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**INTERPRETING SUMMER IN THE PARKS IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA OF  
THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

by

Brendan J. Kane

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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## **Abstract**

### **INTERPRETING SUMMER IN THE PARKS IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

Brendan J. Kane

Old Dominion University, 2021

Director: Chris Zajchowski

Washington D.C. has witnessed many watershed events throughout the history of the United States of America. One of these events was the Summer in the Parks (SITP) program organized by the National Park Service (NPS) from 1968-1976. Summer in the Parks was a community-based series of events including concerts, park visits, and exhibitions designed to quell racial tensions and promote park usage. Researchers have begun chronicling SITP, but have yet to explore how the story of SITP is conveyed by park interpreters to visitors and subsequently what themes are shared to inform public understanding of the historic relationship between NPS resources in the National Capital Area and individuals identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). This research sought to understand where and how SITP is interpreted in the National Capital Area, Region 1 (hereafter referred to as the NCA), what methods are used to produce interpretive programs for SITP, and NPS employees' perspectives on the role of the SITP story in the NCA. In-depth interviews with 5 interpretive program managers were conducted to understand their experience interpreting SITP and how they perceive SITP relates to the larger community engagement narrative woven through the Washington D.C, the NCA, and the NPS. Specifically, we were interested in how interpreters made sense of SITP and its relationship with the current narrative surrounding the engagement of BIPOC visitors at NPS units. Interviews were then analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to better understand how interpreters make sense of and perceive the opportunities they provide visitors to engage with this history. Results will inform future SITP interpretation, as well as how SITP is situated within the goal of the Urban Agenda, created by the NPS to focus on providing opportunities for the many diverse communities in urban centers and “nurture a Culture of Collaboration” (NPS, 2017). Finally, this work aims to further the goal of individuals of all cultures, races, and ethnicities to feeling comfortable, accepted, and represented in NCA units.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Individuals in the United States (U.S) recreated and enjoyed parks and protected areas (PPAs) through the course of American History (Weber & Sultana, 2013; Rice et al., 2019). There are many motivators for park visitation, but a common factor is visitors' desire to better understand nature, history, and the culture in these locations by being guided by a professional trained in interpretation and public communication (Hull & Marks, 2019; Lewis, 1981; Ward, 2013). This interpretation allows them to understand and appreciate what is shared while provoking an emotional response and appreciation for the experiences they have had (Tilden, 1957). Freeman Tilden, often referred to as the "father of interpretation" (Brochu & Merriman, 2015, p. 14), is quoted an anonymous NPS Ranger to have said, "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection." Thus, if this interpretation is successful, it will not only inform park visitors, but also create an appreciation of resources that inspires users to become protectors and stewards.

The U.S. boasts a diversity of cultures; however, not all cultures, peoples, and their histories are equally interpreted and shared with the public in PPAs (Smaldone, 2019; Weber & Sultana, 2013; Schultz et al., 2019). One of the largest organizations that provides interpretation in PPAs and aims to continually improve the stories they share is the National Park Service (NPS), which manages 423 units across 50 states and multiple territories (U.S. NPS, 2020a). The NPS has the ability and, due to its size, and obligation, due to its mandate, to provide equitable interpretation for all cultures. However, Heard (2005) showed that visitors to Civil War Battlefields felt that, although they were interested in interpretation focusing on slavery, sites were not effectively communicating it. Similarly, Wind Cave National Park plays a primary role in Lakota Creation stories, but is not the focus of interpretation by the Park (Smaldone, 2019).



Summer in the Parks (SITP) occurred from 1968-1976 and was a community program organized by the NPS to increase park usage and curb racial tensions in African American communities in Washington D.C. (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, Washington D.C. was plunged into 4 days of rioting and protests, stemming, in part, from store owners refusing to close in the same manner that occurred following the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963 (Simons, 2018). In response, SITP was an NPS program focusing on reintroducing the community to neighborhood parks and nearby natural areas through youth day camps, large shows and events, and community programs. It sought to re-engage the diverse community in usage and ownership of the park and hoped to quell riots.

Today, there are many programs that aim to provide equitable representation and rectify the lack of representation of diverse stories in PPAs. Current interpretation and programming surrounding SITP is one such program deserving scholarly attention and is a model for other parks. However, it has received less scholarly and popular media attention (c.f., Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit, 2018). Thus, exploring the experiences of individuals who interpret SITP will allow researchers to understand what stories are told by the NPS and inform how the NPS tells the story of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) who lived through this historic period. This is incredibly important as much research surrounding BIPOC and PPAs are often deficit-based (Scott & Lee, 2018; Xiao et al., 2017), highlighting what prevents BIPOC individuals from engaging with park resources. Though these deficit-based endeavors (i.e., barriers and constraints) are important to understand the disparities that exist, research that illuminates the positive engagement with underrepresented communities can help to paint a more complete picture and suggest transferable programs in other contexts.

This research was designed to use an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the experiences of SITP interpretation and programming from five frontline interpreters and five interpretive managers who currently work for the NPS. The respondents work within the National Capital Area (NCA), Region 1 of the NPS, specifically at sites where interpretation of SITP occurs such as Fort Dupont, Meridian Hill, and Anacostia Park. An IPA was selected due to the focus on how the individual makes sense of a personal experience (Lee et al., 2014). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis places high importance on the participant and views them as an expert in their own life, allowing researchers to understand not only their experience but their perception of it as well (Howard et al., 2019; Larkin et al., 2006). Thus, this research will allow researchers and NPS managers to understand how SITP is understood and interpreted by staff and presented to the public. This understanding will provide NPS units with the groundwork to share information about historic events, such as SITP, that engage with BIPOC visitors in urban settings. SITP is, in this sense, a case study to help learn how park professionals make sense of how BIPOC individuals have engaged in PPAs in ways other than current research illustrates (c.f., Scott & Lee, 2018). This broader knowledge will provide interpretative organizations the resources needed to expand interpretation of BIPOC history and culture and more equitably illustrate engagement of under-interpreted demographics.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Interpretation and Parks, Protected Areas and Heritage Sites**

Humans have a natural desire to understand what they are seeing or experiencing in a world that is constantly changing. This desire is regularly facilitated in parks and protected areas (PPAs), where visitors can learn something new, make the unfamiliar familiar, and satisfy their curiosities (Lewis, 1981). Visitors can travel to PPAs and participate in experiences unlike anything they have ever seen; whether journeying into the earth to see the beauty of a cave (Black & Davidson, 2007) or exploring a historic Spanish fort and the role it plays in the story of America (Ryan et al., 2019). In the United States (U.S.), the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) is tasked not only to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein” but also “provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (Organic Act of 1916). This legislation tasks park officials with the role of explaining, or interpreting, what has occurred in the past and actually happening in the present within these unique settings. Accordingly, it is the job of the interpreter to serve as a translator of sorts, giving voice to the environmental and cultural histories that exist-and have existed- in a place.

What is interpretation though? Interpretation is “an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden, 1957, p. 17). In other words, the interpreter’s role is not simply to regurgitate information to the visitors; rather a good interpreter takes their audience on a journey through time and/or space, employing as many senses as possible to convey what things truly were, are or someday might be.

In PPA interpretation, John Muir is considered to be one of the first people to influence the word ‘interpret’ to have the meaning it has today (Brochu & Merriman, 2015). Said Muir, “I will interpret the rocks, learn the language of the flood, storm, and the avalanche. I’ll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can” (as quoted in (Wolfe, 2003, p. 144). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Muir was on a journey to understand the natural world all around him, and he believed that the more he understood it, the more he could share it with others. Muir was raised on the frontier heavily involved in the creation of Yosemite National Park and the Sierra Club (Brochu & Merriman, 2015). In doing so, he helped set the stage for interpretation to be seen as a vehicle to inspire individuals to join in conservation efforts<sup>1</sup>.

This linkage between interpretation and conservation was subsequently furthered by Freeman Tilden, generally agreed to be the father of the modern field of interpretation (Brochu & Merriman, 2015, p. 14). As Tilden once heard, “through interpretation [comes] understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection” (Tilden, 1957, p. 65). This phrase has continued to inspire interpreters in the NPS and throughout the U.S. to make a difference in the world through their impacts on visitors. Tilden created a set of six principles to help guide the interpreter, which are laid out in his book *Interpreting Our Heritage* published in 1957. Even though the National Park Service (NPS) began using rangers as interpreters in 1916, this book was extremely influential in the development of the field of interpretation (Brochu & Merriman, 2015). His first principle “Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will

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<sup>1</sup> We recognize the complex history involving Muir, but also the lasting, positive impacts he has on protected area management.

be sterile” illustrates the necessity for relevance and respecting the limited time and attentional resources of visitors (Tilden, 1957, p. 18). Tilden continues on to say that “information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information” (Tilden, 1957, p. 18). Thus, the purpose of an interpreter is to bring stories and the wild world together, leading the visitor through an adventure, rather than simply lecturing as a teacher might. The third principle states that “Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable” (Tilden, 1957, p. 18). Here, Tilden wants interpreters to understand their role as an artist, crafting works of art to help the public understand and appreciate the beauty in the world.

The principle that illustrates the passion that good interpreters create is the fourth principle: “The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation” (Tilden, 1957, p. 18). This principle illustrates the opportunity of an interpreter to leave long lasting impacts. The interpreter cannot force the visitor to appreciate the silence that falls over Gettysburg National Military Park, nor the beauty of Yellowstone National Park, but by sharing their passion they can help visitors to appreciate the natural world all around them or to view history in a different way, reflecting on how it relates to them in the current day. Ham (2009) says there is no greater purpose for an interpreter than to leave a group inspired to make a difference; similarly, as Tilden (1957) exclaims, “interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase” (p. 18). Though written with the gendered mores of Tilden’s time, the fifth principle shows the difficulty of being an interpreter for diverse group. The interpreter must have the ability to connect with each participant while illustrating the whole picture, rather than purely a segment. The final principle says that “Interpretation

addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentations to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program” (Tilden, 1957, p. 18). Psychologists have recognized the developmental difference between children and adults and need programs that are inherently different while containing similar information (Witt & Caldwell, 2010).

It should be mentioned that though Muir and Tilden help to form the American foundation of interpretation, the practice of interpretation is not solely an American idea; organizations around the world concerned with conservation and historical preservation of areas include interpretation training to better prepare their staff and connect their visitors with unique natural and cultural resources (Dumbraveanu et al., 2016). Furthermore, this image of a park ranger leading an interpretive program often concocts images in the wilderness, but interpretation occurs just as often, if not more often in museums (Lewis, 1963; Varutti, 2014), visitor centers, and classrooms (Fisher, 2008). However, though interpretation happens in a variety of contexts, the setting is just as important as the story being told. A strong interpreter uses as many senses that connect with the physical site or “original object” (Tilden, 1957, p. 152) of interpretation as is reasonable to help convey their story. The location provides context for interpretation and understanding of often intangible resources, such as a location’s history (Hull & Marks, 2019; Ryan et al., 2019).

In addition to the consideration of setting, the modern interpreter must find a way to provide an experience, while navigating an audience coming from all walks of life, with variety of experiences, but hopefully a common interest. However, many individuals find themselves too busy to visit NPS sites (Powell et al., 2017), let alone spend that time in an interpretive program. This requires the interpreter to provide quality programs, while also effectively managing time.

Visitors select interpretive programs based on available time (Powell et al., 2017). Different interpretive media are listed in Table 1. These different interpretive mechanisms allow for increased and more-meaningful interactions with visitors by providing options to cater to most visitor desires.

**Table 1** *Main forms of Interpretation*

Interpretation medium	Definition	Sample citation of usage
Living History	Reenacting history by a professional or volunteer dressed in historic attire	(Johnson, 2020)
Visitor Center/Museum	Physical building or structure that facilitates information distribution and self-guided interpretation	(Draper, 2018)
Informal Interpretation	Unplanned conversations on resource related topics provided by any park staff	(Larson, 2015)
Guided Tour	Tour showcasing historical and natural significance led by a trained interpreter	(Miller, 2015)
Wayside Exhibit	Signs or placards along trails providing interpretive information	(Dong, 2018)
Roving	Moving through a general area answering questions and providing brief explanations	(Miller, 2015)
Point Duty	Interpreting at a specific point for groups to come through at their own pace. Guides provide informal interpretation for any visitor at a specific location	(Miller, 2015)

### **Interpretation of Diverse Stories**

The NPS curates 423 sites across the country where interpretation can occur, spanning historical buildings, battlefields that shaped American history to magnificent works of nature that predate even the first humans (NPS, 2020a). As a result, there are multiple cultures and stories in each NPS site across the country. For example, a portion of NPS sites were designated for the interpretation of Native American culture and history. Wind Cave National Park in Hot Springs,

South Dakota plays a central role in the creation story of the Lakota Indians. Yet, despite the centrality of this site for the Lakota people, Smaldone (2019) showed that many Lakota's feel that there is not substantial interpretation of their history at the Park. In other words, interpretation programming that focuses on geology and the White (Caucasian) history of the cave and surrounding area is felt by many Lakota visitors to overshadow the interpretative themes and stories of Native Americans (Smaldone, 2019).

The NPS has made great steps to ensure the stories are shared, but continues to analyze the stories they curate, they are currently sharing, and the underrepresented stories still needing to be told (Davis, 2019; Henry et al., 2020; Hurt, 2010; U.S. National Park Service, 2018). Throughout the country there are sites whose stories include histories involving Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), such as Manzanar National Historic Site (Manzanar) or Mammoth Cave National Park, but who's stories are told? Manzanar tells the stories of the Japanese Americans interned there during World War II through a park film, visitor center, self-guided tours, and the opportunity to explore one of the residential blocks (U.S. National Park Service, 2020b). When discussing the early tours of Mammoth Cave, is it mentioned that slaves were used as guides prior to the Civil War or is it glossed over (NPS, 2018)? If the stories shared are not representative of the individuals who culturally or racially-identify with the site then those visitors will not feel welcome or heard (Henry et al., 2020). As Hurt (2010) suggests, these narratives shared through interpretation need to help individuals see themselves in the history of sites to help foster an understanding of who they are and where they came from, not simply provide a Eurocentric history. In other words, inclusive interpretation allows the individual to create relationships with these sites and empowers them (Jameson, 2019). When an individual sees their history recognized and interpreted it shows that it is important (Bright et al., 2020). For



example, Castillo de San Marco, a Spanish fort in Saint Augustine, Florida formed focus groups from the surrounding Latinx and Hispanic community to understand their views of this historical and cultural site (Ryan et al., 2019). The members of the focus groups felt that the physical buildings allowed them to step “back in time” and embrace Latinx/Hispanic heritage (Ryan et al., 2019).

### **The Narrative of Relevance**

The National Park Service aims to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (NPS, 2020). It gives no distinction for racial identity of visitors, rather implying that resources are available for all. However, current visitation trends do not show these spaces being enjoyed by all racial groups. The 2010 census showed that 72% of Americans identified as White and 13% identified as Black or African American (Humes et al., 2011). Visitation to NPS sites does not mirror this statistics. Vaske and Lyon (2014) connected census data to the usage of 128 NPS units of various designations spread across the country showed that 95% of visitors identify as White and only 1% identified as Black or African American. This lack of proportional representation begs the question of what barriers to non-White visitors may exist in these spaces?

Racial and ethnic minority communities have been subject to segregation and racial discrimination and inequalities over the course of American history. From the first Africans landing as slaves at Point Comfort in 1619 (LaVeist et al., 2019), to discrimination and hate crimes following 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in late 1800’s (Grigoryeva & Ruef, 2015), to the segregation and racial division in Chicago in the 1980’s (Sugrue, 2003), to police brutality and injustice captured on video in 2020 (Bryson et al., 2020), U.S. history is replete with racial injustice. To,

in a small way, address this legacy of injustice, within the NPS, in 2016 the Urban Agenda was created to improve visitor engagement within urban centers (NPS, 2017), in part, to provide greater access to racial and ethnic minority communities by creating new sites and reenergizing the purpose of other sites to speak to the views, cultures, and heritage of visitors. Although creating additional parks helped improve engagement, it is still necessary to understand what other barriers exist and to identify potential bridges to correct them (Perry et al., 2015). This would allow for specific actions to occur to address and remove or mitigate the barriers.

In effort to understand the barriers that lie between minority groups and visitation in PPAs there are three main hypotheses: marginality theory, ethnicity theory, and discrimination theory (Washburne, 1978). Marginality theory explains that socio-economic barriers in place due to prior racial discrimination causes under-representation of people of color. It assumes that the marginalized group would behave the same as the non-marginalized if the historical and present socio-economic barriers were removed. This would mean that local visitors to urban parks would be racially diverse with the removal of barriers (Perry et al., 2015). Ethnicity theory, also called subcultural theory, relies on the idea that different cultures are inherently different, act differently, and even avoid activities and locations that might cause them to be perceived as identifying with another group (Davis, 2019; Virden and Walker, 1999; Washburne, 1978). Davis (2019) explains that stereotypes of African Americans not enjoying recreating in forests remove cultural links that they have with PPAs dating back to slavery. Forests were spaces of refuge for escaped slaves searching for a better life, but stereotypes of African Americans remove the acceptance of them in these spaces. Discrimination theory explains that visitation is directly affected by feelings of discrimination. This includes the lack of comfort in areas where BIPOC do not see anyone like them as a visitor or a staff member (Davis, 2019; Ryan et al.,

2019; Perry et al., 2015). Ryan et al. (2019) found that Castillo de San Marco National Monument in Saint Augustine, Florida lacked staff representing the culture being interpreted was viewed as inauthentic.

There are a variety of implications for interpretation provided by these hypotheses. First, BIPOC individuals – arguably all individuals – need to feel a connection at the site, regardless of whether there is a cultural and historical connection to the individual. This also means that interpreters need to program for the whole group, and not just the majority (Tilden, 1957). Additionally, minority groups may not always feel comfortable with the physical location of the site. The NPS sites with the highest percentage of African American visitors are not in areas with high African American populations. These areas of high African American populations span nine states, but where there are only a handful of NPS sites, many of which are smaller historic sites (Weber & Sultana, 2013). The National Park System was created for all Americans to experience; however, a study of African American women showed that most of them felt they did not belong in outdoor recreation due to not being “adventurous” (Dorwart et al., 2019).

However, research surrounding the African American representation in PPAs tends to revolve around the deficits of marginality, ethnicity, and discrimination (c.f., Pease, 2015), or barriers and constraints (Martoglio et al., 2012; Scott & Lee, 2018); all different ways that African Americans and other minority communities are not participating in PPAs. That said, there is a clear lack of research seeking to understand how these communities currently or historically engage(d) in PPAs, how these spaces empower BIPOC, how these spaces can begin to create equality. For example, the National Park Service programmed specifically for the African American community in Washington D.C through Summer in the Parks (SITP) from 1968-1976. Understanding how SITP is currently interpreted allows for a shift of focus to how

BIPOC historically-used and related to these spaces, outside of traditional damage-based narratives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to engage in that exploration, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used. CRT is a theoretical framework that “advance[s] a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race [sic] and racism...and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language and national origin” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT provides a more accurate description and understanding of race relations in the U.S. than other race related paradigms, such as assimilationist, which showcase an unjustified optimism that racial boundaries should and will meld together and naturally resolve themselves as communities and cultures combine (Christian et al., 2019). CRT is a stronger paradigm due to its reliance on “racial realism” (Bell, 1995), which allows those who deal with the effects of racism first-hand to evidence the persistence of racial inequality across various settings including, but not limited to “academia, the streets, or the legal system” (Christian et al., 2019). This is extremely important in the context of the NPS, where a plethora of research continues to explore why BIPOC are, proportionately, less present in PPAs (Rushing et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2015; Davis, 2019; Xiao et al., 2017; Scott & Lee, 2018). CRT researchers also challenge other researchers to find ways to show the experiences of BIPOC and combat white privilege in society without using so-called ‘white social science’ (Hylton, 2012). One of the ways to show those experiences is through counter-storytelling. These counter-stories show views not usually used in research, providing the opportunity for alternative narratives to be voiced, compared to the Euro-centric stories (Hylton, 2012). In this study, we believe interpretation of SITP allows for counter-storytelling to

ensure that all voices surrounding this event are heard. CRT will be used as an analytic framework to understand how the interpreters' experience of sharing the stories of SITP connects with the racial narrative of the NPS.

### **Summer in the Parks**

Summer in the Parks was a free and innovative program series designed to quell racial tensions and increase usage of urban NPS sites and community relations in Washington, D.C. (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). Although planning began before, the project gained a deeper meaning following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 and the Holy Week Uprisings in Washington, D.C. that followed (Einberger, 2020.) SITP consisted of three main programmatic themes: surprise trips to parks, community park programs, and spectacles (U.S. National Park Service, 2019). These themes aimed at providing African American youth opportunities that they often did not have, such as trips to rural parks and farms (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020).

First, surprise trips allowed 40,000 to visit “wild parks” such as Rock Creek, Fort Washington, Great Falls, and the C&O Canal (Wright, 1969). Events at these sites included programming by various youth serving organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America, Girls Scouts of the United States of America, the YMCA, YWCA, and Big Brothers. This programming aspect aimed at removing feelings of discrimination in outdoor recreational spaces (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). Second, community park programs were born out of declining visitation numbers in many urban parks in the District. New community parks, planned by local communities, were designated within existing NPS sites with the idea that parks should be in close distance to their users and that the users should have a voice in the facilities provided, as well as lead the management, operation, and maintenance of the spaces. Programming in these

parks included community dances that occurred weekly, church services, concerts, and art workshops (NPS, 2019). Third, spectaculars were large outdoor events covering a wide varied of topics that aimed at providing entertainment for massive crowds. Summer in the Parks Spectaculars included concerts, fireworks, Broadway performers, Bicycle National Champions, horse shows, and the first National Jousting Championship (Wright, 1969). Also, cultural events, such as an African pageant and craft fair and an “Indian Powwow”<sup>2</sup> occurred with food, dancing, and teepees. Although attendance was not taken at these events, anecdotal evidence reports a concert at Anacostia Park with tens of thousands of participants (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020).

A decline of SITP would occur through the 1970s, primarily blamed on shifting NPS focus and resource allocation towards the nation’s Bicentennial in 1976. Additionally, SITP did not eliminate racial tension it sought to remove (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). That said, decades later, SITP would begin to make a comeback as a free summer concert series that, in 2020, went virtual due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This series included a variety of styles including Soul, hip-hop, Go-Go, funk, and jazz (NPS, 2019).

SITP was seen as successful due to local participation, cooperation with planning efforts, a dedicated public relations and promotions team, and a willingness to adapt ideas to meet needs of the current day. Reports and testimonies from NPS staff consider SITP successful, but it was not until the preparation began for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary that the views of participants, especially African Americans involved as organizers, park rangers and key informants, and participants were explored (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). However, research has not aimed to

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<sup>2</sup> Indian Powwow is not often the preferred phrase by American Indians, but was used by the NPS during the event.

understand how these historical events are interpreted by NPS staff to the public nor how it fits into the broader narrative of NPS sites in Washington DC.

### **Research Questions**

Accordingly, the following research questions guided this study:

- How are interpreters in the National Capital Area (NCA) of the National Park Service (NPS) interpreting the Summer in the Parks (SITP) program?
- How do NPS Interpreters develop interpretive programming about SITP?
- How do NPS Interpreters perceive the interpretation of SITP related to the broader NPS narrative surrounding the engagement of BIPOC visitors?

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

This study used semi-structured interviews and an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore NPS employees' perspectives on the role of the SITP story in Washington D.C. and the NPS. In the following pages, I detail my positionality as it related to the study, the IPA method, the study participants, the interview process, and my analytic process.

### Positionality

Positionality is the process of recognizing cultural, personal, gender, and societal biases an individual might have (c.f., Parsons, 2008). This research stems from my desire to provide interpretation for individuals of every race and ethnicity to ensure their voice and stories are told. This desire stems from intrinsic motivation to learn about history, seeking to understand the other stories not told in my formal classroom schooling. My membership in the National Association of Interpretation bolstered my desire to help tell stories that all can relate to and identify with. That said, I recognize that as a white, straight, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied, graduate student, I have had the opportunities and resources that other individuals have not been able to have that allow me to pursue this research. Additionally, these identities prevent me from being able to understand first-hand racial discrimination in PPAs. As a result, I seek to focus, as much as possible on representing the words of participants in my results and analyses.

To further acknowledge my positionality in the meaning-making process related to this research, I used multiple strategies to encourage reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decision shape



how you research and what you see” (Mason, 2002, p. 5). To encourage reflexivity in this project, analytic memos were used during the coding process to catalog my thoughts and beliefs as I coded. This also allowed me to strive to acknowledge my own personal biases, and ground the results, as much as possible, in participant’s experiences, perspectives, and beliefs.

Additionally, following the transcription and coding of all interviews, the final themes were sent to each participant to check my analysis and understanding of interviews, as well as identify potential blind spots created by my own multiple identities. This serves to further gauge trustworthiness and authenticity of the analysis (Miles et al., 2014, pg. 313).

### **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

My methodological approach to this research used an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (hereafter ‘IPA’). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis uses a “dual hermeneutic” of attempting to understand how the interviewee understands their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 53). The dual hermeneutic occurs as the researcher seeks to understand the views of the participant, while the participant tries to understand their own experiences prompted by the researcher’s questions. It provides a very detailed understanding lived experiences, which Smith and Osborn (2004) noted can only occur with a small sample.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis have been used in research focused on BIPOC and their experiences in predominantly-white higher education system (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020; Vadeboncoeur & Bopp, 2020; Gardner, 2019), as well as in group facilitation (Charura, 2020). In the former, Curtis-Boles et al. (2020) showed that comments that devalued BIPOC in predominantly-white institutions often came from an instructor, who had power over the student; by extension IPAs might be important to understanding experiences of race and racism in various educational forms, including inside PPAs. Within recreational research a limited number of

efforts have been conducted that are primarily focused on attitudes gained through sports and recreation, such as optimism (deBeaudrap et al., 2017) and coping (Nicholls et al., 2005). To our knowledge, no scholars have used an IPA in NPS context or looked at the professional lived experiences of interpreters. In sum, this approach can effectively be leveraged to understand the interviewee's perception of the relationship race has with PPA usage and interpretation of historical events, like SITP. For example, using an IPA focusing on SITP interpretation might help answer questions such as, 'How do NPS staff perceive the interpretation of SITP relates to the broader NPS narrative surrounding the engagement of BIPOC visitors?'

### **Participants**

In this study five managers were interviewed to provide a variety of experiences across professional roles. This strategy of interviewing across diverse professional levels has been used in other park research to answer specific questions related to marijuana cultivation on public lands (Rose et. al, 2016) and air quality management (Zajchowski et al., 2019). Selected participants have worked for the NCA for at least two years before the study to ensure participation in interpretive opportunities before facility closures and program cancelations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interpretive experience varied between participants, but their General Schedule (GS) level is recorded to acknowledge this.

Access to and selection of participants was guided by Dr. Noel Lopez, the Regional Cultural Anthropologist and key informant for this study. Dr. Lopez has been heavily involved with SITP by creating a library archive of publications relating to SITP and the D.C. Riots, and by serving as a resource during the preparation on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary report on SITP (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). Dr. Lopez compiled a list of various past and present park staff who have worked in a variety of roles within SITP interpretation, including some individuals whose

involvement with SITP dates to the original programming during the '60s and '70s. Data were received in two forms, semi-structured interviews, as well as through a webinar. While data could be collected in a variety of methods, these two were selected for the ability to ask direct questions regarding the lived experience and understand the impact Summer in the Parks had on these individuals.

## **Interviews**

Participants received interview questions (see Appendix A) prior to the interview in order to become familiar with them. The questions were constructed to understand the interviewee's work experience and their understanding of SITP. Additionally, it sought to understand their lived experience regarding BIPOC usage of park resources within the region as well as nationally. Semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately sixty minutes, were conducted using video conferencing software (i.e., Zoom) and were recorded. Approval from the Institutional Review Board at Old Dominion University was received before interviews were scheduled. The interviewer has also completed the CITI training for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct. Participants received a copy of the transcript to review prior to a follow-up correspondence to address clarifications to increase trustworthiness (Miles et al., 2014, pg. 32).

## **Analysis**

Following Howard et al.'s (2019) analytic strategy, the first transcript was read line by line and any descriptive comments made by the researcher were recorded in the left margin. These comments were then analyzed for emergent themes recorded in the right margin. After this process was complete for each interview, the emergent themes were compared and clustered into a list of themes and sub-themes. This allowed the researcher to compare codes across interviewees and assess their salience related to the research questions.

## **Summary**

Through these methods and this research, I aim to allow researchers and NPS managers to share how SITP is understood and interpreted by staff and presented to the public. This understanding provides NPS units with additional information to discuss and train how to interpret historic events, such as SITP, that engage with BIPOC visitors in urban settings. SITP is, in this sense, a case study to help learn how park professionals make sense of how BIPOC individuals have engaged in PPAs in ways other than current research illustrates (Scott & Lee, 2018). This broader knowledge will provide interpretative organizations the resources needed to expand interpretation of BIPOC history and culture and more equitably illustrate engagement of under-interpreted demographics.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The results of this research illustrate the lack of formal interpretation regarding SITP in the National Capital Area, however, they do illustrate the recognition of the importance of the historic program. Lack of interpretation is mainly attributed by participants to reasons out of the control of the NPS (i.e., COVID-19, which will be discussed in later paragraphs), and regional leadership is seeking to understand and utilize the lessons learned from SITP for upcoming large-scale events, primarily the celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. In the following pages, I share the sample, discuss interpretation of SITP, the development of SITP interpretation, and how SITP interpretation can inform the national narrative of BIPOC usage of park resources.

### Sample

From March 16 to July 16, 2021, five semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a webinar regarding SITP that featured one of my prior interviewees, as well as three additional individuals, was viewed. All participants interviewed were current or former NPS employees (one interviewee is recently retired, two are not current NPS employees but were youth paid to perform during the original SITP concerts in 1968-1976). All participants who work(ed) for the NPS as adults are interpretive managers; due to the limited interpretation of SITP involvement in the interpretive program development, the decision was made to limit interviews to managers, as front-line interpreters had little to no knowledge of SITP.

Participant 1 is the Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Outreach at Rock Creek Park and, at the time of the interview, served in this position for 4.5 years. Prior to this position they served as a Supervisory Park Ranger and Public Affairs Specialist at George Washington Memorial Parkway and Prince William Forest Park. In addition, they previously worked at

multiple parks on the West Coast as well. This individual was selected due to the number of current programs their park supports that contain similar aspects of SITP, and their working knowledge of the historical event, even though they don't directly interpret it as part of their current position.

Participant 2 served as the Program Manager for the Civil War Defenses of Washington, an administrative unit of the National Park Service that contains sites from multiple parks within the National Capital Area, for the last 8 years. Their career spans 34 years working in the National Capital Area of the National Park Service, including at sites like the Fredrick Douglas National Historic Site, Glen Echo Park. They were also the first African American Superintendent of Ford's Theater. They were a youth attending SITP events in 1968-1976 and their mother was also a Park Ranger, who helped with the contracting of music groups during the original programming.

One of the few recent interpretive programs was in combination with the Youth Summit put on by Participant 3, who is the Youth and Young Adults Program Manager for the National Capital Area. They have been serving in this position since January 2019. They also served as the Youth Volunteer Program Coordinator at Rock Creek Park, as well as working for a few months in the National Volunteer Program Office.

My goal of understanding the original interpretive plan for SITP lead to an interview with Participant 4. Participant 4 was the past Regional Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Youth Programs for the National Capital Area in Region 1, serving in this position for 4 years before retiring. Previous NPS units include the Santa Fe Regional Planning Office and the Denver Regional Office.

This next participant was a webinar participant, who mainly helped provide the historical context surrounding SITP, as well as knowledge surrounding the events during the initiative. Participant 5 is currently the Regional Cultural Anthropologist for the National Capital Region since January 2020. Prior to this position they were a Cultural Anthropologist working in the National Capital Area for five years. Participant 6 is the current Regional Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Youth Programs for the National Capital Area. Participants 7 and 8 were both involved in the original SITP as members of the musical group “Experience Unlimited,” Participant 7 as a musician and Participant 8 as the manager.

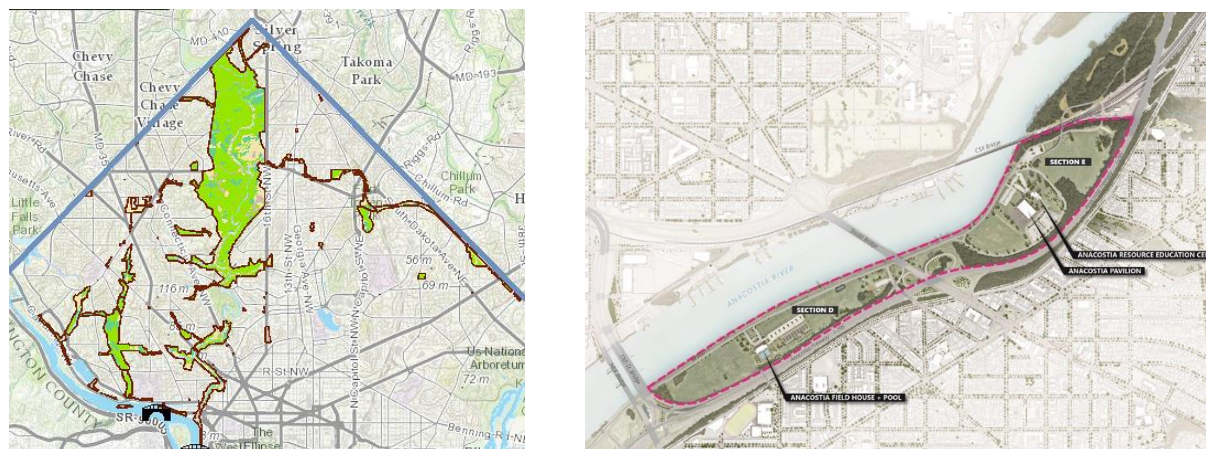
### **Rock Creek Park and Anacostia Park**

The specific NPS sites mentioned most often by participants were Rock Creek Park and Anacostia Park. Rock Creek Park is a 1,754 acre city park established in 1890 that stretches from the Northern corner of Washington D.C. down to the Potomac River. It contains 99 individual sites such as the Carter Baron Amphitheatre, as well as many squares and statues that are not all physically connected Rock Creek Park proper, as seen in Figure 2. Rock Creek was considered one of the most involved parks in the planned interpretation of SITP according to one of the participants. Historically, Rock Creek sits in a higher socioeconomic section of the city than Anacostia Park. Staff during SITP have remarked that recognizing the differences from Rock Creek and “the poor asphalt world of Southeast D.C. significantly changed their worldview” (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020). Rock Creek was also home to programs that provided environmental education to children. Anacostia Park is an NPS site that was first given to the NPS in 1933 and received more programmatic planning and usage during SITP. It is reclaimed swampland located on the banks of the Anacostia River. It is not a stand-alone unit but is rather under the administration of National Capital Parks East. Anacostia Park was the site of concerts

that concert goers claimed were attended by tens of thousands as well as a small amusement park (Garland-Jackson & Shutika, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Rock Creek Park and Anacostia Park Map*



*Note.* Rock Creek Park and its multiple reservations are pictured on the left in light green. Anacostia Park is pictured on the right in dark green.

### **Summer in the Park**

Summer in the Parks, in part, was an opportunity for members of the community, regardless of age, to work and engage in activities throughout the park system. Activities included concerts, hands on gardening, and opportunities to travel to a part of the city that youth may not have otherwise reached. It also provided the opportunity for unity in a city torn by strife. One participant stated that “It [SITP] was the glue because it brought everybody out” that “it brought unity [and] that's what's missing on our streets, that's what's missing right now in 2021.”

Some interviewees were participants for various events during the original SITP and said:

I remember the buses coming to pick us up right there by Ballou [High School] at old Bob's Frozen Custard. Pickin' us up and takin' us from Bob's Frozen Custard up to Rock



Creek Park to do the summer gardening program and introducing us to gardening. So, there were so many different things that were going on in the city and you just had to know what was going on. And a lot of people took advantage of it. Probably more than we [NPS] probably have accounted for.

They also remembered stepping onto the bus and being greeted by another youth who, over the course of the day, impart on them the importance of “taking care of the land we were entrusted with and gardening” and that they took “this little girl from Southeast DC up northeast up to Northwest DC and learning how to plant carrots and all the other things that we planted.”

Summer in the Park also provided the opportunity for individuals to perform music. One participant recounted,

we was in high school... That was our summer job. And, we played all over the city, man. It was amazing. Each Ward we [the band Experience Unlimited] had, like, sometimes twice a week, we would perform you know, on a show mobile stage in various parts of the city.

In fact, they felt that “all over the city when we went, we were the crowd favorite... our band started doing so great being a part of that. That's part of our legacy. Any ‘real’ artists in the city, if they didn't do Summer in the Parks, you never knew them.” Another interviewee remembered “I got here [Washington, D.C.] in 1970 and the atmosphere when I got to Washington, it was pretty... as we said back then, it was pretty cool.” SITP has provided a variety of opportunities for individuals who, when asked to reflect upon them, have had fond memories and remarked,

I've got my whole litany of remembrances of Summer in the Park, as I think I've mentioned to some before that my first concert or Go-Go was in Anacostia Park and what

band was playing up on the stage? Experience Unlimited. I was 13 years old [and] you couldn't tell me anything. I experienced my first concert in Anacostia Park ... listening to Experience Unlimited with the Freeze.

### **Interpretation of SITP**

The first research question sought to understand how interpreters in the National Capital Area (NCA) of the National Park Service (NPS) currently interpret the Summer in the Parks (SITP) program. The three themes emergent from the data illustrated that 1) interpretation is limited, 2) other programs are continuing the idea of SITP, and 3) interpretation is occurring largely through community organizations.

As all interviews demonstrated, interpretation of SITP is extremely limited: “Currently [we are interpreting] nothing [SITP related] because of COVID. In general, in a normal circumstance, [we’d] obviously [host] nature programs, nature hikes,” voiced one participant. As they explained, “The shutdown and the catching up that parks had to do after the shutdown slowed the momentum of moving our plan [for SITP] forward.” The primary two cases of interpretation mentioned in the interviews include a Youth Summit for various youth trail crews across the region in the Summer of 2019, as well as a webinar hosted by Rock Creek Park during the Summer of 2021, which was data analyzed in this thesis. These programs allowed individuals not involved or aware of SITP the opportunity to understand the importance of these events. Particularly, the webinar shared the stories of adults who participated in the event, as musicians and participants, to truly drive home the importance and meaning that the event had to them and the effect it had on the city. “I totally agree [that SITP needs to be reinstated] because I was given the opportunity to grow. And people watched us grow, from teenagers to men. It’s real, it’s real life,” shared one of the webinar participants. This webinar is part of a series regarding the

racial history of Washington D.C., and the Park had not thought to feature SITP in this series in until the interview with Participant 1. As they mentioned, “We actually hadn't talked about SITP at all for the racial history series, but I will bring it up. Yeah, I think that's a great idea.”

While there is a lack of formal interpretation of the SITP history, there are a variety of programs currently occurring within the NCA that are very similar in idea to SITP, primarily nature- and art-based programs. Participants voiced these include “nature hikes”, “video” opportunities, and “planetarium programs.” These programs may not directly tell the stories of SITP, but they seek to create a renewal of the mission to connect the current community to nature and park usage. As indicated by the SITP anniversary plan (2019), “The intent is to connect and inspire diverse audiences, especially local audiences, to visit their neighboring or neighborhood national parks in the Washington, D.C. metro area through SITP activities about arts and recreation.” Thus, the Park Service seeks to reinforce the legacy of SITP through repetition of events that previously worked to increase usage of park resource, reduce racial tension, and connect local communities with park resources.

Notably, participants shared that there is some interpretation occurring through community organizations, such as the Anacostia Community Museum. An exhibit was created that included “oral histories, videos, and photographs” from SITP participants as seen in the SITP Plan (2019). The Museum also partnered with the NPS to host a roller skate night, similar to what was offered during SITP. These programs continue the legacy of SITP by being lead by the local community, just as local communities decided during SITP what programs would be best in the area.

## **Development of SITP Programming**

The second research question looked to understand how NPS Interpreters develop interpretive programming about SITP. The observed themes were 1) program guidance from Regional staff, 2) support from staff in other divisions, and 3) a shifting regional focus.

Although limited, the development of the interpretive materials and programs that did exist was guided by the former Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Youth Programs for the NCA. The process began during an Interpretive Manager Group meeting attended by interpretive managers from across the region and a few interpretive staff members during the Winter of 2019. While a plan was created with attainable goals, the COVID-19 pandemic would force managers to shift gears to determine potential virtual interpretive programs and operations. Unfortunately, this would be a time-consuming process until a safe, effective, and accessible method was determined. As one participant described, “And, so then COVID hit right after that meeting, and we had to jump on distance learning. And with the hacking [and Zoom bombing we had] all the IT people stonewalled us on the programs that we could use.” Furthermore, participants shared the main planning for interpretation regarding SITP was specifically for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, which would have been in 2019, which was impossible to safely celebrate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This halted progress on a multiyear program plan and made it obsolete due to the shifting priorities the Region experienced in responding to the pandemic.

Participants shared that there are no current plans to continue the planning process for SITP programming and interpretation because the Regional focus has shifted to begin the planning process for A250, the 250<sup>th</sup>, or semiquincentennial anniversary of the United States. “We currently aren’t in any structured discussions for interpreting this regionally,” voiced another participant. However, Regional leadership has recognized the importance of lessons

learned through SITP in hopes of utilizing them to make the A250 event as effective as possible. As that participant continued, “with the A250 anniversary coming up, I suspect that we will be looking at how we can utilize all the work put into this to expand our interpretive focus.” The knowledge for the limited interpretation development was reinforced by other interviewees, particularly one who served as a key informant for this paper. As Participant 1 shared, “Well, there was the report by [key informant]. And he also gave a presentation to us, one or two presentations at various points in time. So, a lot of it came from what [key informant] had been working on.” Although they are not a member of the Interpretive staff, it was clear this individual helped educate staff and point them in the right direction for additional research and opportunity to translate history into interpretive media.

### **Relationship between Interpretation of SITP and national narrative of BIPOC visitation**

The third research question looked to understand how NPS interpreters perceive the interpretation of SITP related to the broader NPS narrative surrounding the engagement of BIPOC visitors. The themes that emerged from answers to this question included 1) the need for increased efforts to promote diversity, 2) the need to listen to the desires of the community, and 3) gentrification.

First and foremost, interviewees recognized the need for increased efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in parks and protected areas, however, were mixed on the use of interpretation to do so. As one participant shared “providing the entry point through recreation is kind of a softer introduction to those issues, rather than being really direct about them [through interpretation], which is hard to do.” This individual is not saying that the interpreting the story is not important, rather that the recreation and enjoyment of outdoor spaces provided for a better way to learn about and experience diversity than through formal interpretation. SITP was a

successful program with very little negative media, which showcased a way to provide events for the community that are welcoming to people of all walks of life. Another interviewee described, “Summer in the Parks [...] was an innovative experiment to connect parks with urban communities in and around D.C.”

A dominant discourse throughout the interviews involved Go-Go music. The music genre of Go-Go was born out of the music scene created by SITP, and is a genre that is still very prevalent in Washington, D.C. A speaker during the webinar, said that “We [Experience Unlimited] was always the main attraction.” Experience Unlimited was a group of bands that would be renamed to Go-Go because of their popularity and visibility during SITP. One of the current park managers had the opportunity to continue a concert series that had recently avoided Go-Go music for fear that “people aren’t going to know how to act” and that “it’s too much of a risk to bring Go-Go back to the park” for fear that “it’s going to incite violence” due to “associating Go-Go with a certain population of people [BOPIC].” However, they convinced senior leadership to allow Go-Go music and in 2019 they “brought in 17,000 people” and “not one band-aid was issued. We had no problems. They [visitors] came in, they enjoyed the concert, [and] they left out as peacefully as they possibly could.” This was truly phenomenal because it “broke the glass ceiling of people saying that Go-Go wasn’t wanted anymore in the parks, that we couldn’t have Go-Go in the parks anymore because it would invite violence and people would act crazy.” It was also the largest concert in the park in a number of years. “We hadn’t had 17,000 people in the park for probably 30 years.” As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic this same series went virtual last year and had “67,000 hit that website.” As the participant shared, “it was phenomenal” “we wanted to make sure that the community knows that we’re here and that we could have these Go-Go concerts and so everybody’s gonna be on their best behavior. We’re

gonna be respectful to neighbors, and you're gonna take your trash with you, and they did all those things." This shows that the lived impacts of the original SITP are still occurring in Washington D.C.

That said, the example of the difficulty of getting approval for Go-Go music highlights the struggle of individuals who hope to use parks and protected areas for legal uses but are restricted still due to lack of permitting or attempting to use the space for reasons that are perceived contrary to the foundation documents of specific parks. A glaring example of this is Meridian Hill, an Italian Renaissance Park, created in the 1930's, that was used by African American activists during the Civil Rights movement and commonly called Malcom X Park in honor of him. However, the foundation documents establish it as a European garden, a space to walk around on the sidewalks and enjoy the flowers; in contrast, the community wants to use it for activities aligned with common uses for urban greenspace, picnicking, sports, etc. One of the interviewees remarked:

[The challenge is] what it was intended to be from the enabling legislation versus where the community wants to use it now [...] that's one angle. A whole other angle is, like, it as a site of First Amendment free speech opportunities, that's the whole Malcolm X angle on it [...] to where it sits in the City in context of, you know, the changing dynamics and neighborhoods in D.C.

Thus, there's a need to find a balance between the two: preserving the older history of Meridian Hill that dates back to Thomas Jefferson, while recognizing and respecting the newer history of honoring Malcom X and telling the story of the African Americans who were moved off that land initially to make it a park. One interviewee remarked that it "was a very largely black community at one point. Obviously, gentrification has pushed the bounds on that, but it still has a

lot of familial ties to when it was a very vibrant black community.” In short, participants voiced SITP can tell the story of the NPS working with communities to serve them in the way communities feel they need, giving them what they want, not what the NPS thinks that they want. As one participant voiced, “I think [SITP] restored a lot of faith in people that ‘Wow, the government hears us, the government wants to know what we'd like to see back in the parks. And they're going to give it a chance.’” This is a place where that conversation of what the community wants can occur, not only what the community wants in terms of the physical space, but how their stories are told. As one participant shared,

The program also changed the way the NPS engages with D.C. residents by involving community organizations in planning. Those organizations, in turn, hired locals and design activities to meet community needs. And those then the needs of their meeting included improving children's literacy and creating a hit concert series.

Finally, as alluded in the previous paragraph, participants voiced gentrification is still a problem in municipal areas. As one interviewee shared,

I think gentrification has definitely had a role in the whole SITP [...] and how we [people of color] don't have the resources to continue the level of programming that we've [parks in urban centers] had, you know, in those times [late 1960's through the 1970's], and then even, you know, as late as the 80s.

SITP provided an avenue to increase engagement, however, participants shared that historic engagement with BIPOC communities has not continued at the same level today. One participant voiced this through the ability to recruit volunteers, stating that the parks surrounded by whiter areas tend to have higher number of volunteers throughout the year. In other words, the cultural



geography surrounding parks, such as Rock Creek Park was, in some ways, thought to dictate who was engaging. As one participant shared,

I think Rock Creek is interesting. It's literally, like physically, split down the center of the City. I think that they [the Park], and [this is] also my angle of having worked there... I think that they understand the challenge in front of them. I think a lot of the larger volunteer pool falls from the west side of the city, and there's an attempt to try to figure out 'How do we engage the east side of the city'... east and also sort of south of the Anacostia. Although, I mean, to be honest, [for managers] it's like, again, geographically, you're looking south of the Anacostia you're talking [about] National Capital Parks East: that's the Anacostia Park, folks. So it's like, 'We don't want to like poach those people from Anacostia' [who do] a lot of work at their local park.

Participants voiced that white volunteers support the parks in a variety of means throughout the year, including through programming and maintenance, two aspects of making a park more welcoming that might lead to increasing visitation. In comparison, other areas of the District that are less white have a very strong volunteer group that supports specific programs during the summer and have less volunteers during other seasons. One participant remarked "the volunteer crew over at National Capital Parks East [...] some of their strongest volunteer experiences are based around the Fort Dupont concert series." The legacy of this volunteership is very important and growing this volunteer force into a year-round operation would continue to tell the story of SITP while helping increase visitation. SITP united a community and reduced the effects of gentrification at the time, but it has not lasted to today.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This research sought to understand where and how SITP is interpreted in the NCA, what methods are used to produce interpretive programs for SITP, and NPS employees' perspectives on the role of the SITP story of engagement of BIPOC visitors in the NCA and nationally with park resources. The results demonstrate that interpretation of SITP is extremely limited and mainly occurs outside of the NPS, through community partnerships. The interpretation that does occur shares the impacts of SITP by programming in a similar manner. This research did highlight the importance of continuing the ongoing dialogue of how best to carry forward the legacy of SITP, whether through programming, interpretation, or some combination of both.

The interpretation of SITP is present in some settings though, such as through the Anacostia Community Museum compiled oral histories, videos, and photographs of SITP for exhibits. While the museum is not part of the NPS, it has always sought to express the views of the community it serves, the same way that the NPS created parks during the historic SITP period to serve the communities as they wanted to be served. Thus, this Museum is, in fact, continuing the legacy of SITP, while also interpreting SITP: the location is especially important since Anacostia Park was created as an SITP initiative. The work of this community organization needs to be highlighted, as it shows a community telling their story, their history, defining their own legacy. This story refutes the dominant national narrative that BIPOC individuals are not in PPAs and points to a counterexample to help change this false idea. In other words, for the last 50 years an answer to the question of how to engage BIPOC communities in park resources has been there and has been overlooked because it was not part of the segment of history shared.

That said, the lack of SITP knowledge, both interpreted by the NPS, but also in the broader cultural dialogue, mirrors dominant deficit-based trends in the literature describing minority

participating in outdoor recreation (Rushing et al., 2019). Deficit-based mindset focuses on things lacking for a community, similar to how damage-centered research focuses on the pain and suffering of a community (Tuck, 2009). While an understanding of barriers and constraints is crucial, a dominant focus on this narrative is harmful because it focuses on pain and loss of these communities without providing a holistic picture of their lived experiences, successes, and achievements. In other words, the dominant narrative within most park research and academic writing shows that BIPOC individuals are not currently in PPAs proportionate to their white peers, and, accordingly, seeks to understand what barriers are standing in the way (Perry et. al, 2015; Rushing et al., 2019; Virden and Walker, 1999; Washburne, 1978). Interpreting SITP shows a more holistic picture and a poignant counter narrative: that underrepresented individuals were very much involved in parks through various activities created by SITP that induced that return. Put differently, dominant race-related research focused on parks keeps *a priori* looking for answers for a lack of engagement, when the answers and the counter-narratives are in the stories that have been overlooked. Re-engaging in the story of SITP may bring other stories in other settings into the dominant discourse as additional counter-narratives.

Furthermore, SITP has great opportunity to be interpreted, but the lens that this interpretation is viewed through needs to be transparent and sincere. If the interpretation falls into the so-called 'White Savior Industrial Complex' (c.f., Anderson et al., 2021) of occurring to check a box or to make interpreters and the NPS feel charitable about themselves, then not only is the interpretation degrading and insensitive, but it also removes the sincerity and authenticity of it. Anderson et al. (2021) states that there are three sections of the White Savior Industrial Complex: 'Brutalities in the Morning', 'Charities in the Afternoon', and 'Awards in the Evening.' Brutalities in the Morning references injustice both past and present. In terms of SITP, this would involve

neglecting past and current issues of racism, the history of slavery, and forced removal from these spaces these parks currently sit upon. Thus, Charities in the Afternoon, might be seen through ‘charitably’ welcoming BIPOC individuals to parks or failing to recognize the history of the space. A prime example of this is Meridian Hill, which was part of the African American community before it was a park. Finally, Awards in the Evening represents recognition for work that did not truly occur as it is being shown. This would be seen through celebrating the creation of interpretation without recognizing the continued need to find solutions to enduring issues of systematic racism. It is possible to interpret SITP without propagating this problematic cycle, simply by allowing proximate communities to tell their story of their communities coming together but recognizing the issues that caused the divides in the first place. This is something that Rock Creek Conservancy has already begun to do by hosting a webinar that looked at the personal impact of SITP. It is part of a larger series on the racial history of Washington D.C. and occurred as a direct result of my interview with a participant. They began with a explaining the historical context of SITP and the events leading to it and then allowed individuals who participated in SITP, mainly as adolescents, explain what it meant to them and how it impacted them throughout their lives.

Methodologically, the use of IPA within this research allowed for the understanding of how interviewees understand their lived experiences both of interpretation, or rather the lack of the interpretation of SITP, as well as understanding what SITP means to those who were former participants (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 53). The lack of interpretation allowed individuals to recognize the need for the interpretation and the lived experiences that would accompany it, which would provide further understanding of the need for the promotion of diversity and inclusion in PPAs (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020). The former participants had the opportunity during the webinar to recollect on SITP and how it helped them grow as young people by teaching them maturity,

leadership, and the importance of PPAs and art programs. The most important aspect of the IPA was allowing participants to reflect on their perceptions on the relationship of race. This was seen strongly in the third research question, as participants acknowledged that BIPOC communities are still met with barriers today stopping them from enjoying and recreating in PPAs. However, the recognition of the importance of SITP helped visitors to recognize the need to interpret and educate others on solutions to these problems. If SITP is forgotten, then the solutions provided are also forgotten to history and must be reinvented.

The lack of interpretation regarding SITP shows the continued opportunities to further curate and discuss which stories are shared in the Region. The history of SITP is a part of the saga of the Civil Rights movement. It occurred just two short months following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, an assassination that left many Americans, particularly African-Americans across the country, feeling enraged and frightened. The week that followed would see riots in Washington D.C. that led to the death of 13 individuals. History books speak of these riots and similar riots across America, but comparatively little attention speaks to how the same city came together as a community months after to engage in concerts with nationally acclaimed artists, young people playing music of all genres, art programs, and outdoor experiences for youth. In other words, an opportunity exists to interpret and tell this story to form a more complete picture of this time and the positive and vibrant roles parks played in navigating it.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This thesis was also conducted during a time of heightened racial tensions across the country (e.g., Bryson et al., 2020), which truly signals the importance to continue these conversations even when they are not in national news. While my thesis changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented me from pursuing a previous and much less-impactful project, I am beyond glad for this opportunity. As someone who knew during the early years of high school that interpretation was my career path, I never expected to dive into a topic as intense as SITP, however, I do not think there is any topic that is nearly as important as this. Given 400 years of white hegemony, there is a lot still a long way to go in terms of telling the full story of BIPOC in PPAs, and other spaces and times as well. I hope I can continue to make an impact through interpretive programming, whether that is done through highlighting areas that need more interpretation, such as this or simply providing the small and seemingly unimportant “aha” moments to visitors in PPAs.

My goal for this project was to highlight the importance of telling these stories, while we have access to living history. The question of “what makes something historical” has been on my mind a lot during this process. I’m thankful to live in a lifetime where we see so many historical events occurring and recognizing that they are historical, from 9/11 to the election of the first African American President and Vice President to the first Native American Director of the National Park Service. These are all historical events and I hope our society can continue to recognize their importance. I’m sure my parents’ generation would agree that the first man on the moon or the assassination of JFK were historical, but I hope this thesis helps others to see that SITP is historical and deserves the interpretation and recognition that is given to other events.

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## Appendix A

### Interview questions

#### Work History:

1. What's your position?
2. In which unit(s) do you work?
3. What key sites does it/do they contain?
4. What is the enabling legislation surrounding these sites (ie. Why were they designated)?
5. How long have you been at your site?
6. Have you worked previously at other sites in the NCA or other NPS sites outside of Region 1? If so which ones?

#### Perceptions, insights, and experiences:

7. Are you familiar with the SITP Program that ran from 1968-1976?
  - a. What's your experience with SITP?
8. What interpretation (if any) relating to SITP currently occurs in your unit?
9. Is interpretation relating to SITP spread throughout the unit or is it in a few specific sites, panels, etc.?
  - a. Which sites?
10. Does the interpretation occur year-round or is it concentrated over a month or two?
  - a. Which months?
11. What interpretive forms does SITP utilize?
  - a. List if needed: (Pull from intro)
12. Have you participated in the development of SITP interpretation materials?
  - a. If so were you involved in the planning, implementation, or both?
  - b. If involved in the planning - Where did the history and knowledge of SITP come from?
  - c. If not - Were you given the opportunity?
    - i. If passed over it why?
13. Does the interpretation of SITP tell the whole story of SITP or aspects?
  - a. Are there are aspects left out that you feel should be included?
    - i. What aspects? And Why?

#### Reflection and meaning:

1. In your opinion, how does the history of SITP speak to the historical use of park resources by BIPOC visitors in Region 1?
2. What is the current relationship between BIPOC visitors and park resources in Region 1?
3. In your opinion, does SITP tell a similar or different story to relationship between BIPOC visitors and Park Service units nationally?
  - a. If not, why not? If so, how so?
4. What else related to any of the topics we've discussed today would you like to share?