

The Disneyfication of Stone Mountain:
A Park's Response to its Visitors

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ABSTRACT:

The most important challenge facing parks is the question of how to maintain visitor interest. Without this seemingly simple concept, park visitation would rapidly decline and the parks themselves would become obsolete. The Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA), the independent authority charged with the management of Stone Mountain Park by the State of Georgia, faced this challenge when the park was established and still face it today along with their private partner, Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation (HFE or HFEC). Since SMMA's establishment in 1958, it has sought to present the park in a way that would concrete its place as a Confederate Civil War Memorial, mainly evidenced by the centerpiece carving of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis, along with providing the best visitor experience possible. The SMMA and now HFE still struggle with that balance.

The Stone Mountain Officials respond to what they believe park visitors would like to see. In the park's early days it believed that the visitors wanted a natural setting surrounding the Memorial Carving. Today the park management believes that the visitor wants an active, outdoor environment for family entertainment and recreation. This change is attributed to many factors including changing societal values such as a move away from Confederate memorialization in the South and a greater focus on entertainment over more traditional static historical sites. Utilizing primary sources on the park and scholarship on Confederate memory and commemoration as well as contemporary studies on visitation this thesis concludes that the evolution of Stone Mountain Park is inevitable.*

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1957. Stone Mountain, Georgia. The sun rises over a forested glen outside of Atlanta with wildlife scurrying about searching for shade before a hot summer's day. The massive grandeur of Stone Mountain stands silent watch over the small hamlet of Stone Mountain Village.

2010. Stone Mountain, Georgia. The sun rises over a recreated mid-19th century town with high school workers on summer break scurrying about unloading the cola bottles before thousands of tourists descend upon Atlanta's premiere family fun attraction. The massive grandeur of Stone Mountain is alive with trains, sky lifts, paddle boats, rope's challenges and awaits its role as a giant screen for the laser lightshow spectacular waiting at sunset.

Stone Mountain Park is located twenty miles east of Atlanta, Georgia. The park is a Georgia State Park but is operated by the independent authority, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA). Today the park's attractions are operated by a private entity, the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation (HFE or HFEC). The SMMA has fought to balance the mandate of their charter in 1958 to maintain the park as a Confederate Memorial, primarily derived from the Memorial Carving on the side of the mountain of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis, and their recognition that visitor preference changed over the course of the park's fifty-two year history. Early during the period of state operation the sentiment of the Lost Cause factored greatly into the development of the park's original interpretive plans. Throughout much of the twentieth century, southerners viewed the Confederacy as a lost cause in that they did not feel that the war represented a fight for slavery but instead a utopian southern society that many Georgians' still wished to be a part of. This sentiment still persists today although it now resides in the shadows of public opinion.

HFE assumed all attractions' operations in 1998 and since have struggled to make the park into what they believe the visitor(in HFE's sense, customer) wants. Generally speaking, from the early days of the park when the management (hereafter referred to as simply the park) believed that a natural commemorative space was what the visitor wanted, the park evolved into a major tourist attraction focused on outdoor, active recreational and entertainment programming for what they believe is the visitor of today. The real question is whether the park has followed the visitors or whether the kinds of visitors have followed the choices of the park?

In order to effectively study this topic the players must be known. While it would be very easy in a study of a Confederate Memorial site to focus on the racial divide, this study instead uses a combination of geography and insider/outsider posturing around the issue of management choices within the park. Therefore the players in the question of this study of Stone Mountain include the management of the park, both from SMMA and HFE, local community members, historians of the park, the Civil War, Civil War memory, commemoration studies, and popular historians. These categories may seem a bit strange now but as their positions develop they will make more sense.

The Venable family privately owned Stone Mountain prior to state acquisition. During that period the City of Stone Mountain (sometimes called Stone Mountain Village) felt a sense of ownership over the mountain. The Venable family's influence over the mountain continued to their influence in the city. The Venables originally purchased the mountain to operate a granite quarrying business which employed many people in the surrounding area thus cementing their relationship with the citizens. Samuel Venable was the patriarch of the family during the period of private ownership and his son James Venable led the family in the years during the transition to state control. The city limits end less than one hundred yards from the base of the mountain.

The City of Stone Mountain prior to state ownership reflects what most people of think of as a quaint southern village of the time. During an oral history interview on the topic, Hugh Jordan, a longtime resident of the city and former Georgia State Senator fondly remembered that during some festivals “They covered the streets with corn meal and that way you could dance on it.”¹

Other than fitting into many people’s imaginations the older residents of Stone Mountain knew the long troubled history of the mountain before the state ever got involved. The most obvious man-made thing in the park today is the massive bas relief sculpture on the side of the mountain. The “lost cause shrine” began shortly after the turn of the century and yet by the 1950s only had a rough finish on Robert E. Lee, the only figure on the mountain to that point.²

The residents of Stone Mountain do not have a monopoly on the mountain’s history prior to the state acquisition. For centuries Stone Mountain served as an important site for Native American civilizations and as Robert Harllee reported in his thesis on the mountain:

In 1566 an expedition of sixty Spanish soldiers exploring the interior of Tama (Georgia) recorded the first European contact with Stone Mountain. The commander, Captain Juan Pardo, reported a great “crystal mountain” near the Indian village of Juaraca, in the approximate vicinity of Stone Mountain. The expedition’s interpreter, on his return to the coast, told a tale of this crystal mountain which supposedly contained diamonds, emeralds and many other valuable gems.³

When the state finally took control of the mountain they continued this theme of value, not with jewels but with a commemoration. When the SMMA took control of the Memorial Carving they repackaged the commemoration in a sense. When it was a private memorial the theme was on the heroes of the Confederacy, with a heavy emphasis on their role in protecting the south from Yankees and African-Americans. The SMMA focused on the story of the valiant defense of

¹ Emy Evans Blair et al., “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2,” interview by Tim Moore, Digital Audio File, October 9, 2009, 5.

² Dave Le Bey, “Stone Mountain, Lost Cause Shrine, Has Own History of Frustrations,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, December 20, 1953).

³ Robert Harllee, “Custodians of Imperishable Glory.” (Emory University, 1980), 7.

Atlanta by the Army of Tennessee. The Battle of Atlanta was one of the major campaigns towards the end of the Civil War. The campaign, including Chattanooga, Lookout Mountain, Kennesaw Mountain, Stone Mountain, Atlanta, and the infamous March to the Sea, saw the Confederate Army of Tennessee fighting the advance of the Union Forces under Sherman. A number of small shrines existed honoring these men but none of the stature Stone Mountain could provide. The SMMA believed that instead of focusing on the individuals carved on the mountain the memorial should be to all of those men who fought defending their homeland.⁴

As with most history, Stone Mountain's is open to interpretation. Harllee spent a great amount time detailing the Spanish account of their expedition to Stone Mountain. However, that entire account has been called into question because nobody has yet to find the original account. The SMMA struggles to balance assumed history such as this and their mission. Curtis Branscome, the CEO of the SMMA discusses one interesting encounter he had with some people who believed the stories of the Spanish expeditions recounting:

[M]y favorite one was about five years ago when these two guys came to a public board meeting and explained to the board that through ground radar they knew where there were four or five wagonloads of Spanish gold that were buried in the park. They would share that with us on a halves basis. We referred that to the Development Committee and told them we would get back to them. I do not think we ever got back to them. That has been the funniest. This whole idea of the Spanish exploration coming to Stone Mountain Park is out there as a story from way back. Those folks had scribes and priests with them who kept records of their travels. It is clear that the Spanish explorers never got within 200 miles of Stone Mountain Park. We were not really ready to go dig up the park to find all that gold.⁵

Treasure hunters have company in the park's headaches. Some people believe that the mountain is some sort of spiritual center. Several historical accounts discuss the significance the mountain

⁴ "Memorial is Proposed for Atlanta's Defenders," *The DeKalb New Era*, August 2, 1956.

⁵ G. Curtis Branscome, "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #3," interview by Tim Moore, Digital Audio File, November 12, 2009, 15.

had for Native Americans. One local bookstore owner, C.E. Cantrell, believed there was much more. In his self-published book he says:

Where the Bible states, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s and Christ’s will, is being done by these Great Holy Spiritual Beings, and they place “Holy Stone Mountain” as a base or suitable place for them to reside and work from.⁶

Cantrell believed that inside the mountain was the great library of Holy works on Earth and these “Great Holy Spiritual Beings” lived and worked from this library. Almost no mention of this exists in any other source leading to the assumption that many people likely have beliefs about this and other aspects of the mountain that most academics believe to be irrelevant. The real issue here is not whether Cantrell was logical or not but instead why the park listened to people who said the memorial should be about one thing and not the people who thought it should be about another.

The Memorial Carving is the focal point of the park about which debates began long before the SMMA took control. For the entire extent of the twentieth century struggles about the significance of the Civil War raged throughout the South. Historian David Blight sums up the position of most prominent southerners at the time of the carvings original charter in that “by the turn of the century they [the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC)] had launched an ongoing campaign to designate ‘War between the States’ as the official name for the conflict.”⁷ These early attempts to change the name of the war deal with the ways in which people remember the conflict. Paul Ricoeur details that the link between “doing history” and “remembering” history are intimately connected. Calling it the War between the States instead

⁶ C.E. (Buddy) Cantrell, *Holy Stone Mountain* (Stone Mountain, GA: C.E. Cantrell, 1975), 15.

⁷ David W Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 273.

of the Civil War changes the way people think about the war.⁸ The UDC believed this name allowed the South to be portrayed in a better light as they often believed Civil War entailed the South being the enemy. Balancing Southern perspectives with the normative view on the war continues to frustrate the SMMA.

A person's school education forms much of their impression of history. Stone Mountain realizes that what children learn in school affects the way they view the park. In high schools around the park many people did not learn about the Civil War. Emy Blair, who went to Decatur High School, Decatur being the next town from the City of Stone Mountain, during the 1940s answered that, "...I do not remember any Civil War, or War Between the States history being taught in elementary school or in high school...I do not remember any emphasis being placed on the War Between the States,"⁹ when asked about what she was taught about the Civil War. While formal education may not have played a key role in developing residents' impressions of the war during construction of the memorial, the fact that she corrected herself from Civil War to War Between the States indicates that the prevailing culture did see the war as the UDC intended, as a noble lost cause on the part of the South.

1953 evidenced this prevailing culture. Roscoe Tucker proposed a plan during a public contest to design the completion of the memorial that called for finishing the southern figures but also adding northern ones. He believed that if the memorial were to represent the reconciliation between north and south people nationwide would come to pay respects to this national memorial.¹⁰ The residents of the area nearly ran him out of town and yet today that is exactly the message that the park tries to encourage.

⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 57.

⁹ Emy Evans Blair et al., "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2," 9.

¹⁰ "Stone Mountain Plan Refutes Sectionalism," *Gainesville Times* (Gainesville, GA, January 12, 1953).

Although today the park tries to present itself as a happy family place its origins are much darker. James Loewen's less than pleasant review of the park details that "Older residents know but few out-of-towners realize that this tourist trap was from its inception a Ku Klux Klan site--- indeed the sacred site to members of the second and third national klans."¹¹ This KKK involvement stemmed from the period of private ownership by the Venable family who had a long history with the KKK. This served as the primary source of contention when the Georgia State Legislature considered buying the mountain. The Georgia State Park System believed that Stone Mountain would be an excellent opportunity to expand the prestige of Georgia Parks. They convinced state legislators that they could easily augment the image of the memorial away from the KKK and into a recreational and heritage site.¹² Ironically, while it was the Georgia Parks System that fought so hard for Stone Mountain, the administration of the park went to the SMMA. A similar independent authority controlled Jekyll Island State Park, these two parks representing the most complex in the state.

The issue of the KKK did not die when the state bought the mountain. Residents of the City of Stone Mountain still describe the Klansmen as troublemakers assuring that "I do not know whether anybody from Stone Mountain belonged [to the Klan] other than Jimmy Venable,"¹³ whose family is the only one in the area that cannot deny membership. While most of the residents and visitors do not like to publicly discuss the site's connection with the KKK, they do still feel very passionately about the Confederate Memorial Carving. Branscome described a controversy in the mid-1990s when the SMMA considered taking the song "Dixie" out of their key attraction, a lasershow on the carving. He discussed that people reacted very

¹¹ James W Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York : New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1999), 262.

¹² "State Parks Dept. Urges Purchase of Stone Mountain," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, April 21, 1955).

¹³ Emy Evans Blair et al., "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2," 11.

strongly to this.¹⁴ The amount of passion that members of the KKK had for the mountain is still there, but in a different light. Now people scream for their Southern Pride instead of their racial politics.

Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation has managed all of the entertainment activities in the park since 1998. Privatizing most of the park changed the entire dynamic of the site. Originally the park focused on its natural environment as most people recognize a state or national park. By the late 1990s the park transitioned into what HFE refers to as an attraction. In many ways the new Stone Mountain Park followed the aborted attempt by the Disney Corporation to design a historically themed park. Mike Wallace studied Disney's plan and summarized it this way:

Disney's America was meant to be the next step---a "serious fun" celebration of U.S. History.

The park's "playlands" would include an Indian village and a Lewis and Clark raft ride; a Civil War fort with reenactments; an Ellis Island replica; a factory town with a ride through a blazing steel mill; a World War II airfield with flight simulators; a state fair with a ferris wheel; a family farm with country wedding and barn dance.¹⁵

Disney's primary purpose in its theme parks is to bring families closer together during their visit. Maurice Halbwachs writes that some of the strongest memories are those which occurred with members of one's family.¹⁶ Disney's America and Stone Mountain Park both realized this. The point of a park is to create positive memories so that people will want to come back. In order to entice more families to come they needed to create more entertainment. It is children who really determine whether a family has a good time at a park so they became the target of the new entertainment focus.

¹⁴ G. Curtis Branscome, "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #3," 24.

¹⁵ Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, Critical perspectives on the past; (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 164.

¹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 71.

While the park achieved its goals of attracting more families from a wider area they lost the respect of many local residents. During an oral history interview for this research two of the residents of the City of Stone Mountain described their view of the new program:

JORDAN: When the state took over the park, nobody ever told us that it would go commercial. It was to be a park for Georgians, and a monument. It started off with just a few things around there and the first thing you knew it wanted to be like, what is the name of it in Orlando?

PEET: Disneyworld.¹⁷

Was it to be a park for Georgians, and a monument only? Even in the 1950s before the state established the park, controversy surrounded what the park should be. In 1956, a magazine article discussed the various uses being considered for the park. Some of them included Jordan's concept of a basic state park while others advocated for an early version of the type of attraction the park is today.¹⁸

Even when the park was relatively new, they established a number of the entertainment elements still in use today. James Buffington recalled his favorite interaction with the staff in the 1960s:

One of the things they did was Indians attacked the train [which traveled around the mountain] and the cowboys came on to save the day. The conductor, or someone, was talking over the loudspeaker about what was going on. It was almost like a play, an actor; this person did a really good job. As a kid I was scared to death. I knew we had been attacked by Indians and we were going to get scalped. They seemed to do a good job in my experience with making it seem realistic, showing their knowledge of what was going on. I really had a positive experience with them.¹⁹

There were never any cowboy and Indian attacks anywhere near Stone Mountain. This entertainment element helped Buffington enjoy the park. He remembered being entertained and

¹⁷ Emy Evans Blair et al., "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2," 40.

¹⁸ William Hammack, "What Should the Stone Mountain Memorial Be?," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine*, May 20, 1956.

¹⁹ James Buffington, "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #1," interview by Tim Moore, Digital Audio File, October 8, 2009, 27.

that contributed to bringing his children back when they were born. Buffington focused on the natural beauty of the mountain as many others have.

Poole Maynard wrote a geological history of the mountain when it was still under Venable ownership. He prophesized that “We shall never cease to marvel at its majesty, sometimes at dawn of day, sometimes in the hours of twilight.”²⁰ Even today amidst the attractions great respect still falls on the natural wonder of the mountain. That, however, does not lead to people coming into the park as the mountain is visible for miles in all directions.

How does the park manage to keep the historical and natural elements intact while providing for their visitor’s entertainment? 1998 provided the answer. Branscome sums it up nicely. “For what we do [the SMMA] we are very interested in being as historically accurate as we can. On the other side of the fence when you get to the Crossroads [managed by HFE] as an attraction that is entertainment.”²¹ By managing the park through two separate entities the SMMA can maintain the natural and historical elements of the park while HFE can focus exclusively on making sure people have a good time. Blight studied black/white relations through the lens of the writings and public addresses of Booker T. Washington. In it he described Washington’s belief that in order for the advancement of blacks and whites to occur, they must set aside their historical differences and work together.²² Similarly, the normally opposing forces of memorial associations and entertainment corporations had to work together in order to keep Stone Mountain Park a viable and growing institution. Also in a somewhat ironic note, the General Manager for HFE, Gerald Rakestraw, is an African-American who used to work for the CEO of SMMA Curtis Branscome, who is white.

²⁰ Poole Maynard, *How Stone Mountain Was Created* (Baltimore: Waverly Press Inc., 1929), 20.

²¹ G. Curtis Branscome, “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #3,” 14.

²² Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 332-333.

A trip to almost any Civil War Site reveals that the people who work there are passionate about the war and chose the site for its historical significance. Stone Mountain is the largest memorial dealing with the American Civil War. Therefore one would assume that the people who work for the SMMA are passionate about Civil War history. Wrong. The sentiments for a given site often stem from the person in charge. Branscome discussed his interest in the Civil War saying, “[A]m I a Civil War buff? No. Probably the least depth I have in my historical knowledge would relate to the Civil War.”²³ His background is Public Administration which is very important in managing a park but in a site that is so tied to a particular element of history the leader should have a strong background in it. Even before the Memorial Carving finished people already recognized that Stone Mountain could be the Mount Rushmore for the Confederacy. This comparison in itself is telling to the impact of the mountain as Gutzon Borglum, the original sculptor, left the Stone Mountain project to design Mount Rushmore.²⁴ Just as Mount Rushmore symbolizes the ideals of the presidents carved into the face so too does Stone Mountain represent the noble lost cause of the south during the Civil War. A visitor to Mount Rushmore expects the people working there to know all about the four presidents, what they did, and why they are there. The same expectation no longer holds true at Stone Mountain. Instead of asking about the carving most visitors today want the employees to know about the attractions.

Traditional parks and historic sites offer some sort of paper guide that visitors pick up when they enter the gates or visitor center. Stone Mountain Park’s guide is more along the lines of a map at Disney World. It includes very little background but a great deal of description of restaurants, attractions, and events. The SMMA does print more traditional park brochures but it

²³ G. Curtis Branscome, “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #3,” 3.

²⁴ Dorothy Cremin, “Stone Mountain can Equal Rushmore, McWorter Says,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, July 27, 1958).

is up to the visitor to seek them out in the few exhibit-style facilities scattered throughout the park.

Locals miss the good ole days when people came to the park for the commemoration and natural elements. From 1998 onwards many residents of the surrounding communities felt as if the park abandoned the original purpose of commemoration and shifted to a corporate model of entertainment. When asked about the changes at the park Hugh Jordan responded that “It just got out of hand with this last group. We fought it. In the Senate we fought it.”²⁵ In order for the park’s management style to be redeveloped the Georgia State Legislature had to approve it. Jordan, a Stone Mountain resident and Georgia State Senator, feared that the privatization would ruin the park. From this controversy through the next five years the State Senate debated many changes during one of the most politically charged period’s in Georgia’s recent history. One of the final controversies debated dealt with the State Flag, changed shortly before the state purchased Stone Mountain, to include the Confederate Battle Flag. During the debates many State Senators and Representatives compared changing the flag to removing the carvings from Stone Mountain.²⁶ While the issues of Confederate Memorialization no longer filled visitors minds, in southern politics it is still alive and well. Today, the lasershow, not the carving is the most recognized image of the park. When asked about the meanings of the lasershow, Gerald Rakestraw responded that it is:

To entertain. Simply that, the lasershow is there to entertain. This year will be its twenty-seventh year. We definitely know it is the largest light spectacular of its kind. It has entertained millions. It does not have a deeper purpose or deeper meaning. It is there

²⁵ Emy Evans Blair et al., “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2,” 40.

²⁶ *State Government*

New State Flag: Change Design and Description of State Flag; Change Design and Description of State Seal; Provide for the Preservation and Protection of Certain Public Monuments and Memorials; Require Agencies Eligible for Receipt of State Funds to Display State Flag; Limit State Appropriations for Agencies Failing to Comply with Provisions; Provide for Enforcement

Darren Summerville, Georgia State University Law Review (Georgia State University, Fall 2001),

http://law.gsu.edu/lawreview/index/archives/show/?art=18-1/18-1_StateGovernment_Summerville.htm.

to make you feel good and have a good time with people you are with. There is good music, imagery, and fireworks. It is truly there to entertain.²⁷

The new emphasis on pure entertainment without deeper understanding exemplifies the changeover that has occurred in the park. This is precisely what locals do not like because they feel that instead of people who are truly interested in the park as a commemorative space it now draws people who do not care for the history of the mountain, only the entertainment it provides.

Part of the anger over the changes at Stone Mountain Park stems from changes in the surrounding area. Fifty years ago, the City of Stone Mountain was a small southern town where everybody knew each other. Today it is still a small town but people tend to stay in their own houses and they go to other cities for a night out instead of downtown. Emy Blair thought about what it meant to have her thoughts recorded saying that:

You have got to realize it is very difficult for one to recognize that they are the oldest one in the family. There are things that the family needs to know that I have never sat down and done. Of course nobody else in my family did it either. Just like I could say the three houses from three different generations of my family. I need to record that.²⁸

Many of these longtime residents see their neighborhoods are no longer the way they remember them and believe that if they do not speak out the old ways will be lost forever, just like they fear people will forget why Stone Mountain Park is there. This sentiment is not a new one. Even early on under the SMMA control residents felt they were gradually being excluded from the decision making process regarding the park. Elias Nour, Stone Mountain resident and “The Old Man of the Mountain” was synonymous with Stone Mountain throughout the 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s. However, a few years after the SMMA took control, Nour left the staff amid controversy

²⁷ Gerald Rakestraw, “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #4,” interview by Tim Moore, Digital Audio File, January 8, 2010, 5.

²⁸ Emy Evans Blair et al., “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2,” 49.

that the SMMA was not following the traditions of the mountain and were trying to change it into a commercial operation.²⁹

Stone Mountain Park should be a major site of study for scholars interested in Civil War Memory, Commemoration Studies, and Confederate Historians but it is not. Almost every book written about the park is either fiction or basic history. The most respected work on the site is David Freeman's *Carved In Stone* which he says is geared towards the "ordinary, intelligent reader"³⁰ as opposed to serious researchers or academics. The lack of scholastic level research into the site partially results from the nature of the park. Traditional historic parks have an aura of professional historicism to them. Since Stone Mountain's management is more like a commercial attraction it does not present as a serious site for research. A contributing factor is the sheer administrative history one has to sift through before a strong study into the commemoration itself can begin. The Memorial Carving took half a century to complete with multiple organizations failing to bring the vision to realization. Even before the state purchased the mountain another organization tried to finish the carving in the 1950s. Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, Inc. purchased the side of the mountain from the Venable's to complete the carving without their interference in hopes that what was becoming known as Stone Mountain's shame could be completed.³¹ While the study itself is fascinating most historians do not like to focus on administrative history but instead on the event itself.

The original private memorial commission, the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association (SMCMA), was fraught with problems. As Barbara Blumberg summarizes, "fights

²⁹ Marion Gaines, "Nour Steps Down at Stone Mountain."

³⁰ David B Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), ix.

³¹ "Mountain Development Nears," *Stone Mountain Beacon* (Stone Mountain, GA, April 19, 1956).

over further money raising resulted in the ouster of most of the original association directors,”³² resulting in the carving remaining unfinished during their tenure on the mountain. This is compelling history and yet an issue that historians and the park largely ignore. Other major administrative mistakes in the mountain’s history include the period under the SMMA. In 1983 the park announced that Jim Fowler was in the process of designing a wild animal park within Stone Mountain Park’s boundaries.³³ Fowler left the plan due in large part to disagreements with the SMMA and the requirements of creating an animal park in such close proximity to a major metropolitan area. With the long and complex history of mistakes and infighting within the various stakeholders in the park it is easy to see why the SMMA does not go out of its way to provide a forum for discussing the administrative history of the park.

With any enterprise money is one of the primary factors in success or failure. Throughout Stone Mountain’s history management of finances has always been an issue. Even Freeman, who tried to present the least confrontational account he could of Stone Mountain’s history, recounted that the SMCMA was guilty of “excessive spending on everything but the carving.”³⁴ Today they still spend money on everything but the carving, but now focus on entertainment and attractions for what the park believes its visitors want. If all of these organizations have been so bad at management of the site, why were they allowed to continue? The answer goes all the way back to the American Revolution. After Independence groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) took charge in creating the national myth. After the Civil War the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) took charge in creating the southern myth of the Lost Cause. With help from many southern leaders the UDC successfully,

³² Barbara Blumberg, “Review: [untitled],” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 1 (June 1998): 199.

³³ “New’s Release: Georgia’s Stone Mountain Park” (Stone Mountain Memorial Association, September 8, 1983), SM Collection MSS:95 Box 26 Folder 13, Emory University: Robert W. Woodruff Library: Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

³⁴ Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 119.

in many southerners views, rewrote the national and confederate myths together saying that George Washington, not Jefferson Davis, was the first rebel president.³⁵ The UDC's incredible popularity in the south largely meant that they could do no wrong. The SMCMA developed out of the UDC, and thus benefitted from their notoriety. The SMMA did not benefit from UDC connections but instead from their position as a state appointed agency.

Another point in the questioning of the administrative history of the mountain surfaces in Freeman's book. Today, HFE spends thousands of dollars on its marketing and yet the park cannot market the mountain's connections across the country. In his review of *Carved in Stone* Robert Blythe sums up the connection:

In addition to relating the story of the memorial, *Carved in Stone* touches on the early settlement of the area and the growth of the town of Stone Mountain. The extensive granite quarrying at the mountain also receives attention. Stone Mountain supplied stone for many miles of paving and curbing as well as for monuments and public buildings in Washington, D.C., and across the nation.³⁶

Some of the federal connections include post offices, courthouses, and the steps of the United States Capitol Building. Additionally, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial details the racist attitudes associated with Stone Mountain. Today the park may struggle for recognition but it was not always so. In the 1950s, Stone Mountain was a high profile issue during the debates over buying the mountain for the creation of the state park. In an editorial in 1954, Grace Edwards expressed the sentiments of many Atlanta-area residents when she called upon then Governor Talmadge to chair the Stone Mountain State Park Fund in its efforts to raise the requisite funds to purchase the mountain from

³⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 256-257.

³⁶ Robert W. Blythe, "Review: [untitled]," *The Public Historian* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 99.

the Venable's.³⁷ In 1954, Georgians knew Stone Mountain's significance as a place of history whereas today they largely only know its significance as a tourist attraction.

Why did Georgians feel so passionately about the state purchasing Stone Mountain? The answer lies largely in the times. The 1950s saw great changes especially in regards to racial and sectional relations. In the introduction to his compilation of essays on commemorations John Gillis describes that after the great revolutions "the need to commemorate arose directly out of an ideologically driven desire to break with the past, to construct as great a distance as possible between the new age and the old."³⁸ In the 1950s South the exact opposite motivated the populous. They saw their world changing around them and did not want it to. They chose to change the flag to include the Confederate Battle Flag and advocated the state acquisition and completion of the Memorial Carving to preserve the Old South culture that was under fire. These were not the only societal changes many Georgians resented during this period. During his oral history interview Mayor Peet discussed the changing condition of the area in the 1950s. He described how before the 1950s generation after generation lived in the City of Stone Mountain but beginning in the 1950s it transitioned into an Atlanta suburb losing its sense of community.³⁹

Kirk Savage writes about the political side of memorialization. He states that "monuments make credible particular collectives... [while they] erase others."⁴⁰ Finishing the Memorial Carving at Stone Mountain solidified the Confederacy in the history of the South. At the same time, using the images of the three men made it about the courageous boys and men who fought for the south, not the tenets of the war such as slavery. To many people in the mid-

³⁷ Grace Edwards, "Creation of Stone Mountain State Park Fund, With Gov. Talmadge as Chairman, Is Urged," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, October 15, 1954).

³⁸ *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

³⁹ Emy Evans Blair et al., "Stone Mountain Oral Histories #2," 36.

⁴⁰ *Commemorations*, 143.

twentieth century the Memorial Carving achieved these goals. However, as Margaret Olin explains what is touching to one group of people is wounding to another.⁴¹ As the years progressed the SMMA began to realize that focusing on the Memorial Carving alienated many potential visitors. In response the park began to shift the focus from the carving to the recreational opportunities and eventually entertainment possibilities of the park.

How did the SMMA find itself in this position? William Johnston says that “democratization of the past atomizes memory, displacing it from the nation to the locality.”⁴² When the SMMA focused on the Memorial Carving it meant focusing on the history the carving represented. Since SMMA never attempted to explain exactly what the carving was meant to represent the uncontrolled interpretation of the site ran free. Some groups such as the KKK took it as a heroic sign of their ideals. Others like the NAACP viewed it as a negative scar on the progressing Georgian society. By removing the focus from the carving the controversial nature of the site also fell out of public sight. Ironically, it was all of the people of the United States which helped construct the memorial in the first place. A 1954 article in the Decatur News revealed what few people realized. The United State Mint helped raise money for the Confederate Memorial Carving. Much like today, people in the 1920s collected specially minted coins. At the time, these coins had to come from an official US Mint as opposed to the foreign mints used today. The SMCMA petitioned to mint a collectable coin with the proceeds going towards the carving. The Coolidge Administration allowed it and financed the early stages of carving.⁴³ Today, the period of carving is seen as a racist and sectionalist event. Rather than

⁴¹ Margaret Olin, “The Winter Garden and Virtual Heaven,” in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 140.

⁴² William M. Johnston, “Review: [untitled],” *The Public Historian* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 75.

⁴³ Charles D. MCKinney Sr., “The Challenge of Stone Mountain,” *The Decatur News* (Decatur, GA, February 25, 1954).

challenging people's beliefs and possibly causing them not to return, the park prefers a happy ignorance of the events surrounding their history.

It is difficult to boil down all of the issues in the development of a commemorative site like Stone Mountain but Scott Myerly comes close in his review of *Commemorations*. He provides a listing of the major themes of the essays:

John R. Gillis' introduction essay, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," sounds the subject's depths: "Identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*," (p.5). Richard Handler's "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" points out the complexities and dangers of oversimplification: "the concept of identity is peculiar to the modern Western world" (p.27). David Lowenthal, "Identity, Heritage, and History" tells readers that "heritage distills the past into icons of identity" (p.43).⁴⁴

The point about Gillis' work is evidenced in that Georgian's do not think about what it means to be a Southerner unless they are prompted. However, they do utilize their identity as a Southerner when considering issues like the Stone Mountain Memorial Carving. This study falls victim to the second point about oversimplification. Georgian's in this study are the ruling majority in Georgia. Racial, ethnic, social, religious, political, and all other non-mainstream groups are not factored into the analysis except on specific occasions. The final point is the most direct. The heritage Georgians have regarding the Civil War shapes the way they view themselves. This phenomenon is what told Georgians of the first half of the twentieth century that Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis were their heroes and they should honor them accordingly. Today Georgia has shifted again into a more cosmopolitan society incorporating more varied populations. To keep up with the changing heritage and identity of its visitors the park changed its own public identity. While the original focus on the Memorial Carving may no longer hold true, the sheer excitement over the park when it first became a possibility carries on in the ever-changing landscape of the park. Many of the original great plans revolving around

⁴⁴ Scott Hughes Myerly, "Review: [untitled]," *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 175.

the carving such as an amphitheater carved into the rock may not have happened the way an article in the October 11th issue of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in 1959 but the controversial carving now has a new role in the best known event in the park today, the lasershow.⁴⁵

The park certainly believes that Georgians' identity has shifted away from that of the Old South. Gillis says that "identity has taken on the status of sacred object, an 'ultimate concern,' worth fighting and even dying for."⁴⁶ Southerners identity during the Civil War certainly contributed to their actions. Afterwards groups like the KKK and the decades of legislation reinforced the Old South identity. Few people are willing to fight for that identity today. Has it actually changed, or have people simply internalized it? This identity could be best exhibited by the locals. In her study on urban landscapes Dolores Hayden observed that by conducting oral histories the sentiments of the community revealed themselves more effectively as people heard their peers views and utilized them to develop their own.⁴⁷ In the oral histories for this study with the residents of Stone Mountain the Old South identity did surface but they reversed the traditional sentiments regarding race.

This now hidden identity was at the forefront in the 1950s. In a local newspaper article in 1954, the author expressed these sentiments saying that the state needed Stone Mountain not to represent the south's tradition of slavery, but the tradition of States' Rights.⁴⁸ Douglas McCurdy, relative of Emy Blair from the oral history interviews, was one of the men who advocated the memorial for this reason. Blair naturally had a connection with the original state development of the site. Throughout the interview process, both recorded and unrecorded, saw this sentiment always just below the surface of the participants.

⁴⁵ Lee Fuhrman, "Stone Mountain's Future Big," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, October 11, 1959).

⁴⁶ *Commemorations*, 4.

⁴⁷ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 49.

⁴⁸ "Citizen Cooperation Might be Helpful," *The Decatur News* (Decatur, GA, April 1, 1954).

Even though most of the locals held very similar views on what Stone Mountain should be it is important to remember that the residents were by no means in full agreement. Cantrell is a perfect example of a contemporary to the residents in the oral history interview who took a vastly different view on the mountain's significance. Whereas most locals wanted the mountain to become a symbol of their heritage, which it did for several decades, Cantrell believed a higher power chose the mountain and the people living nearby to spread a holy message. "I have been impressed by those Great Holy Spiritual Beings to reveal some of the spiritual aspects of Stone Mountain so that it will become known as Holy Stone Mountain in the not too distant future."⁴⁹ He wrote this in 1975; just eight years later part of his vision came to fruition. Rather than Cantrell sharing his message from the Spiritual Beings, the awesome power of technology took over in 1983 with the institution of the Stone Mountain Laser-Lightshow.

One message that never gained any ground at Stone Mountain is that of the slaves. The KKK enjoyed a virtual lock on the commemoration practices at the mountain in the decades following the Civil War. Not true across the entire South. Fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation Richmond area blacks petitioned to hold a commemoration ceremony in downtown. Eventually the issue went all the way up to the United States Congress. After a heated debate the Senate finally ordered that the commemoration ceremony be allowed due in large part to the narration of Senators like Thomas Nelson Page as described by Blight:

In this romantic imagery, Thomas Nelson Page's fictions arrived triumphantly as a force on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Transformed once again into *Confederate veterans* and loyal slaves, blacks were allowed their celebration as payment for wartime service. An emancipation commemoration on these terms would not in the least transgress the Jim Crow social and political structure that these very politicians had helped to construct.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cantrell, *Holy Stone Mountain*, 5.

⁵⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 372.

While Virginia may have relaxed its treatment of former slaves in the realm of commemoration, Stone Mountain was not about to follow suit. If any concessions are claimed at all it is that the SMMA quickly squashed all racial meaning behind the carving making it instead a place for all Georgians to come together in their shared heritage.

As many reporters illustrated during the debates over the creation of Stone Mountain Park, the site already served as a major tourist attraction. This article from the town indicates the immense focus on things at the mountain. It details that in the nineteenth century people travelled from around the surrounding area to see the natural phenomenon of the mountain itself. However, by the 1950s, the article argues that people need something more in order to draw them to the site. This article suggests that more attractions need to associate with the mountain in order for a park to be viable.⁵¹ Forty years later, HFE realized that suggestion.

The real issue the park had to overcome dealt with the various groups that previously attached themselves to the sight. SMMA took charge of the park with a mission statement directing them to preserve the park as a Confederate Memorial. Within two decades the park realized that the sentiments from the 1955 article in the *Stone Mountain Beacon* held true, they needed to build more attractions to draw a wider audience. In the early 1980s, people simply did not come to the park in sufficient numbers based on the draw of the Confederate memory. In half a century the public view of the mountain underwent an almost complete reversal. From the 1910s through the state's purchase of the mountain the KKK dominated organized use of Stone Mountain. While the Memorial Carving was designed as a place to pay tribute to the Confederacy the KKK saw the mountain as a place for pilgrimage. A postcard produced out of pocket by a KKK member captions "Stone Mountain, Largest Solid Stone in the World, one mile from Base to Summit. On its highest pinnacle the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Organized at

⁵¹ "Stone Mountain Old Tourist Resort," *Stone Mountain Beacon* (Stone Mountain, GA, January 27, 1955).

Midnight, Nov. 25th, 1915.”⁵² Although the KKK held such a strong connection to the site the park realized they were only the most vocal group and not the norm by the 1970s. The park refocused the park’s marketing towards what it believed to be its primary audience increasing family entertainment and decreasing Confederate theming.

Why do people need so much to entertain them at the site? For decades the natural elements of the park itself drew crowds to the site. A great deal of literature from the 1940s and 1950s advertises the natural beauty and serenity of the sight. In a 1948 edition of *Ford Times* the author details the hiking and vistas that the mountain provides to the explorer who takes one of their vehicles on the expedition to the sight.⁵³ In 1948 Ford Motor Company promoted the natural wilderness character of the mountain to promote their product, cars that could bring Atlanta residents out to the wilderness on an expedition. Fifty years later, entertainment changed from exploring the outdoors to experiencing man-made attractions that fulfill the same desire. HFE believes that by promoting the park as a family fun area creates the same sort of interest that the natural elements did in the 1940s.

Articles like the one from Ford did not make it through the next decade. The SMMA realized that many people would not want to hike up the mountain. During the period of private ownership adventurous drivers could attempt to scale the mountain with their vehicles. Scott Candler, one of the early leaders of the SMMA told local community members that with state acquisition would come an end to this old practice. During a press conference he described that one of the first priorities that the SMMA had for the mountain was to create a public transportation system from the base to the summit of the mountain. Candler’s concept manifested as the Sky Ride which still represents one of the most successful attractions that the

⁵² , Ku Klux Klan Collection MSS:885 Folder 29, Emory University: Robert W. Woodruff Library: Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

⁵³ John D. Murphy, “Stone Mountain Curiosities,” *Ford Times*, March 1948.

park created since its inception. While many things have changed in the park throughout its history, the management's struggle to get people to the top is one of the few that remains high on the priority list.⁵⁴

After all, how many people are really going to go to the park simply for the Confederate Memorial? When a site such as Stone Mountain enters public knowledge it becomes an attraction unto itself. How many people visit exhibits on the Berlin Wall to see a structure that they support? Who goes to the Washington Monument solely to pay tribute to George Washington not caring about the vista it provides? Do people climb the stairs of the Statue of Liberty to marvel at its symbolism or to look across New York Harbor from the Crown? James Loewen recognizes that because Stone Mountain has something unique, the largest bas relief sculpture in the world; people will go to see that, not what it represents. He states that:

Historic sites even take on a celebrity of their own. Stone Mountain in Georgia is an obvious example, visited by tourists who have no interest in the Civil War, much less any leaning toward the Confederacy. They simply want to see what is reputed to be the world's largest monument.⁵⁵

Because most people do not have that Confederate connection, the park has more freedom to capitalize on the memorial. Rather than being forced to present a very somber tone, it can celebrate its spotlight and take advantage by making the site a happy and exciting place when families can come and have fun.

Is this concept of the site being a destination unto itself aside from a Confederate Shrine new? History tells a different story. Even as early as 1955 State Legislators realized the immense economic impact that developing Stone Mountain into a state owned tourist destination could provide. The legislators' desire for the creation of the park is evidenced in an article detailing Governor Griffin's refusal to condemn the private property that would become the park.

⁵⁴ "Candler Outlines Plans for Stone Mountain Park" (Decatur, GA, March 13, 1958).

⁵⁵ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 27-28.

The article reports “The 1955 legislature urged Griffin to condemn the land if necessary in order to develop the mountain as a major Georgia tourist attraction.”⁵⁶ While the Legislative branch of the State desperately wanted to start a park at whatever cost, the Executive recognized that if they condemned the land it would allow for development of the park but it would mean violating the trust of the electorate. Political decisions plagued the development of the park until 1998 when HFE, free of any political considerations, could take charge and turn the park into a commercial enterprise.

HFE is happy to discuss their successes across the country with various types of parks and attractions. They say that they understand the market for Stone Mountain because they are based nearby. However, if one makes the mistake of calling Stone Mountain a theme park around its General Manger, Gerald Rakestraw, be prepared. He quickly corrects that HFE does not view the park as a theme park but as an attraction composed of many man-made and natural elements that collectively create a great visitor experience. The real question in that remains, is a Confederate Memorial an attraction? Rakestraw sees the Confederate Memorial as one aspect of the overall Stone Mountain Park attraction. He does not see any conflict between SMMA maintaining the Confederate nature of the park and HFE turning a profit like the 1955 Legislature envisioned to Governor Griffin.⁵⁷

Today *The Preeminent Family Entertainment Attraction of the South*, as HFE markets it, is a symbol of pride for Atlanta, for Georgia, and for the South in general. In the early days of the park, the aforementioned pride manifested as the great tribute to the Confederacy. Today that pride resides in the park’s family friendly entertainment and its worldwide recognition as such.

⁵⁶ “Stone Mtn. Fight Out, Griffin Says,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, March 3, 1955).

⁵⁷ Gerald Rakestraw, “Stone Mountain Oral Histories #4,” 22-23.

From the beginning, many saw Stone Mountain as not only a major site for Georgia but for the South in general. In the years after the Civil War many southerners realized that they would not be welcomed back into the Union without substantial effort. In order to ensure that southerners would not be forgotten in the progressing country they began banding together both in formalized organizations and in simple spirit. Southern Pride often conjures notions of racist Confederate ideology. At the turn of the last century, southerners wanted to create an identity they could be proud of. The SMCMA realized the power that Southern Pride held in the 1910s and 1920s in their campaign to build the memorial. As quoted in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* South Carolina Governor Thomas G. McLeod called upon the southerners to join together in the Stone Mountain campaign saying “Let us present a united front and declare to the world that the south will build at Stone Mountain with its own money and efforts an everlasting monument to the cause so dear to our hearts.”⁵⁸ Much as Atlanta is often referred to as the Capitol of the South so too is Stone Mountain the monument of the south. Stone Mountain has always been a very visual and memorable landmark throughout the south.

Sometimes this landmark has had a very practical purpose. Until computers many aircraft pilots had to rely on ground markings to identify their location and to find their destination airport. In keeping with the tradition of Stone Mountain being a bastion for the south, in 1953 local groups painted a massive arrow on top of the mountain to guide pilots to the Atlanta airport. As a 1953 article describes “the nation’s largest aircraft directional marker. An arrow, 320-feet long and 30-feet wide” was painted atop the mountain so that all pilots could find their way into Atlanta.⁵⁹ Stone Mountain’s connection with Atlanta did not stop with arrows

⁵⁸ “South is Urged to aid Memorial,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, February 26, 1925), Vol. LVII No. 258 edition, 4.

⁵⁹ “Nation’s Largest Marker: Big Arrow Atop Stone Mtn. Points to Atlanta,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, December 6, 1953).

from the mountain to the city. Stone Mountain is considered part of the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area. Georgia's Major League Sports Teams are all based in Atlanta and they form a major partner with Stone Mountain and Atlanta's other area attractions to present an entire vacation destination. Stone Mountain typically marks one day in a visitor's trip to the Atlanta area. Today, Stone Mountain Park relies on its connections with Atlanta to bring more visitors into the park.

While a large yellow arrow on the mountain became unnecessary in the 1970s the mountain was not yet safe from mountaintop development aimed at making the mountain a worldwide destination. Stone Mountain Park issued a press release in 1983 detailing its plans for the top of the mountain:

Officials of SMP, The SMMA, and William Moffitt Associates are proud to join with the Atlanta Coca-Cola Bottling Company in this effort. The Top of the Mountain Theater, scheduled to open in the Summer of 1984, will provide yet another facility for the family to enjoy TOGETHER, maintaining the emphasis on the enjoyment of one of the State's most beautiful settings in a wholesome and family-oriented atmosphere.⁶⁰

The Top of the Mountain Theater never came to fruition but a series of other buildings were constructed throughout the 1980s. This is one of the first times that the park presents itself as a family entertainment venue due in large part to man-made attractions. Ironically, the plans in the early 1980s represent on one hand the sentiment that the park maintains today, while on the other represent exactly the opposite goal. As evidenced by the earlier newspaper articles, building bigger and more memorable things atop the mountain served as a symbol of pride for the park, Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and the South in general. However, today park managers want the top of the mountain to speak for itself and allow all of the man-made attractions to occupy the surrounding grounds. Family based enjoyment of the park is now the number one priority at the

⁶⁰ "New's Release: Georgia's Stone Mountain Park" (Stone Mountain Memorial Association, October 6, 1983), SM Collection MSS:95 Box 26 Folder 13, Emory University: Robert W. Woodruff Library: Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

site. While this particular theater may not have been successful today the 4-D theater in the Crossroads Attraction serves a very similar role the earlier one would have.

This study barely scratched the surface of Stone Mountain's story. The mountain has always served as a symbol of the area from local politics to Southern Identity. The first half-century after the Civil War the mountain became a site where southerners could remember and pay tribute to the Confederacy. In the middle of the twentieth century the mountain became a state park in the whirlwind of the Civil Rights Movement. The last half century witnessed the park transforming from a Confederate Memorial to a modern commercial enterprise. The history is still there, but it now takes a back seat to the entertainment attractions that SMMA and HFE have created. So what?

It is easy to look at Stone Mountain as an anomaly that has no bearing on the rest of the country or world. This would be a terrible mistake. Other historical sites are already beginning to utilize some of the techniques that were previously employed at Stone Mountain. George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, opened to the public in 1860 as a simple house museum. Today the site features tours themed around the *National Treasure* films and an "orientation center" that includes a 4-D theater, just like in Crossroads at Stone Mountain.⁶¹ Mount Vernon is often considered to be one of the most old fashioned historic sites in the country yet they have adopted a similar visitation emphasis on an active experience as HFE employs at Stone Mountain. Even the hallowed Smithsonian Institution (SI) is guilty of shifting their visitation strategies towards entertainment. Throughout most of their museums, interactive exhibits have slowly been gaining in prevalence. Additionally, they focus on the family with special programs designed specifically for families to actively spend time together, much like Sky Hike at Stone

⁶¹ "George Washington's Mount Vernon - Plan Your Visit," *George Washington's Mount Vernon: Estate and Gardens*, 2010, <http://www.mountvernon.org/visit/plan/index.cfm/>.

Mountain. Additionally, SI now focuses a great amount of time and energy on events like the Folk Life Festival. Much like the various cultural festivals HFE hosts, the focus is less on the material and more on providing an enjoyable experience.⁶² Even the National Mall, what should be the ultimate example of sacred commemoration, follows many of the patterns of commercialization and entertainment focus of Stone Mountain. Each year three events comprise the majority of planning on the part of the National Park Service. The National Cherry Blossom Festival, much like the Yellow Daisy Festival at Stone Mountain has much less to do with the actual plants and much more to do with making sure that there is enough to keep visitors entertained. Memorial Day should be the most somber occasion yet it is highlighted each year by a concert on the United States Capitol Grounds with very similar themes and experiences to watching one of the lasershowes that HFE produces. Finally, the National Independence Day Celebration draws almost all of the park resources away from its memorials and focuses them on providing the visitor with the ultimate family entertainment experience, virtually the mission statement of HFE at Stone Mountain Park.⁶³ Stone Mountain is not a fluke; it is the way many of our historic sites are evolving.

Secondary Sources

Currently there are no secondary works that look specifically at the combination of issues I have discussed. My primary secondary material formed the building blocks for each aspect of my study but I had to combine them in a way that hopefully made sense. My most important secondary materials can be categorized into a few distinct subject categories; Stone Mountain histories, commemoration/memory studies, and park/visitor studies.

⁶² "Smithsonian Institution," <http://www.si.edu/>.

⁶³ Author's personal knowledge and experience as a National Park Service employee at National Mall and Memorial Parks, 2008-2010.

For Stone Mountain histories one book was critical, *Carved in Stone* by David Freeman. This book is as close to the definitive work on the history of Stone Mountain as currently exists. Although I seldom cited the book in this thesis, it served as my benchmark when applying the other primary and secondary sources. Freeman wrote his book as a cut and dry history of the site and thus there is very little thesis development. His book follows the matter-of-fact styling of a guidebook. The information is vital but there is no argument upon which to agree or refute. Because so little has been written at a professional level about Stone Mountain I gave this book extra attention reading many scholarly reviews and including some of their thoughts in the paper.

Commemoration and Memory studies comprised the bulk of my secondary research. In order for me to understand what was going on with the controversies surrounding the degree of Confederate heritage at the site I needed a broad background on the theories. One of the main sources I utilized in this regard was *Commemorations* edited by John Gillis. This collection of essays detail several different case studies including their subject matter, approaches taken, and responses to them. Many of the authors' observations on commemorative projects hold true in a study of Stone Mountain thus acting as a link between other sites and this one.

Race and Reunion served as another key work on this subject. David Blight wrote what is essentially the textbook on Confederate memory after the war. His views on the state of affairs during the post-war period and the evolution of southern identity serve as a backdrop for the events occurring at Stone Mountain during the period of study. This book allowed me a frame of reference for what sentiments were widespread on the ideas of southern identity during the period to analyze the decisions made at Stone Mountain, in particular the changes from one time period to the next. Although this work primarily discusses larger issues than Stone

Mountain was directly involved with placing the events in the park in a wider context allowed the points to more fully develop.

Finally visitor/park studies benefitted primarily from Mike Wallace's *Mickey Mouse History*. Primarily I utilized his essay on the prospective Disney's American. Disney's focus on family entertainment often at the expense of historical accuracy virtually parallels what HFE initiated at Stone Mountain Park almost a decade later. Disney sought to "teach" history at the park by creating various lands for periods and regions in American History. Similarly Stone Mountain created the Crossroads attraction initially as a recreated southern town from the mid-late 1800s. Disney did not succeed in their attempts and now HFE has realized that they made a mistake. Ten years after Disney planned the park Stone Mountain followed their example. Fifteen years after Disney realized the plan would not succeed, Stone Mountain did as well. Mike Wallace's study of Disney served as a framework to my study of Stone Mountain. Without his step by step analysis I would not have known what approaches to take in this study.

James Loewen's *Lies Across America* served as an excellent outsider viewpoint on visitors and historic sites. While he does not dedicate much time to Stone Mountain his very pointed views on the site reveal the way that many scholars look at the park today. Some of his observations directly conflict with much of the other primary evidence I found while other evidence supported some of his other claims. This is the ultimate sign of a good secondary work in that I could evaluate his arguments against the primary resources I found.

Primary Sources

Due in large part to the fact that no study exactly like this has been published; I relied significantly on primary sources. My primary sources are also divided into several categories,

including news releases, magazine articles, newspaper articles, oral histories, and personal experiences.

I only cited two news releases from the park but I utilized several others to develop an overall sense of what sorts of decision making processes characterized the park's history. These primarily tell the story of the plans that the park had at various points in its development. Few of these groundbreaking projects came to fruition but it was valuable to see the types of attractions that have been planned for the site in order to understand how the park evolved the way it did.

I read through several magazine articles detailing the park and its development. These were primarily from the Post-World War Two period before the State Park was established. These magazines are important because they are one of the only ways that the story of Stone Mountain got out from the Atlanta area during that period. Therefore, these articles do not have the very insider perspective with a sense of ownership that many of the primary materials do. Additionally, since many of these magazines were published by automakers it served to show that from the early days Stone Mountain has had a corporate element.

Newspaper articles formed the bulk of my primary research. Most of the newspaper articles I consulted came from the Elias Nour Collection. The collection, managed by Dr. George Coletti (Elias Nour's nephew), focuses on articles that featured Nour. Nour was known as "the old man of the mountain" and thus virtually every article in the collection deals with commentary on the mountain and later the park. This was the most complete collection I found of articles dealing with the mountain during Venable ownership, the challenges of carving the memorial, the debates over state acquisition, the things that should be incorporated into the park, and commentary on the SMMA's management of the park. Without question I would not have

been able to accomplish this study without the vast array of material I took from this collection as well as other articles found in other archives on the subject.

During the course of researching for this project I had the opportunity to conduct four separate oral history interviews. These interviews covered many of the major players at the park and surrounding area. Since I conducted the interviews myself I had the unique opportunity to ask my subject my actual research questions rather than attempting to apply my themes to something already extant.

James Buffington, the first interviewee, is my uncle and thus I had a unique window to ask him the questions I really wanted answered without the risk of crossing a line of courtesy. I chose to interview him not only as my relative but also because he grew up near the mountain and had taken his children there to experience the site. His interview served as a great warm-up for my later interviews.

My second interview was an event unto itself. Initially scheduled to be with just Dr. George Coletti, when I arrived I discovered that in addition there would be nine other residents of the City of Stone Mountain. They included a former State Senator, the town Mayor, a local doctor and reverend, a retired schoolteacher, and several other prominent members of the community. This interview provided insights into the local communities interactions with the decisions made at the park that otherwise would be completely absent from the study. Additionally, by interviewing multiple people at the same time their conversations developed largely on their own, much the way visitors' interact with the site.

Curtis Branscome, the CEO of SMMA, comprised my third interview while the GM of HFE, Gerald Rakestraw, rounded out the interview series. These two interviews I saw as two sides of the same story. These two men run the park and thus their insights into the evolution

and future of the park reveal much more than written material ever could. The ability to compare and contrast their visions of various issues in particular made these interviews useful as it evidenced the multi-use and multi-purpose nature of the park.

Finally, I could not exclude my own experiences with the site. Since I was in elementary school I have visited the site at least once a year. While not a traditional style of primary source, my experiences guided my approach to the study of the site and gave me information that is simply not recorded anywhere else. A picture may be worth a thousand words but an experience cannot be expressed at all. Without having so much background to begin with I would never have been able to produce this study with any sense of passion.

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