development on 700 acres of state-owned land in the Byberry area twelve miles northeast of the city. Ironically, while residents in the city resented the use of federal money for a

¹⁹⁷ Eugene Skora to Jack LeVant, December 3, 1971, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 18, folder: "Delegation of Authority," NARA II.

¹⁹⁸ See Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (New York: Wiley Investment Classics, 2005); Matusow, *Nixon's Economy*.

¹⁹⁹ Donald Janson, "Philadelphia Starts Again on 1976 Bicentennial after Government Calls Plan Too Costly," *New York Times*, December 18, 1970.

²⁰⁰ Homer Bigart, "Site Dispute Dims Hopes for '76 Philadelphia Exposition," *New York Times*, January 21, 1972.

²⁰¹ Donald Janson, "Black Dissent and High Cost Snag Philadelphia Bicentennial Plans," *New York Times*, November 14, 1970; Donald Janson, "Minorities Fight Plan for 1976 Bicentennial Fair," *New York Times*, January 10, 1971.

fairground instead of as aid for the urban crisis, residents of the area adjacent to the Byberry site did not want their neighborhood turned into a “bicentennial slum” and feared an expansion of the airport and of public transportation to the area.²⁰² The protests of the Byberry residents, middle-class suburbanites who were precisely the constituency that Nixon and the G.O.P. were trying to attract, seemed to finish the Exposition plan as questions continued to be raised about both the nature and appropriateness of the celebration.²⁰³ The International Exposition plan failed both because it was a costly venture unsuitable in an economically troubled United States, and because it was an older model of celebration which seemed out of step with the contemporary cultural and political climate in America.

By the first months of 1972, the Nixon administration and the ARBC had realized that they lacked sufficient legislative and public support for the International Exposition but were not ready to give up on the possibility of a centralized Bicentennial celebration.²⁰⁴ Instead the ARBC proposed a hastily-developed a proposal that combined recognition of the changing cultural and political atmosphere that had made the Exposition impossible with a continuing desire to use the Bicentennial as a means to consolidate citizen patriotism and support. In February of 1972, Mahoney and the ARBC revealed a new plan for the national commemoration: a series of fifty Bicentennial Parks, each built on federal land and featuring a pavilion that could contain a travelling ARBC exhibition sent around the country by caravan. The three-dimensional model unveiled by Mahoney at a press conference featured a system of plastic domes under which

²⁰² Donald Janson, “’76 Fair Disputed in Philadelphia,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1971.

²⁰³ “Plans for Philadelphia Fair in ’76 Seen Dead,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1971; Donald Janson, Philadelphia Moves to Drop 1976 World’s Fair,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1971.

²⁰⁴ Eugene L. Meyer, “U.S. Bicentennial Unit Assailed for No Plans,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1971.

multimedia projections, restaurants, and exhibits could be placed.²⁰⁵ Each Park would be enclosed by an “air-supported membrane” and would contain lagoons, ponds, band shells, sports arenas, refreshment kiosks, aquaria, and botanical gardens.²⁰⁶ The plan was a bizarre recombination of some aspects of the International Exposition with an acknowledgment of a growing interest in environmentalism and recognition of the need for a national project. One commentator aptly called the Parks “regional editions of a National Fair.”²⁰⁷ In their national focus and futuristic appearance, the Parks extended the logic of the International Exposition, albeit in a decentralized way which can be said to echo the realignment of power in the U.S. from the “Eastern Establishment” states.

The Bicentennial Parks were never a viable proposal—like the International Exposition, the plan was too costly and required massive coordination in locating and appropriating sites and finding local contractors to build the structures.²⁰⁸ The Parks would not be formally voted down until March of 1973, but due to problems with funding, planning, and land procurement, even ARBC staff doubted their feasibility.²⁰⁹ They had not been introduced to the ARBC until the day of the plan’s unveiling and Commissioners like Richard McCormick, professor of History at Rutgers University, wrote to Mahoney expressing outrage at being kept in the dark.²¹⁰ The plan was a

²⁰⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable, “Bicentennial Panel Urges Network of Parks; Project Could Cost Up to \$1.2-Billion, Commission Says,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1972; Wolf Von Eckart, “To Honor a Revolution -- Parks for the People,” *Washington Post*, March, 18, 1972.

²⁰⁶ Eugene Skora to Barry F. Gidley, “Memo re: Obligation of Funds,” November 15, 1971; Davis, Brody & Associates, “A Proposal For A National Focus Commemorating the American Revolution Bicentennial in 1976”, February 10, 1972. ARBA, RG 452:23A, Office of the General Counsel: Subject Files, 1969-1977, box 101, folder: “Davis, Brody Associates, Bicentennial Parks Model,” NARA II.

²⁰⁷ Horace Sutton, “Bicentennial Park in Each State,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1972.

²⁰⁸ Eugene L. Meyer, “Bicentennial Parks Proposal Faces Barriers,” *Washington Post* December 14, 1972.

²⁰⁹ Eugene L. Meyer, “Panel Leaves Nation Without '76 Celebration,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 1973.

²¹⁰ Eugene L. Meyer, “The Big Birthday Bungle,” *Washington Post*, July 2, 1972, C1; Eugene L. Meyer, “Study Raps Bicentennial Staff,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 1972; Report of Arthur D. Little, Inc. to

publicity measure and a last stab at a national commemoration. The unrealistic Park's proposal underscores a turning point in both the ARBC's understanding of the commemoration and the lengths to which it would go to mount a centralized, federally-coordinated celebration.

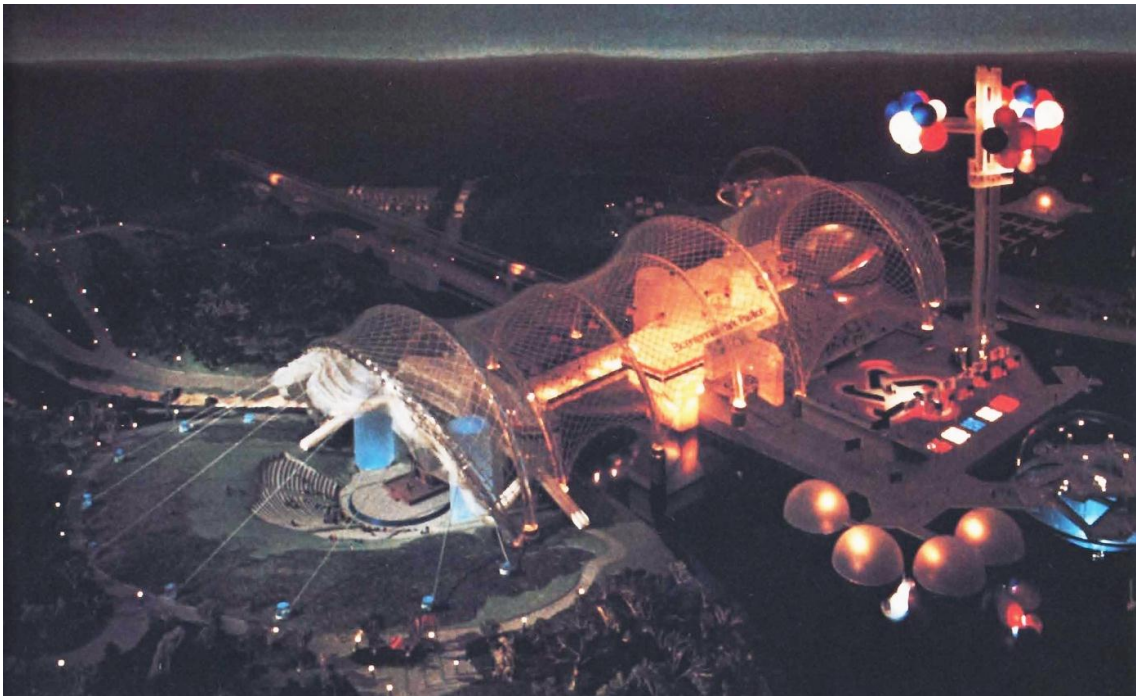


Figure 7. Model for Bicentennial Park unveiled by David Mahoney in February of 1972. Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 245.

“The Big Birthday Bungle:” ARBC Under Fire

With the demise of the International Exposition and the continued failure to settle on a Bicentennial plan that would appeal to a wide public, many different critics raised questions about the meaning of the Bicentennial to make connections between the ARBC's inability to plan the commemoration and the larger issues of the Nixon Administration.²¹¹ Nixon's politicized appropriation of the commemoration backfired—

proceedings of ARBC Executive Committee meeting, June 22, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 20, folder: “Little, Arthur D,” NARA II.

²¹¹ “Washington: For the Record,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1972; Mary Russell, “Quick Bicentennial Vote Dies,” *Washington Post*, June 20, 1972.

in making Bicentennial planning an extension of the current administration, and the celebration itself an ideological tool that did not reflect realities of the contemporary U.S., both became available to progressively more frequent public critiques of Nixon and his allies. As one reporter put it, the ARBC at this moment was “a body whose at-large membership was mostly composed of Nixon political pay-offs.”²¹² The contested terrain of the ARBC and the Bicentennial came to be seen as very visible symptoms of a corrupt administration.

The organization’s troubles and Nixon’s control over the Commission were the subject of a series of high profile articles in the *Washington Post* precipitated by internal papers leaked by a disgruntled former employee in an uncanny echo of the *New York Times*’ revelation of the Pentagon Papers the previous year.²¹³ Starting in July of 1972 with an article entitled “The Big Birthday Bungle,” the *Post* published a series of scathing articles charging Mahoney and the ARBC with corruption, and made apparent Nixon and the Republican Party’s use of the Bicentennial in support of Nixon’s reelection bid.²¹⁴ The third article in the series quoted an unsent memo by Jack LeVant stating that the Bicentennial offered “the greatest opportunity Nixon, the Party, and the government has as a beacon of light for reunification and light within the nation and with the world.”²¹⁵ The *Post* series was extremely popular with the public and was covered in

²¹² Susan Dworkin, “The Bicentennial: Is it Slowly Sinking into the Potomac?” *Ms.* June, 1974, 48.

²¹³ Bob Arnbeck, “Expose of an Expose: Confessions of the Bicentennial Commission Spy,” *Washington Post*, March 18, 1973.

²¹⁴ Eugene L. Meyer, “The Big Birthday Bungle,” *Washington Post*, July 2, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, “Study Raps Bicentennial Staff,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 1972; report of Arthur D. Little, Inc to proceedings of ARBC Executive Committee Meeting, June 22, 1972, ARBA RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 20, folder: “Little, Arthur D,” NARA II.

²¹⁵ Eugene L. Meyer, “Bicentennial Commission: Deeply Involved in Politics,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 1972.

other national newspapers.²¹⁶ The troubles of the ARBC had captured the imagination of newspaper readers, who saw the problems of the ARBC as a sign of larger inefficiencies and corruption in the government, which were becoming evident with continuing revelations of misdeeds in Vietnam. The public and the press extended the “credibility gap” which came to define many aspects of the Nixon presidency to both the planning of the commemoration and to the Bicentennial itself. While federal corruption, partisanship, and backroom brokering was too big an issue to tackle, the ARBC, the organization that was supposed to set out and preserve the very ideals of the nation, was limited enough to be identified and criticized. At the moment of its greatest trouble, the ARBC became a way for citizens and lawmakers to render a critique of a larger, more unwieldy problem onto a smaller, more manageable target.²¹⁷

While the main thrust of the *Washington Post* series attacked ARBC’s partisanship, the articles also voiced a new complaint that Nixon and the ABC were trying to “sell” the Bicentennial.²¹⁸ The *Post* noted the hypocrisy of Mahoney, who had repeatedly come out against “cheap commercialism” in the press, and attacked business relationships that exploited the “meaning” of the Bicentennial. Backroom deals apparently discovered by the *Post* included endorsement meetings with Mack Truck, Marriott Hotels, Baskin Robbins, and others. In the coming years, this criticism grew to be the most longstanding of the Bicentennial, but at this moment, it was a new charge.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Beverly Carman, Letter to the Editor, *Washington Post*, August 22, 1972; “Bicentennial Budget Bill Withdrawn,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1972; “The Dispirit of ’76,” *Boston Globe*, September 3, 1972.

²¹⁷ “Documents Link Politics to the ’76 Fete,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1972.

²¹⁸ Eugene L. Meyer, “The Red, White, Blue—and Green,” *Washington Post*, August 15, 1972.

²¹⁹ Acting Director of ARBC, Hugh A. Hall, one of the only employees who would stay until 1976, responded in a letter to the Editor of the *Washington Post*, characterizing the articles as a left-wing plot, and accusing the *Post* of failing to check facts. The *Post* responded that Hall had “chosen to duck” by

The charge of commercialization stemmed directly from that of partisanship. It was only when planning of the commemoration was revealed to be a partisan effort that its availability to commerce became particularly noticeable. These two critiques came together because both were connected to the destabilization of the meaning of the Bicentennial. Significantly, at this moment, the commercialization of the celebration was universally considered to be a negative trait—federal commemoration was to be a civic exercise free of corporate influences. By the time of the actual celebration, as the nation's troubles became economic rather than political, this position would shift radically.

In the wake of the *Post* exposes, dissatisfaction from inside the ARBC itself became even more visible as the Commission, without consensus on how the Bicentennial should be celebrated, began to garner criticism from other sectors of government, and even from within its own ranks.²²⁰ In late August, Democratic senator John O. Pastore of Rhode Island resigned from his post on the Commission, noting that he did not like the “general smell of the thing.”²²¹ His sentiments were echoed outside the Commission as well, by Fred Harris of Oklahoma, Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. The Congressional Black Caucus agreed, calling the ARBC “manipulative” and a “fraud on the American people.”²²² The

critiquing only the *Post*'s use of the "ARBC papers" and continued to question to Commission's close ties to the White House and GOP. Hugh A. Hall, “Letter to the Editor: Bicentennial Commission Director Responds,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 1972; “More on the Bicentennial Commission,” *Washington Post* August 21, 1972.

²²⁰ On September 1st, 1972, Mahoney sent a memo to all Commission members, addressing the charges that had been leveled by the *Post*. He denied charges of partisanship and commercialism, but embraced the third charge, boosterism, saying “let's make the most of it.” David Mahoney to All ARBC Members, September 1, 1972, ARBA, RG 452:23A, Office of the General Counsel: Subject Files, 1969-1977, box 109, folder: “House Judiciary Committee Investigation of ARBC,” NARA II.

²²¹ Eugene L. Meyer, “Senator Pastore Quits Units on Bicentennial,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 1972.

²²² Eugene L. Meyer, “Bicentennial 'Attacks' Decried by Republicans,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, “Black Caucus Criticizes 1976 Bicentennial Panel,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 1972.

Democratic Party newsletter, *FACT*, observed that Nixon was working the rhetoric of the Bicentennial into his own re-election campaign, using phrases like “The New American Revolution,” and the “Spirit of ’76” as political slogans.²²³ By the end of the summer of 1972, against the backdrop of Nixon’s own reelection campaign, it was clear that the ARBC had neither concrete plans for the Bicentennial nor the support of the public, the press, or members of government.

Because the Nixon administration had failed to secure a meaning for the commemoration that aligned the present with the past, media and popular reactions to the ongoing problems of the ARBC and its connections to Nixon’s troubled presidency often took the form of historical comparisons, a language that illustrated the new focus on history in American culture. As one columnist put it, the Bicentennial needed a “systematic reexamination and reevaluation of the American experiment in order to understand the pluralistic personality of the American people.”²²⁴ Other columnists invited readers to consider their own political position in a historicized perspective, asking, “Would you have joined up in the American Revolution?”²²⁵ Eugene Meyer, the *Post* columnist who had written the investigative series, compared critiques by Pastore and others to those of Charles Sumner regarding the Centennial Exposition a century earlier.²²⁶ The way in which American culture began to look to the past in order to evaluate the present is symptomatic of the destabilization of progressive, linear conceptions of temporality, but also illuminated how new interests and identifications that influenced how Americans understood the contemporary United States.

²²³ “Nixon ‘Stealing the Revolution?’” *Washington Post*, August 13, 1971.

²²⁴ Paul J. Asciolla, “U.S. History Needs Overhaul,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 5, 1973.

²²⁵ James J. Kirkpatrick, “Would You Have Joined Up in the American Revolution?” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1973.

²²⁶ Eugene L. Meyer, “Did National Politics Foil The Fair?” *Washington Post*, May 18, 1972.

The *Post* articles and their mobilization of public attention has direct repercussions for ARBC, which, by the end of that summer, faced two separate federal investigations, from the General Accounting Office (GAO), and the House Judiciary Committee (HJC), which generated reports that blamed ARBC's problems not on corruption or a deeper problem with the very nature of the Bicentennial, but on office morale and staff shortages.²²⁷ These reports recast ARBC's partisanship as inefficiency, its power plays as organizational failures. While the GAO issued a gentle rebuke to ARBC for inefficient staff use and for relying too much on consultants as full time workers, the HJC, chaired by Massachusetts Democrat and recently resigned ARBC member Harold Donohue, returned much harsher findings, charging the ARBC with a "lack of understanding of purpose and an unworkable structure;" paying extremely high salaries to consultants, and maintaining a "relaxed attitude towards government economies," among other things.²²⁸ The GAO report cleared the ARBC of "commercialism," specifically rebutting the *Washington Post* but neither it nor the HJC report mentioned accusations of political partisanship.²²⁹ Instead, the reports focused on the shortage of support staff and the lack of adequate planning, and speculated that in its current iteration, the ARBC would not be able to "provide the country with proper

²²⁷ "Bicentennial Budget Bill Withdrawn," *Washington Post* August 15, 1972; Hugh Hall to Jack LeVant, "Memo re: Telephone Call from John Aidair, General Accounting Office," July 17, 1972, ARBA RG 452-A1-06: Correspondence with Federal Agencies, 1969-1973, box 41, folder "General Accounting Office," NARA II; Eugene L. Meyer, "Bicentennial Director Quits; Management Was Criticized," *Washington Post*, August 2, 1972. Despite Mahoney's public defense, LeVant resigned the day before the hearings.

²²⁸ Eugene L. Meyer, "GAO Is Mildly Critical Of Bicentennial Group," *Washington Post* December 22, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, "Bicentennial Commission Hit in Report by House Unit Staff," *Washington Post*, December 30, 1972.

²²⁹ "Criticisms and Findings of the House Judiciary Committee Staff Report on the Operations of the ARBC," May 8, 1973, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 19, folder: "House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee No 2. September 1972," NARA II; Telegram from David Mahoney to Harold Donahue, August 21, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 19, folder: "Congressman Harold D. Donohue (Mass.)," NARA II.

commemoration by 1976.”²³⁰ With the mounting critique that ultimately culminated in these investigations, it was finally apparent that the 1976 Bicentennial would not be a centralized national celebration.

“Grass Roots,” Funding, and Bicentennial Communities

With the emphasis that the House Subcommittee hearing put on the deficiency of Bicentennial activities, ARBC officials finally prioritized programming, moving away from a centralized to a decentralized model of organization that would allow the Commission to oversee, rather than generate Bicentennial events. In the last months of 1972 and throughout 1973, “grass roots” became the buzzword of the Commission as ARBC planners realized they could solve planning problems by switching ARBC’s focus to identifying and recognizing programs already underway.²³¹ ARBC commissioner James Copely wrote, “Our public trouble, in my opinion, traces in part to our lack of coherent and concise presentations of what we stand for and what we are accomplishing. We badly need something to place in people's hands, for the record.”²³² The shift away from emphasis on a centralized federal celebration towards an acknowledgment and coordination of programs generated from below can be understood in two ways: on one hand, it took pressure off the ARBC to develop its own programming, and on the other, it protected the agency from criticism, as the same public that was both invested in and

²³⁰ Comptroller General of the US, General Accounting Office, “Report: Organization and Operations of the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission,” December 21, 1972, ARBA, RG 452:23A, Office of the General Counsel: Subject Files, 1969-1977, box 105, folder: “General Accounting Office,” NARA II; “House Inquiry ‘1976 Commission Scored in Report,’” *New York Times*, December 30, 1972; “Shakeup Urged; Bicentennial Unit Scored as Failure,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1973.

²³¹ “From Manhattan to Mid-America: A ‘Grass Roots’ Bicentennial,” *U.S. News and World Report*, August 19, 1974, 65-67.

²³² George A Billias to David Graham, ARBC, December 8, 1972; John Copley to David Mahoney, September 18, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 25, folder: “Bicentennial Cities,” NARA II.

skeptical of the federal Bicentennial celebration would now have a stake in it.²³³ More generally the move to “grass roots” shows a new understanding of the impossibility of a national program. While decentralization resulted in part from widespread critique of the ARBC and of Nixon, more significantly, the nation lacked popular consensus on the relationship of the national past to the national present. In other words, due to the continued destabilization of a progressive, linear sense of the unfolding of history, a traditional Bicentennial celebration was ill-suited to the contemporary moment.

But this does not mean that government planners gave up on the Bicentennial as a potential opportunity for the consolidation of patriotic feeling. It does mean that the organizers of the commemoration adapted to accommodate these cultural and social developments. Several scholarly accounts of the Bicentennial have emphasized this decentralization as a response to cultural pluralism—while this is certainly accurate, these analyses also tend to elide decentralization with downscaled federal investment in the Bicentennial, and operate on an assumption of commemoration as fixed and stable. They argue that because the Bicentennial ultimately did not resemble a traditional national commemoration, the state was minimally involved.²³⁴ This development must not be read as a step back, but as a change in strategy. The ARBC’s shift to coordination indicated a continuing investment in overseeing the Bicentennial, albeit in a new way that

²³³ Eugene L. Meyer, “Diluting the Spirit of ’76,” *Washington Post*, August 16, 1972.

²³⁴ For previous accounts of the planning of the Bicentennial that read decentralization as divestment, see Lyn Spillman, *Nations and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Natasha Zaretsky, “The Spirit of ’76: The Bicentennial and Cold War Revivalism,” in *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 143-182; David Lowenthal, “The Bicentennial Landscape: A Mirror Held Up to the Past,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (Jul., 1977), 253-267; Christopher Capozzola, “It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country: Celebrating the Bicentennial in an Age of Limits,” in Beth Bailey and David Farber, *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 29-49.

took account of and reacted to the larger political, cultural, and economic developments that had rendered centralized celebration impossible.

ARBC's new emphasis on programming coincided with a profitable new venture in the sale of commemorative coins that generated funding for Bicentennial. The ARBC had introduced the sale of commemorative medals to raise funds on July 4th 1972 and less than a month after, had already earned \$1.3 million.²³⁵ When in February of 1973, David Mahoney appeared before the Committee on Appropriations, he reported that the ARBC and US Mint's commemorative medal-stamp combination, sold for \$5 each, had sold 791,000 units, and generated \$3.8 million in revenue. A medal sold by itself had sold 649,000 units. In 1973, ARBC would add a slightly more expensive silver medal for \$10, and earn \$2.32 million.²³⁶ In the last months of 1972, ARBC earned 6.3 million dollars from sale of the commemorative medals and granted about \$2.1 million to state Commissions as well as to the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.²³⁷

²³⁵ "Fete Head Praises Criticism," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1972; Glen Elsasser, "Commission Chairman Interviewed; Problems Beset Fete to Mark American Independence," *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1972.

²³⁶ Statement of David J Mahoney before the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations, February 21, 1973, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 28, folder: "ARBC Appropriations Hearings for FY73, Feb 21, 1973," NARA II.

²³⁷ Statement of Hugh A Hall, Acting Director of the ARBC before the Subcommittee on Federal Charters, Holidays, and Celebrations of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, July 11, 1973, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 28, folder: "ARBC Hearings: Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 7/11/73," NARA II; Eugene L. Meyer, "Bicentennial Panel Wants Funds Doubled," *Washington Post*, December 12, 1972; Shirley D Patterson to Robert Lederer, December 27, 1972; Hugh Hall to Senator Wallace Bennett, "Memo re: 1776 Census proposal (NEH)," December 13, 1972; David Goodman to Thomas Chinn, "Memo re: Conference of History of Chinese in America and US Office of Education funding," December 15, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 25, folder: "Programs Nov 1-31 1972, Ideas and Proposals," NARA II.

These earnings allowed the ARBC to reinforce its decentralization by making fiscal allotments for \$40,000 to each state and \$25,000 to each territory for the purpose of generating and funding programs.²³⁸ ARBC program officers also started directing promising proposals towards state Bicentennial Commissions. The extensive network of regional and local offices, put in place to regulate local celebrations and direct resources to the national effort, were now used to distribute funding and to coordinate programs. The revenue from the medals would prove to be the turning point of the ARBC and allow it to shift, in the public eye, from an agency that absorbed funds to one that granted them. While program funding seemed like a form of federal aid akin to something like the National Endowment for the Arts, in reality, it was a way for the ARBC to contract out planning work while still claiming partial credit for the programming. “Grass roots” also advanced an impression of the Bicentennial as a public-directed celebration. In reality, through its control of channels of funding and by circulating proposals from the national Commission to local affiliates, the ARBC still very much dictated the shape and nature of the celebration.²³⁹

In order to provide oversight for its new partners in programming, the ARBC introduced an initiative called Bicentennial Communities, which would become the hallmark program of the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), its succeeding organization. Bicentennial Communities was an additional way for the

²³⁸ Discussion Paper #1: Use of Revenues from the Sale of the 1976 Gold Medal (undated, December, 1972-January, 1973); ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1; Office of the Administrator: Correspondence with Advisory Council Members, 1976-76, box 96, folder: “Discussion Paper #1: Use of Revenues from the Sale of the 1976 Gold Medal,” NARA II.

²³⁹ Charles Goodspeed, “Suggested State Criteria for Use by State Bicentennial Commissions,” November 14, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 26, folder: “State and Local Bicentennial Commissions,” NARA II; Hugh Hall, “Action No 2-73, Bicentennial Communities Program,”), ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 29, folder: “Organization & Management: Delegation of Authority, 1973,” NARA II.

federal agency to exercise control over vernacular commemoration of the Bicentennial, by providing official designation for those communities willing to adhere to its directives. Under this program, communities such as townships, neighborhoods, universities, and even army bases could apply to become an official “Bicentennial Community.”²⁴⁰ In order to qualify, a community supported by a local legislature had to send in an application detailing planned programming under the Heritage, Horizons, and Festival USA rubrics. Approved Bicentennial Communities got the opportunity to apply for grant money through ARBA, and were designated part of the “official” celebration.²⁴¹ The Bicentennial Communities program can be read as a branding move, in which the ARBC could put its logo on all kinds of projects that it itself would choose, according to criteria that it would set. If anyone continued to criticize the ARBC for lack of programming, the Commission could now point to the Bicentennial Communities and their activities.

Many of the programs most heavily supported by ARBC at this moment reflected the new cultural interest in history as well as the Commission’s own growing emphasis on a celebration that looked to the past for answers about the present. ARBC Programming officer Martha Jane Shay wrote in a briefing memo: “An increasing number of Americans are beginning to realize that the past need not necessarily be past, that the past has not only brought us where we are, but that it can continue to serve our

²⁴⁰ Hugh Hall to Nancy Hanks, NEA December 21, 1972 with enclosure: “Proposed Policy for Implementation of ARBC Matching Project Grants,” December 15, 1972; letter from Kenny Williams, Chief, Film Services to Andrew Lipkin, Montpelier, VT December 19, 1972, (proposal for film about Swedish settlement in Maine), ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 19, folder: “Grants 1972,” NARA II.

²⁴¹ “Bicentennial Communities: A Progress Report,” *Bicentennial Times*, 2.1 (January, 1975); “Action No 2-73, Bicentennial Communities Program,” ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 29, folder: “Organization & Management: Delegation of Authority, 1973,” NARA II.

contemporary needs and to enrich our environment.”²⁴² Out of the twenty-some “national” programs recognized by the ARBC (that is, directly as opposed to through the state commissions), a significant percentage were historical in nature. These included Above Ground Archeology, a project that taught schoolchildren how to investigate the histories of their homes; the Freedom Train, a travelling exhibition of documents and artifacts; and document preservation programs with state and local archives.²⁴³ ARBC looked to Heritage projects because they addressed what the Commission saw as a desire by American citizens to reexamine the past.²⁴⁴ As detailed in the previous chapter, Americans were not only more interested in history as a means of evaluating the present, but also engaged the past in new, affective ways, looking for close identification on an emotional level with the people and events of the past. Arguably, ARBC and other state interests found this affective approach appealing because the potential for emotional engagement was also potential for the regeneration of patriotic feeling.

Accordingly, the *kind* of heritage programming which the ARBC sought to support also changed. While the earlier iterations of the Commission had bristled against reenactments as an unproductive mode of commemoration, the ARBC now began encouraging these activities. The Commission formed a new subgroup to stage reenactments of historic events as an antidote to “today’s negative thinking.” The National Patriotic-Civic Organizations Coordination considered reenactments to be “a

²⁴² Martha Jane Shay to Sid Eiges and Herb Hetu, “Memo re: Briefing material (prepared for *Today* show),” August 7, 1974, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, Office of the Administrator: Correspondence with Advisory Council Members, 1976-76, box 96, folder: “ARBA Council--Miscellaneous Correspondence,” NARA II.

²⁴³ For examples of nationally funded programs including those mentioned above, see ARBA, RG 452- A1-70, Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, boxes 253-265, NARA II.

²⁴⁴ Carolyn Toll, “Historians Assail Lack of Planning for Bicentennial,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1972.

positive way of recalling America's heritage and of reestablishing a national pride among young people."²⁴⁵ This statement illustrates the appeal of this kind of affective or immersive interaction. Reenactments could move participants to patriotic sentiment, something that was much desired by state interests in this fraught moment. The move towards reenactment programming reversed earlier ARBC policy both in its emphasis on history as a means of encouraging patriotic identification in citizens, and its use of embodied, experiential historical ideation as opposed to focusing on histories generated by or available through historic artifacts. This new direction echoed new, popular interest in the historical which took account of new, experiential modes of engagement.

ARBA, Warner, and "Operation: Friendly Persuasion"

While the ARBC's programming imperatives addressed a shift in cultural conception of the historical, the Commission itself would soon be reorganized to reflect changing strategies of governance. In early February of 1973, shortly after his second inauguration, Nixon presented a plan for a restructured Commission that would abolish the ARBC and replace it with a streamlined American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), comprised of a single administrator, an eleven member Advisory Board, and a more public Advisory Council. This move cemented the change in planning policy that came from within the organization with a legislative directive that would retroactively attribute this shift to the President's own initiative.²⁴⁶ The main task

²⁴⁵ "Patriotic Groups to Restage Historic Events," *Bicentennial Times*, 2.3 (April, 1975); Wendy Schuman, "Marching Out of the Past," *New York Times*, May 20, 1973.

²⁴⁶ Although the ARBC had seemingly shifted gears, there was still a close connection between the presidency and the Bicentennial as Nixon continued to attempt to use the celebration for his own political advancement. After his landslide victory over George McGovern, Nixon arranged for a colonial marching band, the "Spirit of '76" to precede him in the January Inaugural parade. Eugene L. Meyer, "Nixon to Change Bicentennial Setup," *Washington Post*, February 1, 1973; "Marching Toward '76", *Washington*

of the ARBA would be to continue to recognize Bicentennial Communities and to create a "Master Calendar" of Bicentennial events.²⁴⁷ What was occurring was a delicate balancing act, precipitated by the realization that a national commemoration would not be possible. Following structural changes already implemented within ARBC, Nixon replaced the emphasis on planning with one on coordination and thus shifted the organization's influence from power over planning and production to power over designation and management. The new ARBA would still have say over the nature of the commemoration, but would be presiding over decentralized interests. It can be read as a development in privatization efforts. Rather than a national organization that behaved like a corporation, the new Commission would remain a federal organization, but one that would be free to act in concert with both public and private interests.

At hearings on the new Administration, members of Congress worried about absolute power in approving the changes, anticipating a "Bicentennial Czar," much in the model of the President himself, but the White House stood firm, saying that nothing could be done with an unwieldy structure like the Commission.²⁴⁸ As the Watergate investigation intensified, a subcommittee added Senate confirmation as a necessity for the administrator and his assistants as a safeguard against the politicization of

Post, February 9, 1973; Joanne Omang, "12,000 to Tootle and March Up Avenue Behind Nixon" *Washington Post* January 20, 1973.

²⁴⁷ "President Proposes A New Unit to Plan U. S. Bicentennial," *New York Times*, February 2, 1973.

²⁴⁸ Eugene L. Meyer, "House Panel Criticizes White House For Proposing a Bicentennial Czar," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1973. Despite the controversy surrounding the ARBC, an increasingly desperate and erratic Nixon still considered using appointments for political aims. Just weeks before his second inauguration, Nixon and Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman discussed giving the Administration position to Special Assistant Jeb Magruder as a reward for his work in the cover-up of the Watergate burglary and other "dirty tricks." It was ultimately decided that the spot was too "politically visible," and months later, Magruder would begin cooperating with the federal prosecutors in exchange for a reduced sentence. Stanley I. Kutler, ed. *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 194-197

appointments²⁴⁹ The White House's connections to the Watergate burglars had already been revealed, and in two months, Nixon's top aides would be forced to resign. Issues of political appointments, corruption, and secrecy were at the forefront of public opinion; it is in this context that the conversations around the shift from ARBC to ARBA must be read.²⁵⁰ As questions of federal control swirled around the hearings, ARBC officials began speaking of a decentralized, non-authoritative agency as if to counter the way in which the unilateral actions of the President himself were being questioned.²⁵¹

As the crisis of the presidency mounted, many continued to look towards the past in order to consider the events of the present. Nixon remained uncharacteristically quiet on the topic of the celebration, but others turned to history as a means of making sense of current events.²⁵² While the ideals of the Revolution had previously been assumed to have been realized, Americans now used historical events to understand contemporary shortcomings and to shift the meaning of the Bicentennial from celebration to reflection. As one commentator put it, "today the issues that stirred the colonials ring with new timeliness. Should we have a monarch? Should any man be above the law?"²⁵³ In Boston, New England Life insurance sponsored a series of Bicentennial forums featuring prominent academics and politicians, including John Lindsey, Hannah Arendt, and

²⁴⁹ "New Plan Urged for Bicentennial," *New York Times*, April 25, 1973.

²⁵⁰ On the Watergate scandals see Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery, 1973-1990* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) 12-32.

²⁵¹ ARBC, "Bicentennial News" press releases, March 14, 1973; December 2, 1973, ARBA, RG A1-36: Communications and Public Affairs Division: Official News Release, 1970-1976, box 175, folder: "Press Releases, 1972-1973," NARA II.

²⁵² Nixon's reduced presence was the direct result of ongoing public criticism of his role in the Bicentennial. For example, the town of Lexington, MA, the site of the first Revolutionary battle, voted to ban Nixon from its commemoration, noting that his presence would "diminish the historic values and demean the high ideals" of the occasion. "Lexington to Vote on Plea for Nixon to Stay Away," *New York Times*, February 21, 1974.

²⁵³ Eugene L. Meyer, "Spirit of '76," *New Leader*, June 24, 1974.

George McGovern. Nearly all of the speakers compared the Nixon administration to that of King George, and asked audiences to recall the core values of the Revolution.²⁵⁴ These characterizations also compared Nixon to another “embattled president” who had presided over a commemoration: the scandal-ridden Ulysses S. Grant.²⁵⁵ Commentators used these associations to make sense of the present situation, and to speculate on its likely outcome: the Grant comparison, for example, noted that Grant had been allowed to stay in office because of strong party support, something that Nixon no longer enjoyed.²⁵⁶ These conversations put the past and the present together in new ways.

After Congress approved the ARBA in December of 1973, Nixon signed the bill into law.²⁵⁷ By mid-February of the next year, it became known that John Warner, the telegenic former Secretary of the Navy would head the newly-formed Administration.²⁵⁸ On March 11, 1974, in a radio address, Nixon appointed Warner to the position of Bicentennial Administrator. Reacting to years of charges that his administration was attempting to ‘steal’ the Bicentennial, and co-opting some of the anti-establishment language of the counterculture, Nixon announced, “The Bicentennial is not going to be invented in Washington, printed in triplicate by the Government printing office, mailed to you by the US Postal Service and filed away in your private library. Instead, we shall

²⁵⁴ Transcripts of speeches, B200, box 17A, folder: “New England Life Forums,” BPL.

²⁵⁵ Kevin Phillips, “Previous Celebrations Held During Crisis,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, July 9, 1974.

²⁵⁶ Richard Jensen, “Grant, Nixon A Century Apart: Two Embattled Presidents,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, 1973; Page Smith, “On the Anniversary of a Party in Boston,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1973.

²⁵⁷ “Bicentennial Unit Created by Nixon,” *Washington Post* Dec 12, 1973; “Bicentennial Fete Leader Quits Post,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1973; “Mahoney, Bicentennial Chief, Quits,” *Washington Post*, December 27, 1973.

²⁵⁸ Albin Krebs, “Notes on People Navy Chief to Head Bicentennial,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1974.

seek to trigger a chain reaction of tens of thousands of individual celebrations.”²⁵⁹ With this statement, Nixon explicitly reversed the state’s position on the commemoration. Rather than generating an official celebration from the federal level, the state would now act to motivate and oversee a multitude of “individual” celebrations. The mandate for the Bicentennial was now the responsibility of the citizenry.

Nixon also introduced another new supporting agent into Bicentennial planning in a move that again reversed earlier iterations of the commemoration as a federal affair. In the same address, the President noted: “Our Bicentennial observance could not possibly realize its full potential or meet our high expectations without the support of the free enterprise system which has made our country what it is today—the best and strongest Nation in history. Interest among private groups and organizations is developing, and we welcome their involvement.”²⁶⁰ The Bicentennial, which had begun as a state effort, was now to be planned by the people and financed by the private sector, a shift tied to the twin traditions of democracy and enterprise in America.

The reconstituted ARBA was very different from the ARBC; what had once been a partisan organization became a decentralized coordinating body. As Administrator, Warner had more executive power than his predecessors, and instead of answering to what had gradually grown to 50 Commission members, he answered to an eleven-member American Revolutionary Bicentennial Board comprised of members of the House and Senate, the Secretary of the Interior, and presidential appointees from state Bicentennial commissions that would oversee ARBA operations, policy, and funding. In

²⁵⁹ “Nixon Appoints Navy Secretary to Plan 'Truly National' Bicentennial,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1974; John M. Crewdson, “Nixon Names Head of Agency for '76: Navy Secretary Warner to Coordinate Bicentennial Restoring Structures,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1974; “Bicentennial Post,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1974.

²⁶⁰ quoted in *Bicentennial Times*, 1.3 [n.d. ca. January, 1974], 7.

addition (and for publicity), Nixon appointed an American Revolutionary Advisory Council populated by public figures like producer David Wolper, writers Alex Haley and James Michener, Lady Bird Johnson, and poet Maya Angelou, which would meet and “advise” the ARBA as well as make public appearances to generate excitement for the celebration.²⁶¹ This most visible component of the ARBA more closely resembled the nonpartisan makeup of the original Johnson-era ARBC. While the old ARBC had received criticism for its closed operations, the ARBA, although an equally powerful federal agency, was to be as transparent as possible — part of the mandate of the Council was for the members to act as the public face of ARBA. Accordingly, ARBA also would administer a BINET, a computer database of Bicentennial activities, and publish the *Bicentennial Times*, described in planning stages as a widely distributed “tabloid newspaper” that would focus on the two new central concerns of the ARBA: grants and Bicentennial Communities.²⁶² Considering ARBC’s previous problems with the press, it is not surprising that the ARBA would want its own news outlet. If ARBC had been attacked for its secrecy, ARBA would generate a public record of its doings.

In a marked difference from the previous strained atmosphere, Warner’s efforts at publicizing Bicentennial events and funding, named by the White House staff assigned as ARBA liaisons, “Operation Friendly Persuasion,” centered on using the Bicentennial’s examination of history as a perspective on the contemporary scene.²⁶³ In interviews,

²⁶¹ ARBA, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People*, Volume 2 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977) 26-30.

²⁶² Edward Stafford, “Memo for the Record re: Bicentennial Times,” November 13, 1973, ARBA, RG A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 28, folder: “Information & Public Relations: Newsletter,” NARA II

²⁶³ “Bicentennial Celebration: Charges of Commercialism Are Expected to Proliferate as 1976 Approaches,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1974; Lou Cannon, “Warner Is Named To Head '76 Agency,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 1974.

Warner emphasized that this new approach to the Bicentennial would overcome “residual negativism” and create a “groundswell of Bicentennial fervor.”²⁶⁴ At the time, even ARBC’s most stringent critic, the *Washington Post*, seemed placated by this change and proclaimed a “New Light” on the Bicentennial.²⁶⁵ At a moment where unimaginable truths were being revealed about Nixon’s presidency, perhaps political corruption could be corrected in one area.²⁶⁶ Warner did not shy away from the topic of Watergate and instead sought to use the way in which the Bicentennial had become connected with the politics to make an argument for renewed attention to the commemoration. In this iteration, the Bicentennial would become a celebration of a system that worked under crisis: the Watergate hearings proved that the checks and balances put into place by the founding documents worked to curb excessive and illegal power.²⁶⁷ Warner’s positive reception illustrates not only the mutable nature of commemoration, but also the complex position of the public with regards to the Bicentennial: it was not a wholesale rejection of the commemoration, instead a more nuanced critique of the *nature* of celebration that resulted in movement away from traditional forms. Even in this contested atmosphere, commemoration remained a central site at which meaning could be made and the current state of the nation could be evaluated.

“Buy”centennial: Free Enterprise, Corporate Sponsorship, and the Licensing Revolution

While the political inconsistencies between the legacy of the Revolution and the current state of the union had been resolved with the resignation of Nixon, conversations

²⁶⁴ “Negativism Stalls Bicentennial Plans,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 29, 1974.

²⁶⁵ “New Light on the Bicentennial,” *Washington Post*, August 13, 1974.

²⁶⁶ “Will Ex-Navy Man Keep Bicentennial Afloat?” *Fayetteville Observer*, June 9, 1974; Robert Karen, “New Light in the Steeple,” *The Nation*, June 29, 1974, 818-819.

²⁶⁷ “Commission Chief Says Bicentennial Won’t Divert from Watergate,” *Dennison Herald*, June 30, 1974.

about the commemoration now began to be framed in economic terms as an economic crisis replaced a political one.²⁶⁸ While the dissolution of the ARBC may have settled the matter of political patronage, the charge of commercialism on the part of the Bicentennial planners became more pronounced, especially in the context of mounting economic turmoil. By 1974, unemployment and the curious new “stagflation,” as well as an oil crisis stemming from the OPEC embargo, plagued the United States.²⁶⁹ During his tenure, David Mahoney had derided “cheap commercialism” in the press but Warner resolved this contradiction by advancing an argument that portrayed commercialism and free enterprise as part and parcel of the “American way.”²⁷⁰ Part of the reason for the success of this semantic shift was that between Mahoney and Warner’s tenures, free enterprise had been repoliticized by being cast in opposition to ‘un-American’ price fixing and embargos.²⁷¹

ARBA’s decentralization had been twofold: on one hand, designating the mode of celebration had been delegated to the Bicentennial Communities, while on the other the Bicentennial was also made available to corporate entities who wished to adapt some aspect of the celebration. While some, like the Freedom Train Foundation, American Express, and Sunoco, planned or sponsored events, others sought to introduce

²⁶⁸“The Celebration of Our Bicentennial,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1974, 26; Wolf Von Eckard, “Hucksterism, Kitsch and The Promoting of the Buy-Centennial,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 1974; Wayne Dunham, “He’s Throwing a Birthday Bash,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 1975; Sally Quinn, “John Warner: Rally Round the Flag,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 1976.

²⁶⁹ For further reading on economic issues of the 1970s, see Matusow, *Nixon’s Economy*; Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 53-70; Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds. *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁷⁰ Betty James, “Q & A: John Warner Looks at the Bicentennial,” *Washington Post*, February 25, 1975; “Bicentennial Celebration: Charges of Commercialism are Expected to Proliferate as 1976 Approaches,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1974.

²⁷¹ This in turn would pave the way for popular acceptance of neoliberal as opposed to Keynesian economic models. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7-29.

Bicentennial products. By 1974, stores, catalogs, and advertisements were flooded with Bicentennial paraphernalia running the gamut from t-shirts, tote bags, stickers and flags, to tasteful and less tasteful replicas, commemorative items like paperweights, seals, and posters, to ashtrays, and coffee mugs.²⁷² Motivated by the upcoming celebration and the phenomenal success of the sale of the Bicentennial medals and coins, many manufacturers eagerly started selling their own product lines, and the Bicentennial as a symbol circulated promiscuously through American consumer culture.



Figure 8. Official Bicentennial Merchandise. Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 254-55.

ARBA's new rapport with business interests stood in direct contradiction to earlier iterations of the Bicentennial, which had been conceived of as a federal affair and thus sparked controversy in the media and with the public. While corporate sponsorship

²⁷² Ellen Eshbach, "Oh Say Can You See Those Bicentennial Toilets, Frying Pans?" *Chicago Tribune*, July 17, 1974; Louis J. Haugh, "Bicentennial Related New Products Are Burgeoning," *Advertising Age*, July 23, 1974.

of an officially recognized program was not the same as a Bicentennial toilet-seat cover, many saw the involvement of private enterprise in commemoration as cheapening and trivializing.²⁷³ Warner couched his response in historical terms and noted that free enterprise was an integral part of the America envisioned by the Founders and the involvement of corporation was true to the “spirit of volunteerism” that characterized the American Revolution.²⁷⁴ In interviews and in public appearances, Warner addressed the question of the “Buy-centennial” noting that the America people “historically” demanded souvenirs and that he thought they were intelligent enough to decide on their own what was worthy and what was not.²⁷⁵

Taking a cue from Bicentennial organizations in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia that had been working in public-private partnerships with sponsoring corporations from the beginning, by the end of 1974, ARBA had coordinated a \$2 million investment by J.C. Penney in a collection of historic American music, and had helped convince American Express to bankroll a restoration of the Statue of Liberty. Similarly, a grant from IBM underwrote an international exhibition on Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.²⁷⁶ Issues of ARBA’s newsletter, *Bicentennial Times*, regularly featured calls from Warner for financial support from corporations, and listed organizations that had already made contributions. Calling ARBA “Bicentennial

²⁷³ “The Buy-Centennial,” *Meridian Journal*, August 8, 1974; “Overly Commercial Bicentennial Feared,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 14, 1974; “Bicentennial For Sale,” *Austin American-Statesman*, October 19, 1974.

²⁷⁴ Norma Green, “Warner Outlines U.S. Views for Bicentennial Promotions,” *Advertising Age*, June 17, 1974; James T. Wooten, “Bicentennial: Patriotic and Commercial,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1974.

²⁷⁵ “Red, White, and Blue Nausea,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1974, A6; Michael Seller, “A Bicentennial by the People, for the people,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1974.

²⁷⁶ Some of these local public-private partnerships took on interesting shapes: for example, the furniture company Ethan Allan built a “mobile Bicentennial office” for Vermont’s Bicentennial Commission. “Bicentennial Group Seeking Private Funds,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1974.

brokers,” the newsletter also solicited support for programs that were still seeking private funding.²⁷⁷ In his appeals to private enterprise, Warner again employed historical tropes, making statements like “under no form or system of government has private enterprise been able to flourish as greatly as under the oldest surviving democratic republic in the world—the United States of America.”²⁷⁸ At the same time, this funding model, wherein private capital would move through a federal agency, was a transitional moment in the ascent of the neoliberal state, under which cultural funding would be almost completely privatized.



**‘In what other country are the people free enough to do
this to their Bicentennial?’**

Figure 9. “Free Enterprise” during the Bicentennial. Editorial cartoon, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 6th, 1976

²⁷⁷ See for example, “Warner Calls on Private Enterprise to Join Nation’s 200th Anniversary,” *Bicentennial Times* 1.9 (October, 1974). For a listing of programs seeking funding, see *Bicentennial Times* 2.2 (March, 1975).

²⁷⁸ “Warner Calls on Private Enterprise to Join Nation’s 200th Anniversary,” *Bicentennial Times* 1.9 (October, 1974).

ARBA had a good model for public-private partnerships in city Bicentennial organizations, which had begun to organize along these lines from their inception. Groups like Boston 200 and the Philadelphia Bicentennial Corporation had worked in concert with a variety of interests since the earliest days of their existence. In 1973, representatives from Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington began an organization called "Four Cities," meeting periodically to coordinate activity. The purpose of these meetings was mostly to trade information about logistical preparations including accommodations, transportation, and programming and to promote the East Coast as a hub of Bicentennial activity. Frustration at the ARBC was often made evident in these meetings, as representatives groaned about the lack of federal activity and funding, and voiced a preference for handling organization and publicity at a local level. When the ARBC became the ARBA and began promoting local and regional events as a way to play up their own activity, Four Cities representatives expressed hostility towards these actions.²⁷⁹ By early 1975, the Four Cities had formed a Federation and its roster included representatives from ARBA and local governments, as well corporations sponsoring Bicentennial events or involved in the tourism industry. Each city had launched a licensing program along the lines of ARBA, and the Four Cities had worked with Amtrak to produce a brochure encouraging tourism.²⁸⁰ Miriam Greenberg has written about the way in which New York's business leaders, through a series of public-

²⁷⁹ New York Bicentennial Corporation, "Bicentennial Coordination: A Report of a Meeting of the Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington Bicentennial Staffs on May 10-11, 1973." B200, box 84B, folder: "four cities meeting," BPL.

²⁸⁰ Four Cities Bicentennial Federation, "Agenda Thursday February 6, 1975," B200, box 84B, folder: "four cities meeting," BPL. See also: Morris D. Rosenberg, "D.C. Area Braces For Tourist Influx," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1975; Robert J Dunphy, "U. S. Fete to Welcome Foreigners," *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 1975; Jerry Hulse, "Boston to Fire the First Shot in Bicentennial Celebration," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1974; Paul C. Friedlander, "The Traveler's World: Bicentennial Reports: Bits and Pieces," *New York Times*, November 4, 1973.

private partnerships and tourism initiatives, moved the focus of local funding from resident to tourist.²⁸¹ The efforts of the Four Cities, the way in which each cities' Bicentennial organization worked with both government and corporate interests, and the ways in which they used the celebration to bring in tourism revenue seems emblematic of this shift, and the way in which it paralleled and anticipated moves towards neoliberalism at the federal level.

“Bringing History Alive:” Programming 1974-76

ARBA began actively publicizing projects through the Bicentennial Communities and their corporate partners as a means of generating interest in and excitement for the Bicentennial, which by 1974, had become a celebration not of the American present, but of the American past. Although programming continued to adhere to the three categories that had been set forward in 1970: “Heritage,” “Festival USA,” and “Horizons,” by late 1974, the bulk of Bicentennial projects fell under the “Heritage” rubric—in a September, 1974 survey of recognized projects, “Heritage” programs outstripped the other two categories at a rate of three to one, a proportion that would increase over the next two years.²⁸² A considerable portion of the “Festival USA” programming also addressed the American past—ARBA placed folk exhibitions and such historical fare as the Freedom Train into this category, as well as festivals like “Eighteenth Century Days,” local fairs that highlighted the clothing, cuisine, and entertainment of colonial life and which were popular in many towns across the United States.²⁸³ The *Bicentennial Times* breathlessly reported on all of this programming, often using the phrase “history comes alive” in the

²⁸¹ Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How A City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁸² BINET statistics cited in *Bicentennial Times* 2.2, (March, 1975).

²⁸³ “Remembering the Past,” *Bicentennial Times* 2.2 (March, 1975).

titles to such stories, emphasizing popular interest in the past, and the enactive or performative way in which it was being engaged.²⁸⁴ This new emphasis on the past points to the fact that history had become a key site for Bicentennial activity. Rather than a commemoration which acknowledged the past through celebrating the present, the Bicentennial became an opportunity for many to investigate the past in order to rethink its relationship to the present.

It is significant too, that Bicentennial projects interrogated *all* of U.S. history, as opposed to only the colonial period, a development that can again be traced to American's new interest in the past. Equally important was the impulse to find and identify new historical events and persons whose stories could be inserted into the reformed national narrative. If the archive of the 1950s and 60s had been a well-delineated repository for evidence of the past, the projects of the Bicentennial sought to locate and identify new evidence, which could round out and redefine American history. The Bicentennial became as much about commemorating these new entries into the archive as the old ones.

As a result of this impulse, archives of all different kinds garnered new attention. The National Archives reported a "Bicentennial Boom" in visitors, and also undertook extensive renovations in order to make its main exhibition halls more attractive, putting in explanatory displays as well as benches that would inspire longer stays and quiet

²⁸⁴ See for example, "Minneapolis Makes History Come Alive with Dioramas," *Bicentennial Times* 3.2 (February, 1976); "National Archives Program Brings U.S. History Alive During Bicentennial Period," *Bicentennial Times* 3.3 (March 1976); "Rhode Island, Alive With Colonial History Begins Colorful Celebration," *Bicentennial Times* 3.4 (April 1976); "Virginia Offers History-Studded Panorama for Visitors," *Bicentennial Times* 3.5 (May 1976); "Dan Ambrose's Long Walk Makes History Come Alive," *Bicentennial Times* 3.7 (July 1976).

contemplation of the records.²⁸⁵ Others wished to spend even longer amounts of time with historic documents; the Society of American Archivists reported an “alarming increase” in theft of documents from historical societies and university collections, attempting to combat the problem by inviting security specialists from the FBI to give seminars at their annual convention.²⁸⁶ Historical research by individuals, particularly, as noted in the previous chapter, those seeking to trace their own ancestry, was also on the rise, and an industry of paid support for amateur genealogists sprang up to meet their needs, placing ads with invitations such as “make your ancestors come alive through handwriting analysis,” in both trade and mainstream publications.²⁸⁷

History also “came alive” through many Bicentennial projects which focused on restorations or preservations of historical structures and technologies, as well as reenactments of events over the past two centuries.²⁸⁸ The city of Yakima in Washington reintroduced two electric trolleys that had been part of its cityscape in the early 20th century.²⁸⁹ Vermont too brought back older transportation: state residents and visitors could ride on steam trains and steam boats from the previous century.²⁹⁰ Bicentennial preservation projects included the Iron Mission State Park of Utah, the first iron foundry built West of the Mississippi, outdoor museum Ranch Headquarters in Lubbock, Texas, the renovation of downtown Alexandria, Virginia into “colonial streetscape,” resembling

²⁸⁵ Jeannette Smith, “Making Archives Come Alive in time for the Bicentennial,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 1973; “U.S. Archives Enjoying Bicentennial Boom,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1975.

²⁸⁶ Bruce Nelson, “Library Theft: Our Heritage Gets Mugged,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1976.

²⁸⁷ Patricia Anstett, “Genealogy Comes of Age,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1976.

²⁸⁸ See “Iowa Plans Events,” *Wallace Farmer*, July 14, 1974; Sam Stewart, “Getting Set for a Salute to History,” *South Bay Daily Breeze*, July 15, 1971.

²⁸⁹ “Electric Trolleys to Roll Again in Yakima’s Bicentennial Tribute,” *Bicentennial Times* 2.1 (January, 1975).

²⁹⁰ “Steam Trains and Steam Boats Revive Vermont for Bicentennial,” *Bicentennial Times*, 2.5 (June, 1975).

the “colonial ambience of Old Towne Alexandria complete with period street lighting, brick sidewalks and tree plantings,” which would “enhance this authentic community preservation activity.”²⁹¹ The National Park Service worked with ARBA on a National Parks Rehabilitation Project, funding improvements on twenty historical sites connected with the Revolution.²⁹² Two national projects, the Bicentennial Wagon Train and the Bicentennial Freedom Train, also recalled the American past through, respectively, a reenactment of Western settlement, and a travelling exhibition of historical artifacts. If the federal government had once promoted a celebration that emphasized the ideological legacy of the Revolution in present deeds, the people and organizations that were now most active in the effort worked in the other direction, looking backwards from contemporary times to a focus on the past.

In his rhetoric during the whole of the Bicentennial Era, President Gerald Ford reflected a new affective identification with the people of the past that was characteristic in many of the Bicentennial programs, both national and local. While Johnson and Nixon had referred to the participants in the Revolution as instrumental to the present character of the nation, Ford invited contemporary Americans to “emulate the founders in word and deed.”²⁹³ In other speeches, he suggested that celebrants “draw strength from the past,” and “study carefully the character and qualities of the men who founded this nation” and

²⁹¹Martha Jane Shay to Sid Eiges and Herb Hetu, “Memo re: Briefing material (prepared for *Today* show),” August 7, 1974, ARBA, RG 452, Office of the Administrator: Correspondence with Advisory Council Members, 1976-76, box 96, folder: “ARBA Council--Miscellaneous Correspondence,” NARA II. See also “Bicentennial Sparks Wave of Historic Site Restorations,” *Bicentennial Times* 2.8 (August, 1975).

²⁹² American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People, Volume 2*. (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 152-186.

²⁹³ “President Calls on Nation to Emulate Founders in Word and Deed,” *Bicentennial Times* 3.2 (February, 1976).

“grasp the stuff that was inside them.”²⁹⁴ Where Johnson and Nixon’s rhetoric had pointed to the continuity between the character of the American past and the American present, in the face of the turmoil of the 1970s, Ford’s words emphasized a discontinuity, and a desire to realign the “word and deed” of America’s great past with its troubled present. Significantly, Ford ended the Bicentennial Era where Richard Nixon had begun it, at the National Archives, where the founding documents in their new display were available to the public for seventy-six consecutive hours. At the July 2, 1976 ceremony that opened this vigil, Ford invited Americans to “join with those brave and farsighted Americans in 1776.”²⁹⁵ Ford, like other Americans, wished to draw upon the past to contemplate and reevaluate the present.



Figure 10. Gerald Ford attends a 76-hour vigil at the National Archives. Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 16.

²⁹⁴ “What they Said 200 Years Later in Philadelphia,” *Bicentennial Times* 1.10 (September, 1974); “President Signals Bicentennial Countdown,” *Bicentennial Times*, 2.6 (July, 1975).

²⁹⁵ Gaylord Shaw, “Ford Places Documents of Liberty on Display,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1976.

Ultimately, public opinion evaluating the success of the Bicentennial was mixed. While some commentators saw the celebration as a show of national unity in the face of a crisis of confidence, others charged that commercialism had won the day, and that the American people had not generated a meaningful commemoration. Others still pointed to apathy and non-celebration. This lack of interpretive consensus immediately after the celebration is significant in that it points to the fact that in the end, the Bicentennial was whatever one wanted it to be. What becomes evident is that unlike previous commemorations that had made clear connections between the object of the celebration and the celebration itself, the Bicentennial's meaning became, and remained, destabilized. Instead of a straightforward celebration of the principles of the Revolution and their expansion in the contemporary as it was originally intended, the Bicentennial became an occasion to evaluate the whole of American history. If the original format had assumed and relied upon a stable understanding of the American past and its progression into the present, the final form taken by the Bicentennial reflected both the dissolution of that stable understanding, and an effort to remake it.

Bicentennial Legacy

The trajectory of the Bicentennial mirrors many of the other histories of the 1970s: the political, economic, economic and cultural shifts that defined the decade manifested themselves in debates about the meaning and the nature of the Bicentennial: its leadership and organization, and the way that it was ultimately celebrated. The celebration was first envisioned as a centralized International Exposition, in the context of the last years of the cold war consensus. As the national mood moved away from optimism and progress, the commemoration itself faltered. While questions of political

corruption informed by the Watergate scandals were raised in the fallout over the ARBC appointments and David Mahoney's leadership, economic issues and anxieties about consumerism's place in America's past found expression in the controversy over the "Buy-Centennial." In its final iteration, the celebration mirrored and anticipated, on a symbolic register, larger movements toward decentralization which would result in the neoliberal restructuring of American governance.

Of equal importance, the history of the federal planning of the Bicentennial from 1966 to 1976 affords us an opportunity to look at the history of *history itself*. The core argument of this project is that in the early 1970s a significant change occurred in the way that our culture understands and experiences the past, both in itself and in relation to the present. While the early stages of preparation for the Bicentennial were concerned with the rhetoric of revolution as it was used abroad and with using the celebration as an opportunity to discuss the present and the future, by 1971 and 1972, the planners of the Bicentennial and the public seemed more interested in investigating and engaging with the past: both the Revolutionary era and other moments in American history. Through the Bicentennial itself, the nation was fully engaged in historical activity that, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, was both rooted in larger instabilities *and* fundamentally different in nature. The dissolution of the progressive, linear conception of history, as well as the weakening of the archival body of "official history" that informs commemorative expressions were the results both of social movements that questioned mainstream perception of the past and of larger shifts in subjectivity precipitated by global economic, political, and cultural transformations. Looking at how these informed state management and subject expression during the Bicentennial brings to light not only the critical

relationships between archives, commemoration, and hegemonic power, but also shows how they themselves are mutable.

CHAPTER THREE:
Changing Collection:
New Preservation and Artifact Usage

By the mid-1970s, popular interest in the past exceeded the parameters of the upcoming Bicentennial, yet remained influenced by concurrent planning of the celebration. Historical initiatives which emerged from this new attention focused on the preservation and exhibition of historical objects. We can think of “preservation” as any act of historical engagement that attempts to fix its object as evidence of the past or seeks to gain historical knowledge from material that has been identified and fixed as an artifact. This definition may seem broader than customary, but, in underscoring its breadth, I hope to emphasize the similar assumptions that undergird many seemingly disparate activities. The logic of the archive informs preservation projects—they rely on a sense of difference and separation between the past and the present and emphasize the importance of the artifact being saved in the present.²⁹⁶ But by the beginning of the Bicentennial Era, the archive, both as an ideological exercise of power and in its physical iteration as a stable collection of material that supports canonic narratives of history, had undergone substantial destabilizations. So activities and philosophies surrounding preservation--what was being collected, how it was saved, where it was housed and exhibited, and how it was deployed in the formation of historical accounts--also

²⁹⁶ On the role of artifacts in historical ideation see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Steven Lubar and Kathleen Kendrick, *Legacies: Collecting America's History at the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collects and Collecting* (New York: Overlook Press, 2002); Rachel P. Maines and James J. Glynn, “Numinous Objects,” *The Public Historian* 15.1 (Winter 1993); Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42-56.

experienced a substantial metamorphosis as the past came to occupy a new form and a new cultural position in American society.

At critical sites in historical cultural production--the preservation of buildings, oral history initiatives, and Bicentennial collections and exhibitions--historical objects were used to form new narratives and create historical consciousness that maintained, reoriented, or disrupted hegemonic ideology. The larger reconfiguration of the U.S. national narrative that resulted from transformations in understandings of temporality and the archive led to new and different conceptions, articulations, and uses of historical artifacts. Preservation is particularly important because of the major role that the collection and exhibition of objects has played in shaping historical narratives that legitimate and celebrate nationalistic ideologies. The archive, of course, is deeply connected to hegemonic power--this is why history and its interpretation are critical to the formation of different kinds of identities.²⁹⁷ Through preservation's articulations of ownership of material resources (both in the preserved object and in its maintenance), the political import of the historical becomes essential and new cultural positions with regard to the creation and expression of historical narratives become most evident. Tracing the way that these shifts manifested themselves in a range of preservation projects explains the epistemic break in historical ideation, as well as its uneven development.

While the preservation and exhibition of historical objects continued to be a display of power, changes in the context and reception of preservation projects illustrate the larger factors at work by the 1970s. In 1948, at the height of the cold war consensus of a stable and unquestioned view of the American past, representatives from the

²⁹⁷ On history and the formation of identity, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd Ed. (London: Verso, 1991); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35-73.

government (primarily the Department of Justice and the National Archives) had worked together to create a travelling exhibit called the American Freedom Train. The train crossed the United States, using objects culled from the National Archives to illustrate the country's exceptional development and to promote a celebratory history of the United States. Visitors to this wildly successful enterprise boarded the train at each stop and toured the cars, looking at artifacts that displayed a patriotic and nationalistic history.²⁹⁸ Twenty five years later, in 1973, Ross Rowland, a commodities broker and train enthusiast, quit his full time job to devote the next few years to organizing a new Freedom Train that would commemorate the Bicentennial.²⁹⁹ The media initially hailed Rowland as a great patriot and depicted the Train as a "gift to the United States."³⁰⁰ Federal interests, ranging from Richard Nixon to the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), supported the private endeavor both materially and through publicity.³⁰¹ This support resulted from the success of the first Freedom Train, but also from, the emphasis on artifacts because of which the new project resembled traditional modes of archival history exhibition.

But the new Freedom Train failed to inspire visitors despite its impressive content; disappointed audiences and critics correctly identified an unrepresentative narrative that glossed over everything but the most triumphal and already canonical

²⁹⁸ Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 29-50; Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991) 573-87.

²⁹⁹ Resume of Ross Rowland, January, 1974, Boston 200 (B200) Collection, box 53B, folder: "American Freedom Train," Boston Public Library (BPL).

³⁰⁰ Leonard Sime, "He Will Highball Through on the Freedom Train" *New Brunswick Home News*, June 2, 1974.

³⁰¹ Richard Nixon to Ross Rowland, February 12, 1974, B200, box 80B, folder: "American Freedom Train", BPL; "Ford Talks About Train For Freedom," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1974; Freedom Train Foundation, *All Aboard America*, video recording. Records of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), RG452.21, National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II).

events and actors of American history.³⁰² The artifacts aboard were not enough to create a celebratory history of the United States, nor did they stir confidence and pride in the American past and present. This brief example demonstrates the profound transformation--not only in the use and display of historical objects, but also in audience reception of such displays--that had taken place by the time of the second Freedom Train, and it illustrates the way that state and other hegemonic interests continued to grapple with adapting their own uses of history to these changes. Although the U.S. government remained involved in preservation activity in a variety of ways, new uses of preservation extended far beyond the state. The revolution in preservation had widespread effects and was symptomatic of a larger reorientation of historical subjectivity from the informational to the experiential.

“Preservation is People:” The National Trust and Preservation Redefined

Changes in the preservation of historical buildings was one of the first, and perhaps the most visible, development that signaled a critical redefinition of the purposes and processes of preservation. The impulse to safeguard individual structures as evidence of the past can be traced back over a century to the 1850s preservation of Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, by a group of socially prominent women dismayed to see the first President’s house in ruins.³⁰³ The identification and upkeep of historical buildings was long seen as the provenance of those in power and functioned in a manner similar to many archival projects: as a means of maintaining hegemony by invoking the

³⁰² Eva Roth, “American Freedom Train a ‘Sham’ or Bicentennial’s Biggest Event?” *Albany Knickerbocker News*, March 13, 1975.

³⁰³ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 1-38; John A. Herbst, “Historic Houses,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 98-114.

ownership and display of valuable artifacts. Preservationists selected houses deemed to be the best examples of patrician American culture or associated with famous Americans. Like other archival projects, preservation activity at this time helped to create a visible continuity between the nation's past and its present.³⁰⁴

The federal government sanctioned and supported elite efforts to safeguard the best examples of American life ideologically, but not financially. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was chartered by Congress in 1949, indicating the state's interest in the preservation of aesthetically or historically significant properties.³⁰⁵ The new organization would "preserve current examples of art and buildings as they represented each development in the present and future of the country, alongside the great monuments of the past."³⁰⁶ According to criteria established in 1956, the National Trust chose buildings that had broad historical value, were identified with historic persons or events, or had architectural or landscape value.³⁰⁷ Early targets included the Woodrow Wilson House in Washington D.C., the Wayside Inn in Massachusetts made famous in poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Shadows-on-the-Teche, an antebellum

³⁰⁴ Paul A. Shackel, "Introduction: The Making of the American Landscape," in Paul A. Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 1-16; Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, "Living History Museums" in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 65-7; James M. Lindgren, "A Spirit that Fires the Imagination: Historic Preservation and Cultural Regeneration in Virginia and New England, 1850-1950," in Max Page and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 107-130.

³⁰⁵ "Historic Shrines," *Washington Post*, October 23, 1947; "To Preserve our Heritage," *New York Times*, September 8, 1949.

³⁰⁶ "Culture Trust is Urged, Law Will be Asked to Preserve Historic Sites and Buildings," *New York Times*, November 5, 1948.

³⁰⁷ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Criteria for Evaluating Historic Sites and Buildings," in David E. Finley, *History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1947-1963* (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1965), 95-7.

plantation in Louisiana.³⁰⁸ However, the federal mandate stopped at ownership; Congress did not allot sufficient funds to the National Trust to rehabilitate these properties. Instead, private donors who had a vested interest in preserving examples that reflected their own class positions funded local preservation projects; the past inhabitants of these properties shared a demographic profile with those who now sought to preserve them.³⁰⁹ This early preservation was very much in line with the traditional uses of the archive as a form of hegemonic power; ownership of the evidence of achievements in the past legitimated and supported prominent individuals and groups in the present.³¹⁰ But in the mid-1960s, the nature of historic preservation imperatives and projects started to change as part of a more general reorientation of cultural understanding of the past.

In the early days of urban renewal, preservationists had not seen a conflict between the impulse to build and the impulse to preserve. As late as 1963, an issue of *Antiques* magazine asked members of the preservation community: "Preservation and Urban Renewal: Is Coexistence Possible?" and all responded in the affirmative, calling for cooperation between preservationists and urban planners for a "thoughtful transition between the old and new." One commentator went so far as to call urban renewal a "wolf in sheep's clothing," meaning that redevelopment could lead to expanded preservation activity. "Worthy" historic houses could be moved, or modern structures could be built behind historic facades.³¹¹ What is noteworthy here is the emphasis on single structures

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 14-27. For more examples of buildings favored by preservationists, see Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., *The Living Past of America: A Pictorial Treasury of our Historic Houses and Villages that have been Preserved and Restored* (New York: Crowne Publishers, 1955).

³⁰⁹ See Max Page and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History*.

³¹⁰ See for example, Mike Wallace's work on the founding of Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village by industrialists like John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford. Mike Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 3-32.

³¹¹ "Preservation and Urban Renewal: is Coexistence Possible?" *Antiques Magazine*, October, 1963.

and on the visibility of exterior forms. Historic houses, for this commentator, were there to be *seen*. While, at the height of postwar development, the buildings of the past could be replaced or placed alongside new structures, by the end of the decade, this tidy coexistence would no longer be possible.

But historic preservation had not yet become a popular concern. While some preservationists reconciled their impulse to save historic buildings with support for urban renewal, others worried that any preservation efforts represented a deterrent to postwar modernization. An editorial published in 1964 in the *Chicago Tribune* warned against preservation, questioning the fact that some urban renewal projects were already taking historic sites into account: "It is strange that an agency that is supposed to be devoted to slum clearance and better housing for the poor can divert its energies and funds to such matters as historic taverns and gold-rush towns, particularly under an administration as dedicated to warring on poverty as this one professes to be."³¹² William Slayton, the Commissioner of Urban Renewal under both Kennedy and Johnson, reassured the *Tribune*, "No urban renewal funds are used in the restoration and rehabilitation of any structure. This is prohibited under the urban renewal legislature."³¹³ Federal funding privileged development and modernization efforts, not the preservation of historic buildings; building preservation had not yet penetrated popular consciousness.

The 1966 passage of the National Historic Preservation Act signified the renewed prominence of the historical in direct opposition to the future orientation of the postwar years. This new legislation funded preservation efforts and set up a federal framework for the disbursement and administration of funds. The Department of Interior, through the

³¹² "Misplaced Zeal," *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 1964.

³¹³ William L. Slayton, letter to the editor, *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1964.

National Park Service, maintained registers of historically noteworthy buildings and granted matching funds through state liaisons and partnerships with local governments.³¹⁴ According to a National Park Service pamphlet, the Act was “passed at a time when Americans were becoming increasingly aware of the damage being done to their heritage by modern development.”³¹⁵ This language pitted preservation explicitly *against* modern development, as opposed to imagining a “peaceful coexistence” as preservationists had just a few years earlier. Preservation became not only a central concern of federal agencies, but an activity that involved all levels of government as well as non-state entities such as preservation groups and real estate developers.

The impetus for what came to be called “New Preservation” came from the National Trust and its partners. By the mid-1960s, even boosters and local groups realized that postwar redevelopment emphasized new construction, often at the expense of older buildings.³¹⁶ As a *Washington Post* columnist put it, “there is a revolt against the senseless indignity of urban freeways ruining cities and parks.”³¹⁷ As activists bemoaned lack of federal funding for preservation and rehabilitation, several widely-read books responded to growing dissatisfaction with urban development and lamented the disappearance of older urban sites essential to the creation and maintenance of communities. The continuing popularity of books like Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of*

³¹⁴ National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470).

³¹⁵ Patricia L. Parker “What is the National Historic Preservation Act,” National Park Service, Local Preservation: Distributed by Interagency Resources Division, Washington DC, May, 1987, National Trust Archive, University of Maryland-College Park. See also, Special Committee on Historic Preservation United States Conference of Mayors, *With Heritage So Rich* (New York: Random House, 1966).

³¹⁶ Donald E. Finley, *History of the National Trust For Historic Preservation, 1947-1963* (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1965); James Marson Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990); James A Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990)

³¹⁷ Wolf Von Eckardt, “Freeways Run Into a Blockade,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 1966. See also John Pierson, “They’ll Save Historic Buildings From Demolition,” *Boston Globe*, December 11, 1966.

Great American Cities and Martin Anderson's *The Federal Bulldozer* reflected a growing awareness of history and spurred new interest in the safeguarding of old buildings.³¹⁸ The new attention to preservation echoed the renewed interest in the past in other arenas and proved symptomatic of a growing unease with the political, cultural, and economic upheavals of the present. Urban renewal and modernist architecture had been the most visible hallmarks of the postwar project, and this critique can also be read as an index of dissatisfaction in other registers. The authenticity of historical structures took on a new importance; it became imperative that the government support the maintenance of the old alongside the establishment of the new.

As attention to the preservation of historic structures and sites mounted, the network of preservation activists grew to include community organizers, environmentalists, and others, again signaling the new centrality of the historic to a variety of interests.³¹⁹ By 1972, even the nation's premier preservation organization, the National Trust, embraced the new vision of preservation. In October 1972, the Trust proclaimed in an editorial in *Preservation News* that "Preservation is People," followed by a catalogue of all the different kinds of people (the list included "old people, young people, activists, appreciators, red, brown, yellow, white people, rich people, poor people") who could be active in preservation.³²⁰ Through its newsletter and other publications, the National Trust shared information on best practices, obtaining funding, and building organizations. Both before and after the passage of the 1966 act, it remained

³¹⁸ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal: 1949–1962* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964). For a history of the anti-redevelopment movement, see Samuel Zipp, *The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹⁹ William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 25–35.

³²⁰ "Preservation is People," *Preservation News*, October, 1972.

the most dominant influence in American preservation, but, by the 1970s, even the National Trust advocated new collaborations between the government, cultural organizations, and private interests. The Trust's language expanded the field of preservation and shifted the focus of preservation activity from the object (the historical structure) to the subject—preservation became important not because of the safeguarding of historic places but as a process of historical meaning making and because of its potential effect on community-building.

The new emphasis on use echoed another transformation: historic structures, once thought to be apart from the rest of the physical environment, were now seen as part of it. By 1973, the National Trust *Goals and Programs* spoke of the “amenity value” of historic properties, which in turn, was of concern to “not only to historic preservationists but environmentalists and all those concerned with the development process and land use.”³²¹ Building preservation became linked, in the public imagination, with environmental conservation and the growing interest in ecology would culminate with such activities as the first Earth Day in 1970 and Expo 74 in Washington State.³²² Making use of this connection and of the legislative structures already in place for natural conservation efforts, preservationists argued that old buildings were like any other national resource and must be preserved and used by the public.³²³ The language of conservation has an older and more established history than that of preservation, but at

³²¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Excerpts from Goals and Programs,” 1973, Appendix 23 in Elizabeth D. Mulloy, *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1963-1973* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1976), 281.

³²² See Thomas R. Wellrock, *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements, 1870-2000* (New York: Harlan Davison, 2007), 151-203.

³²³ For more examples of this language, see Stewart Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963); 1976: *Agenda for Tomorrow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1968). Lady Bird Johnson, Forward, in Special Committee on Historic Preservation United States Conference of Mayors, *With Heritage So Rich*, vii-viii.

this moment, the two coincided, precisely because of the new sense of proximity between the past and the present. Thinking about historical structures as parts of an environmental system reflected the fact that the concerns of preservation had moved from discreet buildings to ambient historical spaces as “total” environments.

The objects of preservation efforts also changed: the 1973 version of the National Trust’s goals expanded preservation’s focus to “sites, buildings, structures, objects, and districts...the historic environment comprises areas where significant events have taken place; the cultural environment, areas where distinctive activities and patterns of life have occurred and remain.”³²⁴ As James Biddle, the president of the National Trust, wrote in the Bicentennial history of the organization, “Once the term ‘preservation’ meant saving and restoring buildings of national historical significance, turning them into museums where citizens could come for inspiration.”³²⁵ In the historic preservation community, as in other arenas of American life, the past became a means of understanding the present. Biddle continued, “Only recently has the critical need to remember ‘where we came from’ become obvious to many of us. Only now are we beginning to see how greatly our future depends on our awareness of the past.”³²⁶ Biddle’s description marked a change from the emphases on individual buildings and famous individuals that had characterized the Trust’s earlier efforts.

Local preservation societies responded to the shifts in historic preservation with changes in focus and programming. Rhode Island’s Providence Preservation Society (PPS) was founded in 1956 as a response to the deterioration of College Hill, a

³²⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Excerpts from Goals and Programs,” 1973, Appendix 23 in Mulloy, *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, 281.

³²⁵ James Biddle, introduction in Mulloy, *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, xi.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

neighborhood filled with colonial-era residential houses in need of repair.³²⁷ The organization's charter noted that PPS was "dedicated to the principle that the evidence of the past is an asset for the future. We realize that in order to protect our significant architectural legacy we must accept the responsibilities as well as the privileges which come with living in an old city."³²⁸ By 1958, the PPS had been named a leading preservation organization by *Look* magazine and had helped to save or restore several buildings. That same year, the PPS instituted an annual tour of historic houses in College Hill which raised money for and drew attention to the Society.³²⁹ Early tours emphasized the architectural details of colonial houses. For example, a house might be described thus: "the lintel shaped blocks of the downstairs window caps and the upper window caps which are part of the eaves cornice are characteristic detail of eighteenth-century building style."³³⁰ Interest in building preservation at this time was still rather insular; the assumed audience for this kind of text already had prior architectural and historic knowledge. PPS continued to have a major impact on the revival of College Hill in the 1960s by working with homeowners and with private interests to renovate, rehabilitate, and, in some cases, even move houses in the area. While preservation in Providence, as elsewhere, gained new prominence at this moment, this example illustrates how the focus for the bulk of the 1960s remained single homes, exteriors, and the colonial era.³³¹

³²⁷ Providence Preservation Society (PPS), *Forty; 1956-1996*, commemorative booklet, (Providence: Providence Preservation Society, 1996) commemorative booklet, Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RIHS).

³²⁸ PPS, *First Street Festival*, May 16th, 1958, booklet, RIHS.

³²⁹ William McKenzie Woodward, *1956-1981, Providence Preservation Society 25th Anniversary* commemorative booklet, (Providence: Providence Preservation Society, 1981), 4-6, RIHS.

³³⁰ PPS, *First Street Festival*, May 16th, 1958, booklet, RIHS. See also PPS, *Third Street Festival*, May 6, 1960, booklet, RIHS; PPS, *Seventh Annual Street Festival*, May 16th, 1964, booklet, RIHS.

³³¹ For an excellent account of PPS' early activities see Briann Greenfield, "Marketing the Past: Historic Preservation in Providence, Rhode Island," in Max Page and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 163-184.

In the 1970s, the Providence Preservation Society transformed along the general trajectory of other preservation interests, starting new projects and initiating immersive and self-directed engagements with the past. The PPS discontinued the annual historic house tour in 1971, instead developing regular tours that emphasized the social and political history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, using individual houses and historic figures to paint a broader picture of life in the past.³³² Between 1974 and 1975, income from the tours increased four times, perhaps reflecting the wider cultural interest in history in general and preservation specifically.³³³ In the early 1970s, the PPS began to concentrate on Providence's downtown; instead of eighteenth-century houses, the organization became interested in nineteenth-century hotels, train stations, and department stores, all of which were falling into disrepair. The PPS released a self-guided tour called "City Exploration," with directions such as: "participate in the tensions of the city walls. The interplay of old and new building shapes. Compare old and new. Feel their difference with your hands and eyes. Feel the space, the boundaries of that space and looking up record the different qualities of the city walls."³³⁴ The guides contained no architectural information and invited visitors to make their own meaning. The difference between this language and the previous PPS guides mirrors the preservation movement's general turn towards the individual, the experiential, and the environmental.

In 1976, to celebrate the Bicentennial, the Providence Preservation Society produced new self-guided material to promote both its old and new ventures. Leo

³³² PPS, "Explore Historic Providence," press release, March, 1975, Collection of Providence Preservation Society (CPPS), MSS 241, box 14, folder: "Tours Past, 1975," RIHS; "Third tour: Early 19th century--Age of the China Trade," 1974, CPPS, MSS 241, box 14, folder: "Broadsides, Written Materials," RIHS.

³³³ "Education Committee Report, Tours Program, Analysis of Income: 1970 to date," November 12, 1975, CPPS, MSS 241, box 14, folder: "Tours Past, 1975," RIHS.

³³⁴ Johnette Isham, PPS, "City Exploration," [n.d., ca. 1972], CPPS, MSS 241, Box 14, Folder, "Downtown Tour," RIHS.

Blackman, an undergraduate student in urban history at nearby Brown University, wrote and illustrated two new guides that emphasized self-directed and immersive historical engagement, everyday life in the past, and accessible language, suggesting that, by this time, the PPS appealed to and serviced a larger audience.³³⁵ The first of these guides, *Looking Up Downtown*, produced in conjunction with several downtown businesses, extended the Society's interest in downtown Providence and painted a vivid picture of the past: "The next five buildings on your left formed the heart of the shopping district at the turn of the century, when countless Gibson-girl Victorian ladies with sweeping skirts and plumed hats filled Westminster Street, shopping and socializing, and meeting at the Shepard's clock for lunch."³³⁶ PPS introduced *Explore Historic Providence!* to mark the celebration of the Bicentennial. This guide highlighted buildings and commercial structures in College Hill, again using language that directed the tourist's attention not to individual structures, but to the ambiance of the area: "Walk along North Main to Thomas Street, the site of several handsome houses built shortly after the Meeting House. They suggest how a prosperous Rhode Islander lived in the later 18th century. As you continue along North Main, imagine both sides of the street lined with wood frame houses of a plainer sort, as it would have been in 1776. . .this end bustled with homes and shops."³³⁷ This is a far cry from "the lintel shaped blocks of the downstairs window" that had described the same structures in the previous decades. The Providence Preservation Society was only one of countless local organizations that continued to develop

³³⁵ Leo Blackman, drafts for Downtown Tour [n.d., ca.1975-6], CPPS, MSS 241, box 14, folder: "Downtown Tour," RIHS.

³³⁶ Leo Blackman, PPS, *Looking Up Downtown*, broadside, 1976, RIHS. See also, "Looking Up Downtown" *PPS News*, October 14, 1974, Antoinette Downing Papers, MSS 98, box 22, folder: "Clippings and Posters," RIHS

³³⁷ Leo Blackman, *Explore Historic Providence*, broadside, 1976, Collection of Providence Preservation Society, MSS 241, box 14, folder: "Broadside of Historic Providence, 1976," RIHS.

throughout the 1960s and 70s, but it was one of the most active and, by the time of the Bicentennial, had embraced new notions of preservation.

As people became more interested in the evidence of the past, the nature of structural preservation changed from saving a single exemplar of “history” to creating spatial historical ambience in a larger context, paying attention to landscape elements as well as the structures they surrounded. Preservation initiatives began to speak of the “total fabric of an area,” noting that “preservation activities must consider inter-relationships between people and architecture, buildings and activities, space and buildings, decisions and budgets, public and private investments, culture and commerce.”³³⁸ Perhaps as a result of its reorientation towards corporate interests, a development stimulated by the increased funding possibilities opened up by the new legislation, newer preservation projects underscored functionality. Often group preservations sought to create “main streets” and commercial districts, where rehabilitated buildings could be used to generate income for upkeep and further preservation.³³⁹ Preservation activity, with its new connections among government, commerce and business, followed other models of neoliberal development that were becoming prevalent in political and cultural activity.³⁴⁰

Bicentennial celebrations in other cities also included preservation projects that sought to create ambient historical space. Boston 200 worked with several local historical societies to rebuild prominent buildings along the city’s Freedom Trail walking tour, so

³³⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Excerpts from Goals and Programs,” 1973, Appendix 23 in Mulloy, *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, 282-3.

³³⁹ See Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr. and Walter C. Kidney, *Historic Preservation in Small Towns*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local Histories, 1980); Nathan Weinberg, *Preservation in American Towns and Cities* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979); Antoinette J. Lee, ed. *Past Meets Future: Saving America’s Historic Environments* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1992).

³⁴⁰ On public-private partnerships in local cultural organizations see Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

that visitors could better imagine themselves in the Boston of the Revolutionary era.³⁴¹

The Freedom Trail included sites like Paul Revere's House, the site of the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party Ship. In anticipation of a spike in tourism stemming from the upcoming Bicentennial, Boston 200 addressed problems of accessibility and interpretation at some of the sites. The language used by Boston 200 in describing the new focus of Freedom Trail funding and programming spoke directly to the shift in the object of preservation from individual sites to historic ambience: "The 16 sites it joins together are important not simply because of their age or architectural significance . . . they can call to mind the turmoil and the richness of life in that community of 16,000, at the time of the Revolution." Interestingly, Boston 200 identified outmoded preservation principles as a specific site of change: "the problem stems from the custodial and preservationist orientation of the sites."³⁴² The group's proposal for these new improvements spoke of "making history alive and meaningful," by emphasizing the act of walking through all of these locations and reliving the beginnings of the Revolution from the perspective of Boston's "community of 16,000." The Freedom Trail, one of the nation's most prominent syndicate of preserved sites, shifted attention from to individual sites to an emphasis on the interconnectedness of the sites and the experience of moving between them. In order to facilitate this conversion, Boston 200 used language that made evident the transition from old preservation to new.

³⁴¹ Katherine Kane to William Underwood Company, "Proposal for Improvement of Freedom Trail," July 24, 1974, B200, box 40, folder: "Freedom Trail/Underwood Proposal," BPL; see also, Boston 200 brochures, "Boston's Freedom Trail," (1975) and "The Americans are Coming, The Americans are Coming!," (1975) B200, box 43, folder: "Public Relations and Advertising: Brochures," BPL.

³⁴² Katherine Kane to William Underwood Company, Proposal for Improvement of Freedom Trail, July 24, 1974, B200, box 40, folder: "Freedom Trail/Underwood Proposal," BPL.

The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC) also became involved in new preservation by sponsoring a national Bicentennial program that restored old train stations, opera houses, and other historical sites as community centers for use by local groups. The National Trust partnered with ARBC on several preservation projects, all of which combined the new preservation with the language of community that ARBC and later ARBA used and that mirrored the Trust's own new interests. "Meeting House 76," sought to fund the restoration of 55 historic sites which would be "used as a meeting place for all citizens concerned with the preservation of our cultural heritage and the quality of our physical environment."³⁴³ In November 1972, ARBC's central office sent the Meeting House proposal to individual state Bicentennial commissions. The Meeting House could be any building (suggestions included an old theatre building or a remnant of a ghost town) but, importantly, not an existing or past federal structure. The emphasis on vernacular buildings is significant and parallels other contemporaneous developments in preservation.³⁴⁴ At the same time, ARBC's effort to centralize the Meeting House program is evidence of the organization's ongoing efforts to render a national program. The Meeting Houses' proposal, like the Bicentennial Parks described in the previous chapter, established and coordinated a national network of celebration. The program description underscored the developing connections between anti-redevelopment, preservation initiatives, and the environmental movement and emphasized the shift in

³⁴³ National Trust for Historic Preservation and ARBC, "Meeting House Preservation Act," memo May, 1973. ARBA, RG 452 A1-70: Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box 260, folder: "Meeting House Preservation Act," NARA II; See also "Heritage Meeting House" [n.d. ca. December 1973], ARBA, RG 452 A1-93: Programs, States and Communities Division: General Records Relating to the Heritage Program, 1971-1975, box 311, folder: "Presentation for Warner," NARA II.

³⁴⁴ Correspondence between David Goodman, ARBC, and Howard Lancour, Michigan, November 16, 1972; Charles "Pat" Hall, Wyoming, November 18, 1972. ARBA, 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 26, folder: "Heritage '76," NARA II.

preservation towards use. As the National Trust wrote, “such a meeting place would intertwine the efforts of citizens concerned with saving our inherited open spaces, water, air, and other natural resources with the efforts of citizens preserving our historic man-made features.”³⁴⁵ Put another way, the primary function of historical sites was transitioning from spaces of reflection on the past to spaces of engagement *with* the past. This is why the language of conservation, with its similar emphasis on sensory immersion in an environment, fit well with the discourses of New Preservation. Newly restored Meeting Houses would not become museums or even cultural centers. Instead, they would be used by communities interested in both the built and natural environments.

The new interest in preservation as well as the state’s attitude towards the efforts mirrored the new centrality of history in general and the role of preservation in helping individuals feel a sense of history in particular. A proposal for historic markers in Lexington submitted to Boston 200 made historical awareness’ potential for social change explicit, stating that historical towns could be vital for Americans losing a sense of place and could be used to “encourage citizens and visitors to relate this information to the quality of their own lives.” The proposal echoes New Preservation’s emphasis on environment in its language: “historical towns which have environmental integrity--a rhythm of related shapes, similar building materials, the amenity of common spaces--are an increasingly important resource both to residents and to visitors.”³⁴⁶ In a society felt to be in turmoil, historic sites and their interpretations could help individuals regain centeredness through immersion and contemplation. Historic preservation was one

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ronald Lee Fleming, Vision Inc., Cambridge, Mass. Proposal: "A Marker Project for Lexington," July 1974, B200, box 26 NI, folder” “Neighborhood Exhibits,” BPL.

strategy with which individuals, organizations, and the government attempted to understand their relationships with the past.

Despite the 1976 passing of new tax legislation that favored preservation over demolition and the federal government's continued goal to make preservation an attractive site for public-private partnerships, the state's interest in historical preservation as a primary site for promoting nationalist sentiment rooted in an image of an idealized American past declined in the mid- 1970s.³⁴⁷ The National Parks Service, the Department of Interior, and other agencies transferred their efforts and resources into projects that reflected the movement towards an immersive and experiential sense of history and that used preserved artifacts in new ways, or not at all. Despite the substantial funding invested in the Meeting House program in the early years of Bicentennial planning, by 1975, ARBA's promotion of Meeting House '76 had all but disappeared and its proponents actively sought funding from other public and private sources.³⁴⁸ Historic preservation was one of the first places at which the epistemic break in historicity and historical subjectivity became evident, but ultimately, precisely because modes of ideation were moving away from preservation of the material and towards the creation of the experiential, the state withdrew the earlier support that it had given. Building preservation remained a significant mode of popular interaction with the past, but by the time of the Bicentennial, it was no longer the primary mode of state engagement with the historical.

³⁴⁷ Marcy Lifton, "Historic Preservation and the Tax Reform Act of 1976" *University of San Francisco Law Review* 11.3 (Spring 1977), 458-9.

³⁴⁸ "Minutes of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Meeting House Program. December 17, 1975, Helen Byrd (National Trust) to George Ebner, (Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission), December 22, 1975, Archives of the Department of Commerce, Bicentennial Commission (DCBD), RG 318, box 3, folder: "Meeting Houses-ARBC," Pennsylvania State Archives (PSA).

Preservation as People: New Oral History Initiatives

For the National Trust and other building preservationists at the time, the slogan "Preservation is People" meant the democratization of involvement in preservation activism, but in other ways, preservation became *literally* individuals as oral history initiatives, reflective of the new social history's effort to document the experience of everyday people. Oral history moved notions of historical evidence from the object to the experience, a shift that demonstrated the new cultural desire to understand the feelings, not just the facts, of the past. In the 1970s, oral history was part of a preservation impetus that shared, across genres, many of the same assumptions about the importance of the past to understanding the present. Like some of the building first preservation projects, oral histories had their roots in the New Deal, but by the 1970s, the practice experienced a resurgence. The Oral History Association reported that between 1965 and 1973, the number of current oral history projects jumped from 89 to 316.³⁴⁹ Universities, historical societies, and community groups all became involved in oral histories. Just national history became reconceptualized as everyday history, leading to the preservation of different kinds of buildings, oral histories became an central mode of documenting the experience of ordinary people and the everyday past.

After the landmark Works Progress Administration projects of the 1930s, oral history centers had been established at Columbia University and other institutions in the 1940s and 50s, but these for the most part collected recollections from politicians and other well-known individuals. Oral histories in this context complemented existing political archives and documented famous historical events, as opposed to the more banal

³⁴⁹ Cited in Columbia University Oral History Research Office, Annual Report, 1975, 3. Rockefeller Library, Brown University.

incidences of the past.³⁵⁰ In the 1970s, oral history projects expanded to include the experience of “everyday people.” During this decade, slave histories collected by the WPA began to be used in scholarship that reinvestigated the experience of the enslaved. Oral historian Studs Terkel’s books about the Great Depression and labor in the United States found widespread popularity, indicating the growing currency of first-person experience and testimony.³⁵¹ Terkel’s books coincided with the push towards social history which also focused on history “from the bottom up” and resulted in projects that moved these historical imperatives out of the academy and into communities.³⁵²

As a form of history practice, oral history gained prominence because many of its mandates coincided with scholarly and popular interest in the everyday experience of actors on the periphery of standard accounts. Oral histories brought the past into the present and often resulted in emotional revelations from those interviewed. At the same time, interviewers were also sometimes profoundly affected, as indicated by the extensive body of methodological literature related to this complex relationship.³⁵³ For interviewees, participating in oral history programs could be life-affirming and identity-

³⁵⁰ Rebecca Sharpless, “The History of Oral History,” in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* (Lanham, MA: Alta Mira Press, 2007), 9-32. See also Columbia University Oral History Research Office, Annual Report, 1963-5, Rockefeller Library, Brown University.

³⁵¹ Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970); Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). See also Adam Cohen, “Studs Terkel’s Legacy: A Vivid Window on the Great Depression,” *New York Times*, November 8, 2008. For examples of histories of slavery that use WPA oral histories as evidence, see Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Press, 1977); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Press, 1976).

³⁵² James E. Fogerty, “Oral History and Archives: Documentary Context” in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *History of Oral History*, 197-226.

³⁵³ For early theorizations of this relationship, see Robert Menninger, “Some Psychological Factors Involved in Oral History Interviewing,” *Oral History Review* (1975), 68-75. For more contemporary accounts, see David H. Mould, “Interviewing,” in Donna M. Deblasio, Charles F. Ganzert et al., *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History* (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2009), 82-103; Valerie Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’ Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 54-72.

building exercises that, through the process of recognition and testimony, led to concrete activism; there are many examples of community oral history initiatives fueling housing protests, labor action, and other kinds of political involvement.³⁵⁴ The potential for politicization within oral history practice is undergirded by affective engagement with the past for both interviewer and the interviewed subject.

Oral history projects also represent an intervention in the archive that extended the definition of evidence and artifact while working to increase access. Practitioners spoke about the importance of documentation: saving transcripts and recordings for future researchers, for whom a sense of everyday life in a past historical moment might prove to be invaluable. Public use is also key tenet of oral history practice; practitioners commonly affirm that an oral history does not become an oral history until it is available to the public in some form.³⁵⁵ With these frameworks, oral histories in the 1960s and 1970s became a vital means of democratizing the archive, of opening up to new modes and sources of documentation and evidence, just as did other large history projects of the era.³⁵⁶

The discourse of oral history privileges the moment of recollection and the moment of interaction between interviewer and interviewee as the principal site of the interview's importance, echoing the liminality of new historical ideation and its emphasis on the experience of the historical in the present. But despite mandates to the contrary, oral histories, after the initial recording and transcription, are often not put to use; the act

³⁵⁴ Donald A Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁵⁶ For oral history projects at this moment see Sara Jenkins, *Past Present: Recording Life Stories of Older People* (Washington DC: St. Alban's Parish, 1978); William Lunwood Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970); Carl Oblinger, *Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania: A Conceptual Guide to Oral History* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1978); Glenn Porter, *The Workers World at Hagley* (Wilmington: Hagley Foundation, 1981).

of archiving oral histories looks towards the future but might foreclose the political potentiality of the present moment that is one of the other tenets of oral history practice. Although oral history is and has been touted by proponents as a mode of political participation for marginalized populations (the elderly, students), because of this lack of attention to application and use, oral history projects sometimes exclude these very populations by consigning their testimony simultaneously to the past (in the form of the original recollection) and to the future (in the stressing of usefulness to future researchers). When thinking through oral histories as a new form of preservation in the late 1960s and 1970s, it is essential to consider the full continuum of their production and conservation in order to judge the success of the methodology's own political goals.

The newfound popularity of oral histories led to Bicentennial endeavors like Boston 200's "Neighborhoods" program in which local students interviewed elderly residents of 27 Boston neighborhoods, collecting oral histories to be published as Boston 200-produced booklets highlighting neighborhood histories. The interviews chosen for publication featured mostly nostalgic remembrances of growing up in prewar Boston.³⁵⁷ The booklets themselves subsumed the oral histories into more sweeping narratives that used such traditional archival materials as maps and city records peppered with the mostly positive recollections of the Boston 200 interviewees.³⁵⁸ Modular exhibits in local

³⁵⁷ Dale Rosen, "Bi-Centennial Neighborhood History Project: A draft proposal" July, 1973, B200, box 26NI, folder: "proposals," BPL; Lew Carter, "Boston 200 Press Release: Boston Neighborhood Exhibits Funded," August 22, 1974, B200, box 26NI, folder: "Neighborhood Exhibits," BPL; Eleanor K Welch, "Hanging Out at the Jeffries Point Reading Room," *East Boston Community News*, April 15, 1975. For oral history transcripts, see B200, box 30 NI, folder: "East Boston," BPL.

³⁵⁸ Booklets for Hyde Park, East Boston, North End, South End, Charlestown, South Boston, Chinatown, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain, The Fenway, Roslindale, West Roxbury, Brighton, B200, box 26NI, folder: "Oral History Booklets," BPL.

libraries supplemented the booklets, concentrating on much of the same material.³⁵⁹ The “Neighborhoods” program used oral histories to make the project appear representative of Boston’s local residents, but in the final output, more traditional forms of evidence, such as maps and photographs, dominated the accounts.

In one Boston neighborhood, Mission Hill, Richard Broadman, a social studies teacher and filmmaker, noticed the discrepancy between the exhibitions and what he understood to be the history of Mission Hill, and he launched a campaign to unearth stories neglected in the oral history project, such as the presence of labor organizing and the erosion of industry in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶⁰ Interviewed in a local paper, Broadman said of the Boston 200 project: “They took the cream off the top and apparently interviewed only the middle class families who are the supporters of Mission Church, the people who stayed here. I talked to old Teamsters in the nursing homes, old shoe factory workers who don't see that as their story.”³⁶¹ Broadman’s comment could easily be applied to the other Neighborhoods projects produced by Boston 200. Not only did the interviews and their immediate results (the booklets and exhibits) miss the potentiality of oral history practices to reveal new perspectives, but the records they generated also fell by the wayside. The tapes and transcripts produced in the project ended up in the corporate archive of Boston 200 at the Boston Public Library, where they are not, for the most part, catalogued, and are stored in cardboard boxes without proper climate

³⁵⁹“Gala Celebration at Opening of Bicentennial Exhibit,” *Waterfront Era* 3.4 (June, 1975), B200, box 30NI, folder: “Waterfront,” BPL; “West Roxbury Historical Booklet Now Available,” *West Roxbury Transcript*, September 15, 1976, B200, box 30NI, folder: “West Roxbury,” BPL.

³⁶⁰ Jane White, “Filmmaker tries to capture spirit of Mission Hill history,” *Brookline Ledger*, June 18, 1976. Boston 200 Collection, Box 30NI, Folder: “Mission Hill,” Boston Public Library.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

control.³⁶² The Neighborhoods program illustrated the multiple and sometimes contradictory implications of all historic practice and, specifically, the shortcomings of wide adaptations of oral history methods. While this particular oral history project purported to give a voice to the elderly residents of many Boston neighborhoods, including South Boston and Roxbury, two areas where urban blight and poverty had destroyed older communities, it emphasized the interviews themselves as opposed to either their contents as viable interventions into history or their potentiality as resources for future researchers. The booklets that emerged from the program portrayed regressive histories that did not reflect the main tenets of oral history practice.

As part of ARBC's response to new public interest in the historical, in 1972, the Commission began to sponsor a visible existing oral history project that had already gained significant public attention.³⁶³ Foxfire was started in the Appalachian region in 1966 and paired high school students with members of their larger communities—usually family and neighbors. In these oral histories, interviewers and subjects discussed daily life in the Appalachians, focusing on folk traditions and practices. Students from one of the poorest parts of the nation learned skills such as interviewing, transcription, and recording that could be applied in the workplace. Working on oral histories also gave them confidence and increased feelings of self-worth, and established new partnerships within their communities.³⁶⁴ The Foxfire programs resulted in a quarterly magazine and a popular series of books that spoke to the larger resurgence of interest in American folk

³⁶² See Boston 200 Collection, Boston Public Library, boxes 1NI-4NI for original tapes, 21-30 for transcripts.

³⁶³ Jack LeVant, "Director's Statement to ARBC," August 1, 1972, ARBA, RG 452-A1-01, box 27, folder: "director," NARA II.

³⁶⁴ John L. Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered: A Twenty Year Experiment in Progressive Education* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

culture.³⁶⁵ Foxfire differed from other oral history projects at this moment because, although interviews encompassed a wide variety of topics, many focused on the preservation of folk traditions. Interviewers solicited step-by-step instructions on such topics as hog dressing, log cabin building, and moonshining.³⁶⁶ While the purpose of Foxfire's documentation was to preserve craft tradition, this information proved useful for many Americans involved in experimental living and commune culture, which also emphasized crafts and handwork.³⁶⁷ Foxfire showed not only the new forms that oral history took at this moment but also the practice's potential to appeal to new audiences.³⁶⁸ ARBC thus funded Foxfire to capitalize on an already existing and vibrant movement and to broaden federal association with different history based initiatives, but for Foxfire, participation in the official Bicentennial brought new programs, sources of funding, and participants.

The potential of oral history for revealing new information and influencing the lives of its subjects was theorized as innate to the form (and might be connected to consciousness raising and other discursive politics which emerged at this time), but oral histories needed to be translated from the site of the interview. Oral histories, such as those conducted by Boston 200, can become "trapped" by the archive (maintained

³⁶⁵ Eliot Wigginton, ed., *Foxfire: 25 Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Eliot Wigginton, ed., *Foxfire 5* (New York: Anchor Press, 1977); Eliot Wigginton, ed., *Foxfire 4* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975).

³⁶⁶ Eliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book* (New York: Anchor Press, 1972).

³⁶⁷ For the popularity of *Foxfire* in counterculture, see Michael Allen, "'I Just Want to be a Cosmic Cowboy:' Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a Counterculture," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 36.3 (Autumn, 2005), 275-299. See also Arthur Kopecky, *New Buffalo: Journals from a Taos Commune* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

³⁶⁸ Jack Levant, Director's Statement to ARBC Chairman, August 1, 1972. ARBA, RG 452 A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 27, folder: "reports," NARA II. See also "Institutional Development & Economic Affairs Service (IDEAS) and Foxfire, Program Narrative," September, 1972, ARBA, RG 452 A1-70: Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box 258, folder: "Foxfire," NARA II. For a general history of the Foxfire project, see John L. Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered*.

outside of the sphere of participation) and folded into more traditional histories. In contrast, the Foxfire oral histories not only provided empowerment, skills, and resources to both interviewed subjects and interviewers, but were also useful to a larger audience interested in folk tradition and practice. The archive, as an expression of conservative power, did destabilize in the 1970s, but its innate properties ensured that some of its structural articulations of relations of power remained. The emergence of oral history as a prominent practice points to new interventions in archival practice, a larger emphasis on experience, and an understanding of past and present as mutually resonant, all characteristic of the way that historical ideation was changing in the late 1960s and 70s.

Collection as Critique: Bicentennial Schlock

The emergence of the New Preservation movement and new oral history projects pointed to shifts in cultural understandings of archival practice in terms of what kinds of objects should be saved and what kinds of stories should be collected. In the same way that building preservation initiatives began to emphasize the preservation of more recent structures, recent artifacts also attracted new critical attention. Some museums began to expand their collecting of current artifacts—for example, the Smithsonian’s Division of Political Life began sending curators to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions in order to collect memorabilia, they also reached out to the Black Panthers and other contemporary political groups.³⁶⁹ Collection outside of traditional cultural institutions also grew; as mentioned in Chapter One, many individuals began accumulating clothes and housewares from the earlier decades of the twentieth century, most prominently, the 1950s and the late nineteenth century. New amateur collectors

³⁶⁹ Herbert Collins to Brooke Hindle, June 10, 1976, Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA), National Museum of American History, Division of Political History, 1960-1982, box 1, folder: “July, 1976,” Smithsonian Institution (SI).

accrued objects (clothes, furniture) that they both displayed and used as part of sensory and aesthetic engagements with the past.³⁷⁰

Others started thinking about collection as a political process or as a chance to reflect on the practice itself. As part of a class project, Jesse Lemisch, a lecturer in American Studies at the State University of New York in Buffalo, began gathering Bicentennial memorabilia for a collection he called “Bicentennial Schlock.” Lemisch’s collection, eventually exhibited at SUNY-Buffalo and then archived at Yale’s Sterling Library, included commemorative dishes, clothing, posters, and every other kind of Bicentennial ephemera available, both “official” (i.e., sanctioned by ARBA) and not.³⁷¹ The collection had two purposes: first, Lemisch’s class sought to examine how Americans were commemorating their Bicentennial. Second, the collection illustrated how the public remembered and expressed American history through interactions with consumer culture.³⁷² Writing at the time for *The New Republic*, Lemisch stated, “Bicentennial Schlock was, in a sense, the Watergate of patriotism: a healthy demystification which makes us wisely cynical and distrustful of many things that we should have been distrustful of before.”³⁷³ That Lemisch explicitly connected Bicentennial consumerism to a political scandal emphasizes distrust of the Bicentennial as a state-organized activity, especially by the Left, but it also showed how this distrust could be articulated about, on one hand, uses of history and, on the other, commercialism. “Bicentennial Schlock” took advantage of the ways in which preservation itself was

³⁷⁰ See Henry Allen, “Yesteryear Shock,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 1971; Lawrence Van Gelder, “Nightshirts, for Fashionably Cozy Sleepwalkers,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1976.

³⁷¹ Bicentennial Schlock Collection, Sterling Memorial Library, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

³⁷² The connections between citizenship and consumptions have also been explored by Lizbeth Cohen in *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

³⁷³ Jesse Lemisch, “Bicentennial Schlock,” *The New Republic*, November 6, 1976, 21-23.

being reconsidered in the context of larger developments in the understanding of, and engagement with, history and how it could be deployed for explicitly political means.

Lemisch's collection called attention to what he saw to be the gross consumerist ethic of the Bicentennial festivities, but "Bicentennial Schlock" can also be seen in the framework of changes to the assumptions undergirding the archive as an inquiry and intervention into collecting practices in terms of object and purpose. But Lemisch also did something else; he used archival practice as a critique—building a collection not to uphold state hegemony, but to question it. He took Bicentennial items out of circulation, saving Bicentennial ephemera that were meant to be used to celebrate the Bicentennial at the time of the commemoration and only afterwards to memorialize that commemoration. In doing this, Lemisch questioned the celebration itself.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, Lemisch selected for preservation objects uniformly deemed to be in bad taste, contrary to older practices of archiving only historically and aesthetically significant objects. The Bicentennial ephemera, in Lemisch's eyes, represented the government's (i.e. ARBA) and capitalist culture's continued ownership and control over the expression of history, as well as a commodification of that expression. Lemisch stated that the souvenirs that made up his collection, "floated down from above, and responded to no popular longing to celebrate the Bicentennial."³⁷⁵ By encouraging memorabilia, ARBA denied opportunities for "true" expressions of patriotism and contemplation on the occasion of the Bicentennial.

The collection started out in the classroom but soon had wider currency, Lemisch wrote: "I had decided to see, together with the students, what we made of the Bicentennial as well: to look at the conflicting versions of America's past, present and

³⁷⁴ On the souvenir, see Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire" in *On Longing*, 132-169.

³⁷⁵ Jesse Lemisch, "Bicentennial Schlock," 23.

future presented by the Bicentennial, and to relate them to the various and conflicting definitions of America-to-be that were present at the nation's beginning."³⁷⁶ Several newspapers reported on Lemisch's collection, suggesting the cultural resonance of his activities. Much of this interest coincided with other popular critiques of Bicentennial commemoration, as Lemisch stated, "After a long year of American history Disneyfied and cartoonified, historians may have a harder time selling an overly deferential view of some of the heroes of our past."³⁷⁷ In calling attention to what he saw as the dangers of such expressions of history, and arguably by removing the memorabilia from the original context of its use and circulation, Lemisch attempted to bring back the possibility for such reflection.

Nonetheless, the collection upheld some of the principles of archival practice even as it questioned them: Lemisch used his artifacts as evidence, not *of* U.S. state hegemony, but against it. From another perspective, however, Lemisch made his intervention *in terms* of the dominant logic of the archive, as opposed to an interrogation and investigation of alternative strategies. Lemisch's critique of the Bicentennial history--that it was too "Disneyfied"--echoed the fears of Christopher Lasch, Alvin Toffler, and others writing at this time and might have missed the larger point of the shift in history itself. Lemisch's adaption of preservation in making his critique is further testimony to the expansion of the archive and of the increased availability of preservation activity as a means of political critique. Bicentennial Schlock reflected the basic cultural tenets of preservation--objects acting as evidence and the ideological activity of preservation--but

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.; see also, "Bicentennial Schlock Spoofs Tradition," *New York Times*, Monday October 11, 1976.

used them to make a critique of the U.S. government's handling of the celebration, specifically its emphasis on souvenirs and its reading of history itself.

The American Freedom Train: History Incorporated

Although many of the ARBA-sponsored Bicentennial programs demonstrated changing ideas about both preservation projects and the archive in general, other undertakings remained invested in older assumptions about the role of historic objects in nation and nationalism but presented these objects in novel settings that mirrored new ideas towards the past. An investigation of the planning and implementation of the American Freedom Train shows, on the one hand, an effort by conservative corporations and public officials to use an older model of commemoration to reassert an older, celebratory rendering of American history and, on the other, the transference of such symbolic nation-building activities from the realm of the federal government to private corporations. As described in Chapter Two, public-private partnerships emerged on the local level with such ventures as Boston 200, the Philadelphia '76 Corporation, and the many preservation initiatives that sprung up as a result of the tax code changes regarding building and renovation. The negative reception of the American Freedom Train points to the problems of this model at a moment during which such a unified and monumental representation of history was no longer possible.

Much had been made of the Freedom Train Foundation's founder and president Ross Rowland's decision to leave his "six-figure Wall Street job" to devote himself to his singular dream, but in reality, his new work, like his old, paired him with corporate

interests in the service of furthering U.S. political and economic hegemony.³⁷⁸ Although Rowland and his associates initially sought federal funding for their project, he ultimately secured the sponsorship of several multinational corporations including PepsiCo, General Motors (which was concurrently cosponsoring the history exhibits at Disney's EPCOT center), and Kraft, which helped pay for the restoration of the historic engine and cars, as well as for the storage and care of the artifacts exhibited aboard.³⁷⁹ President Richard Nixon supported the plan and wrote a letter praising the Freedom Train to be included in publicity material sent out to the press and to local chambers of commerce. ARBA worked with Rowland in negotiating federal agencies such as the Department of Transportation. The Department of Interior secured local support for the train, including accommodations and parking renovations at each stop.³⁸⁰ In 1974, ARBA Administrator John Warner appeared in *All Aboard America*, a short film produced by the American Freedom Train Foundation, calling the Freedom Train one of the Bicentennial's "biggest events."³⁸¹ The fact that the Freedom Train had its genesis in another government project might partially explain Nixon and ARBA's support, but the Freedom Train also represented an older style of artifact display connected to the World's Fair tradition--one that foregrounded nationalistic sentiment in an explicit manner and which would thus appeal to state entities using the Bicentennial to generate a renewal of patriotic sentiment among American publics.

³⁷⁸ Robert Davis, "Old Time Train Cars Give a Glimpse at the Bicentennial," *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1974; Bob Wiedrich, "A Ticket to History and the Bicentennial," *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1975; Margot Hornblower, "Bicentennial Freedom Train Planned," *Washington Post*, December 19, 1974.

³⁷⁹ Margot Hornblower, "Ford Talks About Train For Freedom," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1974; Bill Hance, "Porter, Dolly Record Nation's Birthday Song," *Nashville Banner*, October 4, 1973.

³⁸⁰ Colin Stewart, "Freedom Train Will Roll," *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, July 4, 1974; Richard Nixon to Ross Rowland, February 12, 1974 (copy), B200, box 80B, folder: "American Freedom Train"; BPL.

³⁸¹ Freedom Train Foundation, *All Aboard America*.

In publicity material and in the exhibition itself, the Freedom Train Foundation highlighted the artifacts aboard and their priceless value. Promotional material about the Freedom Train Foundation's search for suitable artifacts characterized the process as a “national treasure hunt,” and described researchers traveling around the nation and scouring federal archives, local historical societies, and private collections for “paintings by James Wyeth . . . film clips of Babe Ruth hitting a home run, a Nobel Peace Prize, the first Bible printed in the United States, the back-up lunar rover and the first automobile to win an American transcontinental race.”³⁸² The Freedom Train Foundation also emphasized the essentiality of authenticity, offering examples such as that of “what appeared to be a very old map [but] turned out to be a very old drawing worth very little, while what seemed like harmless old documents proved to be quite valuable.”³⁸³ The attention to the financial worth of the artifacts as a factor in their qualification for inclusion in the exhibit is significant--a connection that emphasized and perhaps exacerbated the corporate nature of the Freedom Train exercise as well as underscored the ideological value of archival objects by signaling their concrete value.

Aboard the train, the artifacts were arranged in ten thematic displays that offered a celebratory and teleological narrative history within the Cold War framework of American exceptionalism, starting with the Revolution and moving through standard histories of Western Expansion (displaying a collage of wagon parts and a “Sioux War Bonnet”) then moving to immigration (with voiceovers dealing out tired phrases like “in

³⁸² Barry Howard Associates, “The American Freedom Train Narrative/Celebrate America!” March 4, 1974, B200, box 53B, folder: “American Freedom Train,” BPL; Katherine Kane to Thomas Healey, April 30, 1975; B200, box 53B, folder: “American Freedom Train,” BPL.

³⁸³ Ibid.; see also Freedom Train Foundation, Inventory of Freedom Train Artifacts [n.d., ca. 1975], B200, box 80, folder: “American Freedom Train,” BPL.

America, the streets are paved with gold”), industrialization, and invention (with Bell's telephone and Edison's vacuum lamp) signified by a “parade of the men of American science.” Exhibitions highlighted American sports, American music (“the sound of America is giddy and passionate, dramatic and frightening”) and entertainment, (“we work hard, we Americans. . .and we play hard”), and the American intellectual and political tradition. The final car pointed at a bright American future, breathlessly noting: “Mass transit systems suspended in space move silently though an atmospherically controlled environment, people shop by cable vision, lasers pierce the earth in search of fossil fuels, space shuttles regularly traverse the void between earth and the planet, satellites take infrared photographs of crops to detect blight and disease before it spreads”³⁸⁴ In its heavy-handed characterization of the “American Experience,” the Freedom Train omitted slavery, all wars, and economic downturns. It also left out cultural and political contributions by women and people of color. The earlier Freedom Train had offered a similar interpretation of the American past and present at a moment at which the majority of Americans accepted these as fact, but, by 1976, critics and audiences found the Freedom Train’s depiction of the United States to be retrograde and unrepresentative.³⁸⁵

Although both the emphasis on artifact and the conservative rendering of American history were typical of older modes of exhibition, the Freedom Train Foundation adapted many new technologies in its presentation of the artifacts, possibly to

³⁸⁴ American Freedom Train Foundation News Release: Fact Sheet: American Freedom Train for Boston-Lowell-Worcester,” B200, box 53B, folder: “American Freedom Train,” BPL.

³⁸⁵ Tom Shales, “One Swift Blur,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 1975; John Sherwood, “Quick Belt of American History,” *Washington Star-News*, April 2, 1975; Richard Raugh, David Wright, letter to editor, “Train Failure,” *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1975; Margot Hornblower, “Freedom Train Falling Behind Expectations,” *Washington Post*, May 30, 1975.

suggest even in its display, that the era of American innovation was not over. This was no accident as the Freedom Train Foundation hired designer Barry Howard, who had previously designed exhibitions at international expositions in Montreal in 1967 and in Osaka, Japan in 1970.³⁸⁶ Howard's aesthetic underlined technological progress and development in both its narration and representation of the American past. A motorized conveyor belt moved audience members through the entire ten-car display in only fifteen minutes.³⁸⁷ Visitors did not like the experience of the conveyor belt, even after the belts were slowed down in response to complaints. One visitor wrote, "A jet will take you further but not faster."³⁸⁸ Visitors were supposed to see all of the artifacts and marvel at Freedom Train Foundation's ability to acquire and arrange them, but the whole process lacked the type of communion with history that many audiences now expected in their interactions with historical objects.



Figure 11. *Designer Barry Howard's rendering of the interior of American Freedom Train.* Barry

³⁸⁶ Barry Howard, Project History, <http://www.barryhowardlimited.com/history.html>, [accessed March 1, 2012].

³⁸⁷ Barry Howard Associates, Project illustrations c. 1973, <http://www.freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-design.htm>, [accessed March 1, 2012]

³⁸⁸ Robert Scott to Kevin White, April 21, 1975, B200, box 53, folder: "Freedom Train: Publicity and Advertising," BPL.

Howard Collection, www.freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-design.htm, [accessed April 5th, 2012].

The Freedom Train also used audio tour technology to facilitate visitor identification with its narrative. Each visitor was given a speaker wand to be held at the ear that provided a narrative to accompany this trip through the American experience.³⁸⁹ Audio tours had been introduced in 1957 but, as personal audio technology had been reduced to a portable size, had only lately become popular in museums and at historical sites.³⁹⁰ The audio tour as a narrative mode reflected history's turn to the immersive and experiential, but, by reducing any space for contemplation or response, can be said, especially in the context of the Freedom Train's other ideological messages, to also support the older, connective and sweeping mode of history. Freedom Train visitors reported frustration at the audio tour, noting that it was often out of sync with the display it described.³⁹¹ While the exhibit meant for the speaker wands to communicate a cohesive, teleological, and celebratory historical narrative, ironically, they conveyed confusion that defeated their purpose and irritated many visitors. Many of these grievances resulted from the Freedom Train's emphasis on artifacts at the expense of the viewer, a choice that, while in line with the overall conservative logic of the archive that Rowland and the Freedom Train Foundation worked within, showed the disparity between the Freedom Train project and newer, more subjective views of history and historical experience.

Even before these display modes invited criticism from audiences and the media, several local organizations had balked at the Freedom Train; for example, Boston mayor

³⁸⁹ Margot Hornblower, "Bicentennial Freedom Train Planned," *Washington Post*, December 19, 1974; James Abdnor, "Tour Slated by Freedom Train," *Chadron Nebraska Record*, November 21, 1974.

³⁹⁰ Acoustiguide 1976 brochure, Acoustiguide Corporate Archives, New York, NY; see also John Canday, "Wired for Culture," *New York Times*, February 14, 1975; Vance Muse, "Pitfalls Amid the Rewards of Audio Tours," *New York Times*, June 3, 1981.

³⁹¹ Herbert J. Rosenthal, "Freedom Train Travels 200 Years," *Boston Globe*, April 21, 1975.

Kevin White and others refused to fund Rowland, instead focusing on their own programming.³⁹² That this neoliberal competition played out on the terrain of conversations about appropriate historical programming testified once again to the centrality of the past as a register for other modes of economic and political discourse. While the original Freedom Train had been an exclusively federal undertaking, the new train emerged from the public-private partnership model that characterized many Bicentennial programs as well as portions of the government in general. In this case, Rowland, Pepsi and the other principals in the endeavor were political conservatives, with a vested interest in presenting a mode of history that sought to recuperate the shifting national narrative. Similarly, while some of its critics refused to support the Freedom Train because of concerns about its representation of the past, others, like Boston 200, represented public-private partnerships interested in promoting their own projects. Although the Freedom Train billed itself as “nonpolitical,” in fact it was overtly political and involved a reanimation of an older form of historical ideation, albeit within the context of new display technology, which further illustrated Rowland and others’ commitment to developing American enterprise. Rowland’s hopes for the train reflected his belief in its mission: “As trains in the American past served to weld this great nation together, so perhaps will this train play a large part in bringing the people together.”³⁹³ The retrograde historical narrative offered by the Freedom Train and its spectacular but unsuccessful preservation pointed to the profound disconnect between the contemporaneous context and projects that attempted to deploy older models.

³⁹² Katherine Kane to Thomas Healey, April 30, 1975, B200, box 53B, folder: “American Freedom Train,” BPL.

³⁹³ Janis Burenga, “News Release from the Freedom Train,” [n.d., ca. 1973], B200, box 80A, folder: “Freedom Train,” BPL.

The Freedom Train attempted a corporate consolidation of what had once been an effective state strategy for nation building and for provoking normative patriotic ideologies in Americans. The display related an unrealistic type of history, not only in the way that it rendered the American past, but also in the way that it generalized the American people, assigning national characteristics unrepresentative of increasingly fractured public opinion. Rowland and the Freedom Train Foundation in effect attempted to privatize not only the celebration of the Bicentennial, but more specifically, the national artifacts aboard the train. In the process, the Freedom Train recast the artifacts in terms of their value and emphasized a progressive national history that eradicated or suppressed all traces of continuing problems and conflicts and that looked to a hopeful future underpinned by continued technological innovation. This was evident not only in the depiction of the American future as a mechanized utopia but also by the attempted use of conveyor belt and audio tour technology within the exhibit itself. The negative audience reaction to these mechanizations pointed not only to the unsuitability of this kind of narrative, one which did not allow for difference or contradiction, but also to the fact that such a celebratory rendition of American history undergirded by an emphasis on material evidence was, by this time, publically unpalatable.

Artifact Usage and the Creation of Immersive Space

History museums, called by critic and historian Mike Wallace, “the institution perhaps most explicitly devoted to nourishing historic sensibility and acting as trustees of the public memory,” adapted new modes of display, using archival material to create interactive spaces designed to foster an experiential understanding of history.³⁹⁴ While the 1970s brought changes in the subject, appearance, and narrative of museum

³⁹⁴Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 267.

exhibition, it is important to remember that this development was uneven. As curators experimented with new topics and executions, some articulations of history were more successful than others in using artifacts and media to create living, affective environments, which itself testifies to both the abruptness and the uneven expression of this transformation. This movement paralleled other movements to an experiential or immersive sense of the historical, as seen on commercial television and in other Bicentennial initiatives.

As part of the larger Bicentennial celebration, at least two museum exhibitions recreated the international exposition with which the United States had commemorated its centennial in 1876. Although at first glance, the Smithsonian's "1876", and Boston 200's "Victorian Boston" (also called "The Grand Exposition of Progress and Invention") appeared similar in subject matter and scope, the very different strategies with which the two exhibits made use of artifacts to carve out positions for their audiences had marked effects on the success of each respective show and on the type of narrative that each related about nineteenth-century America and about the history of technological innovation. While both displays parroted the emphasis on progress and modernization that had been the hallmark of the Centennial Exposition, the Smithsonian used objects and display in a way that placed the viewer *inside* the reanimated Exposition, and it emphasized reflection on the similarities between the past and the present. The Boston show's attempt at sensory immersion failed to establish a subject position for audiences and resulted in an exhibit that deployed many of the strategies of immersive history but was unsuccessful in engaging its audience in a similar way, instead creating an exhibition which underscored the unfamiliarity of the nineteenth century. Carefully considering the

ways in which both exhibits made use of artifacts to create the sense of a particular moment in the nineteenth century helps to clarify how new strategies in display addressed larger questions of historical ideation and generated new possibilities of reception.

The choice of the Centennial Exposition as a subject is significant not only because it addressed national celebration in a historical context but also because that particular *mode* of celebration through display was itself, in that moment, being relegated to the past. The particular history of the international exposition reflects the ideas of spectacularization, progress, and a sense of the world associated with the era of Western industrialization and imperialism. In the United States, the world's fair model had enjoyed immense popularity through the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when the United States was eager, on the one hand, to exhibit to the world its astonishing technological and imperial progress, and, on the other, to explore and organize that progress for a domestic audience both curious about the rest of the world and proud of its own place as a nation within it.³⁹⁵ By the 1970s, America's lead in technological innovation and geopolitical dominance was more tenuous than it had been in previous decades, and thus the international exposition, as an index and celebration of that progress, had become a more questionable form of display, as can be seen from the failure of the 1976 International Exposition originally planned in Philadelphia as the central event of the Bicentennial. However, in the new historically minded cultural milieu, attention became focused on the very *history* of this formerly great tradition, as museums raised questions about the world's fair as a historical practice and about the

³⁹⁵ Robert Rydell, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000). See also, Lauren Rabinowitz' work on visual organization of racial and gendered hierarchy and spectatorship in the 1893 Chicago Exposition. Lauren Rabinowitz, "The Fair View," *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 47-67.

nature of nationalist celebration in and of itself.

As part of its Bicentennial program, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology (which, in 1980, would be renamed the National Museum of American History) mounted an exhibition in the Smithsonian's historic Arts and Industries Building entitled "1876" that sought to recreate the look as well as the feel of the Philadelphia Centennial World Exposition.³⁹⁶ The *Centennial Post*, a mock newspaper distributed to exhibition visitors stated that "the aim throughout has been to return to the Centennial, not to show the Centennial from the perspective of 100 years later."³⁹⁷ Because the Arts and Industries Building was much smaller in scale than the original site of the exposition, curators chose to reproduce just one part of the 1876 Centennial: a trade fair portion in which exhibitors from different states had displayed new innovations in machinery, farming, and enterprise.³⁹⁸ Curators filled vitrines and stands with groups of artifacts with minimal labeling, contrary to traditional practice of isolating objects with individual labels. The displays at "1876" were more like tableaux, showing, for example, exhibits of the farming and industrial products of a selection of states, as well as professional tools from dentists and druggists, military ephemera, and farm machinery like combines and hay compressors. The effect highlighted the development of American industry and fostered an understanding of the nineteenth century as an era in which technology improved the quality of life.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ The "1876" show was one of several Bicentennial exhibitions that were part of the Smithsonian's celebration—other shows, "Nation of Nations" and "We the People" used different modes of display.

³⁹⁷ *Centennial Post*, SIA, Office of Telecommunications Production Records: 1876, 1975-1984, box 1, folder: "'1876' correspondence and development 2 of 2," SI.

³⁹⁸ Anna Reed, "1876 Opens in Grand Style," *Smithsonian Torch*, June, 1976.

³⁹⁹ Robert C. Post, ed. *1876: A Centennial Exhibition* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976).

The overcrowded visual logic of the Victorian-era World's Fairs, which curators sought to replicate, determined substantial choices made with regards to the treatment of historical objects. Because the original Centennial Exposition had shown functioning machines, the Smithsonian restored mechanical artifacts to their original condition, instead of displaying them with the patina of age, which was and remains a standard conservation practice.⁴⁰⁰ The controversial decision for the "high restoration" of objects inspired some debate, both at the Smithsonian and among exhibition visitors.⁴⁰¹ The fact that historic artifacts on display are usually allowed to show their age is significant; the material qualities of the aged artifact underscore the passage of time and past use through the object, emphasizing that the object has been saved, and merits saving. To restore an object is to create an entirely different understanding of history--it negates the passage of time, but purports to show the object as it would have been at the moment of its creation. The object, instead of reinforcing the distance between the past and the present, becomes a talisman for acting *within* the past. That for the first time curators at the Smithsonian chose to depict historical objects in this way as opposed to the more conventional manner shows a shift not only in the principles underlying historical artifacts but also in the basic assumptions about the understanding of history and how history should be depicted.

Interacting with fully restored and functioning artifacts moves the viewer into the visual

⁴⁰⁰ William Miner (exhibit curator) to Matthew Cantor, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, October 4, 1978. SIA, National Museum of American History, Office of the Director, Subject Files c. 1977-1992, box "Exhibits 1876," folder: "1876 Exhibition Correspondence 1978," SI. On "patina," and aesthetic decay, see Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 148-182.

⁴⁰¹ On museum practices at the time, see Lucien R. Greif, "Cleaning Up the Treasures of History," *Curator* 13.4 (December, 1970), 290-299 Correspondence between Bill Miner and Brooke Hindle, September 13, 22 1976, SIA, National Museum of American History Office of the Director., Subject Files c. 1977-1992, box 1, folder: "1876 Exhibition Correspondence 1976," SI. See also Correspondence between Brooke Hindle and Paul Perrot, April 28, 1975, SIA, National Museum of American History Department of Collections Management Services, Exhibition Records, 1971-1998, box 4, folder: "Paul N. Perrot: Correspondence, 1973-1976" SI.

space of the past and collapses time between the historical object and the viewer, rather than using the display of objects to reinforce the audience's position in the present.

Upon entering the exhibit, visitors stepped into a sensory and affective representation of the previous century as they interacted not only with the displays but with the decoration, the music, and the people of 1876. To enhance the celebratory ambience of the exhibition, an organ played songs of the era, and museum docents dressed in period costume as tradespeople relating information about the machines from the perspective of barkers at the original Centennial Exposition.⁴⁰² Much of the information (the name and function of the machine, its manufacturers, its importance in the larger context) remained the same, but it was delivered through extemporaneous performance rather than through written labels. Adding to the festive atmosphere, columns, balconies, and display cases were covered in red, white, and blue bunting, emphasizing that the Centennial Exposition had celebrated the technology, modernity, and accomplishments of the nation.⁴⁰³ "1876" represented a new curatorial interest in using artifact decoration and interpretation in the service of creating a milieu of the past and erasing one mode of critical distance for the visitor. While preservation-based displays had figured audiences in the role of an amateur curator in their inventory of, and interactions with, a succession of historical objects, "1876" produced emotive as opposed to informational knowledge. Audiences would learn about the feeling of 1876 through the sensation of being there, but at the same time, they could connect this feeling to an

⁴⁰²*Celebrating a Century*, National Museum of History and Technology, dir. Karen Loveland, Smithsonian Motion Pictures Unit, written by Benjamin Lawless, Assistant Director for Exhibit Production, NMHT, 1976 (28 mins). Viewed at Smithsonian Institution Archives

⁴⁰³ "Benjamin Lawless, "1876: Celebrating a Century," exhibition script, March 10, 1976; Smithsonian Office of Public Affairs Press Release, April 12, 1976, SIA, Office of Telecommunications Production Records: 1876, 1975-1984, box 1, folder: "1876," SI.

understanding of the nineteenth century as a moment of progress, optimism, and technological mastery quite different than the present moment.

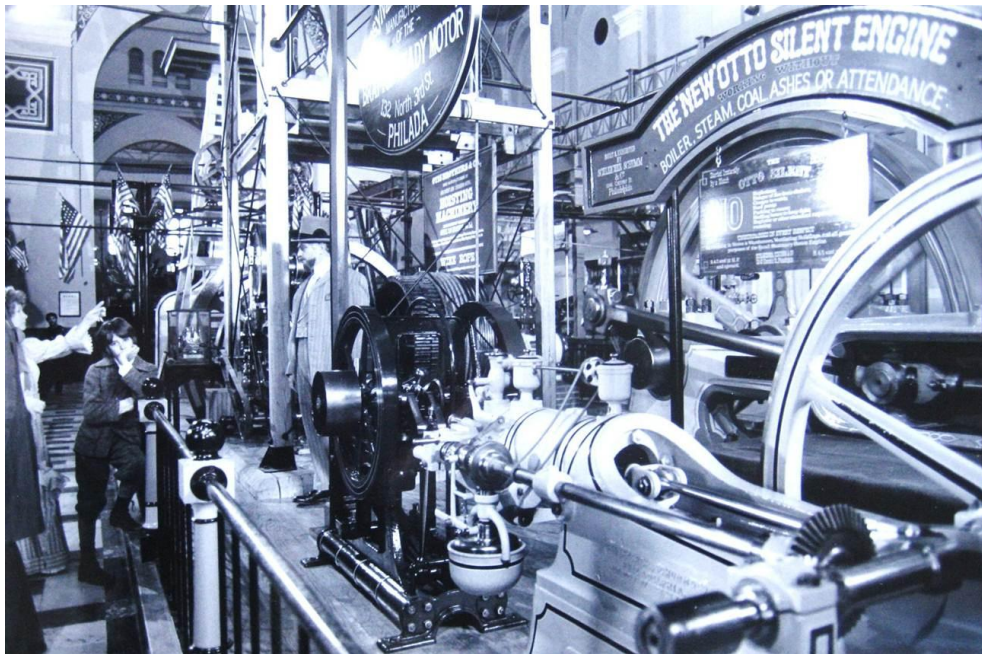


Figure 12. “1876” exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution, note the costumed interpreter in the left corner. Office of Public Affairs, Photographs, 1976-1996, box 1, folder “1876,” Smithsonian Institution Archives.

In its immersive and affective capacities, “1876” encouraged association between contemporary and historical contexts of patriotism and celebration that could lead to either a renewed optimism about the contemporary or recognition of the different circumstances of the last century. Conversations around the exhibition’s development, as well as eventual critical response by exhibit reviewers, connected the political and economic atmospheres of 1876 and 1976, noting similarities between political scandal (for instance, comparing Nixon to Ulysses S. Grant, who had been plagued by the Teapot Dome controversy and allegations about connections to the Tweed political machine in New York) and the economic depressions of each era.⁴⁰⁴ The cover of the *Centennial Times* made the association explicit, with stories about the political hardships of 1876,

⁴⁰⁴ Benjamin Lawless to Paul Perrot, August 13, 1975, SIA, Office of Telecommunications Production Records: 1876, 1975-1984, box 2, folder: “1876 correspondence,” SI.

featuring items about an insurrection in Cuba, accusations of Grant's corruption, and the contested election between Tilden and Hayes.⁴⁰⁵ The original Centennial Exposition, despite these difficulties, had, in the eyes of curators and critics, managed to unite its viewers, leaving a general impression of patriotic excitement about American progress and innovation.

"1876," then, had several functions: it acted not only as a depiction of world's fairs in the nineteenth century, but also as a rallying call and a justification for celebration of the 1976 Bicentennial, the event that marked the occasion for "1876" itself. The exhibition literature noted that despite contemporary problems, the Centennial Exposition celebrated the anniversary of the American Revolution and displayed the progress that the United States had made since that time. The historical ambience of optimism and celebration created by the music, the bunting, and the sheer volume of machinery on display not only depicted the past but also possibly prescribed celebration in the present. Thus, the curators at the Smithsonian sought to translate the look and feel not only of the original exposition itself, but of its audiences. Creating excitement and optimism in museum visitors collapsed the space between the past and the present, and so "1876" extended its celebratory air to the contemporary Bicentennial.

At the same time though, the affective identification sought by "1876" carried with it the potential for a reevaluation of that feeling of optimism and recognition of the different contexts of the current and past celebrations. Kathleen Stewart, Sianne Ngai, and others have written about the potentiality of reading affect; they stress that because feelings are liminal and unpredictable, they operate on a variety of registers and cannot

⁴⁰⁵ *Centennial Post*, SIA, Office of Telecommunications Production Records: 1876, 1975-1984, box 1, folder: "'1876' correspondence and development 2 of 2," SI.

be guaranteed one way or another. Ngai especially makes connections between affect's ability to "mediate between the aesthetic and political," pointing towards the ways that emotive reactions represent a state of suspended consciousness and at least the potential for more sustained awareness.⁴⁰⁶ Deborah Gould, following Brian Massumi, notes that an affective reaction becomes actualized as emotion, which she defines as "the expression of affect in gesture and language, its conventional or coded expression."⁴⁰⁷ Gould further notes the connection between affect and social change, stating, "Ideas about the need for change and movement toward bringing it about often begin with an inarticulate and inarticulable sensation that something in the established order is not quite right."⁴⁰⁸ Creating a milieu that built the audience into its narrative and induced affective as opposed to informational knowledge production, "1876" and other historical cultural productions which relied on reenactive logics of history produced ambiguous meanings in just these ways and so asked audiences to respond emotionally and affectively, which could lead to substantial reconsiderations of the past and of the present.

However, as Lauren Berlant and others have noted, affective reactions, as they move from private to public spheres, can just as easily lead to a regeneration of the status quo, because sentiment often seeks normalcy through appeals to an imagined generality and thus is instrumental in maintaining hegemony.⁴⁰⁹ Appeals to emotion, then, are wildly unstable and carry with them potentials for many kinds of readings that may or may not lead to recognition and, finally, action. This was evident in "1876." Although

⁴⁰⁶ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3; Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19.

⁴⁰⁸ Gould, 26.

⁴⁰⁹ See Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: On the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008)1-32.

supporting texts like the *Centennial Times* made it clear that the exhibition sought to emphasize that political and economic hardship was not unique to the current moment, and thus should not take away from national pride, audiences could just as easily choose to read the celebration of “1876” as distanced from, and in opposition to, the present day. The immersive and re-enactive qualities of the exhibition, which operated at the register of feeling as opposed to information, therefore, had the capacity to produce both dominant readings and more nuanced reactions that could lead audiences to evaluate or even question the status quo as they perceived it through the exhibition.

A display mounted by Boston 200, a local Bicentennial organization, mirrored “1876” in its attempt to stimulate excitement and optimism by conveying the look and atmosphere of the World Centennial Exposition, but it did so in a way that attempted to *show* visitors the nineteenth century, without asking them to *feel* it, a significant factor in the ultimate failure of this exhibition.⁴¹⁰ Taking cues from the Smithsonian exhibition (the Boston team had visited Washington in 1974 and spoken with NMAH curators), “Victorian Boston”/ “The International Exposition of Progress” focused on technological innovation, and, as in Washington, interpreters in Victorian costume operated machines and facsimiles.⁴¹¹ But instead of bodily casting visitors back into the previous century, “Victorian Boston” displayed a pastiche of Victorian people and things: giant cardboard cutouts of nineteenth century-style illustrations of the heads of famous Victorian Bostonians, including John L. Sullivan and Isabella Stewart Gardner, stood alongside the

⁴¹⁰ Boston 200 Press Release on Citigames, [n.d., ca. Spring 1975], B200, box 8-NI, folder: “Advertising,” BPL; advertisements for “Victorian Boston” *Boston Globe*, June 25, 1975.

⁴¹¹ Correspondence from Jan Seidler to Lalor Cadley, November 11, 1973, B200, box 9-NI, folder: “catalogs 19th-20th centuries,” BPL.

machines.⁴¹² “Victorian Boston” capitalized on the spectacular nature of the World’s Fair exhibition model, but its representation remained at the visual, as opposed to moving towards the immersive. Like “1876,” the Boston show was housed in a building of the appropriate period, in this case, a nineteenth-century armory, but unlike “1876,” the curators and designers of the Boston 200 team did not successfully recreate the ambiance of the previous century—the machines and Victorian heads showed viewers the nineteenth century, but failed to place them inside a different time. Unlike the artifacts in “1876,” these objects did not engender emotive communication with the past.



Figure 13: “The Grand Exposition of Progress and Invention” in Boston. Boston 200 Archives, box 55, folder “19th c,” Boston Public Library.

⁴¹²Boston 200, *Victorian Boston Bicentennial Exposition*, guidebook. 1975. B200, box 28, BPL. Peter Anderson, “A Look Back at Nineteenth Century Boston,” *Boston Globe*, June 25, 1975; “Mimicking the ‘Then’ Look,” *Biddenford-Saco Journal*, July 1, 1975.

“Victorian Boston” met with lukewarm critical and audience reception. Visitor reports highlighted the “empty” and “dead” feeling of the building.⁴¹³ Part of this can be explained by a lack of resources; the curators did not have access to as many machines or artifacts and thus could not create the overstuffed displays that were the hallmark of the Victorian aesthetic and that stood in opposition to contemporary museum display.⁴¹⁴ The cardboard heads, large and frightening, also signaled the distance between the Victorian past and the contemporary by pointing to the absence of live people in the nineteenth-century atmosphere that the display had attempted to create and to their replacement by two-dimensional figurines. These factors resulted in a lackluster exhibit that failed to generate a clear subject position for its viewers unsure of how actually to locate themselves within the past, and so the exhibit was plagued by low attendance and poor reviews.

While the Smithsonian curators invoked new modes of historical subjectivity in their immersive presentation, the curators of the Boston exhibit did not create a feeling of the nineteenth century. These differences point to the ambiguous moment of the Bicentennial; curators sensed and tried to work within the perceptible shift, but they were not able to fully articulate it. The transformation in historicity was a transitional and uneven process, as opposed to a seamless conversion. While curators at Boston 200 and at the Smithsonian recognized the potentiality of museum exhibitions to address contemporary issues and attempted to cast audiences into the milieu of the nineteenth century, only the Smithsonian did so successfully and in a way that reflected changing

⁴¹³ Harron Ellison, “Report on Boston Children’s Museum’s Visit to 19th Century Exhibit,” July 28, 1975, B200, box 80A, folder “19th C.,” BPL. Jan Seidler to Ramirez Woods, October 30, 1974, B200, box 3, folder: “19th century progress reports and contracts,” BPL.

⁴¹⁴ Timothy E. Feigle to Ramirez & Woods, July 24, 1975. B200, box 80A, folder: “Ramirez & Woods,” BPL; Sam Bass Warner to Kathy Kane, August 1, 1975. B200, box 3, folder: “comments on exhibit,” BPL.

historical subjectivity, on the one hand, and the potentiality of this subjectivity, on the other. These exhibits are important because of their attention to affective engagement, but they also demonstrate that, at this moment, immersive history strategies had not yet become a standard for museum exhibition and were therefore sometimes successful and sometimes not.

Preservation to Reenactment

Preservation projects of different kinds, undertaken in support of the Bicentennial celebration, demonstrated larger transformations in how American culture understood both the passage of time and its own position in relation to historical narratives. While structural preservation initiatives created ambient historical spaces for the immersive experience of the past, oral history emerged as a means of collecting and preserving the history of an enlarged field of subjects and experiences. As demonstrated through Jesse Lemisch's "Bicentennial Schlock," collection practices themselves changed and could be politicized as a means of questioning hegemonic historical expression. The treatment and exhibition of artifacts also reflected new perceptions of the past in proximity to, or informing the present, as curators used historical objects to create immersive experiences that attempted to communicate the feeling of the historical.

Under what I have called the cultural logic of preservation, the artifact contained the historical, while the subject existed and operated within the contemporary moment. Yet, the developments that both expanded and reconfigured preservation activity in the 1970s began to destabilize this temporal distinction and to move towards a use of artifacts in service to the creation of affective engagements or affinities with the past. Rather than viewing the historical at a distance, from the vantage point of the present, Americans

increasingly sought to place themselves within the past. This is a shift that can be traced through the changing terms and uses of preservation in which the historical properties associated with the material were reoriented towards this concern and deployed in novel ways. More critically, however, the most prevalent site of historical knowledge production ceased to be the preserved artifact. This decade saw a proliferation of new, embodied interactions with the past. It is to this cultural logic of reenactment, and the types of activities that it generated, that I now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Cultural Logics of Reenactment:
Affective Engagement with the American Past

As popular historical consciousness shifted towards affective or emotional identification with the past, history-based cultural productions also took on new forms. The preservation of historical objects was radically reoriented, but even more critical was the emergence of reenactive engagement with the historical. In the 1970s, many preservation projects used historical objects not as evidence, but to produce affective knowledge of the past. While building preservation progressed towards the construction of historic ambiance, museum exhibitions like the Smithsonian's "1876" used restored, functioning artifacts to create an immersive experience of the U.S. Centennial Exposition. But "1876" also contained embodied reenactments; in order to impart information, curators instructed docents to dress and act like Exposition salespeople and interact with visitors in these historical personas. Their presence helped transport visitors into the past; the costumed docents served as conduits between 1876 and 1976.⁴¹⁵ But this exhibition was only one of many sites of embodied reenactment in this decade, the majority of which did not use artifacts at all. In the radical realignment of both historicity and historical subjectivity, the site of historical production shifted from the artifact to the subject body—from the preservation to the reenactment.

This chapter examines reenactment as a strategy of historymaking in the 1970s. Reenactive practice depends on a sense of the past as proximate to the present, positioning knowledge-producing subjects not adjacent to but *within* the historical narrative. Reenactments hinge upon a perception of the temporal as fluid and fractured,

⁴¹⁵ William Worthington, Smithsonian Institution, "1876" docent, email to author, March 13, 2012.

as opposed to progressive and linear. Reenactors and spectators attempt to place themselves within the past—wanting to know the experiences and emotions of historical subjects, rather than simply learning historical information. In the early 1970s, an impulse towards immersion and affective identification that had first appeared in changing preservation projects in the late 1960s was consolidated and extended with the emergence of reenactment as the preeminent mode of thinking about and interacting with the past. These reenactments reflected the changing position of the subject with regards to the historical narrative. Yet, reenactment does not have an inherently hegemonic or resistant charge, the very ephemerality of the emotions that it produces can act in different, and unpredictable ways.

A range of interests, state and otherwise, became involved in reenactment in the 1970s, staging projects that had many different forms. While some, like Boston 200's "Revolution" exhibition, encouraged audience members to understand and empathize with the kinds of decisions made by colonial-era Bostonians, Philadelphia's Franklin Court allowed visitors to interact with spectral renditions of Benjamin Franklin and his contemporaries. Because of the way these two exhibits downplayed artifacts as a means of presenting history and instead used immersive tactics to blur past and present and to encourage audience identification with historical subjects, they can be described as reenactive engagements. But contemporaneous cultural productions featured embodied practice more directly, representing both the development and proliferation of reenactment in this decade; living history museums flourished and established techniques of audience engagement in which the majority of historical knowledge production came from interactions with reenactors, not artifacts or buildings. Most markedly, thousands of

Americans staged and participated in reenactments in honor of the Bicentennial. While some, like the Bicentennial Wagon train tried to elicit patriotic sentiment from citizens, others, like the LaSalle Expedition reenactment, had very different aims. All of these activities, read together, indicate the impact of this change. I am not arguing that reenactment was, at this moment, a *new* mode of engaging with the past, but that, in the 1970s, and particularly in the Bicentennial, it became prevalent as a specific practice and as a logic that privileged a particular mode of placing oneself within a historical narrative and seeking empathetic commonality with the past. So, reenactment took on different meanings as it became more widespread in the 1970s.

The explosion of reenactive practices is particularly striking because, as we saw in Chapter Two, only a decade earlier, reenactment had been vigorously dismissed and denigrated as a means of practicing history. In particular, critics disparaged Civil War reenactments of the 1950s and early 1960s on the grounds that they were “inauthentic” and did not respect the contemplative nature of historical understanding. As one media commentator wrote of a reenactment at Manassas, “These sweating charades. . .sham battles threaten to make a farce of the greatest tragedy in American history. . .the gaudy show at Bull Run was a noisy piece of amateur theatrics, carried on by overgrown boys who get a thrill out of hearing guns go off.”⁴¹⁶ The National Park Service banned the practice on National Parks ground in 1965 and battle reenactment receded into a subculture largely outside of the mainstream.⁴¹⁷ Early Bicentennial planners and

⁴¹⁶“The Gaudy Show at Manassas, VA,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 1961. See also Allan Nevins, “The Glorious and the Terrible,” *Saturday Review*, September 2, 1961; Brooks Atkinson, “Air of Celebration Attached to Civil War Centennial Belies Tragedy of Conflict,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1961.

⁴¹⁷ For histories of reenactment, especially Civil War Reenactment, see Cathy Stanton, *Reenactors in the Parks: A Study of External Revolutionary War Reenactment Activity at National Parks* (NPS Northeast Ethnography Program, 1999) source: <http://www.nps.gov/revwar/reenactors>, [accessed 12 April, 2011]; Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Louisiana

commentators had also derided historical reenactments as inappropriate means of commemoration and looked to more traditional modes of celebration.⁴¹⁸ By the late 1960s, U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and specifically the graphic representation of battles and casualties through televised news coverage had made battle reenactment even more undesirable (and potentially even traumatic), as it too closely resembled the very real carnage that Americans watched nightly on their television sets. Although battle reenactments continued to attract criticism, the valence of the criticism changed alongside other expectations about historical engagement and practice: where, in the 1950s and 60s, many considered battle reenactments “inauthentic,” by the 1970s, they were “too real.” The parameters of the definition of historic value had changed: realism had previously been judged by authenticity, now it became a question of representation. This shift in itself, shows changing cultural attitudes towards and assumptions about embodied history.

The reenactments that took place in the 1970s were different from--but a part of--a longer history of embodied performance of the past.⁴¹⁹ The tableau vivant, a popular pastime during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved actors or amateurs dressing up to approximate a historical event or painting, and standing perfectly still--as

State University Press, 2007); Tony Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage Press, 1999); Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture (A Reusable Past)* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995). For a critical analysis of contemporary battle reenactment's performative aspects, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁴¹⁸ “Goals Cited for Bicentennial of Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1968; Edward Brooke to Carlisle Humelsine, March 31, 1967, Records of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), RG 452-A1-O1, ARBC Central Classified Records, 1965-1973, box 1, folder: “Meeting: Theme Committee, 1967,” National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II).

⁴¹⁹ For examples of performative activity in the past, see John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

the name suggests--a "living picture."⁴²⁰ In the early twentieth century, historical pageantry became popular in the United States with numerous groups staging theatricals that depicted famous events in United States history including battles, events in the lives of famous Americans, and the signing of treaties and legislation. In his work on the topic, David Glassberg notes several reasons for this 1920's upsurge, from local boosterism and patriotic sentiment, to a desire to express the disjuncture between generations. Significantly, in Glassberg's account, the performance of the past helped make sense of the present and future; pageants reflected larger shifts in beliefs about historical continuity and discontinuity that were challenged after World War I and found expression in antimodernist sentiment.⁴²¹ The upsurge of pageants and the way they used the historic as a means of addressing other societal and cultural changes reveals the mutable and symptomatic nature of historical engagement, and prefigures the way that cultural relationships with, and uses of, the past again changed in the 1960s and 70s.

But 1970s reenactment-based projects differed from these antecedents in form and content. Earlier tableaux and historical pageants centered on famous people and events and related stories already well-known to most audience members. They were not instructional, but celebratory. In the same way that 1950s and 60s historical television like *You Are There* focused on the great politicians in American history, early building preservation activists looked to aesthetic or historically significant sites, and postwar oral

⁴²⁰ It is not coincidental that the tableau vivant appeared amidst other significant changes to perception and visibility: the invention of photography, which altered perceptions of the relationship between reality and representation, and the emergence of urban street and entertainment culture, with its attendant phenomena of publicness and spectacle. See Jack W. McCollough, *Living Pictures on the New York Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983); Mary Megan Chapman, "Living Pictures: Women and Tableaux Vivant in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1992); Jennifer Fisher, "Interperformance: The Live Tableaux of Suzanne Lacy, Janine Antoni, and Marina Abramovic," *Art Journal* 56.4 (Winter, 1997), 28-433.

⁴²¹ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

history projects were concerned with famous politicians, earlier performative history took on subjects outside of the purview of everyday life. This reflected a monumental sense of the past and a consensus about the important events and individuals of history, neither of which were present by the 1970s. Moreover, performance of these exceptional and documented events and people failed to engender the same kinds of affective identifications as reenactments of more prosaic people and events; it is easier to effect an emotive identification or relate to the experience of an ordinary person living in the early republic, than, for example, George Washington. Tableaux and pageants were reverent and distant, a kind of memorialization as opposed to an historical inquiry.

In contrast to earlier modes, the reenactive activity that developed in the 1970s foregrounded the experience of reenactors *and* audiences through the erasure of the physical and structural divisions between the two. In my definition and periodization, I seek to differentiate reenactment from earlier performative or embodied practices because through framing devices and proscenia, earlier performances of the past reinforced the separation between reenactors and spectators, and thus the difference between the “past” (as represented by the performance and its participants) and the “present” (the space of the audience). Even battle reenactment reinforced this divide through the field of battle as the space of action as well as the unreality of a spectated battle to begin with. Reenactive practice prior to the 1970s was spectacular; performances were visual, not visceral. Although for the duration of the spectacle, performers in historic pageants might have felt as if they were in the past, audiences remained firmly lodged in the present, marveling at the performance as they might marvel at an object in a museum. In newer reenactments however, the barrier between actors as within the “past” and audiences as spectators to it

began to weaken, signaling that these reenactments were immersive experiences that could help *both* reenactors and audiences commune with the past on an emotional or affective level.

Many cultural factors undergirded and contributed to the emergence of new modes of reenactment and their proliferation at this particular moment. The affective identification that reenactment sought can be connected to the development of other modes of cultural expression that involved the self, including Transcendental Meditation with its focus on the relationship between environment and human; role-playing in personal and group therapy; the rise of the discourse of the personal as political in the Women's Liberation Movement; and self-help culture at large.⁴²² These impulses emphasized personal discovery through interaction and sensation and have been read by scholars as both symptomatic of, and an effort to cope with, larger cultural, political, and economic displacements of the time.⁴²³ Aspects of these projects, which foregrounded both self-actualization and affective identification between subjects, were characteristic of a larger culture which produced reenactment.⁴²⁴ These impulses combined with the concurrent transition towards "bottom up" accounts of the past in academic and museum history to produce a new category of historic ideation, first seen in the development in

⁴²² Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Sara Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds. *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 52-66; Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: New Press, 2010); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁴²³ Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴²⁴ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 415-572; Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

preservation activity and then continued in reenactive expressions of the past.

Affective Technology and “The Revolution” in Boston

While some history exhibitions used artifacts in new ways, others attempted to convey the feeling of a specific moment in United States history without historic objects. “The Revolution,” a Bicentennial exhibit put on in Boston’s historic Quincy Market by Boston 200, the same organization that mounted “Victorian Boston,” used new technology and spatial ambiance to produce in audiences a sense of the difficult decisions made by Revolution-era Bostonians and to connect that discomfort to contemporary local and national political issues. “The Revolution,” by insisting on an affectively specific, but temporally liminal (existing in both past and present) subject position for audiences, and by using immersive spaces and personal technologies to accomplish this identification exemplifies the new forms and concerns of reenactive historical ideation that supplemented, informed, and in many cases replaced preservation-based activities by the mid-1970s.

The history of the planning, execution and reception of “The Revolution” reflects the ways in which the exhibit indicated and engaged larger scale shifts in historical subjectivity at this critical moment. In 1972, in its earliest stages of planning, “The Revolution” was meant to be a compendium of local historical societies’ most prized possessions. Called in early correspondence a “treasures exhibit,” the plan called for an object-based display of eighteenth-century artifacts that would serve as the basis for an eventual City Museum of Boston.⁴²⁵ But by March of 1973, Boston 200 had changed focus, the exhibit would now “bring together collections scattered throughout Boston and

⁴²⁵ Betsy Earls, “Progress Report, September 20, 1972, Boston 200 (b200) Collection, box 8-NI, folder: “beginning efforts,” Boston Public Library (BPL).

New England to show the social and economic conditions surrounding the events leading to the American Revolution of 1776.”⁴²⁶ In the space of one year, planning for the exhibition progressed from a traditional display privileging aesthetic and historically significant artifacts, to a show that sought to use artifacts to tell larger a larger social and economic history.

In the space of the next six months, “The Revolution” again transformed; by September of 1973, Boston 200 planned an exhibit that would use immersive and affective techniques to make audiences understand the 1770s through contemplating the 1970s, and vice versa. Boston 200 hired Michael Sand, an exhibit designer who had worked for Charles and Ray Eames and had been the Design Director of the Boston Children’s Museum, to organize the exhibition. Sand hired as a consultant, Richard Rabinowitz, a Harvard-trained historian and then the Director of Education at Old Sturbridge Village. Together, Sand and Rabinowitz planned an exhibit that connected the political turmoil of the eighteenth century with that of the present. They wrote, “By engaging visitors more actively in the exhibit, we hope to encourage them also to become aware of their own feelings about political power and self-determination, political action and the admissibility of revolutionary violence, the rights of property, and so on.”⁴²⁷ The new proposal encouraged identification as a means of knowledge production and also echoed New Left politics and countercultural associations that resonated with not only the curators, but likely with many of the exhibition’s targeted audience. Key features of the proposed exhibit included a speaker system playing “Taxman” by the Beatles; a life-

⁴²⁶ Katherine Kane, Boston 200, “Exhibit on the American Revolution Period,” Grant Application, National Endowment for the Humanities, March 14, 1973. B200, box 11-NI, folder: “Quincy Market,” BPL.

⁴²⁷ Richard Rabinowitz, “Role-Playing in the Exhibit for Boston,” September 28, 1973. B200, box 11NI, folder: “Quincy Market,” BPL.

size puppet show of the Boston Massacre with labels that explicitly made connections between that event and the recent events at Kent State in which the National Guard had shot and killed four unarmed protestors; and a mirror maze signaling the complications of colonial bureaucracy and divergent paths based on visitors' opinions of the Revolution.

⁴²⁸ In every section, the exhibit used bodily immersion to encourage affective response from its audience. As Sand noted in a section on the Stamp Act Riots, "the *feeling* of participating in the mob is much of the message."⁴²⁹

The exhibition, as planned by Sand, foregrounded emotional, as opposed to informational knowledge; he designed the majority of exhibit components to make audiences *feel* the seventeenth century, not see it. Boston 200 eventually fired Sand in a financial dispute, but the conflation of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries and the appeal to emotive identification in audiences, as well as the reinforcement of this emotive identification with immersive bodily engagement, remained key to the exhibition.⁴³⁰ The final iteration of "The Revolution" maintained a spatial ambience that encouraged audience absorption but many of the interactive elements became technological. The finished exhibition contained video projections, personal computers, and ambient audio tracks. While part of this can be explained by the fact that these implements cost less than the mechanized puppet show that Sand had envisioned, they also mirror the immersive and personal dimensions of these new technologies and their ability to express

⁴²⁸ Michael Sand & Associates, "The American Revolution Exhibit: A Progress Report, January, 1974", B200, box 11-NI, folder: "Quincy Market," BPL.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 5

⁴³⁰ Sand was fired by Boston 200 over a financial dispute; legal papers indicate that Boston 200 felt that he was overspending, and failing to deliver project components. The final designer, DeMartin, Corona, Cranstoun, and Downes used many of Sand's original concepts. Michael Sand & Associates, Press Release announcing resignation over financial dispute, December 12, 1974, B200, box 5B, folder: "correspondence," BPL; Michael Keating to Katherine Kane re: Dispute with Michael Sand, January 14, 1975, B200, box 5B, folder: "Sand Contract," BPL.

information as communication. Although Boston 200 eventually dropped some of the more radical aspects of Sand's proposal, the consistency of many aspects of the interpretation points to their centrality in the decade's new history practices.

"The Revolution" opened in 1975 and depicted eighteenth-century life in Boston, emphasizing local involvement through the choices made by the city's colonists to support or oppose political actions in the fifteen years leading up to the American Revolution.⁴³¹ The actual space of the exhibition was a long, narrow tunnel, described by curators as a spatial indicator of the inevitable road to the Revolution.⁴³² The exhibition contained dioramas, video projections, lighting, and audio tracks that conveyed the look and the sound of Boston in the 18th century. Publicity material reinforced the emotive immersion of exhibition visitors, noting "visitors will be able to participate emotionally and intellectually in the debates, the incidents, and the political climate that led to the birth of the Revolution in Boston."⁴³³ Each section directly addressed and engaged audiences: in the section about the Boston Massacre, visitors faced full-on and life sized representations of British soldiers, with firearms drawn as strobe lights flashed and an audio track played shouting crowd noise. On the floor at their feet were outlines of bodies, reminiscent of contemporary crime scenes.⁴³⁴ Later in the exhibit, audiences walked past a full-scale recreation of the lynching of a British customs officer.⁴³⁵ "The Revolution" created several eighteenth-century subjectivities for audiences to occupy; in

⁴³¹ Steve Clark, Boston 200, "Recollections on Citygames," transcript. January 13, 1977, B200, box 17, folder: "Steve Clark," BPL.

⁴³² John MacDonald, "Treatment and Script for Decisions and Audio Visual Elements in Boston 200 Exhibit," May 14, 1975, B200, box 4, folder: "script for AV segment," BPL. See also, Katherine Kane to Boston 200 Board of Directors, "memo re: Recent Developments on the Revolution Exhibit," March 11, 1975, B200, box 4, folder: "general information," BPL.

⁴³³ "The Revolution in Boston," Press Release, B200, box 5, folder: "Eighteenth Century Exhibit," BPL, 2

⁴³⁴ John Macdonald, "Treatment and Script for Audio Visual Elements in Boston 200 Exhibit, May 14, 1974, B200, box 5, folder: "Eighteenth Century Exhibit," BPL.

⁴³⁵ Photograph from "The Revolution," B200, box 55, folder: "18th Century Exhibit," BPL.

some sections, like the Boston Massacre, they were directly involved, while in others, they were bystanders. With this arsenal of interactives, the exhibit fashioned an environment in which audience members would experience life in colonial Boston.



Figure 14. *Boston Massacre display at Boston 200's "The Revolution."* Boston 200 Collection, box 55, folder "18th c.," Boston Public Library.

While the exhibit space emphasized sensational immersion in the eighteenth century, a supplemental computer interactive sought emotional immersion. Boston 200 partnered with Honeywell, a local computer company, to introduce a computerized system that helped audiences measure their own opinions against those of historic figures.⁴³⁶ As visitors walked through the different sections of the exhibit, they answered multiple choice questions about what they themselves would have done in each circumstance. For example, in a segment describing the Siege of Boston, audiences were asked, "Would you have stayed in Boston and supported the Loyalists, leave with your

⁴³⁶ G.W. Hoffmeister, Bicentennial Coordinator, Honeywell, to Katherine Kane, May 21, 1975, B200, box 5, folder: "computers/Honeywell," BPL.

family and join the patriot militia, or would you have tried to remain neutral?”⁴³⁷ At the end of the exhibit, visitors entered their answers into Honeywell computer, matched with a historical figure whose opinions most closely resembled their own, and labeled as either “Patriot” or “Tory.” There were twelve possible results for the Patriot/Tory test, from Sam Adams, a fervent Patriot, through James Otis, always on the fence, to Thomas Hutchinson, a committed Loyalist.⁴³⁸ The wide range of choices and opinions underscored the difficulty of the decision, as well as the sometimes contradictory opinions held by any given individual. The exhibit presented an interpretation of pre-Revolutionary Boston as a milieu in which inhabitants had to make complicated choices with profound effects on their lives. The immersive environment of “The Revolution” created a historical ambiance, but the Patriot/Tory test forced visitors to become active participants in the exhibit. Whereas more traditional museum exhibitions addressed viewers from a shared vantage point of the contemporary, and asked them to evaluate the past from the position of the present, “The Revolution” placed audiences in the position of the subjects of history. The exhibition was immersive as well as participatory, and thus, affective and reenactive. Rather than considering the complexities of the events that led up to the Revolution, visitors *felt* them, and were shown that their feelings resonated with the feelings of eighteenth-century Bostonians.

At the same time, the exhibit stressed the difficulty of choice—something that would have resonated with audiences grappling with their own decisions on the war in Vietnam and the Boston busing controversies for just two examples. “The Revolution”

⁴³⁷ Wade Franklin, “Would You Have Been a Patriot or a Tory in 1776?” *Hartford Times*, November 11, 1975.

⁴³⁸ Sample ballot, “The Revolution”, B200, box 5, folder: “ballots,” BPL; “The Totalizer,” exhibition script draft, [n.d., ca. late 1975], B200, box 5, folder: “exhibit script,” BPL.

enacted a history that was both subjective and emotive, and that posited a commonality between the past and the present, using affect as a means to bridge that gap. The exhibit posited that feelings of indecision were present in contemporary Boston as well and while some exhibit sections portrayed the eighteenth century through diorama, others portrayed Revolutionary events using contemporary media. A television report of the trial of the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre was set in a contemporary courtroom with actors who dressed and spoke in the manner of the present day and included man-on-the-street interviews and a courtroom correspondent reporting on developments as they happened.⁴³⁹ A curator wrote of the decision: “Our purpose in using a 1976 setting is to bring home to the audience the modern relevance of the principles, prejudices and concerns that motivated people's reaction to the massacre in 1770.”⁴⁴⁰ The display inverted the logic of the television show *You Are There*; while that program separated the past and the present by accentuating the distance between contemporary news viewers and noteworthy events in American history, the Boston Massacre trial display, especially in the context of the rest of the show, invited audiences to view the past in terms of the present by emphasizing the trial as a site of contradictory opinions and by relaying the information of the outcome on a moment-by-moment basis. While *You Are There*, despite its name, underscored the status of historical events as having had already happened, in “The Revolution,” the Boston Massacre trial was in the process of happening while the audience watched; the decision was always in the process of being made. This exhibit then evoked the twentieth century alongside the eighteenth, underscoring the emotive

⁴³⁹ Peter Sage, exhibit coordinator to Dr. Walter Muir Whitehill, Andover, June 9, 1975, B200, box 4, folder: “correspondence/content,” BPL.

⁴⁴⁰ John MacDonald, “Treatment and Script for Decisions and Audio Visual Elements in Boston 200 Exhibit,” May 14, 1975, B200, box 5, folder: “script for AV Segment,” BPL.

space between the two epochs that visitors straddled with their choices. Audiences occupied a liminal space, experiencing the emotions of a historical era, yet remained bodily and cognitively anchored in the present day, relating those emotions to a contemporary context. This disjuncture, on one hand, favored an interpretation of history from the perspective of current events, reinforcing the continuity of the historical narrative, and on the other, created a safe space for audiences to think through the difficulties of the present at the register of long-past events.



Figure 15. Honeywell Patriot/Tory test at “The Revolution.” Boston 200 Collection, box 55, folder “18th c,” Boston Public Library.

But “The Revolution’s” reenactment of colonial indecision also contained an ideological charge reflective of the exhibit’s status as an official Bicentennial project. By stressing the contingency of decision-making, “The Revolution” advanced a narrative that resisted a straightforward and progressive interpretation of the events of eighteenth-century Boston--it presented the Revolution itself as neither “good” nor “bad.” Yet, the personalization of the decision implicitly suggested that the patriotism of audiences was

being judged. While the curatorial objective was to communicate the difficulty of the decisions made in eighteenth century Boston by extending that decision to twentieth century audiences, the exhibit also functioned as a measure of patriotic sentiment for visitors, for whom, especially in the context of the celebration of the Bicentennial, the unspoken objective of the exhibition was to emerge a Patriot. This was not lost on exhibit designers, who as early as 1974, had debated including a “loyalty oath” or a “citizenship pledge” as part of the “results” section of the exhibition.⁴⁴¹ To gain publicity, Boston 200 arranged for several high profile figures to visit the exhibit and publically take the test. While Boston mayor Kevin White emerged a Patriot, the British Ambassador to the United States tested as a Tory.⁴⁴² Exhibition publicity, such as coverage of White’s visit, reinforced the desirability of being a Patriot over Tory— reviewers and exhibition visitors interviewed for articles with headlines like “Would You Have Dumped the Tea?” “Boston Separates Patriots, Tories,” and “Voting System Tests Revolutionary Fervor,” were anxious to testify to their revolutionary bent.⁴⁴³ Local newspapers kept a running tally of numbers, finding that Patriots outnumbered Tories two to one.⁴⁴⁴ Letters from schoolchildren indicated that they understood the desired outcomes, as several students identified both the character they had been designated, and the character they wished to have been named. “I was James Otis but I wished I could have been John Hancock,”

⁴⁴¹ Peter Sage to Kathy Kane, Mike Sand re: Mike Sand's Progress Report, April 29, 1974, B200, box 5, folder: “correspondence/content,” BPL.

⁴⁴² Bill Fripp, “A Simple Test of Patriotism” *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1975; Daniel Q. Haney, “Tory or Patriot? The Computer Will Tell All,” *Lewiston Journal*, March 4, 1976; American Association for State and Local History, “Boston Still Turning Out Patriots and Loyalists,” *History News* 3.1 (March, 1976).

⁴⁴³ Guy Darst, “Boston Separates Patriots, Tories” *Kennebec Journal*, August 5, 1976; “Is Voting System Tests Revolutionary Fervor,” *Honeywell World*, October 20, 1975; Wade Franklin, “Would You Have Been a Patriot or a Tory in 1776,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 11, 1975; Margot Hornblower, “Revolutionizing the Revolution: Would You Have Dumped the Tea?” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1975.

⁴⁴⁴ In March of 1976, 70,000 visitors to “The Revolution” had taken the test, the tallies were 47% Patriots, and 27% Loyalists. 26% were undecided. Margot Hornblower, “47% Support Patriots in Loyalty Quiz,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1976.

explained one student. Another wrote, “I was a Patriot, but my teacher was a Tory.”⁴⁴⁵

“The Revolution” created a space in which audiences could make their own meaning, but through media reception, it became clear that some meanings were more appropriate than others.

Throughout its development, the exhibition generated debate among curators and members of Boston 200’s Eighteenth Century Task Force, an advisory board culled from local historical societies and high school and college history departments. During the planning of the exhibition, older and more established members of the Task Force (echoing Jesse Lemisch) voiced a profound discomfort with what they called the “Disney” qualities of the exhibit, complaining of the irresponsibility of making connections over two hundred years, and worrying that history had lost its gravitas. These conversations provide additional evidence of the substantial transformation taking place, a shift evident in “The Revolution,” as well as in other areas of Bicentennial commemoration, but one that was by no means a smooth and complete transition. The historians of the Task Force used words like “manipulative,” “condescending” and “carnavalesque,” labeling the proposed exhibit as “worse than television.”⁴⁴⁶ The repeated invocation of “Disney” as an index to describe the new immersive history on one hand points to a history that is seen by professional historians as sanitized and accessible, but also too commercial. It also hints at the new history’s emotional appeal, as the moniker “Disney” implied a particular mode of sentimentality.⁴⁴⁷ The conflation of these

⁴⁴⁵ Richard Battista and Doug Bell to Boston 200, December 12, 1975, B200, box 5B, folder: “correspondence,” BPL. See folder for similar.

⁴⁴⁶ Lalor Cadley, “Memo re: Meeting with History Task Force,” November 15, 1974, B200, box 4, folder: “18c exhibit/Michael Sand,” BPL; Peter Sage to Katherine Kane and Michael Sand on opinions of William Osgood and Byron Rushing, April 1, 1974, B200, box 4, folder: “arbitration on Revolution,” BPL.

⁴⁴⁷ For more on Disney and history see Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

characterizations and the critique they make suggests recognition of change by practicing professionals, and an anxiety about this change that is expressed in the language of pervasive American popular culture. This discourse also gestures to a divide between the older historians and younger historians trained in public and social history who, like Sand and Rabinowitz themselves, often identified with the New Left.⁴⁴⁸ Although critical and popular reception of “The Revolution” was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic, its departure from more traditional strategies of exhibition and knowledge-production was noticeable, not only to professional historians, but to the majority of audiences.⁴⁴⁹ That historians worried over the exhibit in these particular terms as opposed to, for example, questions of research rigor and accuracy of information--more conventional critiques made of museum exhibition--points to the fact that the change in historical ideation was a structural, rather than simply a narrative shift. That is, the change was not only in what was being said, but also in how history was presented.

Spectrality as History at Franklin Court

Mirroring the tactics used by the curators of “1876” and “The Revolution,” other Bicentennial exhibitions also attempted to evoke experiential history by emphasizing spatiality as a way for the subject to travel between the past and present. Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi (later the author of an influential study, *Learning from Las Vegas*, taken up by postmodernists in the 1980s) designed a “ghost structure” and underground museum at Franklin Court, the former site of Benjamin Franklin’s house.⁴⁵⁰ The structure and accompanying museum used themes of spectrality to advance a multi-

⁴⁴⁸ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 415-572.

⁴⁴⁹ Wade Franklin, “Would You Have Been a Patriot or a Tory in 1776,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 11, 1975; Bill Fripp, “A Simple Test of Patriotism” *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1975.

⁴⁵⁰ Robert Venturi, *Learning From Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977).

directional historical identification by suggesting not only that audiences could move into the past, but also that the past could move into the present. Among the exhibitions I write about, this one is unique because until January of 2012, it was still entirely intact, without being significantly modified since its opening in 1975. While I have reconstructed other exhibits from published accounts and archival records, Franklin Court testifies to the staying power of the new direction that museum exhibition took in this period.⁴⁵¹ In 2010, at the time of my visit, it appeared dated (and in fact, had been recently granted \$18 million in federal and state funding for renovation), but at its inception, it represented the cutting edge of museum exhibition.



Figure 16. Robert Venturi's "Ghost Structure," Franklin Court, Philadelphia, PA. Photograph by author.

After walking into a courtyard through a passageway (a sign notes that Franklin "went to and from his house through this original passage"), the visitor encounters Venturi's "ghost house," a steel reconstruction of the outlines of Franklin's original

⁴⁵¹ Visit to Franklin Court by author, September 20, 2010.

house, placed on a stone floor inlaid with the house's floor plans, as well as footprints of such external structures as Franklin's well and privy pit. The structure and surrounding elements, including an eighteenth-century garden, places the visitor within Franklin's physical space and thus communicates the experience of Franklin's extraordinary but everyday life there. Paradoxically, the spectral elements of the structure reinforce the distance between past and present, like "The Revolution," rendering the visitor bodily and emotively stranded between (or over) two historical eras. The effect is a doubling and confusing of historical subjectivity, placing subjects in a complex position where they are asked to feel and move as Franklin and his family felt and moved, yet also be reminded of their own contemporary, bodily presence. History, at Franklin Court, is available as a substrate, upon which many different types of meanings can be made.

In the underground museum of Franklin's life and accomplishments, this temporal disjunction persists in an even more radical way. After moving through a long tunnel which again suggests a bodily journey into a privileged space of interaction with a different era, visitors encounter the "Franklin Exchange," a phone bank accompanied by a sign that tells viewers that Franklin was a prolific letter writer but that "today he might well be using the telephone to say many of the same things."⁴⁵² Illuminated in large letters on the wall facing the phone bank are two "directories"—alphabetical listings of names and telephone numbers of politicians and writers in the United States and in Europe influenced by Franklin's life. While some of the entries (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams) are Franklin's contemporaries, others are individuals who followed him in history: Lord Byron, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harry Truman, for example. The listed telephone numbers for these individuals are in correct telephonic form, i.e. George

⁴⁵² Exhibit signage, "Franklin Exchange," Franklin Court, Philadelphia, PA.

Washington's number begins with the "703" Virginia exchange, and European numbers are even longer. The experience of dialing these phone numbers is immersive and realistic; visitors pick out the digits (some of the phones remain rotary), wait three or four rings, and then hear the individual deliver a few lines about Franklin, identify him or herself ("Franklin was the Prometheus of his time! This is Immanuel Kant!"), and abruptly hang up.⁴⁵³ One gets the feeling that these historical figures, posited as somehow embodied (or reanimated) and *physically* present in concrete, telephonic locations, and thus reachable by telephone, do not know contemporary telephone etiquette, their voices seem rushed and annoyed, and they offer no greetings or salutations in their presentations. Perhaps like the spectral structure above, they are also ghosts, resurrected for the purpose of this exhibit, which also emphasizes Franklin as a global, as opposed to national figure. The audience is again stranded in between space and time, experiencing "conversation" (albeit one-sided) with a world historical figure *and* the space between their time and his, mediated as long-distance telephonic space. Although the exhibit seeks to show visitors what others have said of Franklin, the focus is instead on the act of telephoning (and being hung up on by) historical figures, in the way that one would telephone a friend or colleague. The means of communication are entirely modern, yet their subjects are of the past. The act of calling or summoning a historical figure is another way of rendering the past as a place with which one can interact and communicate.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ "Franklin Court Telephone Exchange: Script and Guide for Directing Telephone Calls," Library and Archives of Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴⁵⁴ For more on telephony and spectrality, see Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).



Figure 17. Phone listings in “Franklin Exchange” exhibit, Franklin Court Philadelphia, PA. Photograph by author.

Portrait of a Family, the 1976 film commissioned for the exhibit by the National Park Service and shown in the large theater in the underground museum, emphasizes the two-sided feeling of bodily and spatial immersion, both on the part of the audience, and on the imagined part of Franklin. The film, a biographical sketch of Franklin’s life, begins literally with ghosts, those of Franklin and his wife as they return to Franklin Court to tell the audience the story of their lives. Much like the panelists in *Meeting of Minds*, Franklin addresses his audience directly, and refers to his life, death, and the time that has passed. In the story of his life, Franklin moves inside and outside of the narrative, simultaneously acting out scenes from his past and stopping to address viewers directly to give context to some of the events.⁴⁵⁵ Like the audience members themselves, the Franklin house’s ghost structure, and like the interlocutors of the Franklin Exchange, the filmic ghosts of Benjamin and Deborah Franklin straddle the past and the present,

⁴⁵⁵ John Secondari Productions, *Portrait of a Family*, 1976. Script held in Library and Archives of Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

enacting a history that is affective and experiential. The film's narrative deals primarily with Franklin's feelings about his diplomatic post in France, his daughter's marriage, and his new house, and asks audiences to identify directly with the actors. The film posits history as something that one can know through bodily and spatial interactions with the sites of the past. In the same way that exhibitions and other cultural productions of the time depicted history as something that can be familiar and experiential, Venturi's Franklin Court used the figure of Benjamin Franklin as a mediator between the past and present, rendering for visitors an experience that heightened these connections and that underscored the permeability of the past, placing audiences and subjects within each other's time periods.

The surge of new display technology in the 1970s meant that the appearance and experience of history museum exhibition changed dramatically, but it would be an oversimplification to say that these changes resulted from the availability of new exhibition media. Instead, the old (artifact and display) and the new (devices such as telephone banks, audio tours, monitors, and computer systems) created exhibitions, such as the Franklin Court or "The Revolution," symptomatic of a substantial shift in the production and understanding of history narratives. This shift was underwritten by more flexible senses of historicity and historical subjectivity which affectively and sometimes bodily straddled the past and the present, and that privileged empathetic and experiential perception of the historical past over a more informational or factual knowledge based on the artifact as the site of historical meaning. Although the 1970s saw a transition from historical ideation based on a logic of preservation to one undergirded by a logic of reenactment, this development was by no means tidy or complete, nor easily explained by

technological progress. Instead, these examples of Bicentennial-era historical exhibition and the different ways in which they represented the past and engaged audiences indicate the ways in which ideas of evidence, narration and subjectivity were themselves changing, echoing the larger political, economic, and cultural changes of the decade. Cultural understandings of historical narratives and subject positions within and around these narratives marked the historical as a potential space for consciousness and contemplation of issues of ideology, identity, and, especially in the case of the Bicentennial, nationality and nationalism.

The Living Museum

In “The Revolution” and in Franklin Court, spatial ambience combined with affective technology to situate audiences in the past, but other historical exhibitions used living reenactors to make this move. Although living history museums--outdoor environments that recreated past structures and peopled them with costumed inhabitants--have a history that starts before and continues after the 1970s, during this decade, exhibition and interpretation at these sites changed from demonstration toward immersion and reenactment; emphasis relocated from the historical structures to the people within them.⁴⁵⁶ The first living history museums in the United States, founded by elite industrialists, sought to depict early American life as idyllic and its values as instrumental to the progress of the United States. They were living demonstrations of American greatness, somewhat akin to the world’s fair in their ideological imperatives. Automobile manufacturer Henry Ford inaugurated his Greenfield Village in 1929, while John D.

⁴⁵⁶ Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984); Max Page and Randall Mason, *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004); Stephen Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg opened in 1934. Both sites tried to animate the American past, but while Greenfield Village celebrated the timeless folk values of agrarian America, Williamsburg focused on the colonial planter elite, and their role in the foundation of the nation. Not coincidentally, Colonial Williamsburg played a significant role in Cold War international politics; it was often the site of visits by foreign dignitaries. Like an archive, Colonial Williamsburg was imbricated in the dynamics of state power: its space showcased the monumental American past, and the influence of that past on the present.⁴⁵⁷ Williamsburg and Greenfield were soon joined by Old Sturbridge Village, founded in 1946, and Plimoth Plantation the following year.⁴⁵⁸ All four sites contained restored period homes and businesses, and were populated with costumed "hosts" and "hostesses" whose presence helped set the scene. Inside the buildings, guides were joined by mannequins recycled from local department stores, posed to approximate the activities of the buildings' original inhabitants.⁴⁵⁹ The combination of mannequins with costumed hosts and hostesses emphasized the inauthenticity of the scene, highlighting the importance of the structures, as opposed to the people of the past. Likewise, living history museums put forth interpretations that focused on monumental events in history, as opposed to more quotidian life. Writing in 1981, Cary Carson, Director of Research at Colonial Williamsburg reflected on living

⁴⁵⁷ Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Eighteenth Century Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 76-94.

⁴⁵⁸ "Life-Sized Replicas: Plymouth is Rebuilding Early Pilgrim Village," *Boston Globe*, August 21, 1948; Ward Allan Howe, "Pilgrim Holiday," November 6, 1949; Mike Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 3-32; Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁴⁵⁹ Stephen Eddy Snow, "The Development of a Performative Representation of the Pilgrims at Modern Plimoth Plantation," in *Performing the Pilgrims*, 21-48; Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 28-77; Jean Poindexter Colby, *Plimoth Plantation Then and Now* (New York: Hastings House, 1972), 106-109.

history in the postwar period, calling interpreters a “supporting cast,” and noting, “Small houses, ordinary furnishings and such lesser folk as lived in Williamsburg were part of the picture too, but not in the same way that social historians consider them important today.”⁴⁶⁰ Historical interpretation before the late 1960s focused on producing informational knowledge. Demonstrations were interactive in that they “showed” as well as “told” history and engaged audiences by making their narratives interesting and relatable, but they did not seek to place audiences in the past.⁴⁶¹ Living history museums in the 1950s and early 60s were pedagogical and demonstrative; in the words of Colonial Williamsburg’s mission aiming “to stimulate such thinking on the American heritage that will lead to constructive action on the part of our audience.”⁴⁶²

Large sites like Williamsburg and Sturbridge recreated entire communities but smaller ventures--often single farms--focused on historical agriculture. While a few existed in the 1940s and 50s, living history farm sites, like building preservation, prospered in the 1960s in response to growing urbanization.⁴⁶³ Farms were among the vernacular architecture that fell under the rubric of New Preservation and, as a result, preservationists, especially in rural areas, began to show interest in preserving these exemplars of the American past. Research and interpretation became co-constitutive; with added interest and funding, these farms became important sites of agricultural scholarship where historians and practitioners used period tools and researched historic

⁴⁶⁰ Cary Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History," *Harvard Magazine* 83 (July-August, 1981), 25. See also *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, 1957); Joe Harrington, "Pilgrim Village Replica, Mayflower II at Plimoth," *Boston Globe*, June 24, 1960.

⁴⁶¹ See, for example, Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957) 68-83.

⁴⁶² Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History," 29.

⁴⁶³ For a history of the development of living history farms, see John Schlebecker, *Living Historical Farms: A Walk into the Past* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), 5-16.

strains of plants and livestock.⁴⁶⁴ Many of these developments were recognized and consolidated in the 1970 founding of the Association for Living History, Farm, and Agricultural Museums (ALFHAM) at Old Sturbridge Village; member farms used the new organization to share and exchange information, cultivate best practices, and organize standards for the maturing field.⁴⁶⁵

As living history farms flourished, living history museums also became a premier site of new social history in a turn that must be read in tandem with related changes in historic building preservation, oral history practice, museum exhibition, and the academic profession itself. The homes and workplaces of ordinary people of the past could yield critical information about political life, social and economic structures, and everyday practices, areas of inquiry central to social historians. In 1981, Cary Carson recalled how his Harvard colleague Richard Rabinowitz (later of Michael Sand's "Revolution" team) left Cambridge in the late sixties to become the Director of Education at Old Sturbridge Village in western Massachusetts. Making the connection between the kind of history made possible by living historical sites and the increasingly leftist politics shared by Rabinowitz and other graduate students of history at the time, Carson noted:

Like many breakthroughs the connection he made seemed elementary afterwards. Ours were the first crop of American graduate students to get caught up in the enthusiasm for the so-called new social history. We were attracted to its egalitarianism, and to its "scientific" dedication to finding out how past societies were structured and how their past worked together to form organic communities.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Darwin Kelsey, "Outdoor Museums and Historical Agriculture," *Agricultural History*, 46 (1972) 105-127.

⁴⁶⁵ John T. Schlebecker and Gale E. Peterson, *Living Historical Farms Handbook* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 1-59; Darwin Kelsey, "Harvests of History," *Historic Preservation* 28:3 (1976) 20-24; Edward Hawes, "The Living Historical Farm in North America: New Directions in Research and Interpretation," *ALFHAM Annual* 1976, 33-39.

⁴⁶⁶ Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History", 22.

Carson would go on to follow his colleague as Director of Research at Colonial Williamsburg, where he too helped shift interpretation towards the new social history, paying attention to the everyday lives of ordinary people.⁴⁶⁷ Significantly, Carson noted, this was not merely precipitated by radical academics; it arose in response to a new demand from visitors, “They were a ready audience too, anxious about widespread social change and consequently eager to find out what made human communities tick. From the mid Sixties onwards, museum interpreters--the listening kind--detected the shift in the tenor of the questions their visitors asked.”⁴⁶⁸ Living history farms and museums, like other sectors of popular historymaking, responded to larger changes in how American society thought of and used the past.

While many living history museums began to emphasize social history in the late 1960s and 1970s, Plimoth Plantation’s efforts at authenticity led them to go further, emphasizing “first person” interpretation and, consequently, deepened immersion and affective identification for both interpreters and audiences. At most living history farms and museums, interpretation remained in the “third person”—that is, costumed interpreters spoke from the vantage point of the present, using third person pronouns and the past tense to describe historical persons and activities. This mode of address maintained separation between the past and the present, even as the exhibitions effectively demonstrated some aspects of the past.⁴⁶⁹ In 1967, anthropologist James Deetz became assistant director at Plimoth Plantation. Deetz pushed research and interpretation of the garrison town of Plimoth beyond the sanitized pilgrim story that the museum had

⁴⁶⁷ Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 28-77.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶⁹ For profiles of living history museums in the 70s, see Anderson, *Time Machines*.

been putting forth.⁴⁷⁰ He believed that “to function properly and successfully, a live museum should convey the sense of a different reality—the reality of a different time.”⁴⁷¹ Accordingly, Deetz added live animals and foodstuffs to the site and interpreters, mostly college students, attended intensive seminars and workshops. They were taught farming, cooking, and other skills used by the inhabitants of Plimoth in 1627. The trainees also engaged in role-playing exercises which Deetz likened to “group encounter sessions,” underscoring the connection between affective historical interpretation and psychological practices of the time.⁴⁷² Rather than lecture to visitors, the Plimoth interpreters went about daily work in the village, stopping to answer questions and explain their occupations to curious visitors. In contrast to the clean colonial clothing at Williamsburg, Plimoth interpreters were often dirty, sweaty, and barefoot. Deetz also encouraged total immersion on the part of the visitor—nothing in Plimoth Plantation was kept off limits, visitors could “crawl into bed or sit in a chair. They may chase the chickens or use the implements in the house.”⁴⁷³

Audiences responded positively to this new immersion but it also had a profound impact on the interpreters, who assumed the subject position of their historical counterparts. Writing in 1971, Deetz observed that interpreters “without a word being said, were beginning to shift the whole presentation from third person, past, to first person, present. Guides are frequently saying, “*we do*,” not, “*they did*.”⁴⁷⁴ Because they were living as seventeenth century colonists, interpreters at Plimoth consequently began

⁴⁷⁰ Snow, “The Emergence of a New Genre of Cultural Performance,” in *Performing the Pilgrims*, 183-212.

⁴⁷¹ James Deetz, “The Changing Historic House Museum: Can It Live?” *Historic Preservation* 23 (1971), 51.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

feeling as seventeenth century colonists. Like other reenactive engagements at the time, Plimoth Plantation presented an immersive environment, peopled with living, breathing exemplars of the past. They interacted with audiences in their past personas; for example feigning incredulity at the sight of cameras and other modern ephemera.⁴⁷⁵ Because of their intensive training, they could speak to a large number of inquiries, from questions about their work, to their religious beliefs, to their political opinions.⁴⁷⁶ The pedagogical experience for audiences was self-directed, viewers could feel that they had unrestricted and authentic access to the past, as opposed to a representation of it.⁴⁷⁷ For visitors, Plimoth became, like Franklin Court, a temporally-indeterminate location: its existence could be read as time travel in either direction: it was, and remains unclear if the conceit of Plimoth is that of a seventeenth century colony having moved into the present, or of twentieth century audiences stepping back into the past. In this way, the new Plimoth both reflected and extended concurrent developments in historical ideation.

Many practitioners in the field lauded Plimoth's new approach, but first person interpretation also inspired debates that echoed and anticipated the ongoing critique of reenactment in general. Cary Carson worried that Plimoth left visitors "full, but not nourished;" the exciting experience of interacting with seventeenth century colonists failing to provide a sense of context and comprehension of larger changes and trends of the seventeenth century.⁴⁷⁸ Robert Ronsheim, an education coordinator for Boston 200, was concerned about the misimpression that audiences received about the past, remarking that "empathy is not understanding." Ronsheim stated:

⁴⁷⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Plimoth Plantation," in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 189-200.

⁴⁷⁶ Author visit to Plimoth Plantation, August 20th, 2009.

⁴⁷⁷ Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims*, 120-182.

⁴⁷⁸ Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History," 29.

The likelihood of misunderstanding the past is promoted and multiplied by the sense of involvement and approval given by the living history program. The visitors are told that they are reacting to the way it was and thus are assured that they know “what it was really like.” Responding to costumed individuals carrying out roles from the past, the visitors also gain a sense of knowing how individuals in the culture that has been recreated “really felt.”⁴⁷⁹

Like many history professionals at this time, Ronsheim exhibits anxiety about the veracity of the kind of historical knowledge produced from reenactive practice, and the identifications formed by audiences from such interactions.⁴⁸⁰ The debate surrounding Plimoth Plantation mirrors similar conversations about “1876,” “The Revolution,” and other innovative history exhibitions, as well as some of the social and cultural critiques described earlier. It also prefigures what became a longstanding critique, perpetuated to the present day, and again, points to anxiety that always accompanies a radical shift in perception and practice.

In spite of these criticisms, others extolled Plimoth’s interactivity as an important pedagogical development that would allow students of the past new access to the historical, and used Plimoth’s innovations as a model for their own projects.⁴⁸¹ The National Park Service began to consider adapting living history in many of its sites and, in 1970, published a pamphlet entitled *Keep It Alive!* to introduce readers to the concept. The brochure shows the way that NPS adapted core tenets of living history (“The interpreter. . . is *being* what happened”) and also the degree to which interpretation sought authenticity, cautioning potential interpreters on minute details like period-appropriate

⁴⁷⁹ Robert Ronsheim, “Is the Past Dead?” *Museum News* 53:3 (November, 1974), 16-17.

⁴⁸⁰ Thomas J. Schlereth, “It Wasn’t That Simple,” *Museum News* 56:1 (January-February, 1978), 39-40.

⁴⁸¹ For defenses of first-person interpretation, see Jay Anderson, *Time Machines*; Stacy F. Roth, *Past Into Present: Effective Techniques for First Person Historical Interpretation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Gordon Hilker, *The Audience and You: Practical Dramatics for the Park Interpreter* (Washington, DC: Office of Publication, National Park Service, 1974), 28-34.

glasses and even cigarettes.⁴⁸² The Park Service also introduced an initiative called the Environmental Living Program which, like Plimoth, taught students about the past through experience and combined this with the new associations between preservation and the environmental movement, highlighting the connection between humans and nature in a specifically historical context. NPS described the program as “an actual living, overnight experience for children that takes place at any cultural, historic, or prehistoric site where the interaction and interdependency of man and his environment are presented.”⁴⁸³ Students visited the Tumacacori Mission in Arizona, a nineteenth-century fishing schooner, and a Civil War fort, where they were assigned previously researched historical roles and given situations in which to react. For example, while students in a pioneer cabin organized provisions for the winter, students in Fort Point, the Civil War fort, were given guard duty and told to keep a diary of what they saw.⁴⁸⁴ The educational imperative of these kinds of first-person reenactments was taken up in other places as well, especially in the context of the Bicentennial. Third and fourth graders at an elementary school in Bremerton, Washington spent every Friday for a semester of the 1975-6 school year in a colonial-era school setting. Students and teachers dressed in colonial clothing, and completed lessons commensurate with that era. The school atmosphere changed as well, students wrote in hornbooks, learned by rote memorization, and wore signs and dunce caps when they misbehaved. Both teachers and students enjoyed the experience, reporting that they had learned first-hand about colonial life.⁴⁸⁵ In

⁴⁸² William Kennon Kay, *Keep It Alive: Tips on Living History Demonstrations* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1970), 22-23.

⁴⁸³ National Park Service, *Environmental Living Program* brochure, 1975, 1. B200, box 40, folder: “National Park Service,” BPL.

⁴⁸⁴ National Park Service, *Environmental Living Program* brochure, 1975, “Getting There,” B200, box 40, folder: “National Park Service,” BPL.

⁴⁸⁵ “Pupils Dress the Part to Recreate Colonial Classroom,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 14, 1976.

the 1970s, reenactive practices, although hotly contested, began to be adapted in pedagogical institutions, showing that historical education had come to encompass affective, as well as informational knowledge.

Reenacting the Past

Reenactive modes of historical engagement and meaning-making permeated many history-based cultural productions in the 1970s but the most convincing evidence of this transformation is the sheer number of reenactments that commemorated the Bicentennial. These took many different forms, from historical events surrounding the American Revolution, to concurrent expeditions and initiatives, to other moments in the American past. Some focused on Revolutionary war conflicts such as the battles of Concord and Lexington, but rather than the battles themselves, these often concerned muster or triumph, soldiers preparing to fight, or returning from battle. In the context of Vietnam, not only did the focus of battle reenactment move away from the traumatic realities of battle itself, but it also represented a wish to fix the Vietnam experience at the moment of preparation, or to bring still-missing soldiers back home. Like other historical engagements, these reenactments became ways to process contemporary issues by reflecting them back into the past. In the 1970s, when modes of historical ideation and expression transitioned to knowledge production about the feelings or experience of the past, performative historical practices progressed from battle reenactments to reenactments of other moments in American history, as more people looked for ways to participate in experiential history, either as audience members or as reenactors.

More often, Revolutionary War reenactments took as their subject travel and transportation rather than the battles themselves, focusing on such events as

Washington's crossing of the Delaware River or Paul Revere's ride.⁴⁸⁶ These trips and countless others were undertaken by groups and by individuals; while some were supported by federal and state Bicentennial organizations, others were not. Sponsored by local 4-H clubs, Jerry Linker, a 22-year-old blacksmith from Charlotte, North Carolina relived a 600 mile horseback ride between Charlotte and Philadelphia by Captain James Jack, who had carried a declaration of independence by Charlotte militia to the colonial capital.⁴⁸⁷ A group of Arizona Boy Scout chapters retraced a historic cavalry trail under the supervision of a professor at Arizona State University, hoping to give tourists "an honest opportunity to relive history."⁴⁸⁸ Reenacting a once- common trek from Hawaii to Tahiti, a crew of 26, including historians, scientists, and craftspeople sailed a 65-foot canoe, built as it would have been built a thousand years before.⁴⁸⁹ They trained in navigation without instruments at a local planetarium, and learned about historic means of fishing and distilling water in preparation for the trip.⁴⁹⁰ The significance of these engagements was the degree of effort put into replicating the original conditions of the past as closely as possible—not only on the level of costume and appearance, but at the

⁴⁸⁶ Margaret Carroll, "Chicagoland Drums up a Revolutionizing Spirit of '76," *Chicago Style*, September 6, 1974; Jo Martin, "Stage Revolutionary Battle," *New York Daily News*, October 18, 1974; "State Bicentennial Endorses O'Neill Minutemen," *Frontier and Holt County Independent*, May 4, 1974; Barbara Archer, "Delaware Crossing Reenacted," *Newark Star-Ledger*, January 22, 1975; Paul Jablow, "Revolutionary Rider Makes a Comeback," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 28, 1975; Anne Bishop, "The Western Spirit of '76," *Literary Tabloid*, June, 1975; "Historical Figures to Make a Comeback," *Seattle Daily News*, August 6, 1975; James Tuite, "Vintage Cars Crank Up for Rerun of 1908 Race," *New York Times*, September 11, 1975; Henry Darling, "Caravan Will Reenact Expedition by Benedict Arnold," *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin*, September 28, 1975; "Pilot to Re-Enact 1926 Flight in April," *Caldwell, Idaho News Tribune*, January 19, 1976; Lucrecia Steiger, "Fronteras '76 Links The Past to the Future," *San Diego Union*, January 11, 1976; "The Knox Trail Reenactment," *Worcester Evening Gazette*, January 12, 1976.

⁴⁸⁷ John Burgess, "Historic Ride Reenacted on its Bicentennial," *Washington Post*, June 18, 1975.

⁴⁸⁸ "Historic Trail Being Traced," *Arizona Republic*, August 17, 1975.

⁴⁸⁹ Paul Redfield, Volunteer Coordinator, Madison, SC to Lady Bird Johnson, March 31, 1975, American Revolution Bicentennial Collection, RG 452, Box 96, Folder, "Lady Bird Johnson," NARA II.

⁴⁹⁰ "Hawaii-Tahiti Voyagers Set for Bicentennial Journey," *San Jose Mercury News*, September 28, 1975; "Crew Members Named for Tahiti Canoe Trip," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 9, 1976.

register of skills and experience. All strived to make their expeditions historically accurate because they believed that authentic conditions would lead to authentic emotional experience.

There are several different ways to interpret the emphasis on travel in the context of the contemporaneous socioeconomic and cultural climate: on one hand, mobility has long been a part of the American experience, so these trips might have been reproducing this already present theme.⁴⁹¹ At the same time, interest in detechnologized transportation might have been an articulation of some other impulses in the United States at the time, including the popularity of commune living and “back to land” experimentation.⁴⁹² Other Bicentennial expressions which were not necessarily historical also addressed this kind of unconventional transportation; the largest among them, the Bikecentennial, saw several hundred bicyclists riding across the United States.⁴⁹³ The alternative modes of transport (biking, walking, horseback) that Bicentennial reenactments and other trips highlighted could be read as an expression of anxieties about the restrictions to mobility that the gas shortages and the oil crisis of the period presented.⁴⁹⁴ Significantly, reenactment became a way of contemplating contemporary problems. Through reenactments of transportation, Americans reasserted the possibility of continued movement in the present by looking to travel in the national past.

⁴⁹¹ On America and mobility see Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979); Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile in the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Rudi Volti, *Cars and Culture: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); , Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹² Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Wiliam Hedgepeth, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

⁴⁹³ Jon Van, “Bicentennial Takes Bikers for a Long, Fulfilling Ride,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1976; Judy Moore, “Pedaling Among American Trails,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1976.

⁴⁹⁴ See Allen J. Matusow, *Nixon’s Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars and Votes* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Dean Kotlowski, *Nixon’s Civil Rights: Politics, Principles, and Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002).

Project coordinators affiliated with federal and state Bicentennial initiatives were interested in the emotive and experiential currency of reenactive history, and adapted reenactive practice to create a national history that could account for different experiences across the United States. Reenactments, in their emphasis on experience and empathy could call attention to commonalities between the personal qualities and experiences of colonial agents in all parts of the nation. For example, Bicentennial organizers in the Western states sought to suture local experiences into a national history through reenactments of Spanish colonial movement westward. Raul Castro, the governor of Arizona, made explicit the importance of such activities: “What went on in Philadelphia in 1776 is meaningless here, especially to a guy like me, who came from Mexico. The Anglos are celebrating the Mayflower. . .the Mexican-Americans are looking at the Spanish settlers. But the patriotism and love of country are the same.”⁴⁹⁵ Castro’s statement shows the kind of identification that he and others sought from history, and how such identification could be facilitated through reenactment. Horseback riders recreated the 1776 expedition of Juan Bautista de Anza from Mexico City to San Francisco, using the explorer’s diaries to align their activities to the dates and times of two hundred years earlier.⁴⁹⁶ A reenactment of the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition traced the path of the Spanish missionaries across Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico.⁴⁹⁷ Ideologically, these reenacted journeys were a way for Western states to build their experiences into a triumphant narrative of the Revolution--if 1776 had been a

⁴⁹⁵ Margot Hornblower, “Spanish Heritage Recalled,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 1975.

⁴⁹⁶ Martin Gerchen, “Women Aims to Retrace Trek,” *San Diego Evening Tribune*, September 12, 1975. See also Report of Tucson Bicentennial Committee, April 28, 1975, ARBA, RG 452-A1-O1, Office of Administrator Records, ARBA Advisory Council 75-6, box 96, folder: “April 7 1975 Council Meeting (Tucson),” NARA II.

⁴⁹⁷ Melvin T Smith, “Bicentennial Report,” December 2, 1976. ARBA, RG 452-A1 70, Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box 257, folder: “Dominguez-Escalante,” NARA II.

critical moment of nation-building then so too were the explorations that would eventually lead to Western expansion and “manifest destiny.” Politically and economically, the Sunbelt region of the United States, the area where the majority of these exploratory reenactments occurred, was expanding in wealth, influence and prestige in the 1970s.⁴⁹⁸ A new regional prominence would recast the political landscape of the United States and was reflected by reenactments that aimed to reassert the importance of the West in the narrative of American history by setting up its experiences as temporally and thematically correspondent to those of the East.



Figure 18. *de Anza Expedition reenactment.* Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 66.

⁴⁹⁸ See Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008).

Some exploratory reenactments questioned the still-celebratory history of westward expansion and made use of the experiential nature of the practice to rethink both historic and contemporary issues. In Elgin, Illinois, Reid Lewis, a high school French teacher and Eagle Scout leader who had reenacted the Joliet-Marquette Expedition to the Mississippi in 1973, began work on a larger project--a reenactment of LaSalle's expedition from Montreal to New Orleans, which took place in 1681 and had opened the way for French colonization in the Mississippi Valley. Lewis saw his reenactment as a way to complicate existing understanding of the settlement of the Mississippi Valley by calling attention to voyages outside of the conventional knowledge of westward expansion by wagon.⁴⁹⁹ As Lewis said, "We'll humanize history for those who see us."⁵⁰⁰ Lewis, along with five other teachers, a playwright, a priest, and sixteen of his students began training in 1974, two years prior to the reenactment. In order to ensure the facticity of every aspect of the experience, Lewis put together an impressive team of experts to train the reenactors, including the director of the cartography department at the Newberry Library; professors in physical education, geography, history, French, and environmental studies; and a meteorologist. The group researched and fashioned their own seventeenth-century clothing and acquired hand carved replicas of wooden chests of the type used by the original expedition.⁵⁰¹ Throughout the eight-

⁴⁹⁹ "Canoeists Recreate Voyage by LaSalle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1976; Michael Sneed, "LaSalle Explorers Paddle to Success," *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1977.

⁵⁰⁰ Mark Starr, "LaSalle Voyage is Put on Ice," *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1976; Seth S. King, "Civilization Slows LaSalle Expedition II," *New York Times*, February 5, 1977. In January of 1977, four members of the LaSalle group were hit by a cattle truck as they carried their canoe along a highway in Indiana. Despite this, members voted to continue the reenactment. "Four LaSalle Voyageurs Hit by Truck in Indiana," *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1977; "Canoeists to go on, Despite Crash," *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1977.

⁵⁰¹ Cherrie Hall, "Horizons '76, memo for the record," March 18, 1975. ARBA, RG 452 A1-70: Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box 260, folder: "LaSalle Expedition II," NARA II; Jon Van, "LaSalle's Journey—Elgin Style,"

month journey, the group assumed the names of the expedition members and subsisted on the expedition's original diet of beans, peas, and fried bread in an effort to approximate the experience as closely as possible.⁵⁰²

For Lewis, an "authentic" reenactment of the expedition would help participants and audiences appreciate the significance of the journey by showing them the scarcity of resources available to LaSalle and his companions. As Lewis wrote:

Without this knowledge of our struggling forefathers, we cannot be expected to appreciate the progress which has been made or to understand the errors which have been committed in the development of the Mississippi Valley. People without a sense of history can hardly be blamed for remaining blasé or indifferent in the midst of abundance which, for them has always existed. It is therefore imperative that Americans be imbued with an historical awareness if indeed we are to continue our progress and preserve our environment.⁵⁰³

In press interviews during the course of the voyage, the LaSalle group emphasized material hardships experienced by the original expedition, hoping that his reenactment of conditions of scarcity could call attention to contemporary abundance. The issues surrounding Lewis' interpretation of the history of LaSalle were complex in their interrelatedness and its multivalent comparisons of past to present. Reenactment here took up the concerns of environmentalism and back-to-land living, refracting them through history to make the point that skills that had been fundamental to nation-building in the early moments of the United States might still be useful. It was a way to contemplate both the progress and the errors of American history, as well as to connect the experiences of La Salle and other explorers to contemporary discourses of ecological

Chicago Tribune, October 26, 1975; Jon Van, "A-paddling they will go—for 3000 Miles," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1976.

⁵⁰² William Crawford, Jr. "Imagine LaSalle Exhorting His Crew, 'Stay Cool, Men,'" *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1976.

⁵⁰³ Reid Lewis, project proposal to ARBA, June 28, 1975, ARBA, RG 452 A1-70: Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box 260, folder: "LaSalle Expedition II," NARA II.

scarcity. Reenactive historical practices have been attacked by scholars who worry that the experience sublimates any sense of history on the part of the participants, but this not always true.⁵⁰⁴ As Lewis' writings on the LaSalle project help demonstrate, reenactment can be more accurately said to transfer historical understanding from the collective to the individual and allow different questions and interpretations to emerge.

Some aspects of the LaSalle expedition and other reenactments were informational in the sense of producing, through the spectacle of live performance that relocated participants and even audiences at least partially into the past, a sense of how a historic event might have looked and felt. After the LaSalle Expedition reenactment ended, Lewis reported, "so many people told me they looked out on the river. . .and they thought they were back in the seventeenth century."⁵⁰⁵ However, the affective, reflective component--the fact that interpretation was self-directed and on the level of the individual as opposed to the collective--meant that audiences and participants made meaning on different registers. While the LaSalle reenactors felt keenly that they were approximating the experience of the original group, audience reactions might have been more ephemeral. Even though the LaSalle group met with audiences over five hundred times over the course of the trip, press coverage of the expedition focused on the material and emotional experiences of the reenactors, as opposed to those of the audience.⁵⁰⁶ This might have been influenced by the group's own approaches to publicity, but it also points to the difficulty of quantifying or even verbalizing affective knowledge, which operates

⁵⁰⁴ Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What is Re-enactment?" *Criticism* 46.3 (Summer, 2004), 327-339; Vanessa Agnew, "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present." *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007); Alexander Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History." *Criticism* 46.3 (2004): 487-496. Giusseppe d'Oro, "Reenactment and Radical Interpretation," *History and Theory* 43 (May, 2004) 198-208

⁵⁰⁵ "Mississippi River Trip Proves Point," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1977.

⁵⁰⁶ See also, Frederick Lowe, "LaSalle Trek Presses South," *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1976.

on emotional as opposed to linguistic registers. The kind of knowledge produced by reenactment could be ambiguous and indeterminate, and thus difficult to describe after the moment passed, a challenging factor for those wishing to quantify how reenactive history produces interpretation and meaning.

“History in Reverse”: The Bicentennial Wagon Train

One of the most highly visible projects of the national Bicentennial, the Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage, highlighted both how the reenactment could be taken up as a state strategy for effecting patriotic sentiment, and how this experiential engagement produced in both participants and audiences complex affect which worked against those kinds of identifications. The Wagon Train was organized by the Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission and featured fifty Conestoga wagons (one from each state) accompanied by trail riders and a coterie of support staff, including chuck wagons and a travelling music review.⁵⁰⁷ The Wagon Train began at five points in the West and, over the course of a year, followed historical wagon trails backwards to a July 4th, 1976 encampment in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where they celebrated the Bicentennial with thousands of visitors, including President Gerald Ford.⁵⁰⁸ Along the way, wagons stopped at numerous communities, where locals signed a “pledge of rededication” that the Wagon Train conveyed to Valley Forge.⁵⁰⁹ For the source materials

⁵⁰⁷ “Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage to Pennsylvania,” *Columbia City Commercial Mail*, October 8, 1975; “Bicentennial Wagon Train to Recall Pioneer Spirit,” *Virginia Bulletin-Democrat*, July 24, 1975; Nick Gardner, “Wagons Will Roll Through our Valley,” *Skagit Valley Herald*, January 18, 1975.

⁵⁰⁸ T. Gray Associates, promotional brochure, “The Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage,” 1975, Bicentennial Wagon Train (BWT) Collection, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 17: Wagon Train File, box 1, folder: “misc.,” State Archives of Pennsylvania (SAP); Enos Pennington, “Ford Invited to Join Wagon Train,” *Cincinnati Post*, April 30, 1976; Linda Rosenblatt, “Conestogas Plod on Toward Valley Forge,” *Albany Times-Union*, May 31, 1976;

⁵⁰⁹ “Pledge of Rededication” [n.d., ca. 1975], BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Wagon Train File, box 6, folder: “Pledge,” SAP; Monica Hesse, “Bicentennial Wagon Train Signatures are Lost Pieces of the American Past,” *Washington Post*, July 3, 2011.

of this reenactment, the Wagon Train drew on the heroic history of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny which had, and continues to have, a lengthy cultural tradition.⁵¹⁰ In bringing to life the novels, paintings and films that informed cultural ideals of American exceptionalism, the state-sponsored project staged a spectacle that attempted to bodily evoke the triumph of the past, bringing it into the present as a renewed patriotism and rededication to civic pride in participants and audiences.⁵¹¹



Figure 19. Bicentennial Wagon Train. Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 60.

Funding from the federal government and state and local Bicentennial organizations across the country supported the endeavor, called by its organizers, “history in reverse.” One of the most heavily funded Bicentennial programs; the Wagon Train

⁵¹⁰ see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Athanaeum 1992).

⁵¹¹ While I view the fact that the Wagon Train’s trip was *in reverse* as significant, I have not been able to find an explanation for this that is satisfactory. From a logistical point of view, the types of volunteers (trail riders, wagon enthusiasts, etc.) that had the skills necessary to participate were more easily found in the Western states, which had a more developed network of club organizations. On the other hand, one could make the observation that ideologically, the backwards trip can be read as a further confusion of history and temporality such as those we have seen in this chapter, or as an assertion of the political dominance of Sunbelt states, as we saw in the section on Western reenactments.

eventually received over two hundred thousand dollars through the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), as well as additional support from state governments. The Wagon Train had corporate sponsors as well—among them Gulf Oil, Holiday Inn, and the Mayflower moving company, which donated services in kind.⁵¹² Like the Freedom Train, the Wagon Train was attractive to corporations seeking to reaffirm traditional American values through a celebratory history of accomplishment that was national in scope. For such companies, the renewed pride in the past and belief in national progress that the Wagon Train sought to evoke for spectators would ideally translate to confidence in business, especially in the context of the failing economy of the time.

Publicity material for the Wagon Train emphasized the historical and commemorative nature of the project—the trails, wagons and clothing were “authentic,”—significantly not because they were actual historical artifacts, but because they *looked* like the historical objects.⁵¹³ The participants--individuals and families chosen by local Bicentennial organizations from trail-riding and equestrian clubs, the 4-H, and the Boy Scouts of America--were also described as “authentic” pioneers and expected to maintain period appearances throughout the trip.⁵¹⁴ In addition to the “official” participants sponsored by their states, independent travelers joined the wagon

⁵¹² Aitkin-Kynett press release draft, October 5, 1976, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Wagon Train File, box 7, folder: “Aitkin Kynett Co, Inc, File, Planning, Supervision, Execution of Wagon Train Project,” SAP.

⁵¹³ Aitkin-Kynett, Report on the Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimages to Pennsylvania, June 8 1975 to March 1 1976, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Planning, Supervision, Execution of Wagon Train Project, box 7, folder, “Wagon Train Participation,” SAP; see also Official Souvenir Program (1976) BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relation File, box 4, folder: “Publicity”, SAP.

⁵¹⁴ Letters from wagoneers to Aitkin-Kynett: Mr and Mrs. John Keeler, New Brighton, PA to Lieutenant Governor Kline, February 26, 1975; Thelma Gray to Richard Read December 13, 1975; Kathy Baird to T. Gray Associates, November 17, 1975, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relation File, box 4, folder, “Thelma Gray Correspondence,” SAP.

train on every stage of its journey, sometimes with their own horses and wagons, and sometimes on foot. Over the Wagon Train's yearlong trip eastward, the numbers swelled from around 300 to 1200, demonstrating the widespread appeal of participation in reenactment, and the ability of the spectacle to move bystanders to action.⁵¹⁵

Organizers of the Wagon Train connected the westward trek that it referenced to the core American ideals that had been established during the Revolution. A widely-distributed brochure said of the original pioneers: "the settlers were drawn by a compelling belief in the inalienable rights of man, of liberty, of justice and of freedom—the principles upon which our nation was founded." The Pilgrimage, the brochure continued in civic-religious language, was "back to the birthplace of the nation. To rededicate the faith of the nation's citizens to the same principles which inspired their forefathers."⁵¹⁶ The sight of ordinary Americans reenacting the settlement of the nation was meant to inspire spectators to patriotic support of traditional national values. The organizers mobilized a familiar monumental history--the image of a mass of wagons moving across the United States along with the community building crucial to the formation of new towns. The emotive response and confusion of temporality created by the spectacle of the Wagon Train and the bodily presence of the reenactors reinforced the values of the triumphant past of the United States and projected them onto the more fractured present, resulting in a positive national subjectivity.

If the state motivation for endorsement of the Bicentennial Wagon Train reflected a belief that the enactment of core American values like exploration and industry would

⁵¹⁵ Thelma Gray to George Ebner, February 22, 1977; BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relation File, box 4, folder: "Thelma Gray Correspondence", SAP.

⁵¹⁶ Thelma Gray, "Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage to Pennsylvania," undated publicity brochure, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relation File, box 4, folder: "publicity," SAP.

motivate viewers to normalized patriotic sentiment, the actual participants, or, “wagoneers,” were paradoxically both the most crucial and the least wanted component of the exercise. They were necessary as a bodily enforcement of the validity of this history and the need to project expansion as “live,” but dangerous in that their individual experiences and motivations were complex and unpredictable. The instability of reenactment remains in the potential that embodied knowledge production can always lead to unexpected forms of consciousness and realization.⁵¹⁷ Project organizers recognized the difficulty of this position and regulated the people involved in the reenactment on several levels. First, they took great pains to designate “official” and “non-official” wagon train participants by a system that separated groups of wagoneers into elaborate chains of commands and asked them to abide by lengthy lists of rules.⁵¹⁸ Organizers also tried to regulate individual wagoneers through shifting the focus of the project away from their experiences. Publicity material for the train omitted participant experience and reflection — this is markedly different from coverage of other Bicentennial travels like the Bikecentennial, which often took the form of detailed coverage of the experience of the trip.⁵¹⁹ Project organizers cast individual reenactors as an aggregate—a unified group of bodies with a desire to commemorate the past and to

⁵¹⁷ For more on the potential of embodied performance, see Schneider, *Performing Remains*; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexual Communities Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵¹⁸ “Membership Application,” list of participants, August, 1976, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 17: Public Relation File, box 6, folder: “Participants”, SAP. See also George Ebner (Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission) to Creed Black (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), July 16, 1976, BWT, RG 31, series 17: Public Relations File, box 7, folder: “press,” SAP.

⁵¹⁹ Andrew Malcolm, “Wagon Train Gets Underway on Years Trip to Valley Forge,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1975; “Wagon Train Now in Utah on Eastward Journey,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 1, 1975; “Storm Drenches Bicen Wagoners,” *Portland Oregon Journal*, July 30, 1975; “Bicentennial Wagon Train to Recall Pioneer Spirit,” *Virginia Bulletin-Democrat*, July 24, 1975. James Rees, “Biking Couple are now Wedded Couple,” *Newport News Daily Press*, September 8, 1974; Mary Bralove, “On the Trail, Bikers Have Ups and Downs Plus Aches and Pains,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 1976; Judy Moore, “Biking for the Bicentennial,” *Washington Post*, April 25, 1976.

experience it for themselves. The “authentic” pioneers were meant to stand for an entire history of American expansion and signal that the ideals associated with that movement continued to exist, even in the embattled present. For audiences, viewing and interacting with them, and also knowing that they acted on behalf of a state initiative would ideally help restore positive feeling about and confidence in the current US political project.

While the official narrative of the Wagon Train stressed pioneer values, looking backwards, and patriotism, the wagoneers had more varied motives: some wanted a chance to develop camping, horse training, and survival skills they had previously honed as hobbies, while others wanted to travel the United States in a slow, unhurried fashion.⁵²⁰ Unlike ARBA, the Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission, and other official sponsors, the wagoneers were less interested in the grand narrative of Westward Expansion, than in the feelings of the pioneers themselves; how they had struggled to survive, and how they had felt during their journey—precisely the kind of experiential history that reenactments and reenactment-based projects sought to recover. Many were descended from original pioneers and looked for a connection with these ancestors: as one participant said of her grandmother, who had travelled the Oregon Trail as a child, “I got a wild brainstorm to match her.”⁵²¹ Cap Galloway, a farmer from Sumas, Washington, rode horseback along the Train as scout, and carried his grandfather’s gun and wore his Union Army belt buckle.⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Bill Collins, “Wagon Train’s Appetites, Tales are Both Tall.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 8, 1976; See also participation request letters: Dick Tomlinson to T. Gray and Associates, August 3, 1975; BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 7, folder: “Wagon Train Certificates,” SAP; Mr. and Mrs. John Keeler to Lieutenant Governor Kline, February 26, 1975; Franklin McCollim to Thelma Gray, November 15, 1975; Kathy Baird to T. Gray Associates, November 17, 1975, BWT, Record Group 31: Department of Commerce, Bicentennial Commission, series 14: Public Relations File, box 4, folder: “Thelma Gray Correspondence,” SAP.

⁵²¹ Tom Allen, “Shelton Shelters Trail Mules,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 18, 1975.

⁵²² George Foster, “Bicentennial Wagon Train Rolls First Cabin,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 11, 1975

Fittingly, many of the wagoneers used the aftermath of the experience to attempt to understand and narrate their ideas of the project, and at the same time, to insert themselves *as individuals* back into the narrative of the Wagon Train from which they had been excised in promotional and press materials. In the time after the reenactment, the wagoneers formed a network that reflected the strong connections that they had made on the road. The lengthy recollections they circulated in the form of a newsletter called the *WagoNews* indicated that they did not think of their experience in the context of the traditional narrative of Westward expansion, but in terms of the daily activities of the original pioneers; the monotony of daily travel, but also the camaraderie among those sharing the trip. Reenactors themselves seemed most interested in private, not public, moments.⁵²³ An Iowa couple wrote: “Mostly we remember the days of routine. . .the early morning camp stirrings, the increasing hurrying tempo as departure neared, the hitching and the leaving and the good-byes of the people.”⁵²⁴ Rather than seeing the original pioneers as heroes, reenactors came to think of them as and identify with them as regular people, like themselves.

In the reflective aftermath of the trip, during which reenactors struggled to document and make sense of their experience, the Bicentennial Wagon Train produced an entirely different kind of consciousness, one that highlights the unpredictability and potentiality of reenactment as a mode of historical ideation, and which opens up different means of identification. For example, one participant wrote in *WagoNews*, “I have seen

⁵²³ See Kate Jackson, letter in Earl Reinhalter, ed. *The WagoNews: A Newsletter for those who travelled with the Great Lakes Route of the Bicentennial Wagon Train. Issue #5 April, 1977*, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 2, folder: “Aitkin-Kynett (general)July-December1976,” SAP.

⁵²⁴ Eddie and Louise Relph, “The Great Lakes Wagon Train Trek to Valley Forge,” Earl Reinhalter, ed. *The WagoNews: A Newsletter for those who travelled with the Great Lakes Route of the Bicentennial Wagon Train. Issue #5 April, 1977*, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 2, folder: “Aitkin-Kynett (general)July-December1976,” SAP.

the face of America across the country at three and a half miles an hour. It is seeded with pollution and corruption, soiled with personal greeds, and abandoned dreams.”⁵²⁵ This negative appraisal is in contrast with the aims of the project organizers and shows why organizers were anxious about individual wagoneers. The wagoneers’ own accounts of the trip, with their emphasis on reflection and its measured distance from the actual experience, were a direct reaction to the silencing by the state. The tension of the reenactment, its unpredictability and thus its potentiality is precisely in the excess of meanings made by everyone involved: organizers, reenactors and audiences, and the fact that especially for participants, experience remains an important site of reconsideration long after the fact. Emotive knowledge production leaves psychic traces that can be marshaled in the future and applied in different contexts.

For audiences, the Wagon Train also yielded diverse interpretations. Those who witnessed the most public and thus controlled moments of the Wagon Train, the impressive spectacle of Westward expansion, the camaraderie and dedication of individual participants, were likely to feel the pride in both past and present that the organizers intended. In February of 1977, the *WagoNews* published a letter that two wagoneers had received from a woman in Landsdale, Pennsylvania:

I was in tears and had a lump in my throat when the Wagon Train pulled into Landsdale, your last stop before Valley Forge. I never forgot the thrill and excitement. You brought the 4th of July alive for so many of us. I never dreamed of seeing a wagon train in my life, not a real one. Everyone looked tired, hot, and weary, but Saturday morning it was so exciting seeing you pull out for Valley Forge. I was in tears again... We went to Valley Forge on July 5 and finally found the place you were camped at. The empty

⁵²⁵ Keith Gates, “Memories from the Gates,” in Earl Reinhalter, ed. *The WagoNews: A Newsletter for those who travelled with the Great Lakes Route of the Bicentennial Wagon Train. Issue #5 April, 1977*, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 2, folder: “Aitkin-Kynett (general)July-December1976,” SAP.

wagons look lonely and forgotten sitting there all alone. The effect is lost. I can go to a museum and see empty wagons.⁵²⁶

The emotion that this letter writer felt upon seeing the Wagon Train, and the way in which it “brought the 4th of July alive” shows the potential of reenactments like the Wagon Train to reinvigorate patriotic feeling. Significantly, the letter writer compares seeing the Wagon Train to seeing “empty wagons” in a museum, suggesting that she found the reenactment to be a much more powerful historical engagement. For visitors to the Wagon Train encampments, the experience highlighted the ability of reenactment to portray the everyday past. In Blair, Washington, wagoneer Francis Parkman told his audience about “what the movies skip: biting flies, choking dust, and jarring miles in the saddle or on a spine-whacking wagon seat.”⁵²⁷ Parkman’s account, supplemented by his dirty costume, tired horse, and dusty wagon, was very different from the more sanitized version of frontier travel to which most audiences were accustomed. At the public intervals of the Wagon Train, bodily reenactment seemed to lead to affective knowledge production in reenactors and audiences of an affirmation of “American” values and accomplishments, albeit with a more nuanced understanding of pioneer life.⁵²⁸

But the duration of the reenactment created moments when the present slipped into the past: when not participating in civic events along the trail, some wagoneers did not wear their period costumes. They decorated the costumes with badges they picked up

⁵²⁶ “Mrs. R.G.” to Eddie and Louise Relph, reprinted in *The Wagon News* Issue 4, February-March, 1977. BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 2, folder: “Aitkin-Kynett (general) July-December 1976,” SAP.

⁵²⁷ Parkman quoted in “Wagons East,” *Philadelphia News*, June 12, 1975.

⁵²⁸ “Bowen Drives Mule Team,” *South Bend Tribune*, October 10, 1975; “Bicentennial Wagon Train to Roll Though Parish,” *Denham Springs News*, December 29, 1975; Gary Taylor, “Wagon Train Readied Here for Trip East,” *Houston Post*, December 26, 1975; Joseph Lucia, “LA Wagon Train Heads for Norco,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 19, 1976; “Wagon Trains Recreate West, Rekindle Patriotism,” *Birmingham News*, March 7, 1976; Thomas Hill, “Wagon Train Brings Pioneer Days to Life,” *Tennessee Star*, March 10, 1976; Chambers Williams, “Wagon Train Show Draws 5000 to Milan City Park,” *Jackson Tennessee Sun*, April 8, 1976; Mark Talbert, “Begin Trek to Rekindle Spirit of America,” *Cedar Valley Times*, April 7, 1976.

along the way, and many of the wagons were eventually covered with bumper stickers.⁵²⁹

Wagon Train culture came to resemble contemporary commune culture, an explicitly anti-state milieu that also had roots in an interest in historical frontierism and the drive among original pioneers to form communities outside of the government's reach.⁵³⁰ The meanings made by reenactors were quite different from the communal public affect of patriotism sought by Wagon Train organizers. During the liminal moments of the reenactment, when the expectations within which both reenactors and audiences are working, break down, the contingency of affect, that always marks reenactment, emerges. These are precisely the moments that separate reenactment from other kinds of public performance. Reenactment moves between the public spectacle and the private introspect.

Similarly, other non-public moments during the Wagon Train became sites at which audiences could question both past and present. The historical narrative in publicity material traditionally ignored the encroachment on native peoples and lands, or attempted to cast it as welcome and invited: Wagon Train organizers attempted to circulate a story that wagoneers had "smoked a peace pipe" with representatives from local tribes. What had actually happened was very different; members of the Stillaguamish tribe in Ferndale, Washington had threatened to blockade the Wagon Train's route as a demonstration for tribal recognition from the government.⁵³¹ While unplanned obstacles like the blockade were undesirable and had to be managed and

⁵²⁹ Photographs from Wagon Train, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 15, box 5: "Bicentennial Wagon Train Photograph Album," SAP. See also Earl Reinhalter, ed. *The Wagon News: A Newsletter for those who travelled with the Great Lakes Route of the Bicentennial Wagon Train*. Issue #4 Feb-March, 1977; Issue #5 April, 1977, BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Public Relations File, box 2, folder: "Aitkin-Kynett (general) July-December 1976," SAP.

⁵³⁰ Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); William Hedgespeth, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

⁵³¹ Jack Hurst, "Indian Threat Reported on Caravan," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 11, 1975. See also, *Wagon Train Weekly* (newsletter) 1.10 (June 21, 1976); BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14: Wagon Train File, box 6, folder: "File, Planning, Supervision, Execution of Wagon Train Project," SAP.

suppressed in publicity, organizers felt that spectacular confrontations between native peoples and the Wagon Train, if they could be planned and controlled, could add to the reenactment by bringing it closer to traditional narratives of westward expansion. Organizers asked tribal representatives in Puyallup, Washington, to “stage an ambush” of the train as it passed through their lands. The tribe balked at this request and news stories about the event highlighted its insensitivity and the continued inequality inherent in such a demand.⁵³² This confrontation and the publicity that followed contested the triumphal history the Wagon Train symbolized. It highlighted both the disjunction between the conditions of the past and the present *and* the continuity of racist ideation in a way that brought attention to the many experiences of westward expansion. In the same way, wagoneers reported that they had been “plenty scared” passing through the Dakotas, the recent site of a standoff between Native American activists and the U.S. Military at the historical site of Wounded Knee, ostensibly because they recognized that their reenactment might be seen as offensive by Native Americans.⁵³³ Again in this case, the historic and the contemporary came together in an interesting way. The excess of meaning produced by the reenactment and its reliance on embodiment of the past that pushed comparisons to the present could lead to many different interpretations.

Above all, the Wagon Train illustrated a new mode of historical ideation that encompassed both participants and audiences. This form of historical engagement relied on the spectacle of performance and compressed the past and the present, using affective

⁵³² Ward Welsh, “Newsletter” (internal Pennsylvania Bicentennial Commission), [n.d., ca. early 1976], BWT, RG 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 17: Wagon Train File, box 1, folder: “misc.,” SAP. “Indians Bar Train Attack,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1975; “Tribe Plans Ambush,” *Chicago Defender*, June 12, 1975; “Indians Besiege ’76 Wagon Train,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 13, 1975; Jack Hurst, “Indian Threat Reported on Caravan,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 11, 1975.

⁵³³ Steve Judd quoted in Gary Taylor, “Wagon Train Readied Here for Trip East,” *Houston Post*, December 26, 1975.

identification as a mode of historical knowledge production. The way in which this model sought to quantify historicity and create historical subjectivity differed from older forms that deployed a comparative mode of relating a separate past and present. The logic of reenactment was radically different in that it was based on perceptions of the present, but it was by no means only conservative or nostalgic. Instead, the affective identification and temporal ambiguity produced by these expanded forms of reenactments had the capacity for effecting change.

Reenacting Protest

In the context of reevaluations of US history underwritten by large-scale changes in subjectivity, both preservation and reenactment strategies moved towards interests in immersive expressions of the past that shifted from the artifact to the experience as the site of historical meaning. This can be seen in the reenactive practices that began to characterize organized history exhibition but the preponderance of reenactment projects surrounding the Bicentennial demonstrate the magnitude of this transformation. Projects produced historical knowledge at the level of emotional understanding and identification relied on embodied, not textual, interpretation, and built on a permeable sense of temporality created by bodily immersion into aspects of the past. While some used reenactment to engender sentimentality and pride in the American past and motivate normalized nationalist sentiment and ongoing support of the U.S. political project, others, both participants and spectators, found reenactments to be productive sites at which to reevaluate their own ideas about the American past and present. These historical cultural productions thus made and circulated more ambiguous meanings. A comparative,

emotional view of the past and the present could lead to raised consciousness about individual and national identity and past and present inequality.

Some Bicentennial reenactments called attention to a need for the reevaluation of the American political project. The Boston Tea Party, one of the best-known events leading up to the Revolution, was reenacted on its own bicentennial in December of 1973, not only in Boston but in cities all over the United States.⁵³⁴ In these reenactments, the events of the Revolution and the political and economic grievances they articulated were tied specifically to contemporary concerns. The failing economy of the 1970s with its paradoxical stagflation led a variety of actors on the political spectrum to find meaning in the historical Tea Party's economic protest. Reenactments channeled the sense of injustice, frustration, and anger felt by the original colonists into their own projects, making the historical Tea Party stand for a range of contemporary interests including government taxing, anti-corporatism, the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, and continued racism towards Native Americans. A sense of empathy drove these protestors to make identifications that in turn reinterpreted Revolutionary history. In the context of new historical subjectivity, activists viewed the American past as a storehouse of empirical and affective information for framing their own contemporary social movements. The ways in which histories were both contested as narratives and deployed as strategies will be the topic of the next and final chapter.

⁵³⁴ Tom Wicker, "Manhattan Tea Party," clipping provenance and date unknown [c.a. May, 1974], found in ARBA, RG 452 A1-34, box 169, folder: "May," NARA II; Tom Tiede, "The Birthday Everyone Has Ignored," *Point Pleasant Register*, March 28, 1974; "Nation Ready to Celebrate the Fourth," July 4, 1974, *Lexington Herald*; "Taxpayers Group Plans Tea Party Reenactment," *San Diego Union*, December 14, 1973; Peter Anderson, "73 Minutemen Cried Wolf, People's Group Says," *Boston Globe*, January 13, 1974; "Boston Tea Party Reenactment Is Scheduled Here," *Baton Rouge State Times*, December 13, 1973; "One Man Sacramento Tea Party," *San Jose News*, December 18, 1973; "2 Pueblo Groups List Grips on Anniversary of Boston Tea Party," *Pueblo Colorado Star-Journal*; "Dump Food as Protest," *Davenport Times-Democrat*, December 16, 1973; Viola Osgood, "NOW stages Hub march on eve of Tea Party," *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1976.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Past and Protest:
Activism, Identification, and the American Archive

Changes in historical ideation and practice in the United States resulted from the dissolution of the traditional and teleological understandings of US history: the top-down narrative that focused on political accomplishments made visible through archival evidence. By the 1970s, this account was no longer viable, and Americans became interested in histories that involved everyday people like themselves and that addressed not victories and achievements, but failures, inequalities, and uncertainties. Reenactive practice was taken up in American culture because it responded to a desire for affective, emotional knowledge production about daily life and experience in the past. Reenactment did not require artifacts to make meaning and thus could be practiced outside, as well as inside, an institutional context. Preservation practice also changed—different artifacts were collected and preserved for different reasons. Preservation was democratized within institutions and through participation by community-oriented organizations. In the 1970s, Americans regarded their relationship with the past in new ways. The Bicentennial brought many of these developments to the foreground because it inspired popular interest in the past and because it provided an occasion and resources for many new cultural productions of history.

For dominant U.S. society, the past came to be a place in which to build and define individual and community identities, but for many activists, American history became, not only a language with which to articulate contemporary problems, but itself a site to be examined. Cultural protest efforts organized around new historical interpretations, making the past central to their discourses. This chapter looks at how

various protest and social justice movements that made meaning from the Bicentennial conceived of and used accounts of the American past in the context of their activism in order to form political subjectivities, to create constituencies, and to demand rights and equality.

Activists understood the Bicentennial and the American past that informed and animated the celebration in different ways. While the People's Bicentennial Commission (PBC) saw the weakening of the stable national narrative as an occasion to review the state's management and articulation of commemoration, advancing its own affective reinterpretation of the connection of the past to the present, the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation (ABC) used interest and funding created by the federal celebration to work to introduce evidence and accounts of African American life into mainstream accounts of history. Other groups responded in a more oppositional manner by disavowing the entire celebration as a commemoration of past and present exploitation. The American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Black Panther Party (BPP) questioned the Bicentennial and called attention to the long history of inequality that mainstream accounts ignored. The AIM occupied contested spaces and intervened in reenactments that downplayed aggression towards Native Americans, while the BPP helped organize the AIM and other groups in a massive protest on July 4th, 1976. These activities represent very different uses of the American past, yet all developed from the more general reformulation of historicity and historical subjectivity that occurred at this moment. Activist engagement with the past illustrates how the emergent emotive identification that attended this shift informed, and sometimes even defined political consciousness and action.

The initiatives described in this chapter show the politicized use of identificatory history but they also demonstrate the critical fact that both preservations *and* reenactments continued to be dependent on a more flexible, but still-powerful, archive. Although the archive was destabilized, it nevertheless endured simultaneously as the source for new narratives of the historical and the target of efforts to render more inclusive histories. Ultimately, the archive, because it remained the source of historical material, continued to be the site that informed novel forms of both preservation and reenactment. All of these stories represent different interactions with the archive—demonstrating on one hand, its new contingency, but on the other, its endurance. While reenactive activity like the PBC’s created identifications that reshaped well-known histories, preservation by African American groups made new archival contributions. Native American activism had the most complicated relationship with the American past and its modes of remembrance: while some activists positioned themselves in opposition to mainstream accounts, other used the opportunity of the Bicentennial to gain resources to mine their own histories. Because the groups I detail operated outside of the political and cultural mainstream, we can use them to see the ways in which the archive continued to shape inclusion and interpretation.

Activists’ interactions with and rearticulations of historical narratives in the service of change, inclusion, and equality, testifies to the different ways in which histories can be mobilized towards explicitly political ends. With these case studies, I return to the politicized context of Chapter Two, not from the perspective of state articulation of history and commemoration in the interest of maintaining hegemonic power, but from that of resistance and refusal from groups outside of the mainstream,

making explicit connections between historical conception and concrete action that did not support dominant ideology. These case studies respond to and qualify the genealogy of negative appraisal that I detail in the introduction and seek to complicate: that newer modes of historical activity lead to conservative identification and reification. For a range of different groups with varying opinions, the historical became the terrain on which to marshal progressive political positions.

“Modern Day Tom Paines:” The People’s Bicentennial Commission and the Ongoing Revolution

The People’s Bicentennial Commission (PBC), the largest and most visible leftist organization in dialogue with the Bicentennial, adapted reenactment to call public attention to the discrepancies between the founding moment and present-day America and to illustrate and inspire identification with revolutionary colonials. The PBC accused the state-supported American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission (ARBC) of treating the Bicentennial as an opportunity to legitimize and glorify the present government and of trying to suppress the true “revolutionary” meaning of the celebration. According to the PBC, the ARBC’s Bicentennial encouraged a sense of continuity in the American project by identifying the achievements of the present-day leaders of the United States with those of the Founding Fathers. The PBC contested this account, instead calling the state (in particular, Richard Nixon), corporations, and the ARBC itself, “Tories,” conservative loyalists and enemies of patriotic Americans.⁵³⁵ Throughout its five year existence, the PBC built a reorientation and reenactive identification with the principles of the American Revolution and called attention to the U.S. government’s and

⁵³⁵ For the earliest position papers from the PBC, see Jeremy Rifkin, “The Red, White, and Blue LEFT,” *The Progressive*, November, 1971. For a more general history, see Ted Howard, *The PBC: A History* (Washington DC: People’s Bicentennial Commission, 1976).

other dominant interest's investment in and uses of American history in the articulation and maintenance of hegemonic power. For the PBC, history became the language of constitutional politics.

While the 1960s represented an extraordinary period of progressive organization and mobilization, by the early 1970s, activists on the left divided over ideology and strategy, and searched for fresh perspectives on both. A broad coalition supported the effort to end the Vietnam War, but the New Left, especially groups like the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), floundered, as factions within the groups debated forming alliances with American workers on one hand, and Third World revolutionaries on the other.⁵³⁶ Disagreements led to divisions within the movement, as progressives struggled to define their ideologies and programs of action. Older Communist and Socialist organizations with connections to the New Left, but with different ideological frameworks, likewise split over issues of constituencies, labor, politics, and above all, the Vietnam War.⁵³⁷ For progressive activists, the 1970s were characterized by confusion, division, and contention.⁵³⁸

In the midst of these splits and reorientations and in the context of widespread interest in history at this moment, many progressives began reconsidering the American past as a means of evaluating the American present. In the early 1970s, John Rossen, a

⁵³⁶See T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota, 2005); Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁵³⁷ For interplay between CPUSA and other movements on the American Left, see Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds. *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2002).

⁵³⁸ At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that organized activism came to an end in the 1970s; the anti-nuclear, Chicano, and Gay Liberation movements, among others all began in this decade. For an overview, see Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 70s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

Chicago-based veteran of the U.S. branch of the Communist party who had traveled with the Lincoln Brigade to Spain and who, although older than most members, was active in Chicago's SDS, began writing pamphlets that connected Marxist principles with a concept he called "revolutionary nationalism," that argued that American progressives, in their emphasis on struggles in the Third World, had forgotten their own revolutionary tradition.⁵³⁹ Reacting to what he considered to be the failures of sixties-era activism, Rossen wrote empathetically of American leftist movements' tendencies to overidentify with internationalist causes at the expense of an understanding of the American situation in particular: "This weakness, this shortcoming of the American Left, Old and New, has played right into the hands of the American imperialists. . .who find it easier to keep hidden from the American people their own revolutionary roots and traditions, and are able with greater ease to smear revolution and revolutionaries as foreign-inspired and alien to America and Americanism."⁵⁴⁰ For Rossen, American progressives' lack of attention to American history not only led to a misunderstanding of American character, but also left them vulnerable to attacks from the right. Rossen called for a reinvestigation of the American past that would realign nationalism with a revolutionary tradition. Rossen's condemnation of the American Left's ignorance of the American past echoed the contemporaneous diagnoses of general society by social critics, yet his accentuation of the potential of American history was more optimistic, and in its avowal of history's ability to generate a revolutionary *feeling*, reflected the move towards affective engagement prevalent in other areas of popular historymaking. Rossen's concepts proved

⁵³⁹ John Rossen, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the American Left," in John Rossen and Jeremy Rifkin, eds., *How to Commit Revolution American Style* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Suart, Inc. 1973) 146-161.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 153.

attractive to many progressives who, in the wake of the dissolution of unified movements, searched for ways to move forward.⁵⁴¹

In the fall of 1971, Jeremy Rifkin, a business student and VISTA volunteer who had worked with some of Rossen's groups in Chicago, adapted the idea of a homegrown revolutionary tradition to form the People's Bicentennial Commission (PBC), a new group that aimed to use the upcoming celebration of the Bicentennial to criticize U.S. state and corporate interests and to call attention to what they saw as a forgotten history of revolution. In a 1971 article for the leftist journal the *Progressive* that would be reprinted two years later in the PBC's first anthology, Rifkin wrote: "For the American Left to develop a strategy that can win popular support for programs that answer present grievances, it must first gain a clear understanding of the role which the American heritage plays in the formation of the American people's political attitudes and behavior."⁵⁴² In Rifkin's eyes, the right--symbolized by Nixon and the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission--was coopting the American past in order to legitimize its own position. A reevaluation of this past and its legacies in the present could inspire activists and reorient citizen support towards more progressive causes. The People's Bicentennial Commission could question the way that the official Bicentennial used American history to define and encourage patriotism, using the commemoration as

⁵⁴¹ The concept of "revolutionary nationalism" was subsequently taken up by several groups on the reconfiguring left, most prominently the New American Movement, a Marxist initiative dedicated to both education and electoral politics. For more on the New American Movement, see Victor Cohen, "The New American Movement and the Los Angeles Socialist Community School," *The Minnesota Review* 69 (Fall/Winter, 2007); Arnold James Oliver, Jr. "American Socialist Strategy in Transition: The New American Movement and Electoral Politics, 1972-1982," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, 1983.

⁵⁴² Jeremy Rifkin, "The Red, White, and Blue LEFT," *The Progressive*, November, 1971, reprinted in John Rossen and Jeremy Rifkin, eds., *How to Commit Revolution American Style* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, Inc. 1973), 122.

an opportunity to gather wide support for a movement that would build its ideas on a reflection of American history and its resonance in the contemporary.

The PBC's earliest publications and media statements identified and attacked the way that the state used the Bicentennial and its attendant histories, seeing the official commemoration as an assault on the very terms of the past.⁵⁴³ The PBC was founded precisely at the moment that the ARBC's original plans to stage an international exposition to celebrate the Bicentennial began to lose popular support. The delegitimization of the state's automatic ownership over national narratives and the terms of commemorations opened up space for the PBC to make its intervention. Rifkin saw the American government's interpretation of the past and present as a fundamental issue of PBC's campaign. Seizing upon allegations of mismanagement by ARBC that had begun to surface in the press and with the American public, Rifkin wrote that the ARBC and others engaged in:

psychological warfare, of a scope and magnitude unparalleled in American history. . . their objective is to maintain and expand the power they already enjoy by neutralizing the discontent and by mobilizing millions of Americans into enthusiastic support of the very institutions, values, and power relationships that are the source of the present social crisis.⁵⁴⁴

By calling attention to state manipulation and introducing new interpretations of a familiar past, the PBC aimed to "redirect" the Bicentennial campaign "to build a mass-based social movement for a just and humane society for us all to live in."⁵⁴⁵ The PBC recast the state's use of the commemoration in alarmist rhetoric, as "psychological warfare" on the American people, a language that recalled the terms of the Vietnam

⁵⁴³ William Greider, "Group Plan to Show Radical Spirit of '76," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1971.

⁵⁴⁴ Jeremy Rifkin, "Whose Bicentennial?" in John Rossen and Jeremy Rifkin, eds., *How to Commit Revolution American Style* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, Inc. 1973), 12.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

conflict and placed them within a domestic context. The historical, and particularly, collective memory, had become contested ground.⁵⁴⁶ The anti-government language of corruption and ideological manipulation was consistent with a longer leftist critique of state action, but its transposition onto the meaning of American history was new, and reflective of the larger changes I have been discussing. For the PBC, the Bicentennial represented a struggle to redefine ideas of national heritage and of national support, to be fought on the symbolic terrain of American history. That Rifkin and others saw it this way emphasized the fact that the state, as we have already seen, was losing control over its consensus narrative of American history; PBC and others were ready to move in and make new meanings.⁵⁴⁷

At the beginning of its existence, the PBC depicted itself as a direct alternative to the ARBC, dedicated to exposing the corruptions and manipulations of the state agency, and searching for more meaningful ways to celebrate the Bicentennial. In this first goal, the PBC was almost immediately successful. In one of their group's first initiatives, the PBC leaked documents to the press that exposed the Nixon White House's control over the supposedly non-partisan planning of the Bicentennial. As detailed in Chapter Two, the leak led to the resignation of ARBC chair David Mahoney and subsequent GAO and OMB investigations and the dissolution and reconfiguration of the ARBC into the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA). The media, especially the

⁵⁴⁶ In fact, one of the PBC's first acts was to apply to the ARBC for official recognition as a Bicentennial program under the "Heritage" rubric. See Martha Jane Shay to George Lang, ARBC, July 12, 1972; Martha Jane Shay to Deborah Lawrence, July 11, 1972; Reprinted in *"The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial: Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety Fourth Congress, Second Session, May, 1976, 101-102.*

⁵⁴⁷ For a framework, and other examples of resistance at the site of memory, see George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Washington Post, covered the PBC and Rifkin favorably, publishing a series of articles praising the PBC's watchdog activities.⁵⁴⁸ These accusations of corruption and partisanship came at a moment during which the Nixon administration was increasingly under fire for the cover-ups surrounding the Watergate scandals; it was easy for the press and the public to believe that this kind of maneuvering had extended to the Bicentennial itself and to support activists who invited Americans to make a more meaningful and nonpartisan commemoration of the Revolution.

Building on the publicity brought by this incident, Rifkin and the PBC proved adept at garnering media coverage and garnering strong reactions to their cause.⁵⁴⁹ Supporters of the PBC at this time included VFW chapters, Rotary Clubs, the YMCA and the Campfire Girls, all of who adapted PBC materials in their programming.⁵⁵⁰ Early enthusiasts, including, significantly, conservative columnist James J. Kilpatrick, praised the PBC's "healthy questioning" of the state-sponsored celebration of the Bicentennial, reflecting the growing unease with the Nixon White House in the context of the

⁵⁴⁸ See Eugene L. Meyer, "Counter Bicentennial Group Seeks End of Exploitation," *Washington Post*, September 8, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, "The Big Birthday Bungle," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, "The Red, White, Blue—and Green," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1972; Eugene L. Meyer, "GAO Is Mildly Critical Of Bicentennial Group," *Washington Post* December 22, 1972; Eugene Meyer, "Bicentennial Commission Hit in Report by House Unit Staff," *Washington Post*, December 30, 1972; Susan Dworkin, "The Bicentennial: Is it Slowly Sinking into the Potomac?" *Ms.* June, 1974, 46-51. See also, Deborah Lawrence to David Mahoney, March 23, 1972, reprinted in "*The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial*," 219; Eugene Skora to Jack LeVant, March 31, 1972, reprinted in "*The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial*," 220-221; Leonard Garment to Jack LeVant, April 3, 1972, reprinted in "*The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial*," 223.

⁵⁴⁹ Phil Gailey, "Plans Are Traditional, Inventive," *The New Leader*, June, 24, 1974; William May, "Unofficial Panel Suggests Revolutionary Celebration," *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, July 28, 1974; "Old Time Americanism," *Miami News*, December 31, 1974; James Perry, "Bicentennial Planners on Collision Course," *Sharon, Pennsylvania Herald*, December 6, 1974; "Non-Organized Group Hopes to Form Bicentennial Units," *Decatur Herald*, February 11, 1975.

⁵⁵⁰ Robert Gruenberg, "News for Nixon: 'People' Uniting for Bicentennial," *Tucson Daily Star*, March 24, 1974; "Nation Ready to Celebrate the Fourth," *Lexington Herald*, July 4, 1975.

Watergate investigation from both ends of the political spectrum, and wide resistance to a top-down celebration of the Bicentennial.⁵⁵¹

As the PBC worked to discredit official Bicentennial planning, the group also encouraged Americans to learn about the revolutionary past for themselves. PBC began publishing study and reading guides, which put together capsule histories and bibliographies of American Revolution history.⁵⁵² In *America's Birthday*, a planning and activity guide published in 1973 by Simon and Schuster, the PBC again accused the ARBC of “a bicentennial plan to manipulate the mass psychology of an entire nation,” and implored its readers to look to “the real importance of historical figures,” by applying the past to the present.⁵⁵³ *America's Birthday* featured reading lists and ideas for research projects, but also calls for local TEA (Tax Equity for Americans) parties, and the introduction of Student Bills of Rights in high schools and colleges.⁵⁵⁴ These projects urged a new understanding of the American Revolution by capitalizing on popular interest in the past and comparing present social, political, and economic conditions with those of two hundred years prior, providing a framework in which readers could apply revolutionary principles to their own lives.

The PBC's historical revisionism identified examples of the revolutionary tradition in the later history of the United States, but carefully omitted the most recent New Left from this history, on the grounds that those movements did not represent a nationalistic patriotic tradition. Exemplars of progressive American “patriots” included

⁵⁵¹ James J. Kilpatrick, “A Conservative View: Bicentennial Shaping Up as Glorious Fizzle of '76,” *Washington Star Syndicate*, May 9, 1974.

⁵⁵² Charlie Jones, People's Bicentennial Commission, *Common Sense: Special Supplement* [n.d., ca. 1973], Boston 200 (B200) Collection, box 48, folder: “PBC,” Boston Public Library (BPL); People's Bicentennial Commission, *Voices of the American Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975).

⁵⁵³ People's Bicentennial Commission, *America's Birthday: A Planning and Activity Guide for Citizen Participation during the Bicentennial Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 10-11.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48, 120-139.

the Grange movements, Mother Jones and the Industrial Workers of the World, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Eugene Debs.⁵⁵⁵ From the beginning, PBC publicity deployed this alternative historical trajectory to distance the new group from the internationalism of the New Left and other radical movements of the 1960s, denouncing their adherence to the rhetoric of Lenin, Mao, and Castro as inappropriate to the contemporary United States, and calling for a return to the homegrown values of Revolutionary America, those that had been passed along in the Declaration of Independence and the writings of Paine and Adams among others.⁵⁵⁶ Although the PBC had grown from Rossen's Marxist framework, the group worked to obfuscate this connection. The PBC carefully stayed away from the New Left and depicted itself as an alternative, both because Rifkin and others, disillusioned with the splintering of the New Left, felt that it had strayed from the nationalistic patriotic tradition, but more concretely because, at this point, identification with the New Left was a liability for the broad consensus that the PBC was attempting to form. As Sheila Rollins, a staff member in the national office, noted in a press interview, "it's a populist movement. Democratic with a small 'd.' We are not really a liberal plant."⁵⁵⁷ The PBC worked to create a movement ideology supported by a new conception of United States history that would appeal to many different Americans.

The PBC's reenactive engagement built upon a familiar account of American history but reread the past in terms of the present and evoked emotional identification with texts—the anger and outrage of “patriots” extended over time and channeled into the anger and outrage of “new patriots.” Its members sought to found a new popular

⁵⁵⁵ Charlie Jones, People's Bicentennial Commission, “Our Rights and Our Liberties,” *Common Sense: Special Supplement* [n.d., ca. 1973], B200, box 48, folder: “PBC,” BPL.

⁵⁵⁶ Jeremy Rifkin, “The Red, White, and Blue LEFT,” in Jeremy Rifkin and John Rossen, eds., *How To Commit Revolution, American Style: An Anthology* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, Inc. 1973), 122.

⁵⁵⁷ Sheila O'Brien, “Tories, Patriots Fighting,” *Flint Journal*, March 31, 1974.

movement, one that used the history of the past to provoke change in the present. At the same time, the PBC could turn to reenactment because it was reorienting a history already well-documented by the archive. The PBC's intervention was not in adding new information to accounts of the American Revolution, but in challenging state interpretations of a direct correlation between the revolutionaries of the past and the political leaders of the present.

In its reconsideration of revolutionary history, the PBC underscored persistent parallels between the past and the present, making a claim for a social activism legitimated through the history of the American Revolution. PBC publications emphasized comparisons between the two eras, making statements like, "This is America in the '70s. The 1770s and the 1970s."⁵⁵⁸ The preconditions for revolution present in the 1770s, were, for the PBC, also present in the 1970s. Contemporary leaders were not, as the state reasoned, the heirs of the patriots, but instead more akin to Parliament, invested in a conservative account of the Revolution in order to quell revolutionary sentiment in contemporary citizens.⁵⁵⁹ With these correlations between the events and ideas of the two eras, the PBC advocated for a second American Revolution that would stem from a reassessment of the affective relationship between the past and present: "The Bicentennial can provide a common language and psychology that can unite individuals and groups into a force for real change during the Bicentennial decade."⁵⁶⁰ If the state's Bicentennial celebration invoked American history to cement the success of the U.S.

⁵⁵⁸ People's Bicentennial Commission, *Common Sense II: The Case Against Corporate Tyranny* (New York: Bantam, 1975) 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Jeremy Rifkin, "Whose Bicentennial?" in Jeremy Rifkin and John Rossen, eds., *How to Commit Revolution American Style* (New York: Lyle Stuart, Inc, 1973), 9-20.

⁵⁶⁰ People's Bicentennial Commission, *America's Birthday: A Planning and Activity Guide for Citizen's Participation during the Bicentennial Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973) 9.

political, economic, and social project, the PBC would reorient the history highlighted by the commemoration to question the same, by underscoring similarities between the situations of the two eras.

To further stress affective identification between the 1770s and 1970s, PBC publications used a language of temporal confusion. Their rhetorical strategy posited that historical figures reanimated somehow into the present in the manner of the *Meeting of Minds* television program or the Franklin Exchange exhibition, would be disappointed when faced with the America of contemporary times. For example, in support of a demonstration on the anniversary of the Lexington and Concord skirmishes that began the war, the PBC published a broadside that read the following:

If the patriots of the 1770s could take a look at the economy of the 1970s, they'd be staggered by our silence. The burning issues of 200 years ago read like the front page of today's newspapers. High prices, shortages of vital goods, new taxes, growing unemployment, gross discrepancies in wealth. Back then, a handful of troublemakers we now call the patriots pointed an accusing finger at rich merchants and the monarchy. In fact, economics were behind many of the protests that led to the American Revolution. Take the Boston Tea Party for example. The East Indian Company was a multinational tea monopoly of its day. With stockholders and friends sitting in Parliament. When the King tried to help the company corner the American market, the patriots tossed the idea over the side. Two hundred years late, PBC is rocking the boat again. In the tradition of Paine, Adams, and Franklin.⁵⁶¹

What is striking about this passage, which is typical of PBC's depiction of history, is the multi-directionality of temporal flow that it establishes. On one hand, the patriots of the past are depicted as somehow returning to the present. On the other, the past is described in contemporary language: the East India Company is a "multinational monopoly" and

⁵⁶¹ People's Bicentennial Commission, "Is This What America's 200th Birthday is All About?" [n.d., ca. Spring 1975], B200, box 48, folder: "PBC," BPL.

the king is seen as helping them “corner the American market.” The language used by the PBC deliberately confused the past and the present, making a stronger link across time.

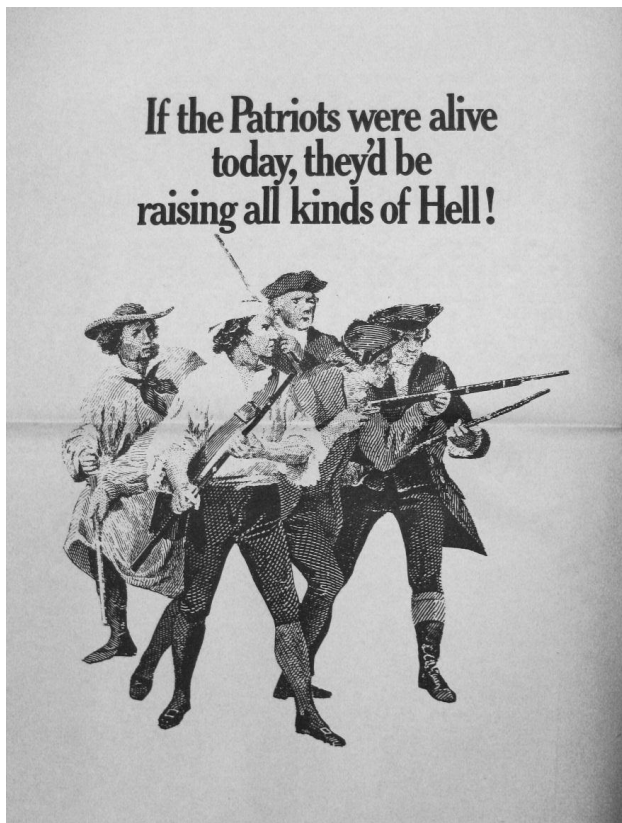


Figure 20. *The PBC's publicity material imagined Revolutionary-era colonists' reactions to contemporary politics.* Boston 200 Collection, box 48, folder "PBC," Boston Public Library.

Other PBC materials likewise emphasized this connection by copying the visual style of broadsides of the 1770s, or by inserting historical writings by Thomas Paine, Sam Adams and others as “guest opinions” in the PBC newsletter, *Common Sense*.⁵⁶² Historical museum exhibitions like Boston 200's “Revolution” and the Smithsonian's “1876” engendered a temporal indeterminacy that could lead to a consideration of the present in terms of the past; the PBC actively invited these connections and built them onto a larger reconsideration of revolutionary history. The PBC sought to legitimize the

⁵⁶² See for examples, Sam Adams, “Guest Opinion,” *Common Sense* 2.2, (April, 1974) 3; Samuel Thatcher, “Before Going On...A Revolutionary Oration, July 4, 1776-style.” *Common Sense*, Special Supplement [n.d., ca. 1973],

idea of patriotic revolt, moving away from the correlation that the state had established between patriotism and consent to stimulate outrage, anger, and finally action, in those who would recognize that the current trajectory of American history was off course.

To call attention to this discrepancy, the PBC staged reenactments that reflected the group's own identification between past and present and that challenged the state's own program of reenactments of the same material. The PBC recognized the importance of sponsored reenactment as a crucial site of discovery and meaning making, and attempted to disrupt these reenactments by contesting the terms of identification. On December 16, 1973, Boston 200 planned a reenactment of the Boston Tea Party, long seen as the inaugural event of the Revolution, (ironically) sponsored by the Salada Tea Company and the John Hancock Insurance Company.⁵⁶³ PBC members from the national office in Washington as well as from local chapters all over New England traveled to Boston for the occasion, which they also called the "Oil Party" as a response to the recent OPEC oil embargo. Carrying signs that read "The Spirit of '76 Lives On," "John Hancock Didn't Sell Insurance," and "Impeach Richard I," protestors hurled empty oil drums into the Charles River. One PBC delegate, dressed in an outsized papier-mâché head of Richard Nixon, complete with a royal robe and a crown covered with Exxon, Texaco and other major oil companies labels, rowed around the replica ship on which the official reenactment was taking place.⁵⁶⁴ Media coverage of the event focused overwhelmingly on the PBC's efforts; papers across the nation reprinted photographs of

⁵⁶³ Dorothy McGhee, "20,000 Rebels Rise Up at Boston Oil Party—Dump King, Exxon," *Common Sense* 2.1(January, 1974), 1.

⁵⁶⁴ Dick Solito, "Crashers May Provide Additional Excitement at Boston Tea Party," *Concord Journal*, November 22, 1973; John Kifner, "1973's Boston Tea Party Brews a Protest: Anti Nixon Movement Steals Stage," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, December 17, 1973; "Protests Add Flavor to Boston 'Tea Party,'" *Norfolk Virginia, Ledger-Star*, December 17, 1973; Don Oakley, "Blow for Liberty, Or Rash Radicalism," *Union Pennsylvania Standard*, December 13, 1973.

the Nixon head circling Boston 200's boat.⁵⁶⁵ Instead of the patriotic support that Boston 200 and Mayor Kevin White had hoped to instill in Boston residents, many spectators made precisely the connections between the past and the present that the PBC had hoped to encourage.



Figure 21. People's Bicentennial Commission action at Boston Tea Party Reenactment, December 16th, 1973. Reprinted from *American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Report to the People Volume 1* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977), 109.

In the coming months, the PBC received letters that indicated that the wide constituency that they sought was paying attention. One woman wrote, "I am past 40 and have two grandchildren—but a patriot through and through. America needs all ages to WAKE UP!" Another woman, writing from Cocoa, Florida said, "There are 3 of us

⁵⁶⁵ Warren Talbot, "Boston Oil Party hopes to Upstage Tea Party," *Boston Globe*, December 13, 1973; Bruce Bowman, "Revolution at the Boston Tea Party," *Ipswich Hamilton-Chronicle*, December 12, 1973; "Ex Local Man is 'Revolutionizing,'" *Greenfield Recorder*, December 14, 1973; Robert Jones, "Plan for Plain Tea Party Goes Over the Rail," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1973; "Protestors Blast Nixon at Boston Oil Party," *Marion, Illinois Republican*, December 17, 1973; "Reenactment of Boston Tea Party Turns to Protest Against 'Tyrant Pres.' *Eldorado Journal*, December 17, 1973; "A Wild Tea Party," *Racine Journal Times*, December 17, 1973; Betty Mills, , "Boston Oil Party Asks Impeachment," *Canadaigua Messenger*, December 17, 1973.

here—middle aged, disgusted Republicans—and very concerned Americans.”

Significantly, some of these letters took on the language of historical identification of the PBC, with a man writing from Minneapolis: “if you can put me in contact with any backwoods Sam or Abigail Adams out this way, I’ll see what we can carry on.”⁵⁶⁶ The Boston Oil Party occurred at a moment when the connections between misrule in the past and the present were clear: the president was being investigated for abuse of executive power, and the oil embargo threatened the abundance that Americans had enjoyed since the end of World War II. More importantly, federal Bicentennial planning had not captured the public imagination, leaving the commemoration open to public interpretation. The PBC’s success at this moment testifies not only to the organization’s effective co-optation and reorientation of the past towards protest, but also the presence of a willing audience for this mode of consciousness-building.⁵⁶⁷ The affective connections that the PBC sought appealed to many kinds of supporters ready to engage with the PBC using their own language of identification.

By the next time the PBC organized against another state reenactment, both the Commission and the political climate had undergone significant changes. On April 19, 1975, the PBC called for a rally at the commemoration of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, the first shots fired in the American Revolution. PBC began the rally at midnight in the town of Concord, and claimed to have amassed 45,000 “new patriots.” Promotion for the rally stressed the connections with the past; posters and leaflets illustrated with the original image of the “shot heard round the world,” looked like

⁵⁶⁶ Letters from Dorothy Matkins, Harriet C. Machine, John P. Goggin, “Committee of Correspondence,” *Common Sense* 2.1 (January, 1974), 13.

⁵⁶⁷ William May, “Unofficial Panel Suggests Revolutionary Celebration,” *Salem Journal & Sentinel*, July 28, 1974; Dan Daniel, “Bi-Centennial,” *Stuart, Virginia Enterprise*, July 31, 1974; Milton Jaques, “Unofficial People’s Group Adds Spark to Bicentennial,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 22, 1975.

seventeenth century handbills, stating “Sons and Daughters of Liberty Take Notice.”⁵⁶⁸

While the format of the rally resembled events of the previous decade, publicity created a historical connection with a more remote past. The event featured dramatic readings of Revolutionary-era writings by Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson and others, as well as speakers from a selection of progressive causes, including Richard Chavez of the United Farm Workers, Don Tormey of the United Electrical Workers, and Aileen Gorman, of the National Consumer Congress. The event also featured musical performances, by Arlo Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs and others.⁵⁶⁹ Its planning further deployed the temporal confusion of early PBC efforts; billed as a reenactment, the rally also featured contemporary music, speakers, and entertainment. The site of reenactment, thus, was not visual or spectacular, but emotive. The political speeches and folk music created an affective identification with patriots of the past and conveyed a feeling that, in 1975 like in 1775, the U.S. was on the verge of a revolution.

Again, the PBC’s activity aligned directly against that of the state’s own celebration and created a discursive space between the two which questioned the meaning and motives of commemoration. The official event began in the morning, with a speech by President Gerald Ford at the North Bridge of the Concord River, ironically where the British had stood two centuries prior. The PBC protestors loudly booed Ford’s speech, and some attempted to approach him by wading into the water and moving to his side. Ford felt threatened and rushed through his speech, ultimately leaving Concord earlier than he had planned. The PBC and its supporters celebrated, and felt that in standing

⁵⁶⁸ People’s Bicentennial Commission, “Sons and Daughters of Liberty,” posters and handbills., B200Co, box 48, folder: “PBC,” BPL.

⁵⁶⁹ Tom Mathews and Jane Whitmore, “Up-to-the-Minutemen,” *Newsweek*, May 19, 1975, 29; John Kifner, “Wary Citizens at Lexington and Concord Await,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1975; Margot Hornblower, “Concord Faces an Invasion,” *Washington Post*, April 17, 1975; Howard, *The PBC: A History*, 50-53

down Ford and other state representatives, they had replicated the affective conditions of the first battle of the Revolution.⁵⁷⁰

While the PBC counted this disruption as a success, the media and the public saw connections between the PBC and the much-denigrated counterculture, as opposed to the revolutionary colonists. Overwhelmingly, the press depicted this effort as a beer-soaked and disruptive reverie, as opposed to an inspirational political action.⁵⁷¹ Perhaps, because of the rural location and the relative youth of the protestors, the rally was too reminiscent of Woodstock and other events associated with the now-demonized counterculture; the media language echoed descriptions of countercultural activity, with one commentator calling the protesters “bearded beer drinkers.”⁵⁷² The slippage of reenactment, which is never quite predictable and never quite works the way in which one intends, moved in both directions. The state commemoration was ineffective, but while the PBC meant to forge a connection between protests of the 1970s and the 1770s, the Concord event ended up being read in terms of a more recent, and lately pathologized history—that of the 1960s political activism and counterculture; themselves sometimes conflated in the public’s mind and memory.

The PBC’s alternative commemoration also might have been less potent because it was no longer the only alternative. By the time of the Concord event, the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission (ARBC) had transitioned into the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) and, rather than attempting to mount

⁵⁷⁰ “45,000 Patriots Gather at PBC Rally for Economic Democracy,” “The Second Midnight Ride to Concord,” *Common Sense*, 3.2 (May, 1975), 8-10; Joan Merrick Naider, “New Concord Alert: Town Fears Bicentennial Heard ‘Round the World,” *Chicago Daily News*, March 22, 1975.

⁵⁷¹ Ernest B. Furguson, “The Uglification of the Bicentennial,” *Baltimore Sun*, April 22, 1975; Tom Matthews, “Up-to-the-Minutemen,” *Newsweek*, May 19, 1975, 29; Bud Vestal, “Bicentennial People Warn of the Wrong Kind of Revolutionary Spirit,” *Grand Rapids Press*, May 4, 1975.

⁵⁷² Victor Riesel, “Radicals Make Bicentennial Bloody,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 25, 1975.

a centralized celebration, had adopted the Bicentennial Communities plan, encouraging all interested celebrants to plan their own commemoration.⁵⁷³ This meant that, just as Rifkin and the PBC had been suggesting, the ARBA invited Americans to make their own meanings, celebrating whichever aspects of the Bicentennial they found personally significant. In a March, 1975 interview with *U.S. News and World Reports*, Bicentennial Administrator John Warner used language that could have come out of a PBC publication: “the word ‘bicentennial’ is in the public domain. I have no control over it, nor should I have any control. It belongs to the people.”⁵⁷⁴ The PBC’s strongest argument against the state’s politicization of the commemoration was no longer viable and the press and the public did not greet its other critiques with the same strong popular support.

The objects of PBC’s condemnation had also changed to a set of ideas that were not as palatable as the more timely attack on Richard Nixon had been but that lent themselves to media insinuations of the PBC’s connections to the radical left. By this time, the OPEC embargo had ended, Nixon had resigned, and PBC had changed its message, moving from a reproach of the state to a condemnation of business. Where once, the primary “Tories” targeted by Rifkin and others had been the United States government, the new Tories were instead, American corporations. The Concord event inaugurated PBC’s new approach: a plan called “New Economic Democracy” that applied the ideals of the Declaration of Independence to economic, rather than political principles.⁵⁷⁵ Rifkin and the PBC had first cited both big business and big government as

⁵⁷³ “From Manhattan to Mid-America: A ‘Grass Roots’ Bicentennial,” *U.S. News and World Report*, August 19, 1974, 65-67.

⁵⁷⁴ “Growing Controversy over the Bicentennial: Two Views,” *US News & World Report*, March 18, 1975, 35-38.

⁵⁷⁵ “New Patriots Unanimously Adopt Declaration of Economic Independence,” *Common Sense* 3.2 (May, 1975).

oppressive forces, but with the resolution of Watergate and the resignation of Nixon, as well as the intensification of unemployment and inflation, the PBC began concentrating on economic, as opposed to political problems. In the media, commentators and critics connected the PBC's new focus to the demonstrations at Concord and perpetuated the unwelcome identification between the PBC and the radical left.⁵⁷⁶ James J. Kilpatrick, the conservative columnist who had previously praised the PBC's attack on a corrupt state, now reversed his opinion, contending that the PBC "perverts the language of Jefferson to the rhetoric of Lenin," discounting the nationalistic image of home-grown ideology that the PBC cultivated.⁵⁷⁷ The PBC's shift to its slogan of New Economic Democracy, which sought to capture a widespread disaffection with the economy, instead had the unintended result of making the PBC seem like leftist extremists.

Although the media now connected the PBC to the Weather Underground and other radical remains of the New Left, the organization persisted itself in maintaining identification with the American colonists. In April 1975, to coincide with the Concord event, PBC published a new book called *Common Sense II* that called attention to abuses of power by corporations and for grassroots action by people. In the familiar PBC rhetoric of temporal ambiguity, *Common Sense II* began with a strangely familiar capsule history of America in the 1760s and 70s, setting the scene by noting that "hemlines were rising," and "a generation gap was emerging." The recounting of American history moved through accounts of economic and political tumult, and ended up by stating:

⁵⁷⁶ Joel Makower, "Power on the Potomac: Revolution, 1976 Style," *Washingtonian*, April 27, 1976, 65-69; Ronald Koziol, "Threats of Bicentennial Terrorism," *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1975; "Conlan Claims Marxists Run Bicentennial Group," *University of Arizona Republic*, October 12, 1975; Bruce DeSilva, "Jeremy Rifkin's Self-Image: A Great Propagandist," *Providence Journal*, January 25, 1976; William Rusher, "The Anti-Bicentennial," *Long Island Press*, February 9, 1976; James Hyatt, "Antibusiness Bicentennial Group is Waging Public-Relations Guerilla War to Push Goals," *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 1976.

⁵⁷⁷ James J. Kilpatrick, "Mr. Rifkin's [sic] Revolution," *Washington Star*, July 24, 1975.

“History has cast our generation of Americans in the second act of that great drama.”

PBC swapped out its first tyrant, Richard Nixon, for General Motors, Gulf Oil, and other corporations as the primary agents of oppression.⁵⁷⁸ Continuing to use the language of revolutionary nationalism and encouraging affective connections to simulate understanding the inequalities of the past and the present *Common Sense II* charged contemporary companies with working against free enterprise and the freedom of the small entrepreneur, and stated that legislative changes must be made to the organization of capital and the ownership of means of production to ensure comfortable lives for Americans.⁵⁷⁹

PBC’s transition to New Economic Democracy led to a series of actions that attacked corporations directly and ended up further alienating the mainstream constituency that the PBC had targeted. In March of 1976, the PBC sent letters and audiotapes to wives of corporate CEO’s, offering rewards for information leading to the prosecution and conviction of corporate crimes.⁵⁸⁰ Another batch of letters went to 10,000 corporate secretaries, also offering them a reward for information.⁵⁸¹ The formerly sympathetic press and public reacted negatively and now labeled the PBC as extremists.⁵⁸² While many Americans, from all sides of the political spectrum, had

⁵⁷⁸ People’s Bicentennial Commission, *Common Sense II: The Case Against Corporate Tyranny* (New York: Bantam Books) 1975, 2-9.

⁵⁷⁹ New Economic Democracy was an unusual plan, prescient in its critique of corporate culture and somewhat akin to the syndicalism of midcentury anarchists, but also underwritten by the logic of emergent neoliberal culture—New Economic Democracy spoke of productivity, initiative, personal responsibility, incentive, and accountability, tying the values to the founding of the United States. See also Fred Turner’s *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) which shows a similar development from New Left to libertarian ideology.

⁵⁸⁰ "Radical Bicentennial Group Lobbying Executive Families," *Cincinnati Post*, March 29, 1976; "Ad Execs Wives Vexed by Bicentennial Tapes," *Advertising Age*, April 12, 1976.

⁵⁸¹ "In Dubious Battle," *Newsweek*, April 26, 1976.

⁵⁸² "A Senate Subcommittee Denounces the People's Bicentennial Commission," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 6, 1976; Paul Harvey, "Beware of the People's Bicentennial," *Willoughby, Ohio News-Herald*, April

applauded PBC's exposure of government corruption in the ARBC, the idea of *corporate* corruption was somehow seen as something that could not be protested or changed.

The new and more negative reaction against the People's Bicentennial Commission culminated in an investigation by a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a report entitled "The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial." The investigation gathered information and evidence from the long history of the People's Bicentennial Commission--including its ties to Rossen, described as a long-time member of the Communist Party and a leader in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee--to characterize the PBC as a subversive, terroristic organization with connections to the Weather Underground and socialist parties backed by Fidel Castro.⁵⁸³ Although there had always been confusion in the media over the PBC's political orientation, the moment that its protest changed from political to economic, and as a result of the events at the Concord reenactment, it became easier to paint the PBC as a socialistic group with radical affiliations.

The investigation, report, and subsequent media reactions reflect the persistent specter of the 1960s that haunted leftist organizations in the following decade and the unpredictability of reenactive practice. While the PBC treated the investigation and subsequent report as a joke, even selling copies of the report signed by PBC leadership, the damage had been done and the PBC became connected to the extremist left in the

30, 1975; Henry Clay Gold, "A Tool of New Left," *Kansas City Times*, May 6, 1976; Ronald Koziol, "People's Commission Called Left-Wing Fraud, Senate Panel Assails 'Theft' of Bicentennial," *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1976; "The Leftist's Bicentennial," *Phoenix Gazette*, April 14, 1976; Margot Hornblower, "Dissidents Aim to Spoil Philadelphia's Fun," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1976; James C. Hyatt, "Antibusiness Bicentennial Group is Waging Public Relations Guerilla War to Push Goals," *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 1976.

⁵⁸³"The Attempt to Steal the Bicentennial:" *Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety Fourth Congress, Second Session*. May, 1976.

media.⁵⁸⁴ The culmination of the PBC's protest against the Bicentennial, a Washington DC rally on July 4th, 1976, was poorly attended, with even some of the local PBC chapters choosing to travel to Philadelphia instead for an event coordinated by the more radical Fourth of July Coalition.⁵⁸⁵ Yet at the same time, the investigations can also be read as a testament to at least the partial success of the PBC's overall project, as recognition that they had managed to shift press and public opinions about national commemoration of the Bicentennial, and causing many to cast a new and critical eye on American history. The PBC's adoption of history demonstrates that reenactment can be used to question dominant accounts of history and to generate affective identification that leads to political consciousness. However, it also shows the ways in which reenactment is often limited to histories that are already present in the archive.

The Black Panther Party, The Fourth of July Coalition, and the History of Empire

The Black Panther Party, as well as the other groups in the Fourth of July Coalition, a loose confederation of radical groups which also included the American Indian Movement and activists for the independence of Puerto Rico, challenged mainstream interpretations, creating comparisons between the past and the present that were quite different from those of the People's Bicentennial Commission.⁵⁸⁶ Direct protests against the Bicentennial celebration resulted from the recognition of ongoing

⁵⁸⁴ "A Senate Subcommittee Denounces the PBC," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 6, 1976; Paul Harvey, "Beware of People's Bicentennial," *Willoughby, Ohio News-Herald*, April 30, 1976; Nicholas von Hoffman, "All the Corruption That's Fit to Tattle on the Boss," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1976; Henry Clay Gold, "Bicentennial Faction a 'Tool of New Left,'" *Kansas City Times*, May 6, 1976.

⁵⁸⁵ "Six Arrested in July 4th Group Clash," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 9, 1976; Ethel Taylor, Women Strike for Peace, Letter to the Editor, "July 4th Can be a Day of Protest Too," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 4, 1976.

⁵⁸⁶ "Dellums Backs 'People's' Bicentennial of Fourth of July Coalition," *Black Panther*, June 5, 1976, 5. For an account of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, another significant part of the Fourth of July Coalition, see Meg Starr, "'Hit them Harder': Leadership, Solidarity, and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement," in Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden Seventies*, 135-154.

structural inequalities that some felt the mainstream commemoration ignored. The Fourth of July Coalition, an alliance that called for a “Bicentennial Without Colonies” consisted of groups to the left of the People’s Bicentennial Commission in that they had not moved away from internationalism as both an ideology and a goal. The Coalition planned rallies for July 4th, 1976 in San Francisco and Philadelphia, designed as an alternative to the mainstream celebratory observation of the Bicentennial. The alliance aimed to stimulate outrage and change by calling attention to inequalities that had been reinforced through the two hundred year history of the United States.⁵⁸⁷ The member organizations of the Fourth of July Coalition saw the settlement of America as an imperial act, and the Revolution as a struggle which ultimately expanded the rights of those already in power.⁵⁸⁸ In this case, the Bicentennial and revolutionary history were adapted once again, to argue for a guarantee of those rights that had never been won, and an end to continuing inequalities.

Some of the most vocal support for the Fourth of July Coalition came from the Bay Area Black Panther Party, which covered planning for the rally extensively in the weeks leading up to Independence Day in its weekly newspaper, *The Black Panther*. American history served a dual role for the Black Panthers: on one hand, they believed that the past two hundred years, a liberal democracy that purported to stand for liberty and equality, had perpetrated extraordinary oppression. As Ericka Huggins, a leading member of the Party said in her speech at the Coalition rally, “Two hundred years ago, a

⁵⁸⁷ See Liberation News Service, “People’s Bicentennial,” *Liberation News Service*, July 10, 1976; http://www.lns-archive.org/packets/1976-07-10_LNS_packet_800.pdf, [accessed 12 December, 2011]; Southern Africa Solidarity Coalition, “Demonstrate July 4th for Bicentennial Without Colonies - Freedom for All Oppressed Nations,” Berkeley, 1976. Social Protest Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, California.

⁵⁸⁸ “July 4th Coalition Appeal to Black Communities,” *Black Panther*, June 26, 1976.

country was born on the sweat, blood and tears of slaves. This county was taken from the Indian by savage adventurers. When the U.S. was founded, its flowery principles of democracy and freedom never included Black people.”⁵⁸⁹ *The Black Panther* contained a long-running weekly column, “This Week in Black History,” that highlighted black achievements despite oppression. Typical entries included events like the removal of antislavery pamphlets from the U.S. mail in 1835, the birth of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1868, the Denmark Vesey Rebellion in 1822, and recent events from the Party’s own history, such as the 1970 release of Huey Newton and the 1969 police attack on the Party’s Chicago headquarters. By aligning these more recent events with those of the past, the Panthers worked to articulate the Party’s own central position within this trajectory of history.⁵⁹⁰ Like the PBC, the Black Panther Party placed themselves within the history of revolution. “This Week in Black History” traced a history of continued black presence and activity in the United States and argued for the centrality of this history to African American identity and consciousness.

The Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Platform and Program, instituted in 1966 and revised in 1972, at once emphasized the importance of the past to the present and appropriated mainstream archival evidence, using it for new purposes. The Platform stated:

We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate

⁵⁸⁹ Ericka Huggins speech quoted in “7000 Rally at S.F.’s People’s Bicentennial,” *Black Panther*, July 10, 1976, 1, 14-15.

⁵⁹⁰ “This Week in Black History,” *Black Panther*, July 27, 1974, March 1, 1975, July 22, 1971, August 10, 1974, August 3, 1974.

to anything else.⁵⁹¹

The Platform connected historical knowledge to political identity and consciousness, and so made intervention into mainstream narratives both a demand and a plan of action for the Panthers. The Ten Point Plan ended by quoting the Declaration of Independence. This appropriation shows the way that meaning could be challenged: in the context of the Platform, the use of the Declaration made connections between the Black Panthers and the historical revolutionaries but also put pressure on the disjunction between the founding premises of the United States and the lived experience of African Americans. It at once created an affective identification across time, and criticized Declaration's contemporary status as relevant in both the past and present.



Figure 22. Illustration by Emory Douglas. Printed in *The Black Panther*, March 27, 1976.

⁵⁹¹ Black Panther Party, “Ten Point Plan” <http://www.blackpanther.org/TenPoint.htm>, [accessed February 12, 2011].

The Black Panther Party, as part of the Fourth of July Coalition, sought to revisit American history, finding and calling attention to the inequalities that the mainstream celebration of the Bicentennial ignored or marginalized. In its publicity material, the Fourth of July Coalition persisted in calling itself the “People's Bicentennial,” deliberately appropriating the name from the PBC because the Coalition felt that the PBC, in its erasure of class and race from its critique of political and economic power, did not truly represent “the people.” The PBC reflected an ambiguous political position in that it inherited many of its members and some of its rhetoric from the left, but persisted in identifying with and addressing a support coalition in the center. As an alternative, the Fourth of July Coalition addressed the more radical left, and their coordinated protest resulted in depleted numbers at the PBC's own Fourth of July rally. At the same time, the Bicentennial Without Colonies failed to garner mainstream media attention—it remained a success within a movement context, but did not cross over to the mainstream in the way that the PBC had.

“Blow out their Birthday Candles:” Native Americans and the Bicentennial

Another key participant organization for the Fourth of July Coalition was the American Indian Movement (AIM), just one of several Native American rights groups that had been inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and had been building momentum since the late 1960s. Native Americans arguably had the most fraught relationship with the Bicentennial, since it represented the culmination of a colonization effort that had been built upon and resulted in literally millions of deaths and displacements of native

peoples.⁵⁹² Native Americans were weary of the Bicentennial, calling attention to continued oppression and the inappropriateness of the celebration, a contradiction that continued to be ignored by many white Americans.⁵⁹³ For example, Charles Johnson, director of the Portland Urban Indian Program reported that his organization had been invited to join the Bicentennial Wagon Train as it made its way through Oregon. Echoing the feelings of many Native Americans, Johnson commented, “We felt the invitation was like the Germans inviting the Jews to celebrate Hitler's rise to power.”⁵⁹⁴ This lack of consideration for the position of Native Americans is illustrative of the majority of the mainstream Bicentennial, and symptomatic of the marginalization felt by many Native Americans.

As a result, many Native American activists positioned themselves in direct opposition to the Bicentennial, on the grounds that it articulated a history that not only ignored the Native American experience, but also celebrated its suppression. American Indian Movement leaders Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt made several statements to the press about the inappropriateness of the celebration, calling on Native Americans to protest the Bicentennial, telling journalists, “If they’re going to have a party, we’re going to be there to blow out their birthday candles.”⁵⁹⁵ Like the PBC, the AIM saw the

⁵⁹² “Indians Want Hard Look at Nation in Bicentennial,” *Scottsdale Progress*, February 5, 1975.

⁵⁹³ “American Indians Snub Bicentennial Celebration,” *San Antonio Express*, March 9, 1975; “A Statue of Sitting Bull,” *Pawtucket Times*, February 28, 1975; “Bicentennial: Another Meaning for Indians,” *Newtown Bee*, May 30, 1975; “Indians May Shun Parade,” *Kansas City Times*, September 30, 1975.

⁵⁹⁴ Robert Olmos, “Indians Divided on Bicentennial,” *Portland Oregonian*, August 24, 1975.

⁵⁹⁵ “American Indians Snub Bicentennial Celebration,” *San Antonio Express*, March 9, 1975; “No Rough Stuff for Bicentennial,” *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, April 24, 1975; “AIM Bicentennial Position is Vicious,” *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, May 6, 1975; Walt Murray, “Indians to Stage Protests During Bicentennial,” *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, November 2, 1975; Len Lear, “Indian Leader Urges Blacks to ‘Disrupt Bicentennial,’” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 3, 1974.

Bicentennial, and the type of normative patriotic sentiment that groups like ARBA encouraged, as an opportunity to call attention to ongoing problems⁵⁹⁶

Apart from the Bicentennial, American history, and especially the history of American brutality towards Native Americans figured prominently in movement discourse. The group had already staged several interventions in mainstream commemorations, calling attention to the erasures evident in dominant narratives of the American past. One of AIM's first actions had been a 1970 Thanksgiving Day occupation of Plymouth, Massachusetts, where the 1621 Mayflower landing had brought early white settlers to the American continent. According to Russell Means of the American Indian Movement, a local tribe, the Wampanoag invited AIM to Plimoth Plantation. The museum and the nearby town of Plymouth had long celebrated the first Thanksgiving with parades and other festivities. This year, the Wampanoag wanted to commemorate Thanksgiving as a "day of mourning" to call attention to the theft of land and violence perpetrated by the original colonists, as well as continuing problems for contemporary Native Americans. Also marking the 350th anniversary of the settling of the colony, the 1970 celebration was to be especially significant for both Indians and the white residents of Plymouth.

⁵⁹⁶ The American Indian Movement started in Minneapolis in 1970, and modeled itself on the Black Panther Party. The organization resulted from increased activism among Native Americans, resulting in such highly visible actions as the 1971 "Trail of Broken Treaties" demonstration and subsequent takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC. Native American activism, like other civil rights movements, was animated by an understanding of past injustices and movements to address these in the context of the present. From the beginning, like the Black Panther Party, it was a decentralized organization with a few charismatic leaders, but several independent chapters. The issues addressed by AIM were also polyglot--at various times, initiatives addressed broken treaties, mismanagement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and harassment and murder of Native Americans. The AIM was one of several movements that continued to flourish in the 1970s, and which changed focus as it struggled to keep an identity. See Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith *Like A Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

Means and the AIM, accompanied by the Wampanoag and tribal activists from all over the country, met at Plimoth Plantation and joined a reenactment of the first Thanksgiving dinner already underway. In Means' account, the reenactors, pleased that contemporary Indians had come to celebrate the occasion, invited the activists to join. In the middle of a welcoming speech, Dennis Banks of the AIM upended one of the tables, yelling "we're not going to eat this shit!," which in turn provoked the other tribal representatives to do the same before making a hasty exit.⁵⁹⁷ Although Means' own account is not corroborated and the disruption was not covered in the media, this event brings to the foreground how embodied history was being mobilized at this moment. The traditional myth of Thanksgiving as a shared meal between colonists and Indians being recreated at Plimoth erased the history of conflict between the groups and propagated a narrative of a peaceful and consensual colonization rather than a violent imperial action. Like the Bicentennial Wagon Train, it took for source material a commonplace American myth that downplayed the brutality of colonization.

The Plimoth Thanksgiving reenactment functioned as a spectacular reconstruction of the two groups meeting and sharing food and as a means of channeling affective identifications in reenactors and spectators that recast Native-Colonist relations as friendly and mutually constituted. The confusion that followed the entry of the AIM and the Wampanoag, and the invitation that stemmed from the assumption that they would want to join in the reenactment as representatives of Indians simultaneously past and present speaks to the way that affective states generated in reenactment are articulated. Banks' own gesture, the overturning of the table and the refusal of participation may also

⁵⁹⁷ Russell Means and Marvin J. Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1995) 174-178.

be interpreted as temporally indeterminate—he was refusing on his behalf as well as on the part of the historic Native Americans who had participated in the first Thanksgiving, as well as disrupting the “script” of the reenactment—i.e. the assumed outcome of community that the exercise attempted to generate, that was not achieved.

The AIM’s next action reflected the historical perspective they took on links between the occupation of land and the erosion of rights. From Plimoth Plantation, the delegation headed to the town of Plymouth, where Plymouth Rock stood alongside a new replica of the ship *Mayflower*. By midmorning, nearly 200 Native American demonstrators had assembled under a nearby statue of Massasoit, who had been chief of the Wampanoag in 1620. There, Means made an impromptu speech, saying “Today you will see the Indian reclaim the *Mayflower* in a symbolic gesture to reclaim our rights in this country.”⁵⁹⁸ In the action that followed, 25 activists boarded the *Mayflower* replica and removed the British and American flags from on board. Both the speech and the action illustrate how Means and the AIM sought to mobilize history as a way to redress present wrongs, and how they did this at the site of a mainstream commemoration.

The Plymouth Rock incident, which gained national press attention for the fledgling American Indian Movement, was one of the earliest coordinated actions in the history of the AIM, which had been started in Minneapolis in 1968 by Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt and modeled in part on the Black Panther Party. Like the Panthers, the early activities of the AIM focused on monitoring police activity in Minneapolis neighborhoods, attending conferences on Indian issues, and working with church and community groups. In their comprehensive history of Indian activism in this era, Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Warrior note that as AIM expanded its activity from the local to

⁵⁹⁸ “Mourning Indians Dump Sand on Plymouth Rock,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1970, 26.

the national, after 1972, they also began “reaching out to a traditional Indian past,” invoking traditional customs such as the Sun Dance and relying on the Sioux spiritual leader, Leonard Crow Dog.⁵⁹⁹ Like others at this moment, AIM used its own history to understand, and to solidify its identity in the contemporary United States.

While AIM began and remained a decentralized movement, one of its main objects was the legacy of over three hundred broken treaties with which the U.S. government had systematically usurped territory belonging to Native American tribes. Members shared this emphasis with earlier Indian activist impulses; it had been one of the main points of the activist director of the National Congress of American Indians, Vine Deloria, Jr.’s 1969 bestseller, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*.⁶⁰⁰ In the second half of the twentieth century, Native American activism centered on these claims of stolen land, and often took the form of takeover of physical spaces and resources, such as the Mayflower action and the earlier occupation of Alcatraz. Their engagements with a history of oppression took the form of space-based resistance—seeking out and occupying historically significant sites like Plymouth or Mount Rushmore to draw attention to the ways in which inequality and domination had played out as limitations of access to space.

The stress on broken treaties shows the archive’s position as simultaneously legal and treacherous. The existence of the archive as a repository for official documents and a source of precedent legitimates illegal actions such as treaty-breaking. The archive was, on one hand, flexible; its evidence could be reinterpreted, or used to implement rules. But

⁵⁹⁹ Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith *Like A Hurricane*, 127-148. See also Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

⁶⁰⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

its malleability was also a part of its power; as often as the archive maintains, it also hides. The treaties, at the time of their signing, had been guaranteed as legal documents, although they had not been enforced. Native American activists on one hand deplored this deceit, but on the other, called for the reinstatement of the treaties, underscoring their still-legal status. Deloria's and AIM's call for the reinstatement of the original terms of the treaties suggests that the archive can be used as the foundation for the legal reparation of ill-gotten land.

Other Native American groups, while recognizing the problems of the Bicentennial, worked with, rather than in opposition to, the government in order to secure badly needed resources and to raise awareness of Native American contributions.⁶⁰¹ Some tribal organizations took advantage of general interest in American life and culture, and specifically, countercultural fascination with Indian culture, to secure funding for structural improvements and community funding that they couched in the language of mainstream assumptions about Indians.⁶⁰² The Florida Bicentennial Commission gave the Seminoles a grant for exterior restorations to Okalee Seminole Village in Southern Florida.⁶⁰³ The Chair of the Navajo Culture and Heritage Center in Arizona, partially funded through the ARBA, commented, "many Indians have said, 'what have we got to celebrate when 1776 was the beginning of the end of Indian Tribes?' but we Indians have survived and have something to commemorate in standing tall and strong against our adversaries. We have our own people and culture to commemorate."⁶⁰⁴ Many tribes,

⁶⁰¹ "Navajo Bicentennial Commission Approved by Navajo Tribal Council," *Navajo Times*, June 27, 1974.

⁶⁰² On the counterculture and Native Americans, see Philip J. Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," in *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 154-180.

⁶⁰³ Susan Lykes, "Seminole tribe gets \$12,640 Grant," *Tampa Times*, September 27, 1974.

⁶⁰⁴ "Navajo Named Bicentennial Community," *Window Rock Navajo Times*, October 3, 1974. See also, "Indians Display their History," *El Segundo Herald*, October 20, 1974; Margaret Schmidt, "Native

including the Potawatomi of Oklahoma, the Winnnebago of Nebraska, and Chitmacha in Louisiana became official Bicentennial Communities through ARBA, using state funding to put on craft fairs and festivals, and to build monuments, community centers, and performance spaces.⁶⁰⁵ The Okalee Semiole, Navajo, and other groups recognized the problems of the Bicentennial celebration, but sought to adopt it to their advantage. The ARBA encouraged such uses as a means to present a national Bicentennial with diverse participants.⁶⁰⁶ In turn, many groups took advantage of the decentralized Bicentennial in order to make their own meanings.

The “Black Bicentennial”

Material evidence of the African American experience had been left out of many archives, and so, black engagement with the historical during the Bicentennial often took the form of adding to the archive, rather than reinterpreting already-present histories. The rearticulations and destabilization of the archive allowed African Americans to include evidence of their contributions, of their very existence, using this evidence as a way to generate and solidify collective identities.⁶⁰⁷ Reenactment, as an embodied performance

Americans to Observe, Not Celebrate Nation's Bicentennial," *Anchorage Alaska Times*, October 25, 1974; "Indian Bicentennial Committee First in the Nation," *Ardmore, Oklahoma Ardmoreite*, February 5, 1975.

⁶⁰⁵ "American Indians Prepare for Bicentennial," *Rapid City Journal*, October 30, 1974; "A Hand for Native Americans," Wichita Falls (TX) Times, November 1, 1974; "Tribes, Nations Plan Observance of Bicentennial," *Aberdeen Washington World*, November 30, 1975; "5 Indian Tribes Get US Grants," *Sacramento Bee*, January 20, 1976; "Yankton Sioux Tribe Receives \$40,000 in Funds from ARBA," *Yankton, South Dakota Press*, February 3, 1976; "Indians In the Bicentennial," *Roanoke Times*, December 9, 1975.

⁶⁰⁶ Wayne Chattin, Director, Office of Native American Programs Narrative, "Native American Programs Activity Report," July 31, 1976; Wayne Chattin to Emery Spears, March 1976; Wayne Chattin to Zissi Kazanas, Keene, New Hampshire, February 18, 1976, Records of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), RG 452-A1-82:Programs States and Communities, Native American Programs, Program Records 75-76, box 289, folder: "Native American Programs Activity Report", National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II).

⁶⁰⁷ In their study of popular historymaking in the United States, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen found that African American respondents, more than others, saw the past as a "particularly useful resource for thinking about whether they could make a difference in the world," (68) and made stronger connections between individual and large-scale narratives. Although their data was published in 1998, many of their respondents talked about longstanding relationships with the past, extending many decades back. Roy

of archival knowledge, required a material documentary foundation and was less available as a strategy of historical activity to a population that had been excluded from the archive in conscious and unconscious ways. Reenactments such as the Bicentennial Wagon Train, the Boston 200 Revolution exhibit, and the development of first-person interpretation at Plimoth Plantation were embodied realizations of already-mainstreamed histories of events that had been documented and preserved as evidence. Even the PBC's oppositional reenactments, which sought to advance new identifications with the Revolution, were grounded in a familiar past. The occasion of the Bicentennial called attention to the still-prevalent absence of black history in mainstream U.S. history and afforded an opportunity for cultural workers and activists to address this problem.

In addition to the absence of evidence, there are other reasons why reenactment, to African Americans, might have been a less appealing strategy of historical ideation. The long history and ongoing memory of racist blackface performance such as the minstrel show's depictions of antebellum life may have caused African Americans to avoid reenactments, which had already been used against them as a strategy of domination and oppression.⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, many of the histories recently included in mainstream accounts of the American past concerned slavery, segregation, and discrimination, all of which would have been problematic and possibly traumatic as an

Rosenzweig and David Thelen, "History in Black and Red: African Americans and American Indians and their Collective Pasts," in *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 147-176.

⁶⁰⁸ For histories of minstrelsy, see Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Susan Smulyan, "Minstrel Laughs: Popular Culture, Race, and the Middle Class," in *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 16-40.

embodied interaction.⁶⁰⁹ This is not to say that African American cultural prediction did not engage questions of memory, intersubjectivity, and affective identification in ways that still reflected the more general shifts in historical subjectivity to what I have been calling the “reenactive mode.” Ashraf Rushdy has written about the emergence in the 1970s of “palimpsest narratives,” defined as narratives which consider the relationship between the past and the present. He cites works by Octavia Butler and Gayl Jones that take a “bitemporal perspective” between protagonists living in the 1970s and the period of slavery, to which they are often bodily cast back. Like other reenactive activity, Rushdy argues that these texts foreground interplay between generations and use shifting temporalities to explore continuing social and political issues.⁶¹⁰ These works represent reenactive engagements, but they occurred in the written word, and not as embodied form. Preservation, then, might have been an appealing mode of historical interaction not only as a response to the absence of artifacts and evidence of African American life in the past, but also because of the already vexed history of white reenactment of black life and the traumatic nature of many events in the black experience.

African American history in the 1960s and 70s developed along a trajectory that reflected larger shifts at this moment. Although black historians like Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois had long argued for the importance of the African American experience in the history of the United States, only a few exceptional individuals like Booker T. Washington or George Washington Carver had been included in mainstream accounts. Most of black history, including slavery and emancipation, social movements,

⁶⁰⁹ On embodied representations of slavery, see Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁶¹⁰ Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African-American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

and cultural activity were relegated to the periphery. Even historians working in earlier decades of the twentieth century had, like others at the time, focused on preserving the output of “great men” who had managed to achieve success within the racist culture of the United States, as opposed to documenting the everyday experience of African American communities.⁶¹¹ The Civil Rights movement’s emphases on representation and equality and the concurrent push to social history in museums and the academy led to a radically enlarged perspective. In this institutional context, African American scholars and curators in the 1960s and through the 1970s worked to show not only the participation and accomplishment of an expanded field of individuals, but also to trace daily life in the context of the systematic oppression and brutality that blacks in America had suffered. New Black Studies departments were being founded all over the country and the opening of several museums of African American history and culture at this moment, including a museum in Chicago and the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, as well as high profile exhibits such as 1969’s “Harlem on My Mind” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York were steps in this direction. These initiatives and others illustrated how African Americans had always been a vital and central part of the American experience.⁶¹² As a result of these efforts, by the 1970s, many felt that

⁶¹¹ See Fath Davis Ruffins, “Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990,” in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, *Museums and their Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 506-611; Jeffrey C. Stewart and Fath Davis Ruffins, “A Faithful Witness: Afro-American Public History in Historical Perspective, 1828-1984,” in Susan Porter Benson, Steven Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *Presenting the Past: Critical Perspectives on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-American Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano, “Introduction: the Struggle Over Memory,” in Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

⁶¹² See Delores P. Aldrige and Carlene Young, eds. *Out of The Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,

American history had begun to acknowledge and even celebrate the role of African Americans.

Nevertheless, scholars and cultural workers felt that black history was still being left out of mainstream accounts, a feeling exacerbated by the many Bicentennial events that downplayed or completely omitted African Americans. Except for some celebration of Crispus Attucks, who had been among the casualties of the Boston Massacre, both national and local accounts of the revolution left out African Americans and enslaved Africans.⁶¹³ Worse still, because many Bicentennial commemorations, especially those planned in the early 1970s, tended to elide the time between 1776 and the present as an era of progress during which the principles of the Revolution had been upheld and broadened. Blacks appeared in more comprehensive narratives as occasional beneficiaries of expanded rights rather than as important contributors to American innovation, politics and culture or as evidence of the continued shortcomings of the American project. The Bicentennial's representation of the American past, like many accounts of American history, treated African Americans as objects rather than subjects, and often erased their presence from narratives of the Revolution and subsequent events all together.⁶¹⁴

In response to these silences, many African Americans expressed a reluctance to take part in the Bicentennial, which they saw as an affirmation of a political system that had been used to legitimize brutality and exclusion. The tension between the promises

2010); Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006); Steven Dubin, "Crossing 125th Street: Harlem on My Mind Revisited," in *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 18-63.

⁶¹³ For a survey of Bicentennial activities by state, see American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People, Volume 2* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1977).

⁶¹⁴ On silencing and memory, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

and the achievements of the Revolution was not lost on the mainstream press, which regularly reported on black ambivalence towards the Bicentennial even after it became a decentralized celebration. George Brown, a pharmacist in Washington stated, in a typical survey response: "I've never been too keen about celebrating the Bicentennial—we're too far away from realizing the idea of the American Dream."⁶¹⁵ Other observers charged that the Bicentennial celebration, like history itself, ignored African Americans, who had no place in the celebration.⁶¹⁶ Despite an expanded historical perspective, the triumphant and self-congratulatory aspect of the commemoration foregrounded many of the contradictions still inherent for African Americans. Because the discourse surrounding the Bicentennial focused on the positive outcomes of the Revolution, the problems of the past two hundred years were often ignored. African Americans, especially in the context of new attention on African American history, felt that such problems needed to be acknowledged and emphasized as part of America's self-evaluation. Black refusal to participate was grounded in a dual understanding both of the America past as problematic, and the Bicentennial as a disavowal of those problems.⁶¹⁷

Some saw the absence of African Americans from Bicentennial histories as an opportunity to address and amend these omissions, and advocated for a "Black

⁶¹⁵ Earl Byrd, "Bicentennial: Black's Views Dim," *Washington Star*, December, 21, 1975.

⁶¹⁶ John Teets, "PhotOpinion: Is the Bicentennial Ignoring Black People? Asked near the Wrigley Building," *Chicago Sun Times* [n.d., ca. January 1976].

⁶¹⁷ For other examples of this critique see Wes Albers, "Blacks View Differently Meaning of Bicentennial," *Lincoln Star*, February 11, 1976; Bea L. Hines, "Should Blacks Celebrate the Bicentennial?" *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1976; Al Johnson, "Yes I'm Angry, Says Black Congressman," *Richmond News Leader*, March 13, 1976; "Black's Role," *Bridgeport Telegram*, March 5, 1976; Leon Pitt, "TV Bicentennial Minutes Hit for Ignoring Blacks," *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 10, 1975; Carol Dumas, "Black People and the Bicentennial," *Cleveland Post*, April 3, 1976; David Chartrand, "Minority Groups Conspicuous in Bicentennial Absence," *Lawrence, Kansas Journal World*, March 29 1976; Thomas A. Johnson, "Few Blacks Inspired by Bicentennial," *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 1976; Len Lear, "Millions for Flowers, Nothing for Blacks, BEDC Leaders Say of Bicentennial Planning," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 27, 1974; Acel Moore, "Black Bicentennial Role is Termed Inadequate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 25, 1974; "Bicentennial Role Blasted," *Washington Afro-American*, November 2, 1974; Margot Hornblower, "Bicentennial: A Black Perspective," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1975.

Bicentennial” as a way of moving from the avowal of past successes to an examination of shortcomings. The Black Bicentennial would highlight the experience of African Americans in the United States to demand equal representation in history. Margaret Burroughs, the director of the Du Sable Museum of African American History in Chicago stated, “Blacks have been here longer than 200 years, and we’ll be right there celebrating with everybody else. But the way we do it may be a little different. It doesn’t necessarily mean standing up and yelling, hip, hip hurrah. It should also be used to point up the inequalities of this system.”⁶¹⁸ Shirley Graham Du Bois, writer, internationalist activist, and widow of W.E.B. Du Bois, echoed these statements: “It us up to us to refute the lie that the only American history or the only American experience is white.”⁶¹⁹ With these goals in mind, by building black experience into mainstream history narratives, Burroughs and Du Bois pointed to the achievements of African Americans as well as their exclusions. Ultimately because the ARBA moved away from a central script for celebrating, the commemoration provided an opportunity for many to make their own meaning by challenging or enlarging existing interpretations of U.S. history and by connecting these realignments to questions of identity, representation, and citizenship.

Local and national African American history initiatives grew in the context of the Bicentennial. In Baltimore, a local group called the Citizens for Black History Exhibits received an \$18,000 grant from the NEA to hire a researcher for the mounting of an exhibition of black Baltimore history from 1720 to 1870.⁶²⁰ In Rhode Island, Rowena Stewart founded the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society and began to collect artifacts

⁶¹⁸ William Braden, "Bicentennial Boycotting for the Du Sable Museum," *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 30, 1975.

⁶¹⁹ "Widow of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois Cites stake in Bicentennial" *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 10, 1975.

⁶²⁰ Jeanne Saddler, "Citizens Support Exhibition Plans," *Baltimore Sun*, August 12, 1974.

and documents from locals, saying, “the Bicentennial is the time to write Black history, I feel it in my bones.” For Stewart and others engaged in collection, the redefined archive made it possible to include objects that would tell new kinds of stories. Ephemera of everyday life--letters, sentimental heirlooms, and craft objects -- had been overlooked by previous generations of black collectors and preservationists; the Bicentennial provided an opportunity and resources for the documentation of the day-to-day experience of the past. The integration of this new history into already-present accounts was equally important for Stewart: “as long as you teach black history separately, you will keep blacks separate.”⁶²¹ For some activists, studying and emphasizing the experiences and accomplishments of African Americans over the past two hundred years provided a way to begin redressing current inequalities.⁶²²

The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation’s New Preservation

Two brothers in Washington D.C., Vincent and Robert DeForrest, veterans of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Atlanta, created the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation (ABC) in 1970 in an effort to reposition African American and American history via the cultural and financial opportunities offered by the Bicentennial.⁶²³ The ABC can be compared to the PBC in that it was modeled on, and formed as a result of perceived deficiencies in the American Revolutionary Bicentennial

⁶²¹ Bert Wade, "She Puts Black History Up Front for Bicentennial," *Providence Journal*, December 9, 1975.

⁶²² See also June Brown Garner, "The Blacks Role in the Revolution," *Detroit News*, September 27, 1974; Chuck Stone, "Color US History Honest," *Philadelphia News*, October 22, 1974; Betty James interview with Betty Shabazz, "Malcolm X's Widow Tells of Pilgrimage," *Washington Star*, March 10, 1975; "Black Landmarks," *Washington Post*, August 11, 1975; Bayard Rustin, "View on the News: Why Should Blacks Observe Bicentennial? An Open Letter to My Godson Michael," *New York Voice*, February 13, 1976; John Warner, "History Forgot the Blacks," *Torrance California Breeze*, February 26, 1976; Bob Ahronheim, "Accentuate Heritage' Historian Tells Blacks," *Jacksonville Journal*, February 10, 1976; C.A. Bustard, "Haki Madhubuti visits Virginia Commonwealth University," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, February 20, 1976; Vernon Jordan, "The Year Ahead," *Sacramento Observer*, January 8, 1976.

⁶²³ Ethel L. Payne, "Brothers Move Insures Black Roles in Fete," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 24, 1971.

Commission (ARBC), which had painfully few programs planned that addressed African American experiences or contributions.⁶²⁴ The activities of the ABC foregrounded the sense of history as a site at which African Americans could make political meaning. Like Jeremy Rifkin, the DeForrest brothers shared a deep conviction that the American Revolution was unfinished. However, instead of looking to the histories already within the canon of the national narrative, the DeForrests introduced new figures who demonstrated the continuing contributions of African Americans and who instilled a sense of pride and celebration.

If African Americans refused to participate because they had “nothing to celebrate,” the DeForrests refuted this by highlighting black accomplishment during the Revolution and beyond. The DeForrests recognized the inadequacies of the Bicentennial celebration, but used it as a chance to find relevance for African Americans. In communications to the press and the public, the brothers underscored this redefinition with statements like, “most blacks probably won't be parading around or singing songs...blacks will be asking questions and considering their status in this country since 1776. The Bicentennial must be viewed through the eyes of the beholder. Don't be turned off by it, consider what it means to you.”⁶²⁵ Like the PBC, the ABC saw the potential of the Bicentennial to forge identifications between past and present and use this identification to form political awareness.

⁶²⁴While ARBA did eventually start the Bicentennial Ethnic/Racial Committee (BERC), the bulk of programming involved white ethnic communities. ARBA RG 452-A1-70, Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, boxes 253-265, NARA II.

⁶²⁵Johnsye Smith, "Bicentennial 'Time for Questions,' Official Says Blacks Should Not be Turned Off," *Tulsa Tribune*, January 13, 1975.

Significantly, the ABC and organizations dedicated to the rescue of African American narratives looked to the entire duration of U.S. history, *not* just that of the colonial period. For those who saw the Bicentennial as an opportunity to change popular understandings of American history, the focus of the commemoration moved away from the colonial period and came to encompass all of the American past and the place of blacks within it. The DeForrests and others felt strongly that they needed to rebuild a trajectory of involvement and achievement to combat the erasure and omission that not only spanned *from* the founding moment, but also *over* the last two hundred years. As Vincent DeForrest said, “We have to make sure the events commemorated are not just Jamestown, Lexington, and Trenton, but also Nat Turner, the experience and creative expression of the blues, the hopes of Reconstruction and the March on Selma.”⁶²⁶ Proponents of Black Bicentennial activity shifted the temporal dimensions of the commemoration, a development that echoed other reinterpretations of the Bicentennial as it moved away from a celebration of a single anniversary to a consideration of all of the American past, both distant and recent.

The ABC’s first actions responded to the New Preservation movement and the opportunities accorded by increased federal support for preservation activity. New Preservation emphasized the preservation of scenes of everyday life and the use of the built environment to convey the experience of the past in an immersive way. While some homes of notable African Americans (for example, Frederick Douglass’ home, Cedar Hill, in Washington, D.C.) were maintained and open to the public, a study conducted by the ABC discovered that of three thousand buildings and sites designated as landmarks

⁶²⁶ Vincent DeForrest quoted in Jacqueline Trescott, “Blacks, the Bicentennial and ‘Two Souls’,” *The Washington Post*, March 20, 1976.

on the National Register, only five of these were associated with African American history. Although many historical structures, especially those in urban areas, had been demolished during the urban redevelopment projects of the 1960s, others still remained, but had to be located, identified, and researched. The DeForrests began their search in their hometown of Washington D.C., a city with a significant black history and that had resources like the National Archives and the Library of Congress which helped them find and document sites.⁶²⁷

Although the ABC's activity can be partially explained by the funding opportunities made available by New Preservation, its attention to historic structures can also be read as an effort to redress previous and continuing inequalities. The preservation of the built environment operates on a spatial register and thus can be read in the context of a larger discourse of the way in which, through legal segregation in the past, and practices like redlining that continued into the present, the physical space and movements of African Americans had been constricted and defined. Jurgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt and others have written about the relationships between visibility and presence in the public sphere and political participation.⁶²⁸ If part of the project of segregation had been to render blacks invisible in the public sphere, the space of political and cultural participation, the search for spaces of black community had an extra resonance for preservationists who sought to show that despite these efforts to reduce and narrow the public visibility and activity of African Americans, places like homes, churches, black-

⁶²⁷ "Black Landmarks," *Washington Post*, August 11, 1975; Eugene Meyer, "Neglected Black Historic Sites Recorded for Bicentennial," *Washington Post*, April 14, 1973.

⁶²⁸ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1968); Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Oskar Negt, and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

owned businesses and historically black schools and colleges had existed and flourished, helping to build and nurture vibrant communities. If segregation eradicated African Americans as public actors, and exercised power over their physical movement, the new preservation efforts would stress that despite those limitations, these spaces of African American community had always been present.⁶²⁹ Furthermore the *act* of preservation, of black activists finding and identifying the places of African American experience, marked out spaces in ways directly oppositional to the way that segregation had functioned. The ABC, and other efforts like it, then, can be read both as a redefinition of community spaces, as well as a corrective and resistive effort on the very register of the legal demarcation of space that is a function of the logics of both segregation and historical preservation.

The actions of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation must also be examined in the context of controversies surrounding another preservation effort in Washington D.C., which again emphasized the connection between historical evidence and political power. The Nixon administration and the federal government worked to refurbish the section of Pennsylvania Avenue within the federal quarter of Washington while blocking attempts to reconstruct the “riot corridors” of 14th and H Streets, despite an outcry from local politicians and constituencies.⁶³⁰ Washington’s African American community, which had been disproportionately affected by the riots following Martin Luther King’s death in April 1968, protested the renovation of Pennsylvania Avenue at

⁶²⁹ On African American preservation efforts, see Craig Evan Barton, ed. *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001).

⁶³⁰ Ellen Hoffman, “D.C. Group to Fight Avenue Bill; Opposes Private Corporation,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 1970; “Whose Heavy Hand?” *Washington Post*, September 30, 1970; Wolf Von Eckardt “A Sure Thing, It Seems; Cityscape A Fingers-Crossed Urban Renewal Project Cityscape,” *Washington Post*, July 3, 1971.

the expense of 14th Street, as well as other infrastructure projects like the new Metro subway system, scheduled to be completed in time for the influx of tourists expected for the Bicentennial celebrations.⁶³¹ This particular conflict shows the connection between preservation and power, and the archive as a representation of sovereignty, stability and order and how these impulses are played out on the built environment. The ABC's projects worked in opposition to those of the Nixon Administration while at the same time each used preservation's monumental capacities—the ability of visible structures to communicate the significance of the past and its ongoing relationship with the present.

Likewise, the DeForrest brothers used landmarks and visible evidence to build a sense of black history back into the canon. They looked for bodily traces of black work, entrepreneurship, schooling, and bodies themselves in order to reconstruct a more inclusive archive in which the African American past could be brought back to life through immersive built environments. Unlike earlier African American preservation efforts, which had often focused on individuals of note, the DeForrests searched for evidence of black communities, a shift reflective of other changes to building preservation at this time. The brothers made extensive use of federal granting opportunities to fund their projects and secured support from the Departments of Interior and Housing and Urban Development, ARBA, and the Rockefeller Foundation in their efforts to recover tangible evidence of the history of African Americans. A \$250,000

⁶³¹For accounts of the long battle between local and federal interests in Washington DC, see Eugene Meyer, "Bicentennial Unit Dissolved, Mayor Will Pick New Panel," *Washington Post*, September 17, 1971; Wolf Von Eckardt, "Bicentennial: Before and After," *Washington Post*, October 9, 1971; Eugene Meyer, "Bicentennial Panel Reformed," *Washington Post*, December 18, 1971; Jack Eisen, "76 Finish Sought for 'Triangle'; Nixon Budget Asks \$126 Million," *Washington Post*, January 25, 1972; Juan M. Vasquez, "Nixon Plans Role for DC in '76 Fete," *New York Times*, February 5, 1972; Eugene Meyer, "D.C. Plan Unveiled By Nixon; Bicentennial Projects Set at \$150 Million," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1972; Bart Barnes, "Sports Arena Fight: Progress vs. People; D.C. Area Residents, Businessmen at Odds on Sports Arena Plan," *Washington Post*, February 13, 1972; "The Convention and Sports Arena Complex," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1972.

contract with the Park Service allowed them to locate and develop landmarks significant to black history in the Washington area. The survey would “ensure that we project a truthful interpretation of the American heritage through. . .inclusion of the sizeable, but relatively unknown Afro-American contribution.”⁶³² The sites the DeForrests found using archival land records and research included Civil War-era contraband schools in Northern Virginia, traces of Mount Vernon construction and maintenance by African Americans, and sites associated with the life of Sojourner Truth. The ABC did its own archival work, in order to counter histories that had rendered historically black spaces, like African Americans themselves, invisible.

ABC’s most visible project involved the restoration of the graveyard of the predominantly African American Mount Zion Church in Georgetown, one of Washington’s oldest neighborhoods.⁶³³ The graveyard, located in the heart of Georgetown, which had become a wealthy residential neighborhood, had been started by the Female Union Band Society, and had fallen into disrepair by the 1970s. The land had been bought by a developer and was in the process of being rezoned as a residential area when descendants of the Union Band used deeds to the plots of their ancestors to file paperwork with the District court to halt development. The ABC mobilized its media and government contacts to champion this cause and proposed a renovation of the graveyard and the establishment of a cultural center tracing the history of blacks in Georgetown on the site.⁶³⁴ The local press followed the court case which eventually resulted in a ruling in

⁶³² Mary Ellen Perry, "Search for Black Landmarks," *Washington Star-News*, April 14, 1974; "In Search of Black History," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 9, 1972; Claudia Levy, "Anacostia: Restoration Efforts Mounted for Historic Area of City," *Washington Post*, April 28, 1973.

⁶³³ Betty James, "Bicentennial Offers Blacks a Continuing Revolution." *Washington Star-News*, July 21, 1974.

⁶³⁴ Erwin Washington, "Court to Decide Fate of Historic Cemetery," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1974.

favor of the descendants of the Union Band and an important victory for the DeForrests. The legal conflict over the cemetery resembled other urban renewal battles but this one was fought and won on the register of history. The Mount Zion Cemetery illustrated how preservation efforts often came up directly against redevelopment and how they helped to establish a genealogy of black history, in this case, literally with the remains of the Union Band.⁶³⁵

By 1975, the DeForrests had added fourteen sites to the National Register, and began to move outside of the boundaries of the Washington area, investigating, among other places, the historically black town of Boley, Oklahoma, which had been incorporated in 1903 as a “haven from oppression.”⁶³⁶ The archival work of the ABC, supported by substantial funding from the federal government, yielded real results which began to address some of the inequalities inherent in an older mode of American history. The DeForrests emphasized a visceral interaction with history, noting that “black people need to be able to touch and see their history.”⁶³⁷ The ABC persevered beyond the Bicentennial, becoming the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development. The link between the past and the present and how it coalesced around the physical and spatial is evident in the choice of name for the new organization.⁶³⁸ The DeForrest’s ongoing project traced a history of black property ownership that, in the context of continued restrictive practices like redlining and busing, had very real effects in the present.

⁶³⁵ Timothy S. Robinson, “Mount Zion Cemetery is Saved by Judge,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 1975; “Requiescat in Pace,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 1975.

⁶³⁶ Emily Isberg, “Black Landmarks,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1974; Angela Terrell, “Black Landmarks,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 1974; “Six Historic Sites are Named,” *Washington Post*, March 18, 1977.

⁶³⁷ Fred Brown, Jr. “Preserving America’s Black Historic Landmarks,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1989.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

While the DeForrests and the ABC worked closely with ARBC in order to publicize their programming and to gain funding, the two organizations had a troubled affiliation which can be read alongside the larger issue of African American participation in the Bicentennial. At its inception, the ABC had looked to the ARBC for cues and guidance, but as time wore on and the ARBC underwent its own upheavals, the DeForrests became frustrated with the ARBC's unwillingness to introduce programming that investigated and celebrated the black experience in America, instead depending on the ABC and other groups to develop initiatives. Vincent DeForrest met with an ARBC program officer in August of 1973 and derided the "paternalistic attitude" of the ARBC towards black groups.⁶³⁹

The presence of the ABC, rather than moving the ARBC to reconsider programs that addressed African American history as essential to the Bicentennial celebration, instead provided a useful place for the ARBC to dump proposals which addressed the topic. The ARBC often passed off proposals from "black groups" to the ABC. In addition, the ARBC asked the ABC to work as consultants, which the ABC, not eager to become enmeshed in the bureaucratic foibles of the ARBC, refused to do.⁶⁴⁰ While ARBC supported the ABC by helping the DeForrests secure funding and by putting them in contact with others who were interested in African American history, ABC failed to influence the larger scope of the ARBC. Instead, the ARBC attempted to foster a relationship modeled on its other public-private partnerships.

The Black American Museum and Cultural Center

⁶³⁹ Vincent DeForrest quoted in Eugene Meyer, "The Big Birthday Bungle," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1972.

⁶⁴⁰ Martin S Goldman to Lynn Carroll, ARBC, Memo re: meeting with Vincent DeForrest, September 6, 1973; ARBA RG 452-A1-70, Programs, States and Communities Division: Subject Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 272, folder: "Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation," NARA II.

Other African American groups also requested Bicentennial funds from the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission and Administrations, but did not have the same success as the ABC in making their projects a reality, perhaps because the histories they attempted to relate stood in opposition to the persistent national narrative. ABC's work fit into many of the mandates of New Preservation that were being taken up by the state, but institutions like ARBC, the Department of Interior, and the National Parks Service often did not support projects by groups that tried to engage American history in ways that pointed more directly to structural inequality. One of the more ambitious projects that sought recognition by, and funding from the ARBC, the Black American Museum and Cultural Center was to be built in Niagara Falls, which had been the first designated "Bicentennial City." Reflecting larger trends in African American museums which, as Fath Davis Ruffins has noted, exponentially multiplied at this point, the Museum and Cultural Center was to act as a research and community center, complete with offices, alongside its preservation program.⁶⁴¹ The Black American Museum and Cultural Center had backing from the NEA, the New York State Regents, and the New York State Educational Department, but could not gain support on a national level.⁶⁴² From 1973 onward, the Center attempted to gain official recognition from ARBC and later ABRA but consistently met with roadblocks that reflected the continued resistance to the use of such exhibition in the service of political or identity consciousness and social justice, something that this museum, from its earliest inception, attempted.

⁶⁴¹ Ruffins, "Mythos, Memory, and History," 506-611.

⁶⁴² Fundraising Feasibility study for Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Plubell Company, Buffalo, NY, 1973; ARBA RG 425-A1-75: Programs, States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box: 267, folder: "Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY," NARA II.

The treatment of the Black American Museum and Cultural Center by program officers at ARBC shows the state's persistence in emphasizing celebratory and conciliatory histories, and the ongoing challenge faced by those who fought to foreground African American history in mainstream contexts. The ARBC seemed to consciously draw out the process of evaluating the Center's proposal, first claiming to have not received the application for recognition and funding and then calling on evaluations from outside sources, something it did not normally do, preferring instead to draw on the resources of staff members or Commissioners.⁶⁴³ In December of 1973, the ARBC sent the Black American Museum and Cultural Center's proposal to Seth M. Scheiner, a historian at Rutgers University who wrote back that he was "quite disappointed" in the proposal on the basis that it "did not provide examples of the historic exhibits that will be available at the museum" or "state that the assistance of historians will be used."⁶⁴⁴ While the proposal did not contain information about specific exhibits, it did include a fold-out collage visualizing what kinds of histories would be told—images on this collage included Sojourner Truth, pictures of runaway slaves, African American Union soldiers, slave revolts, a *Washington Bee* headline about W.E.B. Du Bois and the Niagara Movement, playbills of actor Ira Aldridge, and an 1883 patent for a lasting machine from J. E. Matzeliger.⁶⁴⁵ They formed a cohesive portrayal of African American

⁶⁴³ Frank Mesiah, Project Director to William Butler, October 4, 1974, ARBA RG 452-A1-75: Programs, States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 267, folder: "Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY," NARA II.

⁶⁴⁴ Seth M. Scheiner, Rutgers U to Martin Goldman, program officer, ARBC, December 1, 1973 ; ARBA RG 452-A1-75: Programs, States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 267, folder: "Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY," NARA II.

⁶⁴⁵ Black American Museum and Cultural Center, Brochure; ARBA RG 452-A1-75: Programs, States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 267, folder: "Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY," NARA II; Martin Goldman to Frank Mesiah, January 3, 1974; Sam Johnson to Lynn Carroll, March 16, 1972; ARBA RG 452-A1-75: Programs,

life in the United States and traced a trajectory of African American presence throughout history. Anyone looking at the collage, especially a historian trained in African American history, should have been able to recognize the narrative of black accomplishment and resistance that the museum planned to highlight. Martin Goldman, the Program Officer in charge of “Ethnic and Minority Heritage” passed the comments along to the Cultural Center with a patronizing tone: “To be quite frank, it's one thing to have public relations expertise and the ability to raise funds. It is quite another to be a Black historian or a curator of a Black Museum...I would hope that you and your colleagues would address yourselves to these very real questions as it is our view that such questions must be answered before the new ARBA can begin the process of official recognition.”⁶⁴⁶ The negative attitudes taken towards this proposal are reflective of the continued challenges faced by groups looking to trace the complex history of the black experience in the United States.

The historical emphases of Black American Museum and Cultural Center made the ARBC, at the moment a nominally bipartisan but ideologically conservative organization, uneasy. The first page of the illustrated booklet on the project started: “in the sixties, we saw a polarization of the races as this country moved towards two nations--one black, one white--separate and unequal,” accompanied by a picture of black and white children climbing a jungle gym together. The museum planned to follow African-American history to the present and hoped to achieve, “a demonstrable attitudinal change

States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 267, folder: “Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY,” NARA II.

experienced by those who visit the museum.”⁶⁴⁷ Like the history taught in the new Black Studies departments, it emphasized the struggle of African-Americans since the era of slavery, brought back silenced stories of slave rebellions and organized revolts, and concentrated on more radical civil rights leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois instead of the more conciliatory and less threatening Booker T. Washington. ARBC, at this moment was not interested in this kind of conflict filled, politicized history and so they used the excuse of lack of historical breadth to ignore African American history, instead funding projects like the American Freedom Train, which had been called by another evaluator, a specialist from the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress “a clutter of relics which are capable of illustrating only the most shallow concepts in American history.”⁶⁴⁸ In this instance, the Commission firmly controlled the Bicentennial celebration, continuing to exclude some groups and channeling its resources into projects that embraced a more mainstream narrative of United States history.

Past and Protest

As we have seen from these examples, relationships to the archive informed activist engagement with the past. Reenactment was only possible with source material; that is, when there was an archive already in place, but the practice remained unstable and contingent, generating sometimes unpredictable meanings. For groups that lacked a sanctioned archive, protest took the form of new preservations—adding to an unstable archive. The People’s Bicentennial Commission, with its critique of the official

⁶⁴⁷ Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Booklet, ARBA RG 452-A1-75: Programs, States and Communities Division: Program Files of the Ethnic-Racial Program Office, 1975-6, box 267, folder: “Black American Museum & Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY,” NARA II.

⁶⁴⁸ Joseph B Gorman, Analyst in American National Government, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress to Henry Reuss, re: evaluation of Freedom Train proposal, March 3, 1975, ARBA RG 452-A1-70, Programs, States and Communities Division: Records Concerning Nationally Recognized Bicentennial Programs, 1972-77, box: 253, folder: “American Freedom Train,” NARA II.

Bicentennial's use of history, had as members mostly white, middle class activists who enjoyed enfranchisement in American political, economic and cultural life. Members based their interaction with, and uses of, the past on a deep-seated belief in a historical right to representation. The PBC also displayed a faith that some iteration of the American political system *had* worked and *could* work. This protest, grounded in a reinterpretation of and affective engagement with American history (and one that focused on the revolutionary activity of another set of white males) ultimately took the form of constitutional activism. The PBC first targeted the ARBC, a state initiative, and called for congressional legislation to enact the New Economic Democracy. The PBC's investment in the American political project was supported by the group's reverence for the founding documents already within the canon of the archive and its belief that the ideals in those documents should be applied to present political and economic failures. Other groups had a more fraught relationship with the Bicentennial and the archive-grounded political history that it commemorated: African-Americans and Native Americans voiced cynicism about the celebration, as it represented two hundred years of systematic oppression and erosion of rights. Paradoxically, these rights had been both granted and limited by the founding documents, often touted as the most tangible legacy of the Revolution.

Ultimately, conversation and participation in the Bicentennial, and around the American history it enacted and celebrated, took many forms among people of color; from efforts to use the Bicentennial to agitate for inclusion in or rearticulations of the national narrative, to skepticism and protest in solidarity with oppressed peoples elsewhere. These discussions took their form and content from a debate about the role of

the archive defined as the evidentiary records of the past that generated the historical narratives of American political life. Some activists worked to find material evidence of African American life and accomplishments to expand the archive, believing that an affirmation of equality of representation of experience would lead to equality of rights. Others read into the already existing archive the absences and erasures that continued to define contemporary African American experience. Like other Americans, these activists built upon a basic connection between the historical and the political, but instead of looking to re-enact activity as a means to forge identification between the past and the present, they focused on new possibilities for preservation allowed by the destabilization of consensus history. At the same time, these new preservations instilled pride in achievements that then served as the foundation for appeals for inclusion, again capitalizing on the potential of the past to create politicized feeling in the present.

If the 1960s activist imagination was preoccupied with the present and the future, it can be said that in the 1970s, reflecting cultural trends, many activist movements turned a new eye towards the past. Cultural production of, and engagements with, historical narratives often helped to form, interrogate, and reconstruct identity for all of the movements discussed in this chapter. At the same time, historicity and historical subjectivity took on an explicitly political valence. The People's Bicentennial Commission looked to affective identification with history and reenactments of the American Revolution to address contemporary problems and turned patriotism into protest. At the same time, the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation and other African American preservation groups worked to build evidence of black accomplishment into dominant or mainstream accounts of United States history, looking

to use pride in the achievements of the past to fuel pride in the present. Like the actions of the PBC, the ABC's intervention illustrated the loss of belief in traditional, top-down, consensus history. The concurrent destabilization of the archive, the storehouse of this history, allowed new opportunities for interventions into retellings of the past.

But through this destabilization, the archive still persisted. All of these movements were founded with the assumption of the archive as the source material of understandings and reconceptualizations of the past. Whether it was to repurpose the already-present figures populating the archive, like the PBC, to add new histories to the repository of evidence, like the ABC, or to challenge dominant articulations of archival material, like AIM, the connection between historical ideation and its origin was not lost, only reconfigured. I end with these examples not only because they illustrate the ongoing power of the archive, but also because they demonstrate the site at which political interventions can be made. The move from preservation to reenactment that fueled these historical interventions and the other modes of affective historical ideation that I describe in these chapters was in some ways about animating the archive—recognizing and building upon the emotional valences of the historical, and making central the relationships between the past and the present, not as foundational, but as co-constitutive.

CONCLUSION:
Making History

When you walk through this door, you will no longer be students, you will make history. Lives are at stake! Adult staff members are not here to answer questions or to help you—the responsibility is entirely yours!
—*Staff docent at Air Force One Discovery Center to fifth-grade school group*

On January 14, 2011, during a broadcast entitled “Kid Politics,” the weekly radio program *This American Life* aired a segment recorded at the Air Force One Discovery Center, part of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California. A group of fifth graders posing as the Reagan Cabinet, the White House press corps, and members of the military, participated in a reenactment of the events of “Operation Urgent Fury,” the 1983 U.S. military action in Grenada. After students were assigned roles such as Reagan, Vice-President George H.W. Bush, and General John Vesey, they were separated and put in three rooms: scaled replicas of a battleship command center, the Oval Office (precise even to the jar of jelly beans sitting on Reagan’s desk), and the White House Press Room (video cameras and microphones). Starlee Klein, *This American Life*’s reporter, observed the students playing Reagan and his advisors plan the invasion of Grenada. First, students had to choose whether the action was to be a full-scale military offensive, or a smaller mission to rescue some eight hundred medical students stranded in the country, the ostensible reason for the intervention. After “Reagan” and his cabinet were told that the press had leaked critical information about the stealth mission, they again had to decide whether to continue as planned. The class was prepared to weigh these choices; they had spent several weeks

studying Reagan and the Grenada invasion before the trip to the Air Force One Discovery Center.



Figure 23. Student Reenactors in replica Oval Office, Air Force One Discovery Center, Ronald Reagan Museum and Presidential Library. Still from Reagan Foundation promotional video for Air Force One Discovery Center. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_ul5RFNb3U, [accessed March 30, 2012].

Although the students had been told before the reenactment began that there were no right or wrong answers, when they input their choices into the red phone on the replica Oval Office desk, a loud buzzer sounded, indicating whether their decisions aligned with that of Reagan in 1983. Klein observed, “The whole thing is rigged to make what Ronald Reagan did in 1983 look like the most appealing option.” The students took their choices seriously, and as Klein reported, at various moments throughout the reenactment, appeared genuinely worried, angry, or celebratory.⁶⁴⁹ Their engagement with the past was affective as well as reenactive; the class learned about Operation Urgent Fury from the perspective of those who had been there, and clearly felt some of the stress that accompanied such planning. But at the same time, they were guided through the choices

⁶⁴⁹ “Kid Politics,” *This American Life* episode 424, originally aired January 14, 2011. Podcast and transcript available at <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/424/kid-politics>, [accessed April 1, 2012]. See also, Website of Air Force One Discovery Center, Reagan Library and Museum, <http://www.reaganfoundation.org/education-class-visit-overview.aspx>, [accessed April 1, 2012].

as the Reagan Cabinet had made them; their affective identification was with those in power. The scaled nature of the replica environments also helped school-aged children move bodily into their roles: the majority of fifth-graders were not yet big enough to feel at home in settings like offices, press rooms, or military control centers, yet at the Air Force One Discovery Center, their grownup decisions took place in grownup settings. The Reagan interactive illustrates the contemporary relationship of reenactment to archives like those of the Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, and how the practice continues to be used to generate hegemonic interpretations of history. The exercise at the Air Force One Discovery Center trained a new generation not only to revere Reagan but also to act like him; by reenacting critical moments in the Reagan presidency, students inhabited the President's mindset, feeling as if his choices were also their choices.

Presidential libraries are crucial examples of archives as I have been discussing them; they collect and preserve documents and artifacts related to particular presidents, seeking to glorify their actions. Although the presidential libraries are part of the National Archives system, they are paid for and planned by each President.⁶⁵⁰ But, as we can see from the Reagan example, presidential libraries are not only repositories of documents, they are archives in action—using and interpreting their contents to generate a celebratory and reverent depiction of that President's life and career. For example, at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, one can visit a mock television studio featuring the actual control panel and camera used in the famous Kennedy-Nixon television debate. The audience vantage point is from behind the control panel; as they watch the debate on the screen, they become first-hand witnesses of telegenic Kennedy's triumph over the

⁶⁵⁰ Sharon K. Fawcett, "Presidential Libraries: A View From the Center," *Public Historian*, 28.3 (Summer, 2006), 13-36.

haggard, inarticulate Nixon.⁶⁵¹ At the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois, a hologram of Lincoln interacts with audiences, walking among them as they are absorbed into his life.⁶⁵²

In this dissertation, I have argued that reenactive engagement with history emerged in the 1970s as a primary mode of historical ideation as the result of a complex mix of political, economic and cultural changes that led to reconsiderations of the past, the present, and the future, and the relationship among all three. I suggested--especially in the chapters on television and on the use of computers, telephone banks, audio tours, video and sound projection, and other technological implements in museum exhibition--that new developments in technology, particularly personal technology, while not directly responsible for this transformation, helped to create immersive and reenactive situations. The high-tech environments at the Presidential Libraries and other contemporary history exhibitions show how, with additional advances in technology, the complex relationship between reenactive historymaking and new media has flourished and developed.⁶⁵³

As personal technology advanced rapidly between the 1970s and now, it is easy to see how reenactive engagements with the historical have extended and even taken on new forms in the present moment. The internet and other digital technologies afford ample opportunity to place oneself in the past. Role-playing video games like *Call of Duty* allow players to participate in immersive renditions of the Civil War, World War II, and other

⁶⁵¹ Website of John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/>, [accessed April 2, 2012].

⁶⁵² "The New Presidential Library Showcases Legacy of Abraham Lincoln," *PBS Newshour*, aired April 15, 2005, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june05/lincoln_4-15.html, [accessed April 2, 2012].

⁶⁵³ For a theorization of reenactment in the context of media convergence and cross-platform interactions, see Katie King, *Networked Reenactments: Stories Transdisciplinary Knowledges Tell* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

conflicts. Players join historic military formations and simulate usage of appropriate weapons. Other games, like *Bioshock* and *Fallout*, present interactive “alternate histories,” that are nonetheless rooted in extensive historical research and represent historical ephemera, motifs, and backgrounds, accurately. Aside from simulating war, these games create complex narratives that lend players backstories, experiences, and emotions, allowing players to move outside of themselves while gaming. In recent years, scholars have turned a critical eye on these engagements, asking questions about how game-playing influences the formation and maintenance of ideologies.⁶⁵⁴

The digital has also expanded the possibilities of preservation—digitization, tagging, and advanced searches make archives more accessible and more knowable. All of the Presidential Libraries have extensive digital holdings. The National Archives’ Digital Vaults project, billed as the “National Archives Experience,” allows users access to a variety of documents on such subjects like the Declaration of Independence, the Supreme Court, and Albert Einstein.⁶⁵⁵ This site is pedagogical and has already done the work of research, whereas the Archives’ search engine gives researchers remote access to a great number of texts and images.⁶⁵⁶ Finally, user-driven online archiving like Flickr and YouTube again signify an expansion and democratization of preservation activity.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴ See MacKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Rita Raley, “Virtual War: Information Visualization and Virtual Gaming,” in *Tactical Media*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 65-108; Penny Von Eschen, “Rebooting the Cold War from Films to Video Games,” talk at Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, Baltimore, Maryland, 2011.

⁶⁵⁵ The National Archives Experience, <http://www.digitalvaults.org>, [accessed March 28, 2012].

⁶⁵⁶ Archival Research Catalog, National Archives and Records Administration, <http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/BasicSearchForm?jScript=true>, [accessed March 28, 2012].

⁶⁵⁷ On digital archives, see Diana Taylor, “Save As... Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies,” Keynote Address, Imagining America Conference, 2010. PDF available at <http://imaginingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Foreseeable-Futures-10-Taylor.pdf>, [accessed April 4, 2012]; Mark B. N. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge,

It might be fitting to note here the degree to which my own project has relied on such access; most of the television programs I discuss are available online through YouTube, Netflix, and other platforms; many individuals have posted personal photographs and recollections from the Wagon Train, the Freedom Train, and other Bicentennial activities on dedicated websites. For researchers like me and for individuals curious about their family, their neighborhood, or anything else, the Internet provides incomparable resources.

More museums now have living history programs including highly controversial reenactments of slave auctions, the experience of the Holocaust, and others.⁶⁵⁸

Reenactment has also thrived on television: historical reality television programs like *Frontier House* and *Colonial House* likewise place “regular people” in the past.

Participants are taught about dress, cooking, and everyday rituals from the correspondent time period, and outfitted with replica clothing, tools, and leisure items.⁶⁵⁹ Significantly, and in departure from the “authentic” experience the project strives to create, they are also given hand-held “diary cameras”, which they can use to record their own thoughts and perspectives, an aspect which reinforces the centrality of connecting the experience of reenacting the past to the present and testifies to the complex relationship between embodiment and mediation.

2006); William Uricchio, "The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television." in Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, eds. *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 24-39.

⁶⁵⁸ Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Omer Bartov, “Chambers of Horror: Holocaust Museums in Israel and the United States,” *Israel Studies*, 2.2 1999; Bentley Boyd, “Colonial Williamsburg Auctions Slaves: Re-enactment Provokes Emotional Debates,” *Newport News Daily Press*, October 11, 1994.

⁶⁵⁹ Malgorzata Rymza-Pawlowska, “Frontier House: Reality TV and the Historical Experience,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 37.1 (2007) 35-42.

Accordingly, critiques of reenactive or empathetic history also endure. Vanessa Agnew has written extensively about reenactive practice, echoing previous critics in her concern about the way that its affective dimensions lead to inaccuracy and misunderstanding. Agnew sees potential in reenactment, but notes that it must be “rescued,” and a critical distance must be regained in order to renew history’s ethical and political responsibilities.⁶⁶⁰ In 2010, the historian Jill Lepore published a study detailing the Tea Party movement’s engagement with the past. Lepore worries that the Tea Party both identifies with and misunderstands Revolutionary history, seeing a causal relationship between the two. Fittingly, she traces this tendency back to the Bicentennial, which she calls a “carnival of fundamentalism.”⁶⁶¹ Although Lepore is correct about the Tea Party’s misunderstanding, she misses the point: it’s not that the Tea Party’s reenactment has generated bad history and thus, bad politics, it’s that their politics have generated reenactment, precisely *because* of history’s availability as a way of thinking about politics. While I agree with Agnew and Lepore, that reenactment has both positive and negative aspects and that it must be examined critically, I believe that there is little value in positioning reenactive and affective engagement in contrast to some other, better, more objective, practice of history. As I hope to have shown, in contemporary American culture, reenactment *is* history. I also break with Agnew, Lepore and others’ negative characterizations of reenactment’s pedagogical or political sparseness; as my readings of

⁶⁶⁰ Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb, “What is Reenactment? An Introduction.” *Criticism* 46.3 (2004). 327-339; Vanessa Agnew. “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present.” *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007). See also Alexander Cook, “The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History.” *Criticism* 46.3 (2004): 487-496.

⁶⁶¹ Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party’s Revolution and the Battle Over American History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 68. See also Gordon S. Wood’s critique of Lepore. Gordon S. Wood, “No Thanks for the Memories,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 13, 2011.

the reenactments surrounding the Bicentennial indicate, I remain convinced that reenactive practice is full of possibility for productive historical engagement.

This potential--the unpredictability of reenactment--is evident even in the Reagan example. In the *This American Life* segment, Starlee Klein follows two groups of fifth graders through their reenactments of Reagan's Cabinet during Operation Urgent Fury. While one group makes the "right" choices, behaving as Reagan and his cabinet did in 1983, later that day, a second group makes the wrong ones. Instead of choosing to send a large force to Grenada, this Reagan cabinet does not invade, instead moving to evacuate the medical students that were stranded there. In 1983, after the press leak ruined the "element of surprise" the Reagan cabinet had been relying on, the President has continued with the attack. Again, the students reenacting Reagan differ from the script—they decide to call off the action.⁶⁶² These students' assessment of the Grenada invasion is derived from first-hand experience; their divergence and disagreement with the President's action has come on emotional, not informational terms. Instead of making students feel closer to Reagan, this episode makes them more critical of the President. Reenactment now, as then, can make multiple meanings.

With this project, I have traced large-scale shifts in historicity and historical subjectivity to argue that affective understanding of the past was central to the creation of identity and political consciousness in the 1970s, and remains critical even now. Looking closely at the continuum of production and reception of various kinds of history projects, I have shown the beginning of transformations that have been extended and consolidated into the present. It's only by looking at the development and consolidation of reenactive practices that today seem like second nature in their pervasiveness, that we can take the

⁶⁶² "Kid Politics," *This American Life*.

next step, and begin to see how the past is deployed in contemporary cultural and political discourse.

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