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New Challenges

By the late 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg, the town that had served so long as a shrine to American ideals, finally turned to its new role as a social history museum. This new focus was geared to creating a more complete picture of eighteenth-century life in the Tidewater region of Virginia. This transition was motivated by restoration president Carlisle Humelsine who, starting in 1977, tried to assess what Colonial Williamsburg's future educational mission should be. He also needed to ensure the financial viability of the restoration since the project had accumulated a $4 million operating deficit in 1976. Clearly, no single individual could finance the work of the restoration in its second half century, so Humelsine appealed, via an article in the *New York Times*, for charitable contributions from the general public to help the organization meet its financial needs. The restoration also introduced a new ticket policy: $7 for adults and $3 for children for the first day of their visit to the restoration, with subsequent days costing $3 and $1.50, respectively. As before, there was also a separate charge for visiting the Governor's Palace—$2 for adults and $1 for children. This increase in revenue was needed to help offset rising expenditures, such as yearly maintenance costs that exceeded $2.3 million per year.[1]

Humelsine also brought together a group of young scholars—including Harvard Ph.D. Cary Carson—whose job was to devise a plan of interpretation for the coming decades. Motivated by a weak job market for professors in the 1970s, historians with doctoral degrees began to move out of academia in sizable numbers to work for public history organizations, in addition to positions in business and industry. As a result, Colonial Williamsburg was able to avail itself of the help of these professional historians in reshaping its presentation of life in colonial southeastern Virginia. These historians decided to move the restoration toward its new role as a social history museum. An important result of this undertaking was Carson's work "Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg," which brought forth a new presentation of the town's history called "Becoming Americans," along with the more traditional political interpretation, which was to be called "Choosing Revolution." Under this plan, the restoration would focus on the transformation of both white and black residents from British subjects to American citizens. The interrelationship of these two cultures would provide a framework for programs about the economic, social, and cultural aspects of life in colonial Virginia within the context of the political changes taking place at the time. This idea would combine Colonial Williamsburg's traditional political presentation with a broader look at the people who made up the general population of the actual colonial Williamsburg. Such a presentation would be more balanced and would highlight the contributions made to American society by all groups. These changes demonstrated the restoration's understanding that "millions [of] visitors over the years have come to regard Colonial Williamsburg as one of the nation's ultimate authorities on American history." In working to update the restoration's presentations, these young scholars viewed themselves as teachers who were transforming the restoration into their classrooms and its visitors into their students. The transition from an Americanist monument that presented a one-sided view of the past to an educational institution with a broader interpretation of historical events would solve some of the restoration's problems but would also introduce new ones.[2]

This new program became the cornerstone of the future work of Colonial Williamsburg, marking a transition from the traditional interpretation to the modern view of the town and its people. Such an alteration would be a long and never-ending process. In social history one had to take into account the varying lifestyles of different classes, researching them in detail to create an interpretation of the past that was as correct as possible. This research required considerably more time and energy than merely promoting an Americanist idealization of the period. Thus the restoration realized that it had to examine previously underrepresented groups to understand

the intricacies of their lives. The lives of slaves within their own world of the slave quarters, as well as the lives of women outside of the public view, needed to be explored.[3]

The restoration was also working to develop a picture of southeastern Virginia before the founding of Williamsburg through the archaeological excavations of Wolstenholme Towne, the seventeenth-century settlement on the banks of the James River on the property of the Carter's Grove Plantation. This addition to the restoration's presentation forged a link with nearby Jamestown. Visitors could get a sense of the continuity of European settlement on the peninsula through the end of the eighteenth century. Wolstenholme Towne was re-created by placing posts back in the original postholes to reveal the outside boundaries of the town's structures. First opened to visitors in the summer of 1979, the four-acre site added to the restoration's attempts to broaden its presentation of the region's history and to move past its original role.[4]

Yet the content of past programs would inevitably remain a part of the restoration's newer presentation. Scholars found it easier to build on the existing structure than to revamp it completely, and the political history of eighteenth-century Williamsburg would continue to be an integral part of the modern interpretation of the restoration. But the restoration needed to introduce more average people into the community. The question remained as to the best way to accomplish this goal. Hiring two thousand townspeople, all dressed in colonial garb, to mill around day in and day out from the early morning to late at night to create a semblance of the town's life during the eighteenth century would not be practical either economically or logistically. As a result, visitors would necessarily be asked to subscribe to make-believe, something that they were already doing, but in a slightly different way. Colonial Williamsburg would also need to convey in clearer terms what these average people's lives were like and how they influenced daily affairs in the town. The trade shops, on a selective basis, were already presenting the lives of some average citizens, but the program needed to expand to include the roles of women and African Americans. The restoration also needed to convey the culture that African Americans had developed independent of their masters, since although slaves were economically and socially subjugated, they still were able to forge their own society. The relationships between whites and blacks were more diverse than was generally supposed to be the case, and the restoration needed to develop its programs to demonstrate this.[5]

An African American interpreter with a visitor (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

An important development was the incorporation of more African American interpreters into the programs to give visitors a sense that there was a black presence in the eighteenth-century town. At least 50 percent of the interpreters needed to be black to show accurately their proportion to white residents. Although this goal was not easily obtainable, any strides made in that direction would promote the authenticity of the restoration. Nevertheless, there was no organized program of black interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg until 1979 when three African American reenactors were hired to portray a variety of roles, including a recently arrived slave, a scullery maid, an apprentice cooper, and a free black barber. Work was not easy for these interpreters, who received chilly receptions from some white patrons, as well as a number of black restoration employees. Despite some problems, visitors finally were able to hear the other side of the story, at least to a certain degree. Naturally, any visitors who were not interested could also avoid these presentations. In essence, tourists could visit Colonial Williamsburg without understanding the more complex nature of its society if they so desired. In this way, the restoration again strove not to offend those visitors who preferred to remain ignorant of certain aspects of the town's history.[6]

One of the first ways that the restoration demonstrated its commitment to presenting the past more accurately was the refurbishment of the Governor's Palace. In reassessing the information about the palace, and using, in particular, the inventory taken at the death of Lord Botetourt, who had been the royal governor of Virginia from 1768 to 1770, researchers decided that the furnishings installed during the 1930s were too ornate. The result was a downscaling of the interior, along with the creation of a new interpretation of the building's occupants. The restoration acquired new pieces of furniture and crafted reproductions from documented prototypes. Yet problems still existed with this new attempt at portraying the past. In a strongly critical article entitled "'Slumbering on Its Old Foundations': Interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg," Carroll Van West and Mary Hoffschwelle attacked Colonial Williamsburg's poorly diversified presentation of the history of colonial Virginia. They argued that "the re-creation of America's colonial experience at Colonial Williamsburg remains narrow and misleading." Even though the refurbishment of the Governor's Palace was an attempt to present a more accurate view of the past, it did not live up to its promise. The newer interpretation did not seriously depart from Colonial Williamsburg's previous presentation of the building and its people, the authors argued. Instead, the interpretation relied too heavily on traditional notions of the past, which focused on the colonial elite. The presentation emphasized the role of the royal governor and paid too little attention to the differences between his white English staff and the African American slaves from the colony.[7]

The new interpretation also made little attempt to portray the role of women, beyond that of an upper-class woman. The lives of female slaves could have been documented and interpreted, but this was not done to a significant degree. Thus, the so-called new interpretation of the palace, although somewhat better than the old one, did not adequately address the issues that the restoration was trying to promote. The restoration still placed too much emphasis on the romantic aspects of life, with a few anecdotes about everyday living, rather than making a full-scale attempt at a social interpretation of the palace and its people. West and Hoffschwelle concluded, therefore, that the Governor's Palace, like Colonial Williamsburg's other sites, remained focused on the presentation of great men and their actions.[8]

Edward B. Fiske also highlighted the transformation of the palace in an article that he wrote for the *New York Times* in July 1982. Fiske discussed the palace's newly toned-down nature, prime examples of which were the venetian blinds that replaced many of the more lavish curtains that had framed the windows of the governor's residence. In addition, the bright blue wallpaper in the ballroom, as well as some of the prints in the bedrooms, were not what many visitors expected to see in the home of the colonial elite. Fiske thought the newer approach to the palace's interpretation, which asked the visitors to participate in the life of the eighteenth-century town, was better suited to children than adults. Grown-ups, he felt, were "well advised to sign up for one of the conventional tours at noontime." Although not everything at the palace was to his liking, Fiske commented favorably on the craft shops and the "restored historical houses" in which visitors could stay to make their trip more "authentic."[9]

Another major event again placed Colonial Williamsburg in the international spotlight: the annual meeting of the world's leading economic powers held in the restored village in 1983. President Ronald Reagan, the host of the ninth annual economic summit of major industrialized nations, chose the town more for its traditional presentation of American life than for its growing commitment to social history. The weekend of the summit in May 1983 was also the first time that the restoration had ever closed its doors to the public. This action was not warmly greeted by all in the local community, many of whom wished to feel free to stroll down the Duke of Gloucester Street and through any other part of the restored village. In addition to the leaders of the world's largest industrialized countries, more than three thousand journalists inundated the town to cover the event. The restoration's decision to close over the weekend to host the prominent visitors cost approximately $500,000 in lost revenues. Officials hoped, however, that the added publicity from the event would raise the public's interest in the town and perhaps encourage greater visitation during the upcoming summer months.[10]

Showing that times had not changed much since the 1950s, the *New York Times* reported that "Williamsburg remains the landmark to which the Federal Government shuttles its visitors from abroad." The article went on to compare the restoration yet again with a theme park, arguing that "it is officialdom's Disneyland, an attraction for foreign visitors of distinction." It appeared, therefore, that Colonial Williamsburg had not succeeded in shaking off its old image. As historian Henry Steele Commager said of Colonial Williamsburg, "[I]t's a national shrine and a very natural place to go. . . . You don't have to go to Kansas or Nebraska, . . . you just drive down from Washington. It's our equivalent of Cambridge or Oxford." This assertion was a

rather unusual comparison to make between Colonial Williamsburg and two ancient university towns, but it reinforced the fact that Colonial Williamsburg was still held in high regard as a place that held the key to American history. Certainly for the Reagan administration, which sought to harken back to the country's prior glories, the traditional Colonial Williamsburg, a monument to freedom during the height of the Cold War, served an important purpose. For the nearly 150 world leaders who had visited Colonial Williamsburg since the end of World War II, the restoration presented the glory of the country's past much like an American version of Versailles, the site of the previous year's economic summit. Even into the early 1980s, Colonial Williamsburg remained a shrine for some, as well as a place where foreigners could be brought to help them understand American principles and ideals.[11]

Colonial Williamsburg again made news in 1985 with the opening of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery. The gallery was constructed to display eight thousand antiques of British and American origins dating from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. The museum was housed underneath the Public Hospital, which was a reconstruction of the first institution for the treatment of the mentally ill in America. In the 26,000-square-foot below-ground gallery, visitors had access to parts of the restoration's collection of antiques that previously had been hidden from public view. The exhibits included ceramic, glass, silver, and pewter objects, as well as scientific instruments, textiles, and prints. A number of speciality wares, including samplers, thimbles, watches, nutcrackers, dinner bells, and pipe tampers, were also on display. Named after DeWitt Wallace, who was the founder of *Reader's Digest*, the gallery was built with a $14 million donation that covered most of the cost of the $17 million construction. This private bequest made Wallace the second largest benefactor to Colonial Williamsburg outside of the Rockefeller family.[12]

Above ground, the restoration was making strides in implementing its broader approach to African American history, as well as working to escape its pristine presentation of the past. Instead of using paints to cover the exterior of many surfaces, the restoration was using whitewash, a less expensive and more realistic cover, or in some cases leaving the surfaces bare. This was particularly true of many of the outbuildings—kitchens, laundries, and stables—where the slaves usually worked. In these areas Colonial Williamsburg began to implement its Black History Program, which was under the direction of Rex Ellis. Most slaves had lived in the attics of

kitchens and stables on their master's property, and their lives had revolved around these parts of the town. The "Other Half Tour" was begun to show visitors the lives of Williamsburg's African American community, which accounted for approximately half of the town's residents, as recorded in the 1776 *Virginia Almanack*. The tour, a rigorous two-hour walk through the town, covered four main topics: the middle passage from Africa, country and town living conditions, religion, and music. Many escaped slaves headed to Williamsburg and the vicinity, which was revealed by the large numbers of ads placed in local newspapers by owners attempting to apprehend these escapees. Overall, the lives of slaves in Williamsburg were probably superior to those on many of the surrounding plantations, because in town there was social pressure to treat slaves with less visible cruelty. The presence of the College of William and Mary also may have created a more enlightened atmosphere than in other areas of the colonies. Ultimately, the challenge of portraying the lives of Williamsburg's black residents, both free and slave, was naturally complex. The commitment of the restoration to illustrate this aspect of the colonial past was an important change, yet there was still much to do to present a more unified vision of the town's past.[13]

As the program in African American interpretation was being developed, the work to reenact the lives of the white working class went forward with the reconstruction of the Anderson Forge. The forge would help to explain the life of a colonial blacksmith, who played an integral role in the growth and development of the town, since he made the nails for building, the shoes for horses, and a variety of iron tools and implements. The research for the reconstruction began in 1980, and the structure was completed in 1986. The construction was performed with tools, techniques, and materials common to the eighteenth century. This structure exemplified the restoration's new commitment to historical reconstruction based on strong research and the use of colonial building techniques. Along with the interpretation of the site by the smiths who worked there, visitors saw the kind of work performed by some of the laboring population, as well as the time and effort needed to produce even a relatively simple nail.[14]

Many of those who worked for the restoration in the trade shops and as interpreters found the work to be stimulating, if not necessarily well paid. They were required to do substantial research to understand the role of the people they were portraying. The increase in the numbers of interpreters demonstrated that the restoration was trying to broaden the presentation of the past and not merely showing off the attributes of the buildings and their

furnishings. Such a transition was essential for the success of the new presentation of the town, which was dependent on getting visitors interested in the details of eighteenth-century life. Many of the interpreters found a great deal of personal satisfaction in their work—creating objects that might be put on display in one of the shops and purchased by a visitor. Those who represented people from the past such as slaves or shopkeepers based their interpretations on historical individuals. This work helped to give visitors a sense of the town's eighteenth century population, although it was necessarily limited in scope.[15]

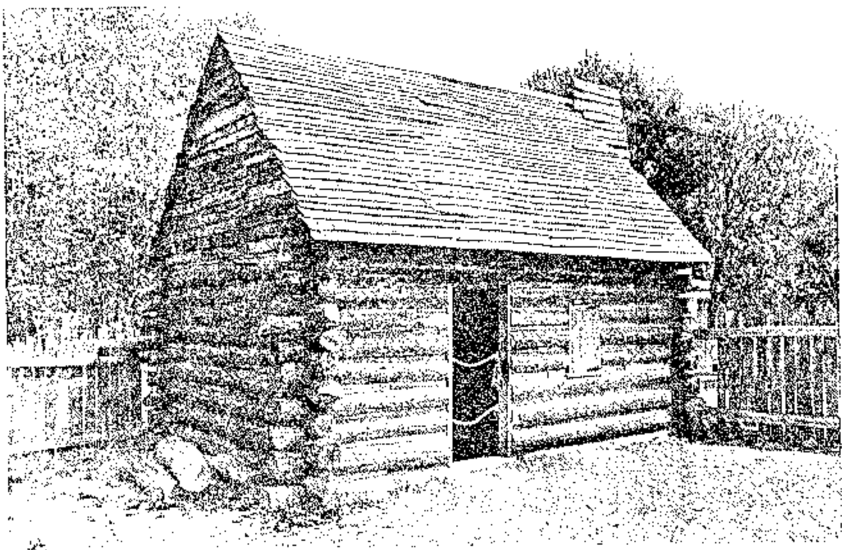
Even in the late 1980s, however, the popular view of Colonial Williamsburg tended to concentrate on the quaintness of the restored town. An article in *Travel Weekly* in March 1987 reiterated many of the traditional ideas that had surrounded the restoration for decades. As the author, Elvira Delany, argued, "Colonial Williamsburg continues calmly to do what it was meant to do, which is to invite guests within its gates to step back into the 18th century. . . . It involves the visitor in the activities of the butcher, baker and candlestick maker." Such phrasing was reminiscent of the articles of the 1930s and 1940s that extolled the town's peacefulness and the charm of the trade shops. The article made no mention of the restoration's move to promote African American history, while supporting *The Story of the Patriot* as an introductory film that "sets the mood." In so doing, Delany was primarily interested in offering Colonial Williamsburg as a showpiece among the other attractions in the Tidewater area, including Busch Gardens and Water Country USA. This presentation helped to foster the misinterpretation of Colonial Williamsburg as yet another theme park set in a pleasant locale.[16]

While the restoration was working to present the lives of the slaves in Colonial Williamsburg, it also re-created plantation slave cabins that would give visitors a glimpse of African American life in the countryside. This reconstruction was created on Colonial Williamsburg's Carter's Grove Plantation, about a quarter of a mile from the large house that had been home to members of one of Virginia's most prominent families. Archaeological excavations at Carter's Grove found thirteen pits lined with boards that dated to the eighteenth century. Further investigation revealed that these were storage pits that likely had slave cabins above them. In rebuilding these dwellings, Edward A. Chappell, the director of archaeological research for Colonial Williamsburg, drew on existing slave cabins of the period, notably one in Clarksville, Virginia, which was a one-room twelve-by-sixteen-foot

clapboard-covered frame building. Archaeological work at other former plantations, such as Monticello's Mulberry Row, a one-thousand-foot-long avenue once lined with seventeen structures, revealed examples of eighteenth-century slave dwellings. Workers salvaged some fifty-three thousand items from Mulberry Row, including toothbrushes and a medicine bottle. Further research revealed that African Americans lived varied and complex lives in colonial times. The earliest slaves had hunted with guns, built their own dwellings, prepared their own meals, and occasionally learned to read and write. All these pieces of information filled in the puzzle that allowed interpreters to present the lives of slaves. For the first time, visitors would finally be able to gain a greater appreciation of the lives of people of African descent who had helped build the colony and the state.[17]

The slave quarter reconstructions at Carter's Grove opened to the public in 1989. These structures were important because they gave interpreters the chance to discuss the lives of plantation slaves, which often differed considerably from the lives of slaves in the town. Colonial Williamsburg became the first major museum to seriously discuss colonial slavery, as opposed to the nineteenth-century version with which most Americans were familiar. As Rex Ellis, the assistant director for African American interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg, commented, "We're going to have to show rebellion, violence and racism in a way we haven't done at Williamsburg; . . . we need to learn from all parts of history, including the uncomfortable parts." Ellis's realization of the need to present a more sophisticated view of colonial life was vital if Colonial Williamsburg was to be an educator in the modern world.[18]

This updated presentation helped to change Americans' understanding of slavery. As the *New York Times* commented in 1988, the "guides no longer speak of servants, but of slaves." In being more forthright about the true situation of the bondsmen in Williamsburg, the restoration was attempting to portray the past more realistically, especially where African Americans were concerned. Aided by a $400,000 grant from AT&T, acquired by Humelsine's successor, Charles Longsworth, the restoration started new black history walking tours and story-telling entertainments. Archaeological digs also helped to expand Colonial Williamsburg's study of African American life. Those digs yielded artifacts that created a more complete picture of how blacks lived in the colonial era. Deeper research into existing artifacts also helped to promote a greater understanding of African American life. There was not a lack of sources, as the restoration had originally claimed,



A reconstructed slave cabin at Carter's Grove, part of Colonial Williamsburg's updated portrayal of colonial slave life (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

but there were instead many avenues of research that modern historians could follow to elicit information about black life under slavery.[19]

Although the restoration had traditionally been a site predominantly for white travelers, geared to showing them a glorified past, with the changes under way, Colonial Williamsburg began to attract more African American visitors who for the first time could learn about the lives of half of the town's residents—individuals who might have been their ancestors. This new interpretation inevitably meant coming to terms with the fifty years of racism and discrimination that had prevented this aspect of the town's life from being portrayed. White visitors also began to ask questions about slave life—a subject that all Americans needed to understand. Finally, a part of Colonial Williamsburg's past that had been ignored for its first half century began to see the light of day.

During its first fifty years, the restoration's traditional presentation had also dealt with women's roles in colonial times in an offhand manner. Although women commonly had worked as hostesses, guides, and interpreters throughout this earlier period, these women generally interpreted male history, focusing more on the illustrious figures of the past than they did on women. The interpretation of women's lives beyond the traditional view of

the genteel colonial lady was lacking, as was an interpretation of the status of female slaves beyond the stereotypical "mammy." A conscious attempt to strengthen the interpretation of women's history at Colonial Williamsburg began in 1981 with the three-day conference Women in Early America. Sponsored by the Institute of Early American History and Culture and Colonial Williamsburg, the conference revealed that women's lives in the so-called golden age of the eighteenth century were far from the simplistic and relaxed presentation of colonial women that the restoration had put forth earlier. Although the Revolution aided men in their pursuit of political goals, the same era left women "the unenvied equals of slaves and lunatics." The incorporation of a tour called "According to the Ladies" provided the first chance for visitors to glimpse the varied lives of colonial women. The tour, which compared the situations of women of the various classes, provided a look at the different lives of urban and rural women.[20]

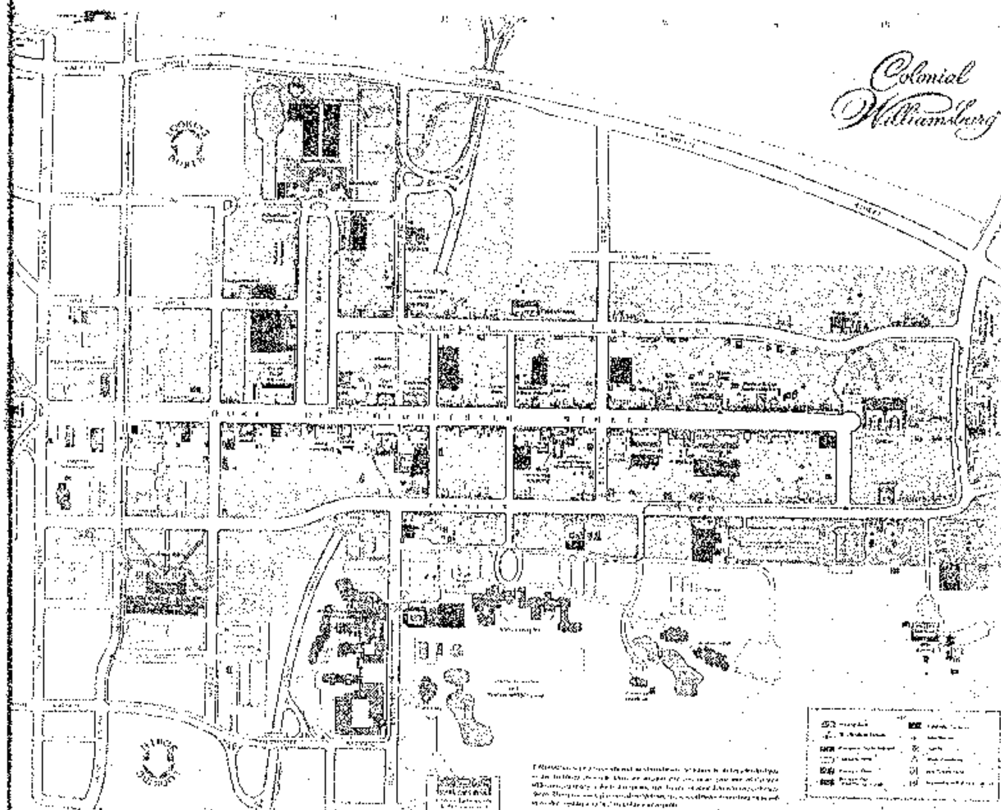
But even this further emphasis on women's affairs left tremendous gaps in Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation program. Both women and blacks served primarily as supporting actors in the drama of Colonial Williamsburg, and the roles they played were not commensurate with their importance in eighteenth century society. As such, visitors to the restoration failed to grasp the importance of these groups in colonial life because they saw women and blacks primarily as shadowy background figures rather than full-fledged actors on the historical scene. The late arrival of many of these programs was evident since they appeared to be grafted onto existing exhibitions. As a result, visitors inevitably wondered if these programs should be taken as seriously as others that were politically based.

With the implementation of these new programs, the restoration entered its new phase as a social history museum. This transition brought with it a certain level of responsibility, since Colonial Williamsburg proposed to tell a bigger story—one that would return neglected groups to their proper positions in the American historical consciousness. In an article in the Forum section of the winter 1989 issue of *Winterthur Portfolio*, Edward A. Chappell commented on the social responsibility of the American history museum. His argument was "that museums have a responsibility for the broad social implications of what they present, as well as for the accuracy and clarity of the particular subject with which they are dealing." He believed that museums must go beyond simply presenting the facts and have something more to say, "introduc[ing] people to new material and to various ways of perceiving its meaning." As sites such as Colonial Williamsburg strove to

reexamine their traditional interpretations of the past, they were forced to integrate modern research techniques and interpretations in their exhibits. But since no museum could be entirely objective, both officials and patrons needed to understand that all types of presentations contained an inherent subjectivity. In demonstrating the responsibility that a museum like Colonial Williamsburg had, Chappell argued that "to venerate fine craftsmanship and elite design while ignoring the lives of those who lacked such amenities . . . is irresponsible."[21]

More recent projects such as Plimoth Plantation had helped to advance the mission of the social history museum, challenging the traditional view that the public was not interested in new interpretations but only in the politically conservative, traditional approach. With the growing popularity of Plimoth Planation, other museums began to follow the lead, ever mindful, however, of their visitor base. As Colonial Williamsburg followed this trend, the revamping of its presentations meant a change not only in interpretation programs but also in new construction, such as the reconstruction of the Public Hospital and the slave quarters at Carter's Grove. Both of these sites dealt with parts of the past that were less comfortable for visitors but that were inherently necessary for understanding the complexity of eighteenth-century life and the treatment of those at the margins of society—African Americans and the mentally ill. Chappell argued, however, that "museums must move on from a history that is simply more democratic, more representative of realities, to depict the systems that everyone dealt with, and that . . . are still likely to affect us today." As the restoration moved into the 1990s, it worked to follow through on Chappell's challenge, yet this process was not necessarily easy. Many visitors were not ready for a more radical step; they had accepted the treatment of previously taboo subjects like slavery and mental illness but were not necessarily prepared for presentations, such as slave auctions, that would force them to deal with major issues that had not been previously portrayed.[22]

A more sophisticated understanding of the restoration's goals had begun to enter the popular press by the end of the 1980s, although this viewpoint was by no means universal. One who recognized the restoration's transition was Bob Vila, whose article entitled "Restoring America" was published in the May 1989 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. Vila realized that one must suspend disbelief in visiting the town, yet he criticized those who felt that Colonial Williamsburg was merely another Disneyland: "[T]o think that Colonial Williamsburg is nothing more than a period theme park is to



Map of Colonial Williamsburg, ca. 1988 (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

grossly underestimate what goes on there in terms of subtlety, complication and commitment." This realization was the key to the new interpretation. Restoration officials, such as Cary Carson, the vice president for research, indicated that he understood the criticism directed against the restoration, commenting that "to a certain extent, we feel that the classroom we have to teach our history sometimes doesn't live up to what we want to do with it. But we can't literally tear down our predecessor's work." This statement was certainly true; even a modern reconstruction would inevitably have an air of fakeness about it. But the restoration worked to update its presentation, utilizing its researchers who were trained in the fields of architecture, archaeology, and social history. They lent their expertise to the excavation, reconstruction, and interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg's 173 acres.[23]

In truth, the restoration's attempt to portray the eighteenth century was limited, especially since then, as now, people had a wide variety of lifestyles

and beliefs. Although many visitors believed that there was a single type of colonial dress, speech, or opinion, life in the eighteenth century was as complex as it is today. As Chappell indicated, "I think our generation is most interested in the differences, the relationships, the intersections between people. . . . There was an incredible range of living and working conditions and intellectual perspectives." The restoration of the Courthouse of 1770 highlighted the complexity of eighteenth-century life and the desire of the restoration to portray that era as vividly as possible. Court cases often illustrated the seedier side of colonial society—public drunkenness, robbery, and the like. By opening the Courthouse to visitors and allowing them to help resolve some cases of the period, the restoration gave the audience a chance to participate and perhaps to gain a deeper understanding. As Carl Lounsbury, the architectural historian in charge of the restoration of the Courthouse, commented, "I don't want visitors to come away thinking that the 18th century was simply a little older and didn't have electricity. I want to stress the differences between the two and how our society . . . evolved and developed."[24]

Although the *New York Times* had presented some of the changes going on at Colonial Williamsburg, these complex issues were not the most important thing for the newspaper in its portrait of the restoration during the Christmas season. In an article published on 16 December 1990, the *Times* focused primarily on the food, festivities, and shopping that were available in the historic area during the winter holiday season. The emphasis on the quaint customs and foods of the eighteenth century demonstrated the traditional perception that those attractions were why one would visit the restoration, namely, to witness "taverns and halls festooned with mountain laurel and white pine roping and boxwood wreaths fashioned from fruits, cones, seed pods and nuts." To whet the appetite, "the tables are laden with . . . Virginia hams and roast beef, barbecued ribs . . . Sally Lunn bread, pickled oysters, plum pudding, sweet potato pie . . . claret punch and foaming mugs of ale." Clearly, such publicity helped the restoration, which suffered a drop in attendance during the holiday season, but was not in accordance with the newly espoused move to present a broader understanding of the lives of all members of colonial society. Obviously, the restoration was reluctant to relinquish its roles as a travel venue and a purveyor of good food and drink, as well as a place where visitors could purchase "romantically packaged jars of violet bath powder" or a "handsome pewter teapot." Even though profits from all of the restoration-run enterprises were plowed back into the research and presentation of the period, tourists were inevitably presented with a conflicting picture of what Colonial Williamsburg was attempting to represent.[25]

Thirteen years after the start of the African American interpretation and presentations program, fifteen black interpreters worked in that department at Colonial Williamsburg. This number fell far short of adequately representing the 52 percent of the town's colonial population that was of African descent, but their presence was a major improvement, considering the many years of neglect in this area. Although only about 5 percent of the restoration's visitors were black, the African American interpretation program attracted people of color who previously had not come to Colonial Williamsburg probably because they thought the lives of their ancestors would not be discussed. In addition, the changes at Colonial Williamsburg were reflected in other historic sites, such as Mount Vernon and Monticello, that had previously spent little or no time covering the lives of slaves. By the early 1990s, most white visitors expected to hear some information about African American life. Although this did not necessarily mean that visitors had a sophisticated understanding of black life before the Civil War, the interest existed, and that aided the development of the restoration's fledgling interpretation programs.[26]

The questions about how far to extend the interpretation of African American life was a difficult one, however. One aspect that the restoration had not previously addressed was particularly problematic: the slave auction. The buying and selling of slaves at public auction were common from the seventeenth century through the Civil War. These auctions were degrading affairs for the slaves, who were pinched, prodded, and examined repeatedly in public view. The reenactment of a slave auction would be a highly controversial, yet important, addition to the work of the restoration. Such a re-creation could not be completely accurate, but even providing a sense of what had occurred would educate visitors about an important part of African American history.

In 1994 Christy S. Coleman, the director of the restoration's African American interpretation department, organized a mock slave auction, arguing that this portrayal was an important ingredient in presenting an accurate view of eighteenth-century black life. "The legacy of slavery in this country is racism . . . [and] until we begin to understand the horrors that took place . . . people will never come to understand what's happening in our society today," Coleman commented. Local African American groups

initially expressed dismay at the reenactment in October 1994, but after seeing the event, some accepted that auctions were an important part of the slave experience that needed to be presented to appreciate fully the pain and humiliation that slaves had endured. Jack Gravely, the Virginia political action director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, initially objected strongly to the reenactment, shouting at the auction, "You cannot portray our history in 21 minutes and make it some sideshow." Yet after witnessing the portrayal, Gravely retracted his earlier remarks, commenting that the "presentation was passionate, moving and educational." On the other hand, Curtis Harris of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference felt that the presentation was "nothing more than a show, not an authentic history." Yet such programs were vital if Colonial Williamsburg was to live up to its social responsibility to present the past as accurately as possible and to demonstrate the ways in which past events influenced modern-day issues such as race relations.[27]

Such divisions over the representation of slavery revealed that Colonial Williamsburg would have a difficult time in promoting its desire to re-create the past more accurately. Part of the problem lay in the ignorance of some members of the public, and part in the difficulties left over from decades as an Americanist shrine. Comparisons in the popular press between the restoration and theme parks like Disneyland also lessened the conception that Colonial Williamsburg was pursuing serious history and instead promoted the notion that all the restoration did was put on shows to amuse its visitors. Therefore, Colonial Williamsburg needed to promote a more serious image of itself to ensure that it could carry out its programs effectively. At the root of these issues were the monetary demands of the restoration. The costs of such work were extremely high, and the restoration needed to strike a balance between the price it charged its visitors and the quality of its programs. Visitors also needed to be better informed about the types of presentations that they might see while visiting the historic area, so that they could understand the significance of these portrayals.

Further criticism of Colonial Williamsburg and its operations emerged in 1994 in an article for the *Journal of American History* that was written by anthropologists Eric Gable and Richard Handler, who conducted over two years of ethnographic research at Colonial Williamsburg. Gable and Handler found that a serious gap existed between the work of the restoration's professional historians, who stayed behind the scenes, and those who were responsible for the frontline interpretations of the restoration. "There is a

huge gap in pay, in status, and in spatial location within the institution," they argued. The four hundred or so costumed interpreters served as frontline representatives of the restoration who were directly responsible for educating the public. These individuals were divided into four main groups: those who spoke of eighteenth-century life, but not in character; those who portrayed eighteenth-century figures; those who worked in the trade shops; and the African American interpreters, who "used a variety of pedagogical techniques." Ultimately, Gable and Handler found that quite a bit of tension existed between the management, or those in suits, and the frontline interpreters, or those in costumes. Frontline interpreters tended to feel that upper-level management looked down on them and considered them to be less knowledgeable than those historians in suits. Consequently, much of the interpretive work of the restoration was scripted by the managerial historians and merely recited by the interpreters, resulting in a one-dimensional view of the past that mirrored the ideology of the restoration, as opposed to the views of the individual interpreters.[28]

Cary Carson's reply to Gable and Handler's criticisms highlighted the restoration's belief that some type of regulated presentation was necessary to ensure that visitors learned the facts that the restoration thought were important. Carson wrote, "As responsible educators, we believe that some things about the eighteenth century are more worth knowing than others." As a result, certain issues were emphasized, others were given less attention, and interpreters were expected to go along with the restoration's emphasis. But "each [interpreter] is free to be as spontaneous, creative, fresh and original as any imaginative classroom teacher who nevertheless follows a curricular plan." Carson also argued that "the centrality of social history to museum curricula provides another guarantee that interpreters' voices will be heard, no matter what." Presumably he meant that since people were interpreting the lives of other individuals, interpreters would necessarily have a chance to put a human face on their presentations.[29]

The exchange between Gable and Handler on one hand and Carson on the other demonstrated that as Colonial Williamsburg moved to present a more complex view of the past, it inherently opened itself up to criticism from individuals both inside and outside the restoration. Interpreters may not have liked the restoration's corporate culture, as Gable and Handler claimed, but as employees they were obligated to conform to their employer's demands. In this way, the modern Colonial Williamsburg, like its predecessor, had an ideology, but one that emphasized the town's social his-

tory as opposed to its political one. Overall, the restoration retained a portion of its conservative past, even if its interpretive emphasis had been altered to meet the demands of modern social history.

Even through the mid-1990s, Colonial Williamsburg was often presented in the popular press as a quaint tourist stop rather than as a serious history museum that was striving to educate its visitors through its interpretation programs. Articles in both the *New York Times* in 1994 and *Town and Country* in 1995 supported the traditional perceptions of Colonial Williamsburg; neither one made significant mention of African American interpretation programs. The *Times* article referred briefly to an interpretation program at Carter's Grove that discussed the lives of female members of the household, "including a 16th-century American Indian, a 17th-century English immigrant, an 18th-century plantation housewife and a 19th century sharecropper, formerly a slave." Nevertheless, the piece made no mention of the reconstructed slave cabins or the interpretation program that accompanied them. The *Town and Country* article focused on the family of Paul Kusserow, who became the marketing director of Colonial Williamsburg in 1994. Although the author described in detail the surrounding community and life in the Grissell Hay House, which was on restoration property, she did not mention the diversity of interpretation programs offered to the public. The theme of a "trip back in time" permeated the article, which focused on antiques, flowers, and the thrill of living in a restored village. This misrepresentation did not help publicize the new interpretations, since visitors who might have come to see the presentation of African American life might not know it existed, nor did the article prepare tourists for the intensity of some of the new programs.[30]

Financial questions inevitably remained an important issue for the restoration through the 1990s. Since the town was open to all who wished to walk through it, the restoration lost thousands of dollars each year from individuals and groups who viewed only the exteriors of the buildings and did not purchase tickets to the closed exhibits. Some companies ran tours focused on the Duke of Gloucester Street or the ghosts of Williamsburg and gave visitors a short introduction to the historic area, perhaps in some cases whetting their appetites to purchase the official ticket, but in other cases driving away the business of those who felt that they had seen enough. Yet tour operators denied that they seriously cut into potential ticket purchases from Colonial Williamsburg. In an address to community leaders at the Williamsburg Lodge in May 1997, the restoration's president, Robert C. Wilburn, labeled these businesses "parasite tours," arguing that they took away substantially from Colonial Williamsburg's potential proceeds. He indicated that many members of these groups "leave thinking they've seen Williamsburg, getting who-knows-what information about the place. To me it's unconscionable." For visitors who only have a few hours, however, purchasing a $32 basic admission ticket to view more of the restoration would be a waste of money. Ideally, one should be prepared to spend several days viewing the exhibits, but that is not always possible.[31]

By closing off the historic area east of Bruton Parish Church, the restoration would receive a significant amount of new revenues, while allowing unticketed access to the church, the College of William and Mary, and other areas of general historical interest. In addition to boosting revenue, such a closing, which would probably only occur in the summer months, would allow the restoration to create a greater sense of historical verisimilitude within the enclosed area. The other option, if the area was not enclosed, would possibly be cuts in programs to ensure that the restoration remained within its financial limits. Financial exigencies would, therefore, remain an essential ingredient of the restoration's struggle to present the past. The closure plan was not initially popular in the community, and the restoration needed the support of the City Council if it wished to close off city streets. Part of the concern was that the restoration's ticket sales had stagnated at around 940,000 for the previous two years. The cash reserve to help cover any shortfall from admission prices was $15 million, with an annual cost of $14 million to maintain the buildings.[32]

Many of the restoration's critics continued their attacks on the restoration into the late 1990s, arguing that it still represented a false history. In her book *Unreal America*, Ada Louise Huxtable continued to criticize the restoration, claiming that it "pav[ed] the way for the new world order of Walt Disney Enterprises." She argued that "it has been a very short distance down the yellow brick road of fantasy from Williamsburg to Disneyland. Both are quintessentially American inventions." While Huxtable was interested primarily in architecture, and not in the interpretation of American history, her failure to give Colonial Williamsburg credit for attempts to portray the past more accurately appeared one-sided. Naturally, the restoration needed to make compromises in its portrayal, but the reconstruction of earlier buildings, even if flawed, must be considered on a different plane than the creation of Disneyland.[33]

In an attempt to broaden the restoration's appeal, and perhaps to counter

arguments of its theme park qualities, the restoration started the Williamsburg Institute in January 1997. The institute offered courses year-round varying in length from "a few hours to a few days." These courses provided hands-on experience in a number of areas, including cooking eighteenth-century foods in the kitchen of the Governor's Palace, sewing colonial-era clothing, or working at trades such as coopering, basketry, and carpentry. One could also plow a field or study garden design and flower arranging. These programs were offered at different times of the year, with offerings for adults and children. Such programs encouraged visitors to learn more about eighteenth century life through both observation and practice. These courses highlighted the switch to a social history museum as the focus of the restoration. They emphasized the work of the skilled craftsperson of the eighteenth century and what the modern-day visitor could learn from the colonial-era approach to a variety of trades and practices.[34]

By the end of the 1990s, the press had begun to deal with the restoration's presentation of slavery and the public's reaction to it. As Peter Feuerherd wrote in the journal *Commonweal* in November 1999, "[T]he colonial town is taking a vigorous, dramatic look at the impact of slavery on eighteenth-century life, and by implication, today's America." Yet not everybody was ready to confront slavery. In his coverage of the public's reaction to the restoration's program "Enslaving Virginia," Feuerherd noted that "one discussion of slavery we witnessed included many families, most of them white. The children were engrossed in the lecture. But a number of parents quickly wearied of the presentation and moved along to other exhibits." Apparently, not only visitors but also some staff members were not enthusiastic about the presentations, for Feuerherd noted that "at Carter's Grove a staff member directed [us] toward the mansion, discouraging us from spending time at the slave quarters." These issues demonstrated that presenting a less "safe" interpretation of the past did not always meet with strong support inside the restoration. As Feuerherd commented, "[T]he Williamsburg Foundation deserves credit, in any case, for challenging its visitors and raising questions, thus transcending the Disneyfication of history."[35]

Another program, entitled "Broken Spirit," was presented at the reconstructed slave cabins at Carter's Grove. This presentation was based on the lives of the slaves who had lived at the site and was constructed from eighteenth-century plantation and parish records, as well as new research. The program, written by Christy Matthews, detailed the "breaking" of a newly

arrived African slave named Kofi, who had apparently tried to run away. In reality, he had gone to pray for his god's assistance to help him return to Africa. Yet Kofi's poor English made it difficult for him to communicate with the other slaves on the plantation. "The plot turns on misunderstanding between creole natives and the African newcomer, as well as some tragic personal trade-offs forced by slavery." This portrayal of the complexity of slave life and the master's reaction to disobedience clearly unsettled many of those who witnessed it. As one interpreter, Sheila Arnold, remarked, "[W]hat shocks people so much about this program is that slaves become human. They don't all just think in one way—the way you think they should." These reactions were so powerful that the restoration added a debriefing session so that visitors could ask questions and talk through their reactions to what they had witnessed. Visitors often became passionately involved in the discussions surrounding slavery, debating with each other the causes and effects of the institution. Philip Morgan, a professor of history at the College of William and Mary, commented that "Williamsburg has changed dramatically from a lily white, rather hands off, just watching things [kind of place]. Now they're really engaging people and taking on really significant issues."[36]

Yet many of the African American interpreters were not happy with the way that they were treated by the restoration. Understaffing meant overwork for many of the interpreters, and many were also unhappy about a reorganization of the restoration, which involved dissolving the Department of African American Interpretations and Presentations in 1997. Colonial Williamsburg's management argued that this reorganization improved the presentation for visitors, making it easier for them to navigate the restoration. Three enclosed areas were set up, with a manager for each site. This move and other reorganization efforts made black interpreters feel that they no longer had a collective voice in the presentation of African American history. Although African Americans did assume managerial and supervisory roles, many felt that these opportunities were not made available to them often enough. There were other problems, such as white staff members who used language that deviated from the agreed-upon formulation for reenactments, which, in one case, insulted one of the black female interpreters. In addition, a white restoration employee was accused of referring to African American staff members as "coloreds." In response, the restoration instituted a sensitivity program to deal with the problem and to encourage staff members to be more considerate of their colleagues. Under-

lying much of the bitterness of African American staffers were the relatively low wages of approximately $7 an hour. Yet the restoration realized that it needed to retain as many interpreters as it could, since these new interpretive programs were important for the future of the project.[37]

The restoration's financial picture began to look more positive as the decade came to a close. The 1998 annual report indicated that Colonial Williamsburg achieved its first surplus since 1990. Overall expenditures increased more slowly than before, because a healthy stock market resulted in a decrease in payroll expenses, primarily in the area of retirement benefits. "Since the markets were strong in 1998, the foundation didn't have to contribute as much to its retirement program." The restoration sold 983,100 admission tickets in 1998, and a larger number of tourists bought more expensive tickets, which allowed them to stay longer and to visit the historic area more often. Revenues from product sales and private donations also increased. Overall, the strong economy was highly beneficial for the restoration, because the value of its portfolio grew, and visitors were willing to stay longer and to purchase more items. Although it is difficult to determine the influence of the restoration's more diverse presentations on ticket sales, the increased publicity that these changes garnered was probably beneficial.[38]

Finally, by the end of the millennium, there was a broader understanding of Colonial Williamsburg as a museum that strove to present a more balanced portrait of the past while at the same time teaching the public a lesson in social issues. In an article in the *New York Times* entitled "Williamsburg Rethinks History," Katherine Ashenburg recounted the changes that had taken place at the restoration since the 1970s, including the refurbishment of the Governor's Palace, the creation of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery, and the reconstruction of the Public Hospital and the slave quarters at Carter's Grove. These were all significant changes, along with the decision of the restoration to leave the town a bit messy by not cleaning up horse manure in the streets and by not rushing to paint or to fix items as they grew older. According to Ashenburg, visitors wanted more than simply the chance to eat eighteenth-century food or to visit the shops. Her coverage reflected a change from previous articles, which had emphasized these aspects. She wrote, "I went to the Secretary's Office next to the Capitol, where a staff historian . . . discussed the tightening vise of 18th-century slavery laws. The attendance was standing room only, a perspiring room full of whites and blacks, some of them with school-age children."[39]

An article by Alan Solomon in the *Chicago Tribune* also highlighted the

The Fifes and Drums—a Colonial Williamsburg tradition (Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

restoration, with particular attention paid to the character interpreters in the town, ranging from George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry to an "illegal" gathering of slaves, who discussed the need for change in Williamsburg. The article also pointed out the emphasis on traditional interpretations, such as the Fifes and Drums, whose daily parades had great popular appeal, especially among children. Solomon also mentioned the neighboring sites of Jamestown and Yorktown, thereby emphasizing the historic triangle, much as was done several decades before. Although Solomon's portrayal of the restoration was generally positive, he did point out some inherent flaws in the presentation, such as the presence of George Washington in Williamsburg in the fall of 1775, when he actually was in Boston commanding the Continental Army.[40]

Since the late 1970s, the restoration has made strides in its attempt to present a broader interpretation of the past. Over time, the media have also begun to recognize this trend and the new emphasis of the restoration. Some critics have insisted on promoting the comparison with a theme park, yet clearly the work of the historical researchers, archaeologists, and architectural historians has demonstrated that Colonial Williamsburg is not a

[illegible] The inevitable remnants of the town's previous incarnation, [illegible] buildings and *The Story of a Patriot*, however, mean that the restora[illegible] presentation will be pushed largely toward a political orientation. Even [illegible] visitors probably think of American history largely as a political [illegible], with social history as an additional part added on to promote popu[illegible] interest. Yet Colonial Williamsburg's attempt to portray slavery more ac[illegible], its move to diversify the town's buildings to include places for in[illegible]preting the lives of the working class, and the added emphasis on women all indicate a serious attempt to transform the presentation of the past.

Epilogue

Just as it did fifty years ago, Colonial Williamsburg has continued to walk a fine line in its historical presentations, attempting to interpret the past in a way that will meet its educational goals while not alienating its visitors. Although some might be shocked by the restoration's demonstrations of life under slavery, all in all Colonial Williamsburg has sought to present a version of the past that is more geared to attracting visitors than repelling them. Even today, however, not all visitors necessarily want a thorough indoctrination into colonial American social history. Some may come to enjoy the quaintness and charm of an earlier age, to study garden design, or to learn how Christmas was celebrated in the eighteenth century. The restoration will seek to satisfy those individuals as well. Although its modern incarnation no longer promotes to such a large degree the Americanist issues of its founders, Colonial Williamsburg still must work to meet its modern aims of presenting the past effectively and honestly.

Inevitably, critics will charge that Colonial Williamsburg is not all that it should be. This is no doubt true. But the restoration has made major strides in its seventy-five-year history. In its present manifestation, it is no longer the shrine that JDR Jr. would have liked it to be because the focus of the education of today's Colonial Williamsburg is quite different from that of its earlier era. Yet most visitors probably leave knowing more about the colonial period than they did when they arrived. Ultimately, this must be the restoration's goal—to bring a better understanding of the past to its visi-

tors while helping them to realize the diversity and complexity of eighteenth-century life.

Colonial Williamsburg also will continue to promote itself as a tourist destination to attract more visitors who will use its facilities: the hotels, restaurants, conference center, and golf course. Profits from these subsidiaries are plowed back into the restoration for research and the development of interpretation programs. Although these facilities may be eyesores to many purists, ultimately they help to sell Colonial Williamsburg to the consumer. After all, getting people to visit the town must be the restoration's first priority. To attract visitors, the restoration must act as a tourist destination as well as a history museum. The ultimate question is how these qualities should be divided, so that the area's tourist appeal does not overshadow the museum and its efforts. With the dramatic increase in visitors that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, the restoration became more of a mass marketer of the eighteenth century than merely a purveyor of the quaintness of the past. With the development of the Information Center and the closing of many of the town's streets to automobile traffic, the restoration strove to preserve the experience that visitors had had before World War II. Yet the growth of the town, the diversity of its programs, and the need to compete with other sites has forced the restoration to advertise in ways that would have been unthinkable half a century ago.

Presumably the restoration takes this promotional route today because it thinks such promotion will appeal to a broader range of visitors, especially children, who more and more determine families' travel plans. The restoration's recent financial success appears to support the theory that this type of advertising works. Drawing people to Colonial Williamsburg and keeping them there longer will result in more purchases at the restoration's stores, more meals eaten at the taverns and restaurants, and more money spent on other attractions, such as evening performances and tours, which further utilize the town's sites for dramatic portrayals, dances, and concerts. All these activities make money for the restoration and help to fund its programs. Alliances with other attractions, such as Busch Gardens and Water Country USA, seek to bring in visitors who might otherwise have ignored Colonial Williamsburg. While the restoration is considerably more than just a theme park, it cannot exclude itself from the other recreational sites on the peninsula, because to do so would risk a dramatic drop in revenues.

Today Americans are looking more and more for packaged travel that provides access to a variety of sites in one area, as well as relaxation and entertainment for all members of the family. This trend forces the restoration to make allies of sites that are different from itself. The Revolutionary Fun package, for example, was intended to make it easier for tourists to book a trip to the Hampton Roads area in the southern part of the Tidewater region of Virginia. The package included Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown Settlement, Water Country USA, Busch Gardens, and the Yorktown Victory Center. Tourists would get unlimited access to all those attractions for one price. The money invested in these types of joint tickets provides large economic rewards to the Williamsburg area, as well as for the restoration itself, with increased visitation as well as purchases in stores and meals in restaurants.[1]

Such alliances are beneficial, since the restoration sees its major competition coming not from other historic sites but from Disneyland and amusement parks such as Six Flags. This competition forces the restoration to use low-brow advertising while at the same time trying to maintain programs that have high integrity and historical accuracy. The Just Partners advertising agency produced five television commercials for Colonial Williamsburg that parodied the "now familiar Super Bowl quarterback or other sports champ plugs for Disney World." In one ad an actor playing Patrick Henry is asked, after he has given his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, if he is going to a Disney theme park. "No," he replies, "I'm going to [Colonial] Williamsburg." Other ads, such as one showing people dancing the minuet, were discarded, because the Just Partners agency believed the imagery focused too much on tradition and "not enough on fun." Advertisements were also placed in magazines like *Martha Stewart Living*, *People Weekly*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* that targeted mothers, especially those of young children. Again, this type of advertising sends mixed messages to an audience that may expect a Disneyland experience but is confronted with programs that may be too intense for young children.[2]

Money has been, and probably will remain, the primary point of contention surrounding the restoration. To operate a large, fully developed historical restoration is expensive. Admission fees, private donations, and the Rockefeller trust fund provide Colonial Williamsburg with enough cash to operate but never quite enough to feel secure. As a result, the restoration must inevitably consider carefully what operations it will undertake. The restoration has been fortunate to find contributors since it began seeking

outside donations in the late 1970s. In addition to generous gifts from individuals such as DeWitt Wallace, Colonial Williamsburg received more than $1 million from PepsiCo over a ten-year period in exchange for agreeing that the company would be the exclusive supplier of soft drinks for all Colonial Williamsburg properties. The restoration has also sought smaller donations from many of its visitors, urging them to support the restoration's programs with their contributions and providing them with special perks, such as the use of the St. George Tucker House as a hospitality center when they are in Colonial Williamsburg. The broader attempt to court supporters enhances the role that Colonial Williamsburg seeks to play as a nonprofit educational foundation. Much like a university, the restoration desires to promote the image of a serious educational institution that presents the diversity of eighteenth-century life in southeastern Virginia. In the process, it hopes that visitors will be enthralled, or at least interested, and as a result of their visit make a further contribution to the work of the restoration.[3]

As Colonial Williamsburg enters its third decade committed to being a social history museum, it must still confront questions of how to adequately represent the lives of the African Americans, women, and laborers who made up the majority of the town's population. Surrounded by competitors, critics, and opponents, Colonial Williamsburg must work to carve out its niche in spite of these forces. No doubt the restoration could do more to present new and challenging programs that would educate and captivate visitors. Colonial Williamsburg has worked to find suitable individuals to portray important and recognizable figures from the past such as Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and George Washington. These interpreters maintain their characters and profess no knowledge of modern-day issues or events. Yet many costumed individuals, both black and white, are not "in the eighteenth century." By making all costumed employees people of the colonial period, the restoration could promote the continuity of its interpretations and demonstrate the diversity of townspeople in the eighteenth century. The restoration should also have a greater number of individuals in modern dress who can explain life in the eighteenth century and bridge the gap between past and present.[4]

Colonial Williamsburg's variety of phases have mirrored the American experience over the past seventy-five years. The restoration has brought a changing view of the past to different audiences over this time. Even during its period as a shrine, the restoration's presentation was not static. Rather it pursued different areas of emphasis during the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. In its last quarter century, the restoration's shift to a social history museum has demonstrated the complexities of historical presentations in the modern age and the difficulties that come from trying to present a more nuanced version of the American colonial experience. The restoration will ultimately be judged on how well it can transcend its origins and present a cohesive examination of the past. Although its critics argue that Colonial Williamsburg has not changed significantly from its days as a shrine, this simply is not the case. Although the restoration's earlier role has not been erased, new research initiatives, broader interpretation programs, and the construction of new interpretive sites have made a difference in the way visitors understand the eighteenth century. The fact that *The Story of a Patriot* now seems so out of place is testimony to the changes that Colonial Williamsburg has undergone in the past two decades. Although the restoration still suffers from a hybridization of its dual incarnations, eventually Colonial Williamsburg may truly live up to its motto "that the future may learn from the past."[5]