Before 1979: African American Coachmen, Visibility, and Representation at Colonial Williamsburg

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Abstract: Before the living history museum of Colonial Williamsburg started its concerted interpretation of slavery in 1979, the African American coachmen were already representing the past and implicating black history and slavery in this restored eighteenth-century capital of Virginia. Various records of photographs, postcards, letters, newspaper clippings, oral history accounts, visitor observations, and corporate papers provide a window to understand the social climates of the museum's period in the 1930s to the 1970s. This body of evidence supports the contention that the coachmen were visible and influenced public history within and outside the museum.

Key words: Coachmen, African American history, slavery, visibility, and representation

Introduction

THE YEAR 1979 MARKED the formal introduction of Colonial Williamsburg's concerted efforts to interpret eighteenth-century African American history and slavery. That summer a group of African American actors role-played free and enslaved people in vignettes and street scenes. Most observers believe that,

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until that time, this pioneer living history museum, founded in the 1920s, ignored these indelible aspects of the past in its mission to interpret Williamsburg, the colonial capital of Virginia. In 2009, Colonial Williamsburg celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of this benchmark date, further underscoring its significance in the annals of its living history interpretive achievements. For since the 1970s, it has developed, with considerable success, a diversified interpretation of the past.[1]

Over the years, many scholars and other evaluators have ignored strong evidence that, before 1979, Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation did include portrayal of a diverse history. These limited analyses of the pre-1979 years have contributed to a myopic history that has overlooked the valuable interpretive roles of frontline African American employees, including the coachmen. In their heydays from the 1930s to the 1970s, the skilled coachmen-interpreters were highly visible as they manned carriage rides for dignitaries and regular visitors at Colonial Williamsburg, effectively controlling a major pathway to nostalgia about the past.[2]

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[1] This essay draws on Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's (hereafter CWF) internal newspapers from 1940 to the 1990s for information about the African American workers. For more about the living history program (it also included white actors) that was introduced in the summer of 1979, see Susan Bruno, "By Troupe of Actors: History Comes Alive in Colonial Williamsburg," *Daily Press,* June 10, 1979, 4; Rex M. Ellis, "Presenting the Past: Education, Interpretation and the Teaching of Black History at Colonial Williamsburg," (PhD thesis, College of William and Mary, 1989), 272-273. See also his article, "A Decade of Change: Black History at Colonial Williamsburg," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 14-23. Activities that were included in the 2009 celebrations are listed in the program brochure, "African American History Programs 30th Anniversary Celebration Opening Weekend, April 4-5, 2009. Sankofa: Looking Back, Moving Forward" (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2009). A chronology of the museum's development is available in "Colonial Williamsburg Now 60 Years Old: Chronology 1926-1986," *Colonial Williamsburg News* November 1986, 6; and at "CWF Chronology (1924 - 2012)," CWF Intranet site.

[2] Studies with evaluations that have supported a myopic history include, Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, "Living-History Museums," in, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 64-97; Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Public History Readings* eds. Phyllis K. Leffler and Joseph Brent (Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 1992), 429-455; Christopher D. Geist, "African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg," *CRM*, 20 no. 2 (1997): 47-49, http://npshistory.com/newsletters/crm/crm-v20n2.pdf; Fath Davis Ruffins and Paul Ruffins, "Recovering Yesterday—Collection and Preservation of African American history," in *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* (June 16, 2007), http://diverseeducation.com/article/7467/ reprinted from *Black Issues in Higher Education* 13, no. 25 (Feb., 1997); and James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 35-55. For studies with more nuanced approaches to Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of the African American past and slavery see Ellis, "Presenting the Past"; Linda Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945," in *Williamsburg, Virginia: A City Before the State 1699-1999* ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Williamsburg, Va.: The City of Williamsburg and the University Press of Virginia, 2000), 121-136; and Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). For dignitaries and carriage rides, see Mary Miley Theobald, "Every Man a King: The VIPs Visit Colonial Williamsburg," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* 23, no.3 (Autumn 2001): 37- 41. Visual images of the coachmen and carriages are on file at Visual Resources, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library and at Photo Services, CWF. Early postcards from the 1930s showing black coachmen can be viewed at

This essay provides fresh perspective on the early history of Colonial Williamsburg through an analysis of the roles of the African American coachmen. It contends that, before 1979, through their visibility and interpretive roles in the carriage ride, the coachmen prompted considerations of African American history and slavery in the museum's public history. They were included, not excluded, in the public face of Colonial Williamsburg during this period, despite the fact that the museum did not treat these interpretive areas as top priorities. This study is primarily about visibility—visual perception, recognition, nonrecognition or invisibility, and other visual practices—surrounding the black coachmen and the carriage ride. Much of the analysis is centered on inclusionary and exclusionary activities that sustained as well as challenged the interpretation of race within the museum, before 1979. The (in)visibility of the coachmen continues to serve as a commentary on Colonial Williamsburg's public history.[3]

In "Interpreting Visual Culture," Terry Barrett discussed practices of visual and verbal communications that are useful to this thesis about Colonial Williamsburg's black coachmen and its interpretive programs. Barrett drew on the work of French scholar Roland Barthes (1915-1980) to explain how "denotations and connotations are at play in all of visual and verbal communication." Denotation refers to what is actually seen in a visual image (like a photograph), while connotation encompasses the meanings and associations that someone can derive from the image, usually based on factors such as the individual's previous knowledge and economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. This schema is applicable for understanding the coachmen's visibility and how visitors and other viewers saw them and how they interpreted visual images of these men. Undoubtedly, visitors were influenced by their own social and cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge, and exposure to history as well as contemporary race relations.[4]

Race is a connective tissue in this examination of the roles of the coachmen, particularly as Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya defined it. These scholars championed the active nature of the practice, labeling it as "doing":

> Race is not something that people or groups *have* or *are,* but rather a set of actions that people do. More specifically, race is a dynamic system of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices. Certainly, the process involved in doing race takes different forms in various times and places. But doing race always involves creating groups based on perceived physical and behavioral

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"Williamsburg Postcards: History through Pictures," http://williamsburg.kspot.org/. The black carriage drivers were called coachman-interpreters from the early years, see "John Sheppard," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, April 1952, 3.

[3] Irit Rogoff, "Studying Visual Culture," http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Rogoff-StudyingVisualCulture.pdf; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 165-81; "Visual Culture/Visual Studies: Inventory of Recent Definitions," http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/Visual-Culture/VisualCultureStudies-definitions.html; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Rutledge: New York and London, 2000).

[4] Terry Barrett, "Interpreting Visual Culture," *Journal of Art Education*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 6-12.

> characteristics, associating differential power and privilege with these characteristics, and then justifying the resulting inequalities.[5]

The imperative to see the centrality of race in studying the visibility of the coachmen also highlights how much the scholarship on cultural hegemony connects the concept to specific time, location, and social experiences. Steven Hoelscher highlighted these relationships in his research about historical commemorations in Mississippi, particularly the Natchez Pilgrimages that, in the first half of the twentieth century, celebrated the South's past centered on the homes and lifestyles of wealthy whites. Without ignoring the role legislation played in the process, Hoelscher declared, "that a full examination of American racial segregation must take into account the cultural productions that articulated it, reinforced it, and made it deeply embedded in daily life."[6]

With their high visibility, the pilgrimages created a powerful but exclusionary interpretation of the past, because, as they drew on and reinforced whites' cultural hegemony, they marginalized African Americans. These cultural performances worked to sustain segregation, for as Hoelscher described them, they fell into the category of "the sorts of nonordinary, framed public events that require participation by a sizable group and that, as planned-for public occasions, invest their participants with meaning." Whites' cultural hegemony and their control of the pilgrimages, however, did not go unchallenged. The black participants sought to redefine their roles in these events and even refused to participate in them. They understood that their visibility had consequences; it influenced the use (or even the abuse) of history in Natchez.[7]

Colonial Williamsburg was not the first public history project in Williamsburg to involve African Americans in highly visible roles. Even as an unrestored place with few standing historical structures in the 1890s, Williamsburg was "the Mecca to which hundreds of sightseers yearly make pilgrimage." African American men and women served as guides at historic buildings now contained in the main area of the museum. One recommendation to cultural tourists with the "power and purse" arriving by rail to experience "the charm and character" of the old town, assured them that "a bus," apparently a carriage, will be available for them. "The negro driver will crack his whip and take" them to an inn where they will rest for the night, before embarking on the next day of historic sightseeing.[8]

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[5] Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya, eds., *Doing Race: 21 Essays from the 21st Century* (Norton: New York, 2010), x.

[6] Steven Hoelscher, "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (Sept., 2003): 657-86, quotation on page 659.

[7] Hoelscher, "Making Place," 661.

[8] See Ellis, "Presenting the Past," and "A Decade of Change." See also, Rowe, "African Americans." The quotation is from Mary Lyons Mayo, "The Ancient Capital of the Old Dominion," *Peterson Magazine* 7, no. 9 (September 1897), American Periodicals Series Online, page 850.

The overall impact of African Americans in this early public history was perhaps limited if compared to the scale of the preservation activities. But within the context of race relations in America at the time, the very fact that they had key roles and were not excluded from this movement curtails simplistic interpretations of this period. A myopic history would overlook the implications of their presence and render them invisible in these early encounters of presenting the past in Williamsburg.

The coming of Colonial Williamsburg not only transformed the town's physical landscape; it ushered in a new era of preservation and restoration activities, especially through public history programs. Moreover, it brought significant changes to the level of African Americans' involvement, the scale of their visual presence, and the reach of visual representations about them in heritage tourism and education. From its inception, the museum became a major employer of blacks placing them in both skilled and unskilled areas in landscaping, construction and maintenance, culinary and hospitality, and at exhibition buildings, as well as in archaeological work. African Americans literally built Colonial Williamsburg.[9]

Countering a Myopic history

Within the first two decades of its establishment, Colonial Williamsburg offered a special way to experience its restored setting. In 1942, the museum's internal newspaper circulated an invitation:

> All the people who have been longing for years to ride in an open carriage may now gratify their wish, for the Restoration is renting for a tour of the Restored Area a recently restored 18th century carriage, complete with two horses. The rates are 50 cents a half hour per person, with a minimum rate of $1 for each tour.[10]

Six years later, the carriage ride was a customary attraction boasting some key facilitators.

> Starting May 11, a second old carriage was added to the Williamsburg scene. This is the "blue" carriage, the one used before the war to carry hostesses to and from the buildings. It is a closed coach with four seats. Now the visiting public can take a carriage every 15 minutes from the Old Court House Museum. A tour of thirty minutes gives the visitor a general view of the restored area . . .

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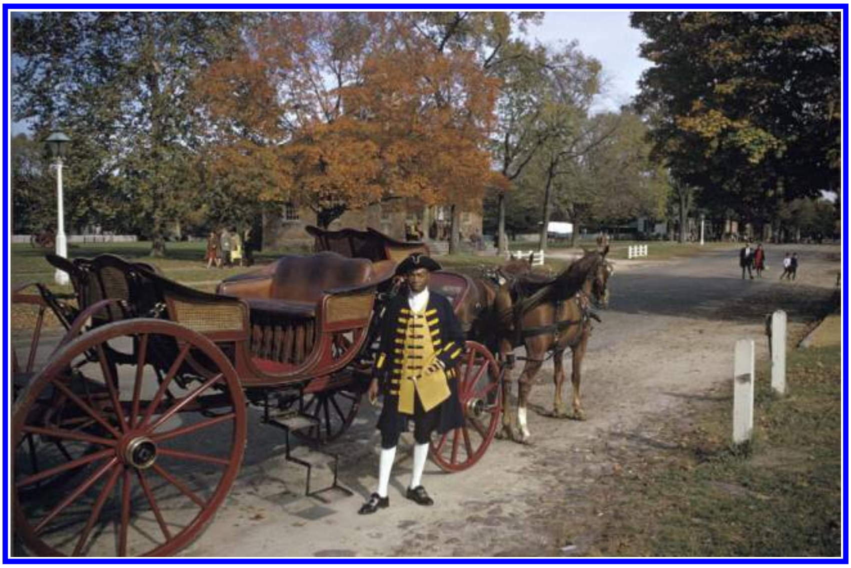
[9] In the early 1940s, information about the black employees was published in a column called "News of the Colored People," by Thomas Kearney and Isham Johnson in *The Restoration News*. See issues for November 1940, 5; April 1941, 3; June 1941, 3; and September 1941. See also news stories in *Colonial Williamsburg News*, "Three Familiar Figures," October 1954, 3; "Service Awards: Mamie Lindsay," November 1955, 3; and "Presenting the Epps," May 21, 1968, 4.

[10] "Old Carriage," *The News of CW*, August 1942, 3.



A coachman, probably Benjamin Spraggins, poses by a carriage in Colonial Williamsburg's historic area. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

> The number one coachman is Ben Spraggins, sometimes called the most photographed man in Williamsburg. The coachman for the second coach is John Sheppard. Willie Meekins is in charge of the stables and keeps the horses looking so well groomed. The coach has long been a favorite part of the Williamsburg scene for both tourists and residents.[11]

What was left unsaid, or was taken for granted, in the second news item was that Ben Spraggins, John Sheppard (sometimes Shepperd), and Willie Meekins (who was also a coachman) were African Americans. The three men were early representatives of the museum's tradition of using mainly blacks as carriage drivers before 1979. Black coachmen facilitated rides predominantly for white visitors within a historic landscape reconstructed to showcase life and events in Williamsburg in the years surrounding the American War of Independence.[12]

Colonial Williamsburg developed as a pioneer public history museum through a massive restoration project that was guided by the vision and dedication of the Reverend W.A.R. Goodwin, a local Anglican minister, and infused with the capital and commitment of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a wealthy philanthropist. The museum was founded with the wide and far-reaching goals of teaching citizenship and expounding American democratic ideals and practices. Its town-sized landscape, comprising restored and re-created buildings of residences, public offices, and trade shops, as well as modern stores and amenities, was largely used to tell a story of an affluent and well-managed past. In the pre-1979 years, the built historic landscape and public programs were not harnessed in ways that would effectively inform visitors about the race-based slavery that defined life in the eighteenth-century period of the town's history, a time when whites upheld themselves as the dominant group, and blacks were treated as an inferior people, the majority of them living as enslaved individuals.[13]

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[11] "Carriage Fleet Grows," *News from CW,* June 1, 1948, 2.

[12] Information about the carriage drivers are in the following items in the *Colonial Williamsburg News:* "Hold that Pose'—Click!;" August 1959, 4; "Bartlett, 11 Year CWer Reaches Retirement," October 13, 1964, 3; "Another Lively Addition," April 20, 1965, 4; "Dateline Williamsburg," May 10, 1966, 1; "Harmon Washington, Jr.," June 29, 1977, 3; "A carriage ride," May 1982, 6; and "Order of the Pineapple," January 1985, 3.

From its early years, even when the emphasis was on restoring and rebuilding structures, Colonial Williamsburg drew many visitors. It also attracted critics, including scholars, who highlighted its shrine-like qualities and its overall promotion of a narrow version of history that downplayed the conflicts of class and race. They pointed to the many ways the interpretations prioritized the stories and material life of famous historical figures and elites with little attention paid to the life-ways and contributions of lesser-known individuals and to groups like Native Americans and African Americans. In his scholarly assessment of the museum's early years, Michael Wallace described its general antipathy against interpreting ordinary people:

> But though there would be craft shops and costumed guides at Colonial Williamsburg (CW), Rockefeller was not the least bit interested in recapturing the culture of "the folk." There were precious few "folk" in evidence, and there was absolutely no reference to the fact that half of eighteenth-century Williamsburg's population had been black slaves. (Until 1939, "colored only" signs dotted the CW landscape.)[14]

Wallace determined that the museum embraced "a vision of a total social order" aimed at eliminating conflicting and inharmonious factors in the restoration and presentation of history. He compared the proponents and facilitators of the Restoration to corporate elites who assumed the mantle of their colonial counterparts, promoting their own cultural and social hegemonies.[15]

Some of Colonial Williamsburg's early critics recommended changes to its interpretation like adding information about slavery and African Americans to alter what they saw as the museum's falsely pristine characteristics. Walter Muir Whitehill described the place in the 1960s as "an entirely artificial recreation of an imaginary past . . . a fantasy in which the more pleasing aspects of colonial life are evoked with the omission of smells, flies, pigs, dirt, and slave quarters." Similar descriptions sought to indict the museum's public history as warped and unrepresentative of the colonial past.[16]

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[13] Wallace, "Visiting the Past," 439-40; Edward A. Chappell, "The Museum and the Joy Ride: Williamsburg Landscapes and the Specter of Theme Parks," in *Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations* eds. Terence Young and Robert Riley (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 120-56.

[14] Wallace, "Visiting the Past," 439.

[15] ibid.

Michael Wallace also provided a vivid overview of the state of affairs in the early days:

> CW's [Colonial Williamsburg's] order flows from the top down. It is a corporate world: planned, orderly, tidy, with no dirt, no smell, no visible signs of exploitation. Intelligent and genteel patrician elites preside over it; respectable craftsmen run production paternalistically and harmoniously; ladies run well-ordered households with well-ordered families in homes filled with tasteful precious objects. The rest of the population—the ninety percent who create the wealth—are nowhere to be seen.[17]

Undoubtedly an unintended consequence, aspects of the criticisms about the museum seemingly implied that blacks were part of the unsanitary aspects of Williamsburg's past, and did so in ways that conflated a group of people with the horrors of an institution and way of life.

Some visitors were critics, too, and wanted more concrete expressions of an inclusive approach to America's heritage. They wrote to Colonial Williamsburg requesting additional information about slavery and pressuring for an increase in the visibility of African American interpreters in the public history.

> 1962: When a slave area is shown, why is it not shown as it really was? What of the more seamy and unattractive facets of life in Williamsburg during the period depicted? I am sure that a chamber-of-horrors presentation is not envisioned, yet, while I do not fully agree with the criticism (appreciating, what I think, is being done) would it not be possible to present to a greater degree 'the-other-side-of-the-track' Williamsburg?
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> 1968-69: The contributions of the black population have been largely omitted. Any questions asked about this aspect of the life are met from the hostess by obvious discomfort and embarrassment. Similarly I think it is unfortunate that as middle and upper-class white women are recruited as guides in the house, there should also be articulate, middle and upper class Negro women in the kitchen exhibits to serve as guides.[18]

Although offered with well-meaning intentions, recommendations for change were frequently couched in language that would strengthen segregated offerings. During this time, the museum did not provide its visitors and critics with enough guidance on how to see the restored area as a representation of an enslaved Williamsburg. Even today, amidst a much more diversified interpretation of history, this message is still a very hard one to convey to visitors. The museum still finds it difficult to get visitors to understand the all-encompassing nature of slavery and the wide-scale involvement of blacks in the town during the colonial period.

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[16] Quoted in Leon and Piatt, "Living-History Museums," 73.

[17] Wallace, "Visiting the Past," 439-40.

[18] Letter, J. Douglass Smith, "To Staff, Hostesses, Hosts, and Kitchen Interpreters: Re: Visitor Reaction to Interpretation, 1962-1974," (Dec. 30, 1974), 116, 119-120. CWF Archives, General Correspondence 1926-Present.

Those critics who saw and acknowledged black workers thought that they were missing from key areas that would have made their representation more meaningful to an understanding of Williamsburg's history. In the late 1980s, Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, for instance, proffered an analysis of the situation.

> The lives of that half of Williamsburg's population consisting of black slaves were consequently ignored by interpreters and hidden from visitors. Moreover, in a region where segregated workplaces were still common into the 1960s, virtually the only blacks that visitors encountered were the waiters, waitresses, and busboys in the cafeteria and restaurants.[19]

In a 1997 article, Christopher Geist also summarized the museum's early approaches to the colonial past and painted a comparable scenario.

> From early restoration efforts in the 1920s through the 1960s it was the rare visitor who encountered evidence that African Americans had played any role at all in Williamsburg society. Early editions of the village's *Official Guidebook* offered discrete references to "servants," but generally slavery and the major role played by slaves in 18th-century Williamsburg was not evident.[20]

Fath Davis Ruffins and Paul Ruffins reiterated a similar story about the invisibility of African American history.

> The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg which was intended to be historically accurate, ignored the fact that 50 percent of Williamsburg's inhabitants had been African American. This began to change when museums realized that minorities constituted a significant portion of their audience and that many of these new audiences came to museums to partake of exhibitions or programming that related to their history and culture. In the late 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg began to incorporate African Americans into its interpretative framework.[21]

The practice of condensing the museum's first fifty years of interpretation into a few sentences or paragraphs continues to appear in studies of the museum. For example, in 2006, James Oliver Horton presented 1979 as a watershed moment.

> In 1979, slavery was interpreted for the first time when Williamsburg employed six African American interpreters to present first-person portrayals of slaves, who accounted for roughly half of the town's population in the eighteenth century.[22]

[19] Leon and Piatt, "Living-History Museum," 73-74.
[20] Geist, "Visiting the Past," 47.
[21] Ruffins and Ruffins, "Recovering Yesterday."
[22] Horton, "Slavery in American History," 49-50.

Many critics of Colonial Williamsburg overstated the overall absence of black history and the dearth of references about slavery in the museum before 1979. They overlooked how these dynamics of the past, even when unnoticed, were intricately interwoven into the fabric of the historical restoration and into its concurrent public history as well. The critics subscribed to a simplistic framing of a very complex issue—how to tell an inclusive story of the colonial period of the town. Their theory of absenteeism stemmed from a false dichotomy that slavery and the lifeways of blacks in the eighteenth-century town existed separately and apart from the totality of life at the time.

What many of the critics failed to see was the extent to which African Americans were always present at Colonial Williamsburg, in roles that told black history as part of America's past as well of that of the history of slavery, and that African Americans were included in Williamsburg's "elitist" story. Many of the black workers interpreted in key areas and displayed high standards of service and hospitality as they interacted with the visitors. Members of musical groups even entertained guests as part of the advertised programs of "Enchanting Negro Spirituals" in the 1940s. Perhaps, it was later scholars, more than contemporary visitors, who disregarded the referential and powerful nature of the visibility of the early black workers at Colonial Williamsburg.[23]

Many visitors saw the black frontline employees in the exhibition areas and on the streets of the town and even documented them through photography. The visitors, mainly upper-middle-class whites, had opportunities to see blacks demonstrating crafts, undertaking interpretive roles at exhibition buildings, and especially driving carriages. In the 1960s, many of these visitors came as members of school, adult, foreign, and military groups. The American ones came primarily from the northeastern and southeastern areas of the country with nearly two million accounted for in 1966. In 1978, over a million visitors came to the museum with visitation level falling to a little below this number in 1979.[24]

From the 1930s, Colonial Williamsburg and its visitors participated in a public history rooted in a referential framework that was highly informed by images of blacks as enslaved people laboring for whites. This information was also popularized and expounded through different cultural productions

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[23] Newspaper clippings files at the CWF Archives have advertisements for the spirituals. These were placed in the *New York Times*, June 16, 1940, *New York Herald Tribune*, June 15, 1941, *New York World-Telegram*, June 11, 1941, and in the *Virginia Gazette*, March 9, 1948. Also see, *New York Times (1923-Current file)* June 29, 1941 and July 27, 1941, in ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851- 2006), pp. 22 and 27. For more on the singers, see "School Days Not Yet Ended For Quintet of CW," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, June 2, 1964, 4; Visual Resources, CWF Library.

[24] "Coming Together: Interpreting in the Sixties," *The CW Interpreter* 13, no. 4 (November 1992): 1-15; "1964 Group Visits Set New Record, Top 100,000 Mark," *Colonial Williamsburg News* February 9, 1965, 1; "Where Do Our Guests Come From?," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, March 7, 1967, 2; and "Viewpoints from the President," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, February 1981, 2.

such as films and other mass media. Two early films produced and circulated by the museum featured blacks and interpreted slavery. These are compelling evidence that Colonial Williamsburg had recognized that, in its search for authenticity, it had to increase its efforts to be inclusive. Its introductory film, *The Patriot,* premiered in 1957 and, by the next decade, it amassed a viewership of about "six-and-three-quarter million" at the museum and "eleven plus million" when external viewing sites were added. Many of the black staff members assisted with the making of the film and had acting roles in it.[25]

Another film, *Music of Williamsburg* (1960), produced with the help of folk-music collector Alan Lomax, featured blacks working and singing together in various scenes in its goal to provide "a sense of daily life in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia" and to show how blacks had contributed to the "nation's heritage." By 1962, the film was released on television, and shown on "approximately 150 [national] telecasts." In addition to these products, the museum marketed other items and programs that represented or alluded to slavery and menial laborers. These included postcards, advertisements for Negro spirituals, and souvenir dolls and figurines of black people dressed in colonial-style clothing.[26]

Many black women worked in costume as kitchen attendants and interpreters at places like the Governor's Palace and the George Wythe House. They had duties in areas where visitors most likely would have associated them with slavery. Kitchen attendant Mamie Lindsay's job brought "her in contact with many visitors each year." In November 1955, she celebrated her ten-year anniversary in this capacity. That same month, two visiting dignitaries, Britain's Countess Mountbatten and Belgium's Prince Albert sampled her Brunswick stew at the Palace kitchen. Lindsay retired in July 1960. Marion Bartlett (married to coachman Junious Bartlett) worked as a kitchen interpreter and was already a retired "CWer" before her husband joined her in this status in 1964.[27]

This tradition of black women working in the restored area's kitchens started in the 1930s. In 1937, *The National Geographic Society* published

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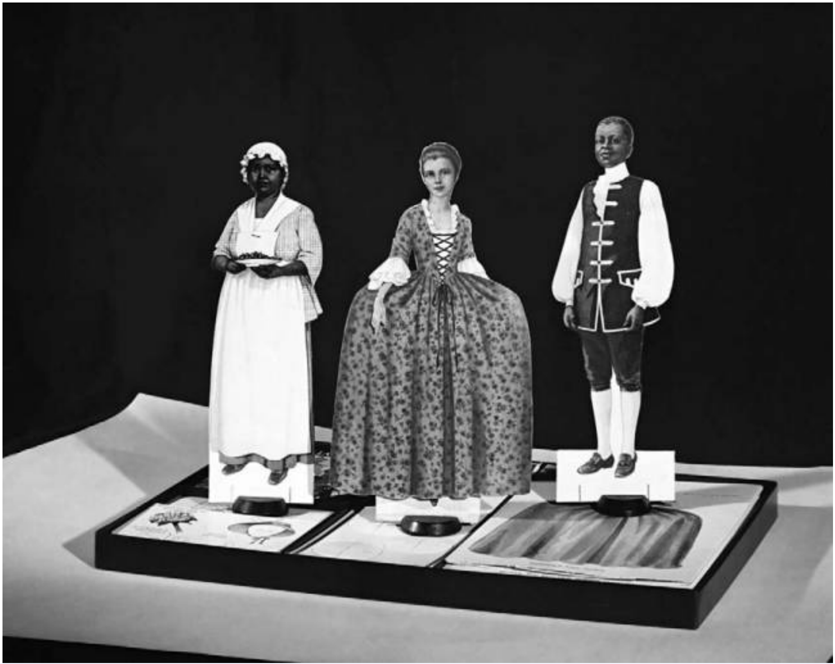
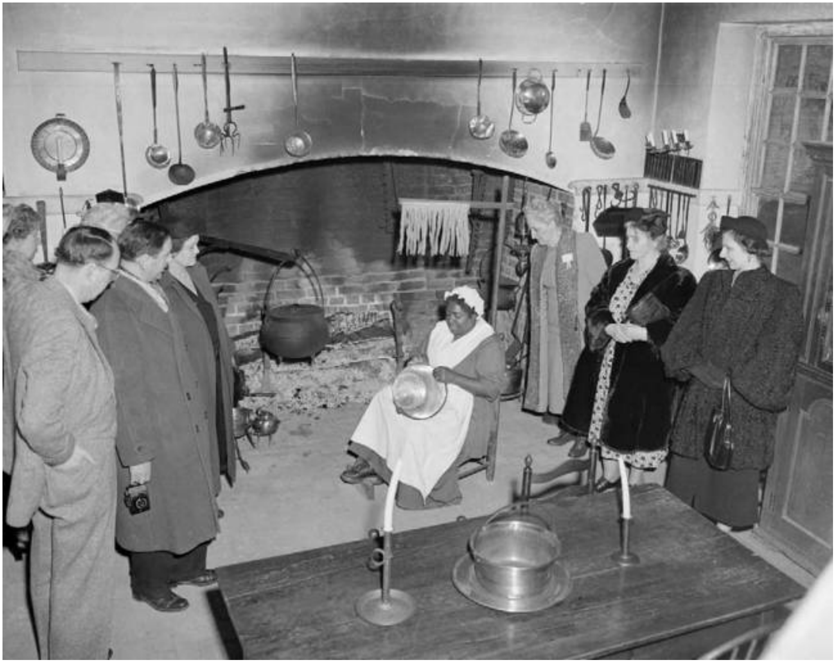
[25] Alice Sircom, "Hundreds of CWers," *Colonial Williamsburg News,* May-June 1956, 1, 3-5; and "*Patriot* Celebrates Tenth Anniversary," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, April 4, 1967, 1, 3.

[26] Carol J. Oja, "Filming the Music of Williamsburg with Alan Lomax," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 1-2, 12-13, http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/publications/newsletter/NewsF03.pdf; *Colonial Williamsburg, Music of Williamsburg* (1960), re-released on video and distributed by CWF; "Craft House Adds Doulton Figurines," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, November 1959, 1, 4. Photographs of dolls and postcards are on file, at the Visual Resources and Photo Services, CWF. Also see advertisements from various national newspapers on file at CWF Archives.

[27] George Wythe was a jurist and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. For post-1979 programs at this site, see Handler and Gable, "The New History," 43, 85-93. The George Wythe House was opened as an exhibition in 1940 and the Governor's Palace in 1934; see "Colonial Williamsburg Now 60 Years Old." For more details about the female workers, see "Service Awards: Mamie Lindsay"; "Marion Barlett," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, Feb. 1959, 2; "Bartlett, 11-Year CWer"; and "Bullman, Fraser, Lindsay Close Out Careers with CW," *Colonial Williamsburg News,* July 1960, 4.



A 1950 photograph of paper doll products. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)



Governor's Palace kitchen cook with Antiques Forum guests in 1949. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

an illustrated article on "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," with a photograph of a black woman in the Governor's Palace Kitchen. It was captioned: "'Mammy' explains to visitors the use of cooking utensils." Apparently, this frontline worker interpreted for, "garbed in colonial attire" she told about a range of kitchen equipment. It would not be farfetched to say that this individual may have been a formerly enslaved person, for a woman who was born in slavery actually worked at the Governor's Palace. Two early postcards depicted "Aunt Mary" at the Palace. One, with a postmark of August 1951, illustrated a scene from a painting of a costumed black woman. It text informed that "'Aunt Mary,' born a slave and one of the old cooks of Williamsburg, is now the custodian of the Kitchen of the restored Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia." The other postcard is undated.[28]

Children also represented peoples of the colonial past and even entire black families interpreted at a site. The Payne family lived on the upper level of the kitchen at the George Wythe House property, before the 1960s. Their two children, Majorie and Carole, were included in presentations at the site, for "at the behest of Colonial Williamsburg, the family wore colonial costumes when at home and tended a cow, a few chickens, and a garden on the grounds to give the house a more colonial look." In April 1941, little "Marjorie Alice Payne, five-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Payne, caretakers at the Wythe House," was described as "the most photographed person in Williamsburg."[29]

With this referential framework, infused by information from within and outside the museum, it is not hard to believe that visitors were "doing race" and seeing the black workers mainly as representatives of enslaved people and as menial laborers. A retired staff member recalled that he not only worked in front of the public, but also interpreted his craft to everyday visitors and visiting dignitaries in the 1960s. Blacks, unlike whites, were not trained to conduct tours but they still engaged in this work. Another worker in the trades recalled that some of the visitors referred to blacks in derogatory terms. He as a black presenter felt embarrassed about this treatment, especially because of the African American visitors who were keenly aware of the situation. Although these frontline workers wore period costumes, blacks were more likely to be seen as representing general people of the past rather than as skilled practitioners and presenters of colonial crafts.[30]

As critics and visitors looked at the undemocratic nature of Colonial Williamsburg's early representation of history, they overwhelmingly prioritized

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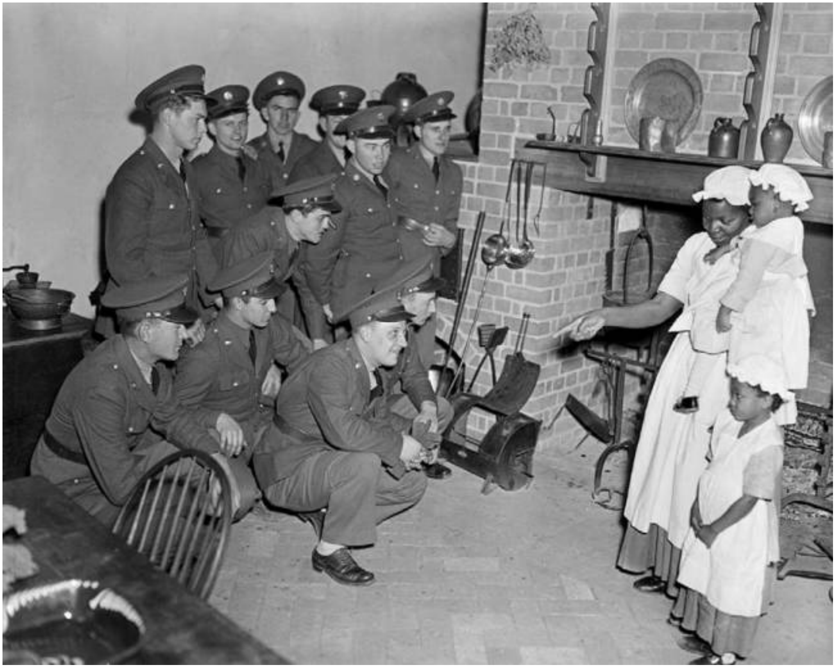
[28] W.A.R. Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," *National Geographic* (April, 1937): 402-43. Postcards with "Aunt Mary" are on file at Visual Resources, CWF library.

[29] Rowe, "African Americans," 128; Kearney and Johnson, "News of the Colored People," April 1941, 3; "Message from the President," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* 12, no. 3 (Spring, 1990): 6. Interestingly, a Payne family also influenced public history at Stratford Hall Plantation, Stratford, Virginia. See "Payne Family," http://www.stratfordhall.org/meet-the-lee-family/payne-family/.

[30] "Coming Together," 3-4; and Smith, "Visitor Reaction."



Members of the Armed Forces interact with Carrie Holmes and two Paynes, Majorie and Carole, during a visit to the kitchen at the George Wythe House in Colonial Williamsburg, January 1941. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

a theory of black absenteeism that discounted the visibility of workers like the coachmen. When blacks were seen, their historical roles were most likely to be perceived of in stereotypical ways because they were confined to outbuildings like the kitchens and stables at exhibition sites. The museum had allowed the past to meet the present without providing solid avenues for visitors and critics to appropriately question or critically consider the structural mechanisms and the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices that had worked to relegate a group of people to particular positions within its sphere.

The black workers, however, were not just engaged in building the museum; they were establishing community both within and outside its historic core. These individuals were making deep inroads into efforts to improve their social and economic situations and those of the race. They acquired and maintained property and invested in the future: they sent their children to high schools and colleges. These employees deepened their social and spiritual bonds with each other within the workplace and external community, for they shared memberships at nearby churches, mainly Baptist, and in benevolent societies and social clubs.[31]

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31. “Three Familiar Figures,” “Presenting the Epps.” Also see, “Pro-Basketball Star BHS Recognition Night Speaker,” *The Brutonian* 1, no.1 (June 7, 1962): 1; and “Roosevelt Harris, Jr.,” *Colonial Williamsburg News*, February, 1954, 2.

Meet A Few Coachmen

The black coachmen of Colonial Williamsburg were accomplished workers who helped to pioneer standards that are still central to coach-driving practices at the museum. They were trusted with the safety of the visitors, including royal and distinguished individuals. The coachmen not only controlled the horses and horse-drawn vehicles but, as they ferried visitors around the restored town, they had to monitor their surroundings to avoid people walking around and things (even automobiles in the early days) that were on the streets. Today, many duties of a coachman echo those of their predecessors.[32]

> Coachmen have to understand the horses and know how to handle the vehicles confidently and safely. Schedules must be met, tickets accounted for, and emergencies, like a harness breaking, handled. Drivers must be good with people, able to make passengers comfortable, and answer their questions, which touch on the animals, Williamsburg, and colonial history.[33]

Before 1979, African Americans were the museum's main carriage drivers and key workers at the stables with duties of training and taking care of the horses. Men like Benjamin Spraggins, John Sheppard, and Willie Meekins had public and behind-the-scene roles as they provided the early carriage-ride offerings. They paved the way for the other black coachmen like Junious Bartlett and Charles Jackson, who worked in the 1950s and 1960s, and Harmon Washington, Jr. and Joseph Jones, who started their careers in the 1970s.[34]

Colonial Williamsburg appeared to have made more explicit acknowledgments of the coachmen in the earlier years than in later times. In June 1950, a news story identified the forty-year-old Benjamin Spraggins "as senior member of CW's coach driving team" and described him as "a singularly optimistic coach-driver." Without leaving the town, Spraggins' carriage rides covered "approximately 11 miles a day, or seventy-seven miles a week" totaling thousands of miles. Apparently, he was not intimidated by the visitors; he introduced them to his perspective of the town. Spraggins took an active role in the cultural performance of the carriage ride, basically controlling the visitors' experiences.

> When you ride with Ben, you get the notion that Williamsburg is his town . . . If it's not "This is a beautiful garden on my left," it's "That brick house on the right is used as a residence. I think it's in a beautiful setting, don't you?"[35]

Spraggins became a coachman in 1937, but he had worked in construction of the Restoration from 1934. From 1935 to 1940, the coach transported hostesses to the buildings and Spraggins became part of this activity. He was honored for fifteen years of service in 1948 and described as a "much-photographed coachman."[36]

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[32] Joyce Henry, "A Day in the Life of a Coachman at Colonial Williamsburg," Unpublished paper (Coach and Livestock Department, CWF, 2012); Ed Crews, "Colonial Carriage Rides," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 40-42.

[33] Crews, "Colonial Carriage," 41-42.

[34] See note 12.

[35] Don Piedmont, "Spraggins Covers 11 Miles Per Day on Coach Circuit," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, June 1950, 2.

Spraggins shared his visibility with John Sheppard who started building his skills as a coachman-interpreter in the 1940s. In June 1950, the two men "carried around 3000 passengers in their two vehicles; the biggest month ever," and by the fall, they drove a carriage at George Washington's Mount Vernon. Along with other co-workers and some horses, Spraggins and Sheppard were assigned "to help the Ladies Association of Mount Vernon mark their big day. The occasion was the putting in service of an authentic eighteenth century coach." During his career Sheppard facilitated rides for dignitaries such as Sir Winston Churchill and the Crown Prince of Japan. He retired from the museum in April 1971.[37]

Willie Meekins was one of the first drivers Colonial Williamsburg hired and he worked on the carriage rides and in his stable duties with great expertise. By the time he reached retirement age in 1954, he had gained a reputation as a coachman "who instructed and delighted Williamsburg visitors from his perch in the driver's seat of a coach." Although Meekins worked in the stable in the 1940s, he only became a regular stableman in 1952, "after aggravated old physical injuries made climbing in and out of the coaches a difficult task." This situation coincided with the opening of a new twentieth-century stable complex near the restored area. It was placed in Meekins' "competent hands."[38]

Like Meekins, Joseph Jones excelled in carriage driving as well as in his wider work with horses. Jones started his duties in carriage driving in the mid-1970s and by the 1980s, he was working as the head coachman and still manning carriage rides for important visitors. As a coachman with "the Right Stuff to make horses feel comfortable and safely learn their new surroundings," Jones was "responsible for training new horses, introducing them to . . . [the] Historic Area, and judging their suitability for the job of giving carriage rides." Jones taught carriage driving to some of the museum's white employees.[39]

Jones was the last pre-1979 black coachman to retire from Colonial Williamsburg. His retirement, in 2002, ended the tradition of the highly

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[36] ibid.; "Long Tenure Reward," *News from CW*, September 1948, 6.

[37] *News from CW*, June 1948, 2, 8; "Mount Vernon Coach Work," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, November, 1950, 1, 4; "Wallace, Lee, Sheppard Observe 20th Service Milestones," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, April 1957, 2; "April Marks 25th CW year," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, April 1962, 4; "John Shepherd Marks 30th Year," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, April 19, 1967, 3; "Chronology 1926-1986;" CWF Chronology (1924-2012); *Colonial Williamsburg News*, November 1986, 6-8.

[38] "C&M Opens 20th Century Stables," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, September 1952, 4; "Three Familiar Figures," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, October 1954, 3; and "Carriage Fleet Grows."

[39] "Joe Jones—The Right Stuff," *The Colonial Williamsburg Animal News*, April 1, 1988, 2; Pat Saylor, "Helping to Re-create," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, October 1987, 5. Conversation author had with Joseph Jones, August 2013.

visible and strong representation of this group there. Since the early 2000s, for various reasons including remunerations and recruitment requirements, the museum has been unable to attract African Americans on any permanent basis to this position. The carriage ride, however, is a mainstay and a testimony of the contributions of the black coachmen who travailed and traveled with the museum as it perfected this offering. Perhaps like no other museum, Colonial Williamsburg has made the carriage ride a display of historically appropriate vehicles with well-costumed coachmen, a very visible and popular offering of its public history. It developed this offering with the help of some competent African American coachmen.[40]

The Contexts of Race

Race impacted the visibility of the coachmen for they operated in an American society that harbored marked perceptions and beliefs, many negative, about African Americans. Their roles were akin to individuals who lived and worked in situations with ongoing close contact with whites, somewhat similar in manner to those of household workers during and after slavery. This proximity contributed to the ensnarement of many of these individuals into a web of invisibility or a taken-for-granted presence. Many of these individuals learned to navigate segregated and troublesome spaces by using knowledge about the customary ways to interact with whites, who, overwhelmingly, expected them to have "proper deference" and to know their "place."[41]

From historical perspectives, the "place" of blacks in America largely has been defined and marked by practices of race and racism. This history was initiated with the forced migrations and subsequent enslavement and later freedom of Africans and their descendants in the Americas. It left America with a legacy of diverse cultures and peoples and with enduring marks and beliefs that blacks are not equal to whites. The economic and cultural hegemonies of whites, based largely on race, have deep-seated roots in slavery.

This legacy was apparent in Colonial Williamsburg. Dennis Gardner, a former employee of the museum and native of Williamsburg, was born in 1934 and resided up to 1955 in what became its historic core. He recounted the nature of racial relations in the early years of the Restoration:

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[40] Conversations author had with Richard Nicoll, Director of Coach and Livestock Department and Joyce Henry, Head Driver and Interpreter, of the same department, summer 2013. This situation might be changing, especially since 2013, because of two African American interpreters, Adam Canaday, a coachman and Willie Wright, an occasional driver of other horse-drawn vehicles, who now work in the area.

[41] See C. W. Harper, "Black Aristocrats: Domestic Servants on the Antebellum Plantation" *Phylon* 46, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1985): 123-35; Robert S. Starobin, "Privileged Bondsmen and the Process of Accommodation: The Role of Houseservants and Drivers as Seen in Their Own Letters," *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 1 (Autumn, 1971): 46-70; and Kevin Borg, "The 'Chauffeur Problem' in the Early Auto Era: Structuration Theory and the Users of Technology," *Technology and Culture* 40, no. 4 (Oct., 1999): 797-832.

> Williamsburg is a very nice place to live now. It was back then too, but it was a segregated city. Don't let nobody fool you, a segregated town, very much segregated. . . I remember having a very bad tooth ache and couldn't get to a dentist and he [my dad] finally persuaded the mayor of Williamsburg, Mayor Striker who was a dentist to take a look at my teeth and he said okay, he agreed to do it. But we had to go about 7 o'clock in the evening after all the other patients had left.[42]

Nathaniel H. Reid Jr., who served for forty years as a bellman in the museum's hotel services, recalled that during segregation, he had remained "optimistic rather than bitter."

> When one of his daughters questioned why she couldn't sit at the same lunch counter with the white girls her age, he had told her, "You be patient, and I guarantee you that you will see a change. It has to change. You have too many good white people in your corner. They are just waiting for the right time."[43]

Reid lived to see better times; he died on March 7, 2009 at the age of 93. African Americans in Williamsburg, during the early pre-1979 years, bore the brunt of discriminations mediated through and within inclusionary and exclusionary practices that defined as well as challenged race.

Before 1979, the carriage ride personified racial practices that heightened references to the sensitive and troublesome history of slavery and "the place" of blacks in America. For example, the black coachmen and the carriages were used as backdrops for interpretive colonial life and were crucial to Colonial Williamsburg's search for an aura of authenticity. When the carriages shared the streets with automobiles, it further complicated the work of transcending both place and time and transporting visitors to the past. The museum sought legislative help and enacted measures such as constructing a tunnel and bypass routes to redirect and restrict modern vehicles in the main area of the museum. Its best strategy, however, to combat these intrusive representatives of the present, was its deployment of the vehicles of the colonial era—the coaches manned by costumed coachmen.[44]

To some extent, the roles of the coachmen mirrored conditions of black workers in other industries of public performance. The coachmen provided authenticity to created colonial scenes and programs similar to the roles played by blacks in the Hollywood cinema industry during the 1920s and 1930s. Charlene Regester studied African American actors in Hollywood during this period and described the subservient and demeaning roles that many of them accepted to gain a foothold in the industry. They faced

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[42] Dennis Gardner Oral History conducted on 08/07/07, transcript, Williamsburg Documentary Project, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, https://digitalarchive.wm.edu/

[43] "Nathaniel Reid Jr. a beloved bellman: Church and civic leader, always optimistic," *Virginia* Gazette, March 11, 2009, 1 and 7A.

[44] *Colonial Williamsburg*: *The President's Report* (Williamsburg: CWF, 1962): 39-40; "There are no cars," *Colonial Williamsburg News,* May 18, 1965, 3; "Coming Together," 2.

discriminatory practices in how they were mainly cast to play "savages" in jungle scenes, and characters like "mammies" and "slaves."[45]

Before the 1940s, blacks in Hollywood were primarily in "extras-roles" and were required to portray "endless variety of representations deemed racially different." Although some of these actors managed to gain better acting parts, the majority of them had to continue accepting roles that required them to "provide the 'human backdrop' for pictures, to serve as supporting players to their more illustrious stars, and to lend authenticity to a picture's atmosphere." Still, these blacks were included. This helped to explain why they continued to work under marginalizing conditions. Even though, "they were fully aware of the travesty that was being inflicted upon them . . . many felt that before they could argue for improved screen roles, they first had to gain visibility." These workers had to remain employed and continue visualizing their representation, before they could fight for increased wages and improved working conditions.[46]

Although this analogy cannot be forced wholesale onto the situation of the black coachmen at Colonial Williamsburg, it lends credibility to the concept of visibility and representation as important variables among the social and economic imperatives governing or influencing the choices and work of these men. They manned carriage rides when the occasional African American riders were likely their co-workers serving as footmen. Perhaps a major strength for these coachmen was that they had their community with them, meaning relatives and friends employed by the museum. Thus, they were able to stay employed, an essential condition for gaining levels of economic stability, and strengthen family life and community ties, while they simultaneously, in both verbal and nonverbal ways, represented the achievements and the potentials of the race. The coachmen were aware of the implications of their visibility within the museum.[47]

The Interplay of Race and Visibility in the Carriage Ride

The carriage ride was known as the quintessential Colonial Williamsburg's experience as early as June 1950, when *The New Yorker* Magazine featured the museum in its "America's Playgrounds" series. The article included a cartoon detailing a scene of the buildings and streets of the historic area, filled with visitors. The cartoonist depicted the coachman, apparently a black man, on his carriage seat as the individual physically higher than the others. But, when compared to the other figures, apparently representing white people, the coachman's facial features were the most undefined and appeared almost nonhuman. This treatment most likely reflected how the coachmen operated within a social context of practices and beliefs about blacks' alleged inferiority to whites. Their "place" within the museum reflected both the past history and the contemporary realities of race and class relations in America.[48]

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[45] Charlene Regester, "African American Extras in Hollywood during the 1920s and 1930s," *Film History* 9, no.1 (Special Issue, Silent Cinema, 1997): 95-115.

[46] Regester, "African American Extras," 95, 98.

[47] Coachmen who had relatives as their co-workers included Charles Jackson, John Sheppard, and Junious Bartlett, see "Jackson Observes 20th Anniversary," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, December 1959, 4; "April Marks 25th CW year;" and "Bartlett, 11-year CWer."

From its early years, Colonial Williamsburg has presented travel in horse-drawn wheeled vehicles mainly as an official and family activity for wealthy colonial people, even after it added larger passenger-type wagons. Its distinguished carriages were modeled after coaches owned by prominent and wealthy Virginians such as royal governors and other colonial officials; they were also named honoring these individuals. Although white males, indentured or free, worked as coachmen for elite families, this job was also held by enslaved blacks. Often times, these coachmen wore livery and the colors of their employees or legal owners. Colonial Williamsburg's employment of blacks as coachmen was grounded in historical truth but prejudicially practiced because few whites worked in this area before the 1970s.[49]

Visuals of well-groomed horses, elegant carriages, and coachmen in fine costumes signified they were "turned out for royalty." These displays encouraged visitors to associate the carriage ride with the lifestyles of royalty and wealthy people as well as with notions of privilege and right to this service. Perhaps in taking rides, manned predominantly by blacks, many visitors may have identified themselves with wealthy and other whites in colonial times. That this special and leisurely way to see the restored town was largely presented as an activity separated from the world of work may have contributed to these connotations.[50]

Although the carriage ride may have provided some visitors with the means to imagine themselves as royalty and gentry, blacks probably experienced these rides in different ways than whites. If some blacks associated the ride with practices of colonial gentry, slavery, and unequal race relations in America, it may have been more difficult for them to indulge in such fantasies and even to partake in this activity. Others may have indulged in these moments, for the pleasure of the rides only. Probably, many African Americans were still unable to take a carriage ride for many years after the museum's seemingly open invitation of 1942.

How visitors saw the black coachmen and experienced carriage rides were influenced by practices of race, many learned through exposure to stereotypes about this population in visual texts. Many visual stereotypes drew on the

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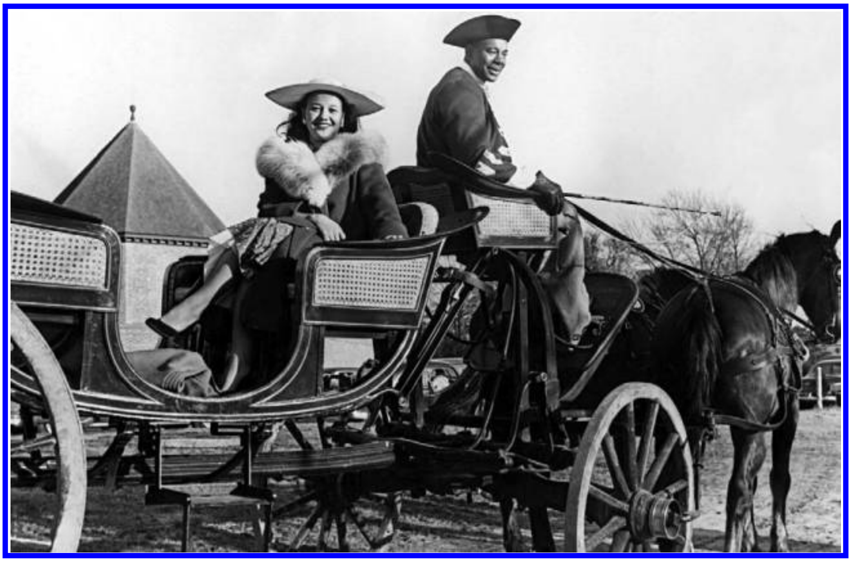
[48] "America's Playgrounds," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, June 1950, 2.

[49] "The Coaches of Colonial Williamsburg," Press Release 2009, The Colonical Williamsburg Foundation, Office of Public Affaris, Williamsburg, VA; Edward Crew, "Town Coach," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, 28, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 36-38; "Colonial Stage Waggon," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, February 9, 1965, 1; Mary R. M. Goodwin, "Wheeled carriages in Eighteenth-century Virginia" (CWF Library research report series, RR-181, 1959); Theobald, "Every Man"; and podcast transcript for "Coachman," October 17, 2005, The Colonical Williamsburg Foundation. http://podcast.history.org/2005/10/17/coachman/.

[50] Henry, "A Day in the Life."



Benjamin Spraggins and an unidentified female rider. (Courtesy of The Albert Durant Photograph Collection, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

history of slavery and its legacy. Terry Barrett looked at popular racial stereotypes like "the savage African, the happy slave, [and] the devoted servant," and how these continued to exacerbate racism in American society. David Brion Davis also linked the pervasiveness of racism to its connections to slavery. He found that increasingly from the 1920s, white Americans viewed slavery as a long past, inefficient institution, largely harmful for whites, that would have ended on its own, without the Civil War, and that it benefitted the civilized advancement of blacks.[51]

In the early twentieth century, the scholarship on slavery was heavily influenced by racist texts and blacks were treated as inferiors. Davis explained the consequences of these practices:

> One must remember that in 1954, at the time of *Brown v. Board of Education* and 89 years after the Thirteenth Amendment, blacks in much of the South were . . . "expected to step off the sidewalk or cross to the other side of the street if whites were approaching," while "in the national imagination, blacks were typically janitors, maids, chauffeurs or bootblacks."[52]

Particular ideas about the past were undeniably present in historical accountings and within various contemporary cultural practices. They served as a template for inferences about blacks, such as the coachmen, in Williamsburg's

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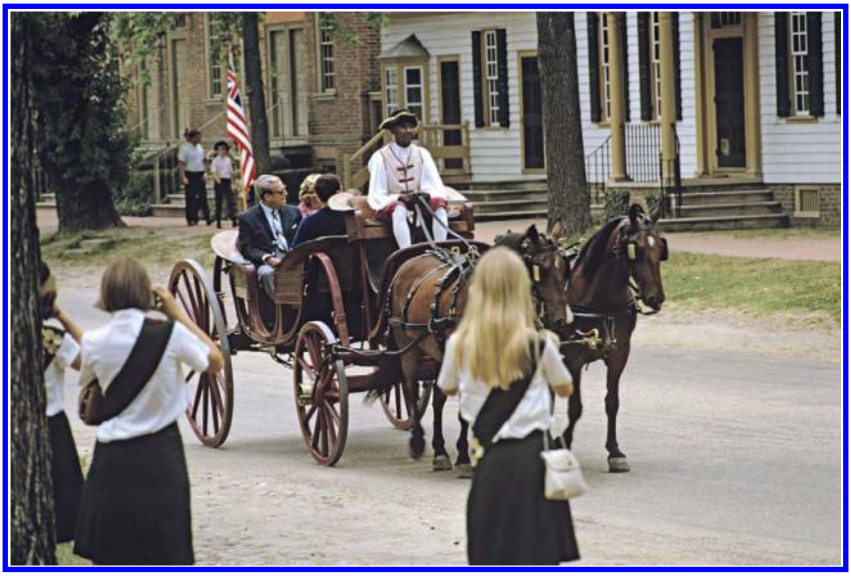
[51] Barrett, "Interpreting Visual Culture," 7; David Brion Davis, "The Central Fact of American History," *American Heritage* 56, no. 1 (February/March 2005), http://www.americanheritage.com/content/central-fact-american-history

[52] Davis, "The Central Fact." See page 1 of the online article.



A coachman, identified as Harmon Washington, Jr., driving visitors around Colonial Williamsburg. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

public history. Visitors, who embraced prejudicial information about the ability of blacks as no more than menial laborers, may not have seen the coachmen as skilled and accomplished individuals. They probably disregarded these interpreters' expertise in managing carriages and horses and in ensuring the safety of riders.

During visits to Colonial Williamsburg, visitors gazed upon the coachmen; but the visual images of these men had a larger viewership and a wider distribution. They were seen by people who would never visit the site. The museum regularly placed images of the coachmen in postcards and other advertisements. It even included Charlie Jackson, who started working as a coachman in the 1950s, as a model in a colorful travel brochure for prospective visitors in 1964. Jackson was featured on "the cover illustration [that] shows the arrival of an eighteenth-century 'family' at the Raleigh Tavern," one of the museum's exhibition buildings. In March 1964, the museum had about 2,000 boxes of the new brochures for use in its advertising and publicity campaign for various areas of the United States and Canada.[53]

Although the museum promoted such inclusive practices, it also practiced and facilitated exclusionary ones, especially in documenting its own history. Images of the coachmen illustrated annual reports, journal articles, and stories about distinguished visitors, and even in the histories of carriages and horses. Nevertheless, they were excluded in meaningful acts of recognition and

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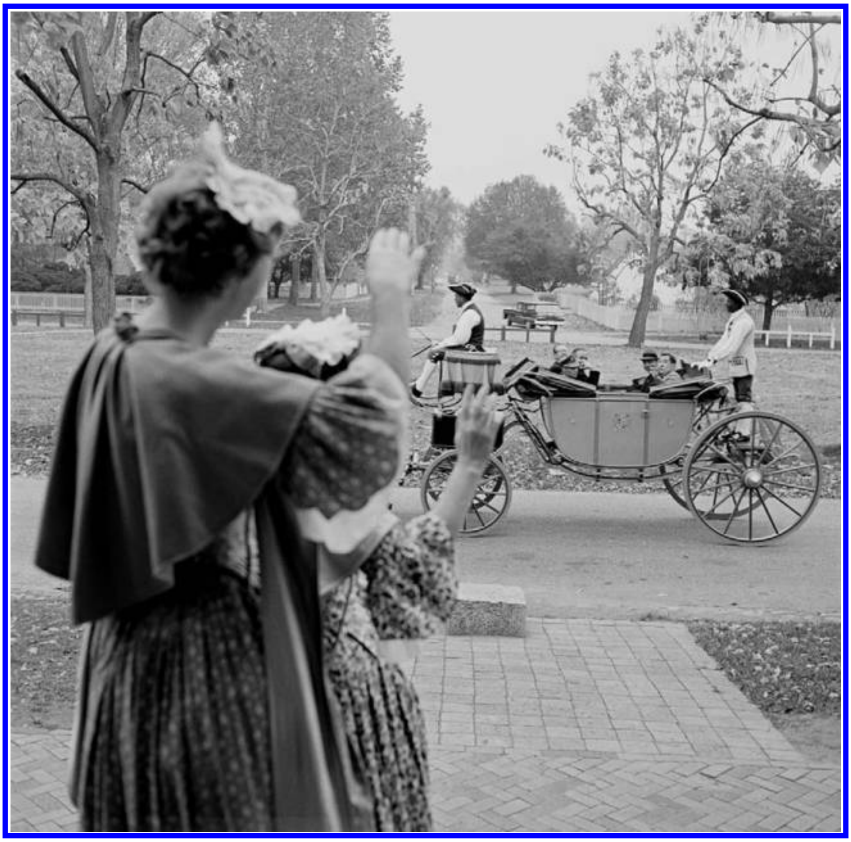
[53] "Another Lively"; "CWers are Photographer's Model," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, March 17, 1964, 3; and "Jackson Observes."



"President Carlisle Humelsine points out the Wythe House to President Paz of Bolivia, seated next to him in the landau, as hostesses Mrs. Ball and Mrs. Hinkson wave their greetings." (*Colonial Williamsburg News*, October, 1963. Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

generally lost in anonymity, based on the practice of not naming them. Even when the coachmen were identified these documentations failed to include substantial references about their achievements. These regular acts of "doing race" were highlighted in visual practices surrounding the carriage ride.

A good example of "doing race" that surrounded the "taken-for-granted" assumptions of social relations in Colonial Williamsburg can be interpreted from the image and caption about Bolivian President Paz's visit in October 1963. The photo story illustrated how the two black men on the coach were rendered invisible because they were left unacknowledged. The two white hostesses, however, who are turned away from the camera (one is mostly hidden by the other), are foregrounded and named in the caption.[54]

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[54] "President Carlisle Humselsine," *Colonial Williamsburg News,* October 30, 1963, 1.

Visiting Colonial Williamsburg and taking carriage rides were activities packed with notions of leisure and privilege that merged with other racial and societal assumptions and practices that favored whites and disadvantaged blacks. For instance, in the pre-1979 years, whites were usually the ones taking these rides while blacks were the main workers facilitating this way of seeing the restored town. The restrictive practices that excluded or limited blacks' participation in this key activity as nonworkers also contributed to their invisibility when they were present as laborers and facilitators of carriage rides.[55]

Envisioning Meanings

With the pervasiveness of racial stereotypes and prejudices in the society, when visitors encountered the coachmen, they mostly likely "did race" and considered "the place" of blacks within the museum and in society generally. An example of how this practice may have worked can be surmised from "The Virginia Caravan," a news story written by James L. Hicks and published in the June 1955 issue of *The Afro-American*, a Baltimore, Maryland newspaper. He described his encounter with a coachman.

> Among the workers I found at Williamsburg were Junious Bartlett who dresses as a coachman and drives visitors to the historic city around in one of those ancient carriages drawn by two horses. There are many colored people holding such jobs and wearing the uniform of the 18th century.
>
> At first, when one looks at them in these droll costumes, he immediately thinks of old Uncle Tom, but when one reflects that many of these same people are doing much harder work in other Virginia cities, with far less pay, and actually being treated like Uncle Toms, he begins to feel that perhaps this is not such a bad deal after all.[56]

Hicks's discussion revealed various social forces that supported white cultural hegemony. His encounter with Bartlett revealed how the denotative image of a costumed-black man invoked the connotative image of an Uncle Tom. Obviously, the coachmen represented African American history, primarily in their visibility. This visibility was opened to different readings and interpretations including ones that challenged the museum's historical narrative that downplayed the contributions of African Americans. Although the coachmen were not in charge of the language of the main narrative that framed their physical presence and the use of their images, their visibility in these practices broadened the representation of history.

Coachman Bartlett had widespread visibility for he was featured in the film *The Patriot.* He was one of the few coachmen named in photo-stories about

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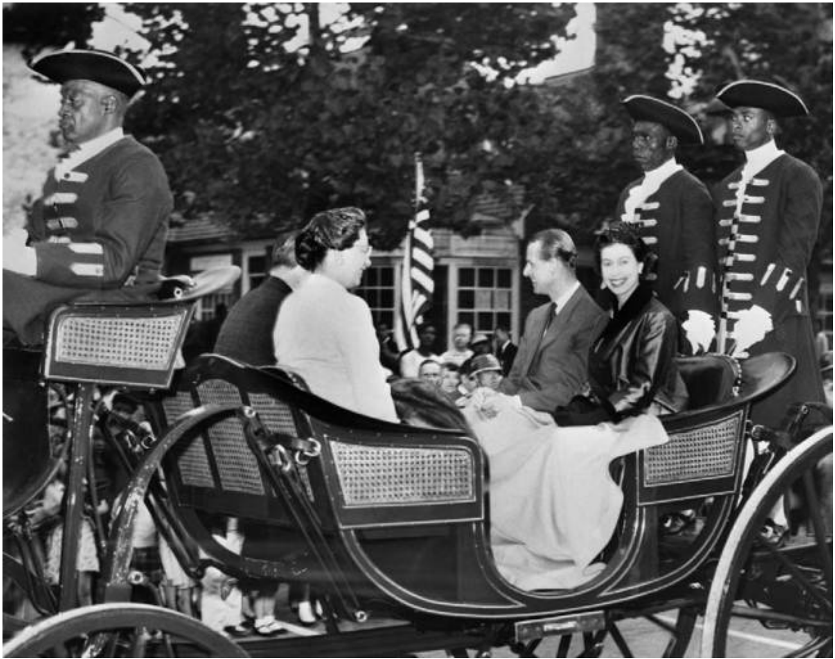
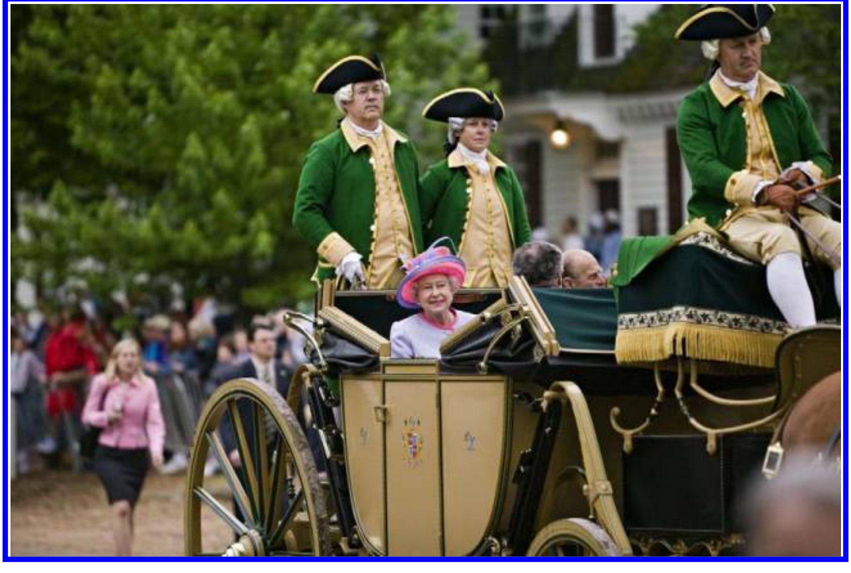
[55] "You Don't Need 20th Century Transportation in Colonial Williamsburg," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, February 13, 1974, 1.

[56] James L. Hicks, "The Virginia Caravan," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, June 4, 1955, 15.



Coachman Junious Bartlett takes Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip of England on a carriage ride during October 1957. They are accompanied by two unnamed footmen and other riders. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)



Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip ride in a carriage during their 2007 visit to Williamsburg. Richard Nicoll is the driver of the carriage and the footmen are Joyce Henry and Bob Krasche. Note the absence of black carriage workers, a stark contrast to the 1957 visit. (Courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.)

visiting dignitaries. Bartlett was entrusted with the safety of royalty for he drove the carriage for the tour of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip of England during their visit in October 1957. He was included in many memory-making opportunities for he was regularly photographed. He took his visibility with a good attitude: "I couldn't get away if I tried . . . although it's hard to be exact, about 50 snaps are taken of me on some days." Both the museum and the visitors saw and recognized Bartlett as a key player in these performances of historical commemoration and memory making.[57]

Bartlett should not be defined by his performance within the museum only, for his abilities to influence public history were buttressed by his accomplishments in his own community. In 1955, Bartlett told the reporter from the *Baltimore Afro-American* that he had lived in Williamsburg for fifty-eight years, thereby centering himself in the community. Bartlett was quite an impressive figure and had a particular way of standing evident in photographs of him at work in the museum and in the recollections of people who knew him. He retired in 1964, after eleven years of service and from a position of senior coachman-interpreter. At the time of his death in 1992, at the age of ninety-five, Bartlett was remembered as a member of several religious and social organizations.[58]

Conclusion

Like Colonial Williamsburg's visitors, the African American coachmen interpreted and assigned meanings to the cultural performances surrounding the carriage ride. They highlighted their expertise in representing the American past and its contemporary present. Their activities opened up possibilities for contesting racism and other biased practices. Until now, how the coachmen and their visibility contributed toward a nascent diversified interpretation of the past have remained largely untold in evaluations of the early interpretation of African American history and slavery at the museum. A myopic history belied the contributions of African Americans who were included, not excluded, in the interpretation of the past at Colonial Williamsburg, before 1979.

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[57] "Sircom, "Hundreds of CWers"; "Bartlett, 11-Year CWer"; Riding in Royal Style," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, October 1957, 4; and "Hold that Pose."

[58] Hicks, "The Virginia Caravan"; "Oxen Reappear," *Colonial Williamsburg News*, August 1963, 1; "Bartlett, 11-Year CWer." Author's conversations with members of the Union Baptist Church, Williamsburg, Virginia, October 2011. Benjamin Spraggins was member of this church. Candy McCrary (compiler) "Obituaries," *The Daily Press,* June 11, 1992. Accessed May 2012; http://articles.dailypress.com/1992-06-11/news/9206110117_1_colonial-williamsburg-peninsula-resident-hampton.

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