H34(418)

To: All NPS Parks and Offices

From: Acting Chief Historian

Subject: National Park Service Thematic Outline for American History

The National Park Service has long used a thematic framework or outline of American history and prehistory in studying, planning for, and interpreting historic sites. Such an outline was last published in 1987 in a yellow paperback titled History and Prehistory in the National Park Service and the National Historic Landmarks Program.

Four years ago, Congress directed us to revise this outline, in cooperation with outside professional organizations, to better reflect current scholarship and represent the diversity of America's past. We recently completed this task and transmitted the revised outline to Congress. A copy is attached.

The preamble to the outline summarizes its development, intended use, and underlying philosophy. It will serve us and other interested parties in evaluating historic properties for the National Register of Historic Places, for National Historic Landmark designation, and for potential addition to the National Park System; in assessing how well American history is represented in existing parks and other protected areas; and in enhancing park interpretive programs to provide a fuller understanding of the nation's past. Given the broad, conceptual nature of the outline, it will often need to be supplemented by more detailed outlines as particular topics are addressed.

We plan to publish guidance and develop training for use of the revised outline this fiscal year. Meanwhile, feel free to call Patty Henry (202/343-8163), Barry Macintosh (202/343-8169), or me (202/343-8164) with any questions you may have about the outline and its use.

Attachment

File item 2: THEMFRAM.DOC 10/18/94 9:56AM

[2] From: Dwight Pitcaithley at NP-NPS 10/19/94 11:12AM (48872 bytes: 15 ln, 1 fl)
To: STMA Superintendent's Office (Michael Watson) at NP-WASO
Subject: Thematic Framework
---------- Message Contents ----------

Text item 1:

Michael,

Many thanks for your time yesterday. I thought it important to expose Jim to all the good things that are happening at Mather. He was impressed.

Thanks again.

Attached is the revised thematic framework for history. It represents a major change from the "yellow book." The History Division is planning on printing it.

Let me know what you think.

Dwight

File item 2: THEMFRAM.BM2 10/14/94 10:22AM

REVISION OF THE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S

THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

1994

REVISION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Preamble

Grounded in the latest scholarship in history and archeology, this revised thematic framework responds to a Congressional mandate to ensure that the full diversity of American history and prehistory is expressed in the National Park Service's identification and interpretation of historic properties. It resulted from a workshop held June 18-20, 1993, in Washington, DC, cosponsored by the Organization of American Historians and the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History and supported by the American Historical Association. Participation was evenly divided between academic scholars and NPS professionals.

New scholarship has changed dramatically the way we look at the past. In the introduction to *The New American History* (1991), historian Eric Foner, a former president of the Organization of American Historians, describes this transformation: "In the course of the past twenty years, American history has been remade. Inspired initially by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—which shattered the 'consensus' vision that had dominated historical writing—and influenced by new methods borrowed from other disciplines, American historians redefined the very nature of historical study." That remaking or redefining of the past has expanded the boundaries of inquiry to encompass not only great men and events but also ordinary people and everyday life.

So profound have been these changes that the group charged with infusing the new scholarship into the NPS thematic framework quickly concluded that an entirely new approach was needed. The first NPS framework, adopted in 1936, was conceived in terms of the "stages of American progress" and served to celebrate the achievements of the founding fathers and the inevitable march of democracy. Revisions in 1970 and 1987 substantially changed the framework's format and organization but not its basic conceptualization of the past. The present revision represents a clear break with that conceptualization.

The revised framework will guide the NPS, working independently and with its partners in the private and public sectors, in:

> (1) evaluating the significance of resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, for designation as National Historic Landmarks, or for potential addition to the National Park System;
>
> (2) assessing how well the themes are currently represented in existing units of the National Park System and in other protected areas; and,
>
> (3) expanding and enhancing the interpretive programs at existing units of the National Park System to provide a fuller understanding of our nation's past.

The use of the framework need not be limited to the federal level, however, for the conceptualization it provides can equally inform preservation and interpretation at local, state, and regional levels.

The framework's themes are represented in the following diagram. They embrace prehistory to the modern period and a multiplicity of human experiences. The diagram reflects how scholarship is dramatically changing the way we look at the past, reconstructing it as an integrated, diverse, complex, human experience. Each segment in the diagram represents a significant aspect of the human experience. The reality of the interrelationships is reflected in the overlapping circles.

The framework draws upon the work of scholars across disciplines to provide a structure for both capturing the complexity and meaning of human experience and making that past a coherent, integrated whole. For purposes of organization, the following outline, like the diagram, provides eight seemingly discrete categories, but they are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Cutting across and connecting the eight categories are three historical building blocks: people, time, and place.

People: The centrality of people may seem obvious but should not be taken for granted. In their work, recent scholars have emphasized that people are the primary agents of change and must be the focus when we try to recapture the past. The framework also recognizes the variety of people who have populated our past. In every category of the outline, consideration of the variables of race, ethnicity, class, and gender will help us better grasp the full range of human experience. This approach does not mean forsaking the whole and breaking up our past into small unrelated pieces, but rather recognizing how the whole has been shaped by our varied histories.

Time: Time is central to both prehistory and history, not simply as a mechanism to locate or isolate events in history, but also as the focus of our concern with process and change over time. The emphasis is not on "what happened" but rather on "how and why," on the transformations that turn the past into the present.

There is no assumption of progress or inevitability in interpreting these transformations. Instead, the emphasis is on the tension between change and continuity and on understanding why and how particular choices were made. There is no fixed periodization scheme in this new framework. While the committee of scholars who worked on this revision recognizes that there are moments of significant change in our past, it has not proved valuable to break the past up into rigid segments of time that often ignore or obscure the complexity of historical change.

Place: The outline that follows was developed to address issues of national significance, yet it recognizes that region, community, and other dimensions of place are relevant. This framework acknowledges the richness of local and regional experiences and recognizes difference in place—particularly regional difference—as an important factor in a fuller understanding of both the origins of national change and the impact of national trends and events. Because place is the concrete context in which our history unfolds, a richer reconstruction of the past must include local and regional experience to help build appreciation for our national experience.

People, time, and place reach across all eight themes and contribute to the interconnections among the themes. One example that can be used to illustrate this interconnectedness is a Southern plantation dating from the 1830s. A quick survey suggests that the significance of this site cuts across every category of the outline. The move of a planter, his family, and his sizable household of slaves from Tidewater Virginia to land purchased from the Choctaws in Alabama would fall obviously under "Peopling Places," but the economic imperatives and agricultural developments that triggered the move and the adaptation of the plantation system to the new environment would fit under "Developing the American Economy,"

"Expanding Science and Technology," and "Transforming the Environment." While the lives of the plantation's white and black, male and female inhabitants fall under "Peopling Places" and "Creating Social Institutions and Movements," the design and construction of the distinctive "big house" illustrates the theme of "Expressing Cultural Values." The transfer of the planter's political power from Virginia to Alabama and the role of the planter class in antebellum Alabama falls under "Shaping the Political Landscape." Finally, the planter's dependence on the cotton economy and his influential role in international trade on the eve of the Civil War tie directly into "Developing the American Economy" and "Changing Role of the U.S. in the World." The outline suggests that users think broadly, not narrowly, that they look beyond traditional categories of historical significance in an effort to recapture the larger meaning and depth of past experience.

The framework rests on the assumption that, just as our understanding of the past has been reshaped in recent decades, so it will continue to evolve in the future. It should not be viewed as a final document or definitive statement. It is a part of an ongoing effort to ensure that the preservation and interpretation of our nation's historic and prehistoric resources continue to be informed by the best scholarship available.

This new conceptualization will assist the National Park Service in deepening and broadening its identification and interpretation of sites. It suggests fresh opportunities to assess the significance of sites from new perspectives and at regional and local as well as national levels.

I. Peopling Places

This theme examines human population movement and change through prehistoric and historic times. It also looks at family formation, at different concepts of gender, family, and sexual division of labor, and at how they have been expressed in the American past. While patterns of daily life—birth, marriage, childrearing—are often taken for granted, they have a profound influence on public life.

Life in America began with migrations many thousands of years ago. Centuries of migrations and encounters have resulted in diverse forms of individual and group interaction, from peaceful accommodation to warfare and extermination through exposure to new diseases.

Communities, too, have evolved according to cultural norms, historical circumstances, and environmental contingencies. The nature of communities is varied, dynamic, and complex. Ethnic homelands are a special type of community that existed before incorporation into the political entity known as the United States. For example, many Indian sites, such as Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona, are on tribal lands occupied by Indians for centuries. Similarly, Hispanic communities, such as those represented by San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, had their origins in Spanish and Mexican history. Distinctive and important regional patterns join together to create microcosms of America's history and to form the "national experience."

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. family and the life cycle
2. health, nutrition, and disease
3. migration from outside and within
4. community and neighborhood
5. ethnic homelands
6. encounters, conflicts, and colonization

II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements

This theme focuses upon the diverse formal and informal structures such as schools or voluntary associations through which people express values and live their lives. Americans generate temporary movements and create enduring institutions in order to define, sustain, or reform these values. Why people organize to transform their institutions is as important to understand as how they choose to do so. Thus, both the diverse motivations people act on and the strategies they employ are critical concerns of social history.

Sites such as Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, and the Eugene V. Debs National Historic Landmark in Indiana illustrate the diversity and changeable nature of social institutions. Hancock Shaker Village, a National Historic Landmark, and Touro Synagogue, a National Historic Site, reflect religious diversity. This category will also encompass temporary movements that influenced American history but did not produce permanent institutions.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. clubs and organizations
2. reform movements
3. religious institutions
4. recreational activities

III. Expressing Cultural Values

This theme covers expressions of culture—people's beliefs about themselves and the world they inhabit. For example, Boston African American Historic Site reflects the role of ordinary Americans and the diversity of the American cultural landscape. Ivy Green, the birthplace of Helen Keller in Alabama, and the rural Kentucky Pine Mountain Settlement School illustrate educational currents. Walnut Street Theater in Pennsylvania, Louis Armstrong's house in New York City, the Chautauqua Historic District in New York, and the Cincinnati Music Hall—all National Historic Landmarks—reflect diverse aspects of the performing arts.

This theme also encompasses the ways that people communicate their moral and aesthetic values. The gardens and studio in New Hampshire of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, one of America's most eminent sculptors, and Connemara, the farm in North Carolina of the noted poet Carl Sandburg, both National Historic Sites, illustrate this theme.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. educational and intellectual currents
2. visual and performing arts
3. literature
4. mass media
5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
6. popular and traditional culture

IV. Shaping the Political Landscape

This theme encompasses tribal, local, state, and federal political and governmental institutions that create public policy and those groups that seek to shape both policies and institutions. Sites associated with political leaders, theorists, organizations, movements, campaigns, and grassroots political activities all illustrate aspects of the political environment. Independence Hall is an example of democratic aspirations and reflects political ideas.

Places associated with this theme include battlefields and forts, such as Saratoga National Historical Park in New York and Fort Sumter National Monument in South Carolina, as well as sites such as Appomattox Court House National Historical Park in Virginia that commemorate watershed events in the life of the nation.

The political landscape has been shaped by military events and decisions, by transitory movements and protests, as well as by political parties. Places associated with leaders in the development of the American constitutional system such as Abraham Lincoln's home in Illinois and the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Atlanta—both National Historic Sites—embody key aspects of the political landscape.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. parties, protests, and movements

2. governmental institutions

3. military institutions and activities

4. political ideas, cultures, and theories

V. Developing the American Economy

This theme reflects the ways Americans have worked, including slavery, servitude, and non-wage as well as paid labor. It also reflects the ways they have materially sustained themselves by the processes of extraction, agriculture, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

Vital aspects of economic history are frequently manifested in regional centers, for example, ranching on the Great Plains illustrated by Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Montana. Individual economic sites, such as Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, may be distinctive in representing both the lives of workers and technological innovations.

In examining the diverse working experiences of the American people, this theme encompasses the activities of farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, and managers, as well as the technology around them. It also takes into account the historical "layering" of economic society, including class formation and changing standards of living in diverse sectors of the nation. Knowledge of both the Irish laborer and the banker, for example, are important in understanding the economy of the 1840s.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. extraction and production
2. distribution and consumption
3. transportation and communication
4. workers and work culture
5. labor organizations and protests
6. exchange and trade
7. governmental policies and practices
8. economic theory

VI. Expanding Science and Technology

This theme focuses on science, which is modern civilization's way of organizing and conceptualizing knowledge about the world and the universe beyond. This is done through the physical sciences, the social sciences, and medicine. Technology is the application of human ingenuity to modification of the environment in both modern and traditional cultures. Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument in Texas reflects pre-Columbian innovations while Edison National Historic Site in New Jersey reflects technological advancement in historic times. Technologies can be particular to certain regions and cultures.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. experimentation and invention

2. technological applications

3. scientific thought and theory

4. effects on lifestyle and health

VII. Transforming the Environment

This theme examines the variable and changing relationships between people and their environment, which continuously interact. The environment is where people live, the place that supports and sustains life. The American environment today is largely a human artifact, so thoroughly has human occupation affected all its features. Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, which includes portions of the Ohio and Erie Canal, for example, is a cultural landscape that links natural and human systems, including cities, suburbs, towns, countryside, forest, wilderness, and water bodies.

This theme acknowledges that the use and development of the physical setting is rooted in evolving perceptions and attitudes. Sites such as John Muir National Historic Site in California and Sagamore Hill National Historic Site in New York, the home of President Theodore Roosevelt, reflect the contributions of leading conservationists. While conservation represents a portion of this theme, the focus here is on recognizing the interplay between human activity and the environment as reflected in particular places, such as Hoover Dam, a National Historic Landmark.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. manipulating the environment and its resources

2. adverse consequences and stresses on the environment

3. protecting and preserving the environment

VIII: Changing Role of the United States in the World Community

This theme explores diplomacy, trade, cultural exchange, security and defense, expansionism—and, at times, imperialism. The interactions among indigenous peoples, between this nation and native peoples, and this nation and the world have all contributed to American history. Additionally, this theme addresses regional variations, since, for example, in the eighteenth century, the Spanish southwest, French and Canadian middle west, and British eastern seaboard had different diplomatic histories.

America has never existed in isolation. While the United States, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has left an imprint on the world community, other nations and immigrants to the United States have had a profound influence on the course of American history.

The emphasis in this category is on people and institutions—from the principals who define and formulate diplomatic policy, such as presidents, secretaries of state, and labor and immigrant leaders, to the private institutions, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, that influence America's diplomatic, cultural, social, and economic affairs. Monticello, the Virginia home of Thomas Jefferson, a National Historic Landmark, reflects the diplomatic aspirations of the early nation.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. international relations

2. commerce

3. expansionism and imperialism

4. immigration and emigration policies