

## Continuing Skirmishes in Harpers Ferry: Entangled Memories of Heyward Shepherd and John Brown

*Akiko OCHIAI\**

### INTRODUCTION

Starting from the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birthday in 2009, and culminating in the sesquicentennial of the Civil War (2011–15), Americans are observing numerous ceremonies and events related to that great national conflict. Among these are academic symposia, entertainment-type contests, and battle reenactments by committed history buffs. This flood of commemorations has inevitably revived debates about the memories, interpretations, and meanings of the Civil War and their transmission to the next generation. This contemporary discussion cannot ignore the vicissitudes of scholarship nor the spirits of the times over the past 150 years.

In particular, the Lost Cause movement that romanticized the racial and gender hierarchy of the antebellum South poses a dilemma to twenty-first-century American society that officially endorses multicultural equality.<sup>1</sup> Founded in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), in cooperation with the Sons of the Confederate Veterans (SCV), concerted their efforts on propagating the Lost Cause version of their war memories. Proclaiming itself

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\*Professor, Doshisha University

the nurturer of the “true” history, the UDC led a movement to erect Confederate Memorials in prominent public locations such as courthouse squares throughout the South and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

Memory studies since the 1980s illustrate that creating and legitimating or consecrating a particular memory as a “public memory” is closely related to political power and social control. Those with the power to control society carve into their memorials not only the past that they idealize but also the social order that they envision for the future, while subsuming contested minor voices into silence or oblivion.<sup>3</sup> These remnant memorials of the Lost Cause still dominate the landscape of the South, reminding us of its past “glory.”

On the corner of the downtown main street of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, stands a plain granite Confederate Memorial dedicated in 1931 to Heyward Shepherd, a *free* black who became the first casualty of John Brown’s raid in 1859 (see fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> This memorial stands on the same plot as it did eighty years ago, but since its erection, the physical landscape has changed. Incorporated into the National Park Service in 1953, Harpers Ferry underwent a major renovation, becoming an alluring

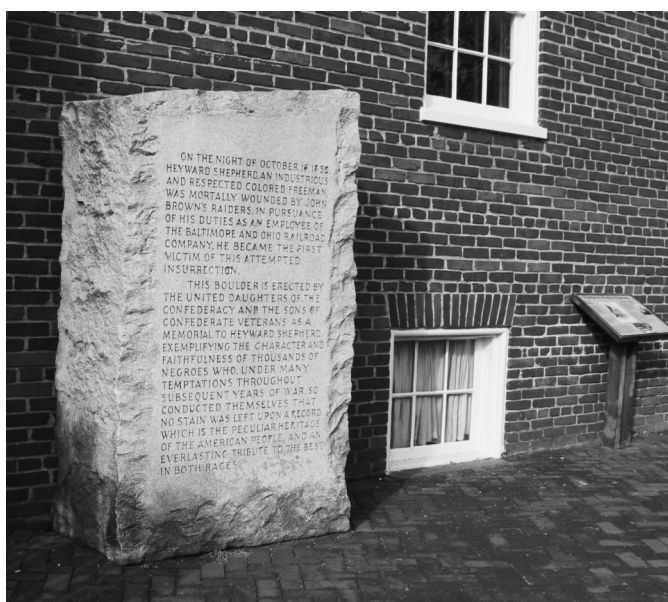


Figure 1 Shepherd Memorial with Plaque, 2010

tourist town with its mid-nineteenth-century atmosphere.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, American society itself underwent tremendous changes, affecting the ways people interpret and utilize their historical past and construct their memories.

There are three major academic studies on the Shepherd Memorial. The first one, conducted by Mary Johnson, places African Americans' protests over the erection of the Shepherd Memorial within a detailed local history. Paul Shackel focuses more on the Lost Cause, explaining the Shepherd Memorial controversy within that context. He also reviews the contested history of memory from the 1930s to the 1990s, showing the difficulties in constructing a broad collective memory of Shepherd and its place in Civil War interpretation. Seeing the images of heroism and gender as central to the Shepherd Memorial controversy of the 1930s, Caroline E. Janney argues that conservative Southern whites pitted the emasculated docile image of an Old Negro (Shepherd) against the fearlessly demanding image of the New Negro who would emerge as a corollary of John Brown's radical racial egalitarianism. Janney also traces the reignition of the controversy in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

To advance beyond these previous studies' discussion that waned in the 1990s, I illuminate in this article not only the contested history of memory construction relating to Shepherd and Brown but also the difficulty of presenting that history to the public with slim prospects of bridging those entangled memories. I review Brown's historical raid in 1859 and the rise of a reconciliatory interpretation of the Civil War toward the turn of the century. Then I trace the development of the Shepherd Memorial project and the controversy over the memorial between conservative Southern whites and African American activists, first in the 1930s and then in the 1990s and beyond. I especially contrast African American understandings of the Shepherd Memorial with the memories that the Lost Cause advocates inscribed on it. While the NAACP reaffirmed its uncompromising opposition to those advocates in 2006, the post-9/11 debates on terrorism and social justice have revived public interest in Brown's use of violence, complicating the dilemma of dealing with the Lost Cause legacy.

#### JOHN BROWN'S RAID AND HEYWARD SHEPHERD

By the 1850s, after nearly two decades of active engagement in the antislavery movement, John Brown had firmly come to believe that God

had commissioned him to abolish slavery.<sup>7</sup> To fulfill his mission of opposing the aggressive stance of the Southern proslavery adherents, he advocated “righteous” direct action. In 1856, he and his two sons fought advocates of slavery in Kansas, where he became famous in the North (infamous in the South) as the fierce leader of the Pottawatomie (Creek) Massacre, where five proslavery Southerners were mercilessly hacked to death.

Over the next few years, Brown mapped out a plan to attack the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, hoping to instigate a slave insurrection that would establish an interracial state in the Appalachians and ultimately deal a blow to Southern slavery. On the night of October 16, 1859, Brown and eighteen followers (thirteen whites and five African Americans) snuck into the town of Harpers Ferry and quickly seized the arsenal,<sup>8</sup> taking hostages into the engine house that became known as John Brown’s Fort. While Brown was waiting for nearby slaves to rally to his cause, the next morning armed townsmen and local militia began shooting at the fort. A company of U.S. Marines under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee and Lt. J. E. B. Stuart arrived late that evening and apprehended Brown the next morning, October 18. During the thirty-six-hour raid, ten raiders, six civilians, and one Marine were killed. Severely wounded himself, Brown was captured, tried, and sentenced to death in a week-long trial for murder, inciting insurrection, and treason against the State of Virginia.

By the time John Brown was hung on December 2, he had transformed himself into an oratorical martyr of abolitionism, and church bells mourning his death pealed throughout the North. Conversely, his raid sent a wave of alarm through the slave South, which consequently heightened its defenses against Northern threats to its sovereignty and institutions. Since then, the significance of Brown and his raid has been fiercely debated, differing dramatically according to one’s stance on Brown, the Civil War, and ultimately on America’s pursuit of racial equality. However, most historians agree at least that Brown accelerated the sectional crisis and the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

One of the casualties of Brown’s raid was Heyward Shepherd, a baggage handler for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B & O), who was trusted as “remarkably civil” by the town’s whites. He was shot in the back by one of Brown’s raiders when he went to the railroad bridge to look for a railroad watchman who hadn’t returned. Soon after the raid, one John D. Starry testified to a Senate investigating committee that the

dying Shepherd had personally confided that he had been shot because he had ignored an order to halt. The local *Virginia Free Press* newspaper reported that Shepherd was shot because he refused to join the insurrection. It is difficult to substantiate whether Shepherd actually knew the raiders' motives and refused to join them, or indeed whether his assailant even knew that Heyward was black. Both local militia groups and white residents paid Shepherd deep respect, accompanying his funeral procession. In its report of the burial, the paper did not forget to mention that Shepherd was the first casualty of Brown's raid, while belonging to the race that Brown had hoped to liberate.<sup>10</sup> However, the honor showed at his funeral didn't last long; by the turn of the century, nobody could identify where they had buried Shepherd's body.<sup>11</sup>

Shepherd's name appeared sporadically in the *Virginia Free Press*, usually to counter Northern sentiment glorifying John Brown's martyrdom or advancing Brown's endorsement of "forcible liberation" for African Americans. In 1881, Frederick Douglass eulogized Brown in his commencement address at the local historically black institution, Storer College: "If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery." The *Virginia Free Press* editor shot back, "The negro-worshippers may canonize John Brown as much as they please, but we don't mean to let them forget that the first victim of the old murderer was an inoffensive, industrious and respected colored man, brutally shot down without provocation or excuse."<sup>12</sup> After John Brown's Fort was removed in order to realign the B & O tracks in 1892, Douglass and other African Americans endorsed a plan to erect a monument for John Brown on the vacant lot that remained. Rather than opposing the plan itself, the editor demanded to inscribe the monument with Shepherd's name.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE RISE OF THE PLANTATION MYTH AND THE SHEPHERD MEMORIAL PROJECT

With the demise of racial democracy at the end of Reconstruction came a sectional reconciliation between the North and South that emphasized the valor of *white* soldiers, and state sovereignty (rather than slavery) as the cause of the war.<sup>14</sup> John Brown's (and African Americans') contributions to the abolition of slavery did not suit this new deracialized interpretation of the Civil War. Moreover, in the 1880s, new testimony about the Pottawatomie Massacre in "Bleeding Kansas" showed

that Brown's activities had been far more atrocious than previously thought, increasing concern even in the North over Brown's psychotic disorder and his violent impulses. As a result, by the early twentieth century, the public image of Brown had shifted from that of an abolitionist martyr to that of a dangerous fanatic or dogmatic murderer who unnecessarily agitated the sectional conflict. Only a minority of African Americans and liberal whites continued to preserve an emancipationist memory of the war and to commemorate Brown's abolitionist martyrdom.<sup>15</sup>

The reconciliationist sentiment between the North and South encouraged Lost Cause advocates to romanticize the paternalistic antebellum plantation South, where benevolent white owners and docile slaves lived happily together, reciprocally performing their own roles and duties. This romanticism implied that white Southerners had been (and continued to be) good friends of the African Americans. In 1904, a UDC member advanced in the *Confederate Veteran*, the monthly official publication of the various Confederate organizations, the first proposal to erect a faithful slave monument. However, she couldn't rally enough support from her sister members, among whom were those who doubted slaves' wartime fidelity and those who prioritized establishing Confederate widows' asylums over war memorials.<sup>16</sup>

Micki McElya argues that the dramatically changing sociopolitical situation in the New South of the early twentieth century undergirded the UDC's growing "belief in the capacity of public sculpture to forge new relationships of affinity and power." Woodrow Wilson's presidency and his segregation policy in the capital gave new impetus to the Lost Cause advocates, culminating in their erection of the Arlington Confederate Memorial in 1914. On the other hand, the continuing Great Migration of African Americans to the North, their "Red Summer" counterattacks against white rioters throughout U.S. cities after World War I, and the NAACP's growing organizational leadership and membership alarmed Southern whites. As if to dispel their fears, the UDC sought to carve in stone their image of "appropriate, safe, and appealing blackness."<sup>17</sup>

Matthew Page Andrews, a Baltimore historian and an active member of the SCV, took an interest in the Heyward Shepherd story. On his suggestion, at the UDC's annual convention in November 1920, President General May McKinney recommended erecting a memorial in Harpers Ferry for the "faithful slave" Shepherd, "who stood between Southern womanhood and a renegade adventurer." The convention

promptly agreed to erect the memorial in cooperation with the SCV, assigning Andrews to write its inscription.<sup>18</sup>

The UDC's optimistic plan to erect the memorial within a year turned into a decade-long search for an appropriate site. In May 1922, they sought permission from the B & O to use a plot across from the John Brown Monument, which was built in 1895. Concerned about Andrews's inscription that condemned John Brown's raid as a "bloody massacre," the B & O consulted the town council through its recorder, Henry McDonald, the Northern white president of Storer College and an ardent fan of John Brown. McDonald suggested the inscription might induce "unpleasant racial feeling" in the community, which in fact had a Ku Klux Klan march a year later. On the council's advice, the B & O denied permission.<sup>19</sup>

After several years of internal miscommunications and a fruitless search for an alternate site, 1930 brought the UDC a breakthrough. Determined to erect the Shepherd Memorial, the new president general of the UDC, Elizabeth Bashinsky, persuaded Andrews to soften the wording of the inscription and so secured support from newly elected town mayor James Ranson, the son of a Confederate veteran. Although her negotiations with the B & O came to naught, a property owner offered land just across from the originally planned plot.<sup>20</sup> Taking the revised inscription as a sign of "good will and better inter-racial feeling," McDonald assented. Historian Johnson speculates that Storer College's financial situation affected McDonald's conciliatory attitudes toward Andrews and the UDC, but Janney and Shackel rather attribute it to his mildly paternalistic racial views. In either case, with these favorable changes, the UDC eventually managed to hold an unveiling ceremony for the Shepherd Memorial in October 1931.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE UNVEILING OF AND CONTROVERSY OVER THE SHEPHERD MEMORIAL

About three hundred whites and one hundred blacks gathered for the ceremony that started with McDonald's conciliatory address. However, the subsequent speeches by Lost Cause advocates revealed their anti-Brown position. Andrews not only condemned Brown as a lawless rabble rouser but also reaffirmed Brown's insanity, while praising Shepherd as a representative of "a transplanted people" who conducted themselves admirably during the Civil War. Bashinsky praised the benevolent white Southerners who "civilized" heathen Africans well enough to save

Harpers Ferry and the entire South from a devastating slave insurrection such as Haiti had experienced in the 1790s. Probably thinking the emasculated Shepherd image inappropriate for the highly racialized Southern sexual taboo, she spent the rest of her speech in glorifying the black mammy, an asexual maternal figure symbolizing African American natural docility and attachment to the whites. From such remarks, we can see that the emphasis of anti-Brown arguments had changed from the earlier articles in the *Virginia Free Press*. Encouraged by the sectional reconciliation over the war, they emphasized Shepherd's presumed loyalty to the Confederacy over the tragedy of his innocent death and Brown's aberrant violence over his ideological mission, thus tactfully downplaying slavery and the racial issues of the Civil War.<sup>22</sup>

Attending the ceremony as honored guests from the African American side, Reverend George Bragg, Shepherd's descendent James Walker, and B & O porter James Moton expressed their approval of the installation. They reasoned that people should just appreciate Shepherd's integrity and fidelity to his duty and take this as an opportunity for interracial goodwill. However, African American newspapers and the NAACP vigorously protested, critiquing the symbolism of the UDC's version of Shepherd. Calling the Shepherd Memorial the "Uncle Tom Monument," the *Baltimore Afro-American* listed the African American raiders who fought with Brown and suggested erecting a monument for them. In another article, J. Max Barber challenged Shepherd's loyalty to the Confederate cause, averring, "he did not know what John Brown's men came for." Barber even vindicated John Brown's armed uprising as "a passion for justice," comparing him to George Washington in the Revolutionary War.<sup>23</sup>

The highlight of the ceremony for the African American protest (and an unexpected disgrace for the Lost Cause) was an impromptu speech by Pearl Tatten, the African American music director at Storer College. Before the chorus that McDonald had scheduled, she extemporized that her father volunteered to fight for "the freedom of [her] people, for which John Brown struck the first blow," and that her people would pursue "a larger freedom, not in the spirit of the black mammy but in the spirit of new freedom and rising youth." Although conservative Southern whites did manage to erect the Shepherd Memorial, this episode shows how tenuous their dominance was. In other words, the memory they inscribed was neither so solid nor immortal as they had envisaged for Harpers Ferry, a geographical and cultural border between the North and South,



where conflicting memories of Brown and the Civil War are entangled and contested.<sup>24</sup>

The African American protest against the Lost Cause resurfaced in May 1932, when the NAACP sought permission from Storer College to install a tablet (hereafter, “the Brown Tablet”) on John Brown’s Fort, which had been purchased by the college and relocated to its campus in 1910. Composed by W. E. B. Du Bois, who inclined toward socialism and depicted Brown as a social revolutionary, the inscription is a radical extension of African American activists’ previous argument: “Here John Brown aimed at human slavery a blow that woke a *guilty nation*. With him fought seven slaves and sons of slaves. Over his *crucified corpse* marched 200,000 black soldiers and 4,000,000 freedmen. . .”<sup>25</sup> McDonald and the board of trustees declined the request, judging it “not likely to increase the better interracial relationship” unless the NAACP would change the inscription to the more abstract “John Brown, 1859–His Soul Goes Marching On,” but the NAACP brusquely refused. After this incident, African American newspapers accused McDonald of selling out to the UDC and challenged his competency as college president, while some African American alumni of Storer College defended McDonald. However, without further development, the controversy gradually subsided.<sup>26</sup>

As Janney points out, the controversy over the Shepherd Memorial and the Brown Tablet reveals the irony of conservative white approbation of a free black contrasting with radical black approbation of a controversial white.<sup>27</sup> Shepherd’s presumed faithful servitude not only promoted the race relations that the Lost Cause advocates cherished but also evoked the devastating image of Brown’s murderous violence. Against this, the African American activists focused primarily on Brown’s pursuit of racial equality, while at the same time they affirmed the image of African American masculine agency. In the absence of reliable historical records, and inseparable from Brown’s legacy of violence, Shepherd became powerful ammunition indeed for the UDC to downplay Brown’s martyrdom. Thus, Shepherd’s death posed African Americans radicals a dilemma: how to commemorate the violent struggle for the destruction of slavery and racial oppression. Liberal Northern whites like McDonald and moderate African Americans who basically believed in Brown’s abolitionism but took a guarded stance on his violent means distanced themselves from the dilemma, giving a tacit nod to the Lost Cause version of Shepherd’s story.

THE MAKING OF THE NATIONAL PARK AND  
THE CHALLENGE OF RELEVANCY

Neither the Shepherd Memorial nor the Brown Tablet surfaced in the media for four decades after 1932, but in the same period, Harpers Ferry experienced a transformation. Around the time McDonald refused the installation of the Brown Tablet on Storer College's John Brown's Fort, he was working with Representative Jennings Randolph, who introduced a bill (HR 5849) to establish a national military park in the Harpers Ferry area in 1935. McDonald's ambition to establish the park might have prompted his conciliatory attitude in the Shepherd Memorial controversy. However, this time, he directly confronted Andrews and the UDC members who regarded the park as a pro-Brown commemoration. In 1944, Congress finally ratified Randolph's bill (HR 3524). Land acquisition for the park took yet another decade, but in 1955, the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (HFNHP) officially commenced operation.<sup>28</sup>

Reflecting sectional reconciliation as well as local whites' ambivalence toward John Brown, the park toned down the Brown element, highlighting "Stonewall" Jackson's charge at the 1862 Battle of Harpers Ferry, as well as its surrounding natural beauty. The racial tensions of the civil rights movement in the face of the excessive patriotism of the Cold War discouraged open discussion of the racial questions that Brown's legacy would otherwise naturally evoke. So in 1959, the HFNHP soft-pedaled its centennial celebration of Brown's raid.<sup>29</sup> The 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* had ironically spelled the end of historically black Storer College, because the State of West Virginia terminated its subsidies to racially segregated schools that were now declared "unconstitutional" by the decision. In 1962 the financially collapsed college came under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service and was turned into a training center, while John Brown's Fort was moved to Arsenal Square, opposite the Shepherd Memorial, in 1968.<sup>30</sup>

By the time the HFNHP got off the ground in the mid-1960s, radical activists were embracing Brown's racial egalitarianism and militancy, and America was moving in the direction of multiculturalism. As the Shepherd Memorial became a headache for the HFNHP, they "quietly turned the stone with its face to the wall," but "restored it to its former prominence" under pressure from a congressman, according to a letter to the *Washington Post* in August 1970. In the same year, HFNHP super-

intendent Joseph Prentice personally expressed his wish to remove the memorial. In 1976, with the permission of the UDC and SCV, the park removed the memorial as part of its renovation of adjacent buildings, and it remained in storage for another five years.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1980s, the UDC and SCV were urging the park to display the Shepherd Memorial once again. Newly arrived superintendent Donald Campbell and park officials patiently continued their negotiations with both groups and with the NAACP in hopes of displaying it with an explanatory plaque. Failing to find common ground, the park reinstalled the Shepherd Memorial to its original place without any plaque in 1981. Shortly thereafter, rumors of possible vandalism caused them to cover it with a plywood box—a decision breeding dissatisfaction among the UDC and SCV. However, the memorial remained covered with plywood for the next fourteen years.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1990s, the UDC and SCV increasingly pressured the HFNHP and the National Park Service, mobilizing support from grassroots members and from Senator Jesse Helms, the conservative leader who opposed multiculturalism in the escalating “culture wars.” In June 1995, the HFNHP finally restored the Shepherd Memorial to its original place, this time with a plaque. Mentioning only that Shepherd was shot during Brown’s raid in 1859, the plaque briefly explains the 1930s controversy and adds Du Bois’s tribute to John Brown as “Another Perspective.” It equivocally quotes the Lost Cause advocates’ allegation to “prove that the people of the South who owned slaves valued and respected their good qualities as no one else ever did or so will do.” According to Superintendent Campbell, the “neutral” and “factual” information “invites the park visitor to make their own judgment about the monument.”<sup>33</sup>

Restoration of the Shepherd Memorial aroused vigorous opposition from both sides, illuminating half a century of controversy as well as the continuing fundamental discrepancies in their views (or definitions) of history. Harriet Elizabeth Nichols Binkley, honorary president of the West Virginia Division of the UDC, appreciated the memorial’s “long overdue” redisplay to “bring out the *true history*.” G. Elliott Cummings, Maryland commander of the SCV, held the plaque unnecessary, for “any monument speaks for itself and doesn’t require interpretation.” Criticizing the HFNHP for bowing to the demands of “political correctness,” he sarcastically suggested adding a plaque to every memorial.<sup>34</sup>

For other reasons, the NAACP was not happy about the arrangement. James A. Tolbert, president of the West Virginia NAACP, wanted the

memorial to be removed and “taken to the Potomac River,” because even with the plaque, it was still an “insult” to his people that would mislead tourists into thinking that African Americans willingly supported the Confederacy. Claiming, “It’s not *history*,” he attacked the white UDC’s and SCV’s continual denial of membership to African Americans, exposing their racism packaged and justified as “heritage.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite this crossfire from both sides, Superintendent Campbell stood firm in his position. While admitting that the plaque didn’t tell “the whole story,” he maintained that “the Shepherd monument *and* its controversy . . . [are] *history* that happened at Harpers Ferry,” and that the park should “respect the views of Americans to disagree over the monument’s meaning.”<sup>36</sup> Both sides continued to express their disapproval of the HFNHP’s decision, but after a few months Campbell reported that park visitors seemed to be satisfied with the plaque. The controversy had subsided by 2000, when Janney interviewed an HFNHP interpreter.<sup>37</sup>

#### FRAGMENTED MEMORIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF THEIR HISTORICAL PRESENTATION TO THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY PUBLIC

Intriguingly, each of the above three positions projects its own understandings on the word “history.” Though clumsily, the HFNHP explored ways to incorporate not only the historical facts known about the 1859 raid but also the historical facts known about the placement and interpretations of the Shepherd Memorial, in order to present them coherently and historiographically to contemporary visitors. That was what Campbell meant when he said that the memorial should be “presented as *history*.”<sup>38</sup>

However, the UDC and SCV insisted that the inscription on the Shepherd Memorial were accurate, “true” history, reflecting what actually happened in the Civil War era, rather than reflecting the interpretations their predecessors had constructed in the early twentieth century. Despite losing their former dominant position even in the South, in the late-twentieth century, these conservative groups still glorify the Lost Cause under the rubric of history and heritage, substantiating the insight of leading memory studies scholar Edward Linenthal that “for many Southerners over several generations, Confederate death could only be honorable if slavery was not the cause of the war.”<sup>39</sup>

The NAACP criticized the Lost Cause advocates, exposing their ideological construction of so-called historical accuracy, both in the 1930s

and in the 1990s. However, the NAACP's very demand for the removal of the Shepherd Memorial not only downplayed Shepherd's death but also denied a part of their eighty-year-long historic contestation with conservative Southern whites over the memories of Shepherd and Brown. The following episode illustrates the NAACP's downplaying and denial.

In early preparation for their 2009 centennial celebration, the NAACP got permission from the HFNHP to install their reproduction of the *original* Brown Tablet, which they now called "The Great Tablet" at the former campus of Storer College (see fig. 2). Their intent was to "complete Dr. Du Bois' mission of 1932, to honor John Brown, to execute the NAACP's long documented role in honoring persons who fight for justice and equality," as Julian Bond, chair of the NAACP, told more than a hundred people gathered for its unveiling ceremony in July 2006.



Figure 2 John Brown Tablet Memorial, 2010

According to the NAACP's press release, Storer College (McDonald) had refused the original Brown Tablet because they had thought Du Bois's inscription "too militant." However, the NAACP alluded neither to the Shepherd Memorial nor to the controversy it bred in the 1930s and 1990s; without any explanatory plaque, viewers would assume that the memorial were built in 1932, as the inscription implies.<sup>40</sup>

As if avoiding Shepherd-related memories were not enough, the NAACP camouflaged Brown's belief that "righteous" violence was necessary for overthrowing the violent slavery system, consequently toning down the potential violence in revolutionary racial changes that Du Bois had poignantly inscribed in the tablet in 1932. At the heartwarming ceremony of 2006, realizing their long-awaited dream, Julian Bond cautiously commented that the NAACP founders "condemned the violence but celebrated the impulse. . . . They're not celebrating the violence that [Brown] perpetuated. They're celebrating his commitment to racial justice."<sup>41</sup> True as that may be, it further circumvents the fundamental question that victims of violence such as Shepherd pose: whether noble ends ever justify violent means.

In the late-twentieth century, John Brown's use of violence to achieve racial equality came to haunt Americans more than ever, as extreme political groups both on the left and on the right, such as the Weather Underground and abortion clinic bombers, began to appropriate Brown's revolutionary violence for their own causes. The September 11th terrorist attacks only escalated this intricate moral question, making people more reticent to applaud Brown's methods for obtaining social justice. As the controversy over "just wars" extended to controversy over "just terrorism," even scholars anguished over categorizing Brown as a "good" terrorist.<sup>42</sup>

Budding Brown scholar R. Blakeslee Gilpin regards Brown as "a reminder of the irreconcilable fault lines in the nation's relationship with violence, equality, and change."<sup>43</sup> However, in the post-9/11 sociopolitical atmosphere, the NAACP avoided throwing itself into the middle of this hard challenge and took a rather contradictory position by installing Du Bois's radical inscription and toning down its implications and, at the same time, sidestepping the long trajectory of the Shepherd Memorial controversy. Even the HFNHP, which incorporated the controversy into its exhibition, confines its debate on violence and morality to the Civil War era, avoiding discussion of the violence that has riddled America's long struggle for freedom.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Emboldened by sectional reconciliation and Jim Crow segregation after Reconstruction, Lost Cause advocates erected the Shepherd Memorial in 1931. They claimed that Shepherd's death proved his opposition to John Brown's abolitionist raid and, by extension, symbolized African Americans' loyalty to the Confederacy. Outraged by this abuse of logic if not of history, the NAACP and African American activists celebrated Brown's martyrdom in the cause of abolition, not only in the 1930s but until the present day. Although the details in dispute have changed over time, the chasm between conservative Southern whites' memories and African Americans' memories is not easily bridged, because both sides remain keenly aware that memorials are carved into stone to preserve their visions of the past and future for ages immemorial.<sup>45</sup>

The long controversy over the Shepherd Memorial also illuminates the challenges facing U.S. historical parks and museums to present history in an allegedly multicultural public landscape. Through the civil rights movement and consequent social transformations, African Americans gained a greater voice and political clout. As a result, local governments and the national parks that supervise century-old Confederate Memorials face challenges from those who find such memorials racially offensive and historically misleading. Cynthia Mills finds "no systematic effort" to take down the Confederate Memorials so far, partly because of communities' desire to preserve their distinct local heritage. However, three ways of coping with this challenge are emerging. First, some kinds of explanation, usually plaques, are added to the memorials to "neutralize" the engraved memories. Second, some memorials are actually removed to less visible plots to avoid social friction. Third, new memorials are constructed near the originals, embodying alternative memories that the Lost Cause tended to ignore or downplay, in what Mills calls "desegregation." In doing so, the planners emphasize that public space in a multicultural society is not for a particular people but for all.<sup>46</sup>

After taking the Shepherd Memorial away from public view for about two decades, in the 1990s the HFNHP attempted to "neutralize" the Lost Cause memory with a plaque, to deconstruct the history interpreting Brown and Shepherd, and to show visitors how people use and abuse their historical past. As Linenthal pertinently observes, "those monuments that are most controversial are most in need of interpretive attention."<sup>47</sup>

However, both conservative Southern whites and African Americans opposed the decision of the park, insisting that only their particular memories were “history.” Today, the Shepherd Memorial is located in the central area of the HFNHP, while the building behind the memorial is dedicated to the Brown exhibition. Largely ignored by tourist guides, the Brown Tablet Memorial reposes in a quiet yard of the former Storer College, a half mile from the Shepherd Memorial. Those two memorials stand too far apart to call their parallel existence “desegregation.”

The Shepherd Memorial controversy is unique in its intensity and duration. Ironically, the NAACP’s denying of the racially biased interpretations of the Lost Cause downplays Shepherd’s death and fails to historicize more recent African American struggles contesting the memories of Shepherd and Brown. The post-9/11 U.S. sociopolitical atmosphere not only calls into question the justification of Brown’s use of violence but also obscures the violent aspects of struggles against racial oppression. Thus, even if the “desegregation” of the Shepherd Memorial is geographically realized, the memories of Shepherd and Brown as well as their critical historical presentation for the public will remain subjects of continuing conflict.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On the Lost Cause and subsequent sectional reconciliation between the North and South, see, for example, David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 49–72; and John J. Winberry, “‘Lest We Forget’: The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape,” *Southeastern Geographer* 23, no. 2 (1983): 107–21. About 370 memorials were erected on Southern soil from 1866 to 1929, peaking between 1903 and 1914, which interestingly correlates with the peak of the UDC’s membership.

<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 11–19 (hereafter cited as *Memory B & W*); and Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3–5.

<sup>4</sup> While most Confederate Memorials commemorate white male leaders and soldiers, some few memorials erected after the 1890s were dedicated to “faithful slaves.” Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 155–61.



<sup>5</sup> On the history of Harpers Ferry, see Teresa S. Moyer and Paul A. Shackel, *The Making of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park: A Devil, Two Rivers, and a Dream* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008) (hereafter cited as *Making HFNHP*).

<sup>6</sup> Mary Johnson, "An 'Ever Present Bone of Contention': The Heyward Shepherd Memorial," *West Virginia History* 56 (1997), [http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal\\_wvh/wvh56-1.html](http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh56-1.html); *Memory B & W*, 77–112; and Caroline E. Janney, "Written in Stone: Gender, Race, and the Heyward Shepherd Memorial," *Civil War History* 52, no. 2 (2006): 117–41.

<sup>7</sup> Some recent studies on John Brown and his Harpers Ferry raid: Robert E. McGlone, *John Brown's War against Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Knopf, 2005). Until recently, most studies mentioned no slaves joining Brown's band to seek freedom. However, some scholars document slaves' involvement as well as their restlessness during and after the raid. See Hannah Geffert, "They Heard His Call: The Local Black Community's Involvement in the Raid on Harpers Ferry," in *Terrible Swift Sword: The Legacy of John Brown*, ed. Peggy A. Russo and Paul Finkelman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 23–45.

<sup>8</sup> The total number of raiders was twenty-one; Brown left three of them on guard in outlying locations.

<sup>9</sup> Even academics differ dramatically on the meaning of Brown's cause and activities. For example, see Merrill D. Peterson, *John Brown: The Legend Revisited* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Bruce A. Ronda, *Reading the Old Man: John Brown in American Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008); and Russo and Finkelman, *Terrible Swift Sword*.

<sup>10</sup> "Testimony of Lewis W. Washington" and "Testimony of John D. Starry," both in Select Committee of the Senate Appointed to Inquire into the Late Invasion and Seizure of Public Property at Harper's Ferry, S. Rep. Com., no. 278, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., 1860, 23–24, 39; "Slave Insurrection at Harper's Ferry," *Baltimore Sun*, October 18, 1859; "Harpers Ferry, Great Excitement," *Virginia Free Press*, October 20, 1859 (hereafter cited as *VFP*); and "Harpers-Ferry Invasion," *VFP*, October 27, 1859.

<sup>11</sup> Henry McDonald strove in vain to identify Shepherd's grave in the 1930s. See Henry McDonald, letter to Governor Harry F. Byrd, January 11, 1932; and C. Vernon Eddy, Letter to McDonald, January 18, 1932; both in McDonald Papers, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, West Virginia (HFNHP), ser. 3, box 4, folder 3 (hereafter cited as McDonald Papers).

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Douglass, "John Brown: An Address at the Fourteenth Anniversary of Storer College," May 30, 1881, reprinted in Benjamin Quarles, ed., *Blacks on John Brown* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 65; *VFP*, June 18, 1881. Storer College was established in Harpers Ferry by the Freewill Baptists of New England in 1867. Although opened for all regardless of race and gender, it functioned as a freedmen's school during the Reconstruction era and developed into one of the few higher educational institutions for African Americans in the South at the turn of the century. For details, see Dawne Raines Burke, "Storer College: A Hope for Redemption in the Shadow of Slavery, 1865–1955" (PhD diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> *VFP*, August 8, 1994. The John Brown Monument was actually installed in 1895.

<sup>14</sup> See note 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ronda, *Reading the Old Man*, 63–108; and Peterson, *John Brown*, 33–85.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Fred A. Olds, "A Monument to the Faithful Old Slaves," *Confederate Veterans* 12, no. 9 (1904): 443 (hereafter cited as *CV*); Mrs. W. Carleton Adams, "Slave Monument Question," *CV* 12, no. 11 (1904): 525; and "Monument to Faithful Slaves," *CV* 13, no. 3 (1905): 123–24.

<sup>17</sup> Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 116–59; and Micki McElya, "Commemorating the Color Line: The National Mammy Monument Controversy of the 1920s," in *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, ed. Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 203–18. The UDC's most ambitious effort was lobbying the Congress for the National Mammy Monument in Washington, D.C., between 1923 and 1924.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, "Ever Present Bone of Contention"; and *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (Asheville, NC: United Daughters of the Confederacy, November 9–13, 1920), 40, quoted in Johnson, "Ever Present Bone of Contention." Even after the UDC found that Heyward was not a slave, they kept calling their committee "the faithful slave memorial committee."

<sup>19</sup> Memo, June 1, 1922; McDonald, Letter to President Daniel Willard, the B & O, June 2, 1922; George H. Campbell, Letter to McDonald, June 23, 1923; all in McDonald Papers; and *Farmers Advocate*, September 1, 1923. Andrews's proposed inscription is reprinted in Janney, "Written in Stone," 139–40.

<sup>20</sup> "The New President General, U.D.C.," *CV* 36, no. 1 (1930): 4; "From the President General," *CV* 39, no. 7 (1931): 270; and Johnson, "Ever Present Bone of Contention."

<sup>21</sup> McDonald, Letter to Walter White, October 19, 1931, McDonald Papers; Johnson, "Ever Present Bone of Contention," note 51; Janney, "Written in Stone," 129–30n27; and *Memory B & W*, 99–100. R. Blakeslee Gilpin contrasts vividly radical African American views with moderate liberal Northern white views regarding Brown's racial egalitarianism and his means to achieve it. R. Blakeslee Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives: America's Long Reckoning with Violence, Equality, and Change* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), esp. 79–105.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Page Andrews, *Heyward Shepherd: Victim of Violence* (Harpers Ferry, WV: Heyward Memorial Association, 1931), esp. 7–8, 10–11, 25–28; "Heyward Shepherd," *CV* 37, no. 11 (1931): 411–14; "Speeches Made at Dedication of Uncle Tom-Pappy Monument at Harpers Ferry," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 17, 1931 (hereafter cited as *BAA*); and *Memory B & W*, 85–86, 94–98.

<sup>23</sup> James Walker, Letter to Pearl Tatten, n.d., HFNHP microfilm, reel 117, flash 9; "Confederates to Dedicate 'Uncle Tom' Monument," *BAA*, October 10, 1931; "John Brown No Criminal as Rebel Daughters Infer," "N.A.A.C.P. Raps Dedication of 'Pappy' Tablet," and "Yankee Woman Steals Rebel Girls' Show," all in *BAA*, October 17, 1931; and J. Max Barber, "Daughters of the Confederacy and John Brown," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 24, 1931.

<sup>24</sup> "Yankee Woman Steals Rebel Girl's Show"; and Janney, "Written in Stone," 118–19, 132.

<sup>25</sup> White, Letters to McDonald, March 23 and April 16, 1932, both in HFNHP microfilm, reel 123, flash 9, emphasis added. Historians usually count only five of Brown's raiders as African American, but Du Bois regarded two white raiders as mulatto and so numbered them among the African Americans. On Du Bois's stance on Brown's use of violence, see William E. Cain, "Violence, Revolution, and the Cost of Freedom: John Brown and W. E. B. DuBois," *boundary 2* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 1990): 305–30; and Julie Husband, "W. E. B. Du Bois's John Brown: Placing Racial Justice at the Center of a

Socialist Politics,” in *The Afterlife of John Brown*, ed. Andrew Taylor and Eldred Herrington (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 159–71.

<sup>26</sup> White, Letters to McDonald, April 20 and May 2, 1932; and McDonald, Letters to White, April 19, April 25, and May 3, 1932; all in HFNHP microfilm, reel 123, flash 9. In those italicized words of Du Bois’s inscription, McDonald and trustees saw dangerous revolutionary violence even against the nation. See also “College Refuses N.A.A.C.P. Tablet to John Brown,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 25, 1932; “Storer Prexy Away,” “At Storer College,” and “Balked at Singing ‘America’ on John Brown Pilgrimage,” all in *BAA*, May 28, 1932.

<sup>27</sup> Janney, “Written in Stone,” 135.

<sup>28</sup> *Making HFNHP*, 33–51. Until 1963, the park was called Harpers Ferry National Monument. However, in this article I use the contemporary naming.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 93–97; and Foster Hailey, “5 Experts Debate John Brown Raid,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1959.

<sup>30</sup> Burke, “Storer College,” 356–57; and *Making HFNHP*, 89, 158. Although Storer College was a private institution, it was heavily dependent on state subsidies.

<sup>31</sup> B. J. Layman, “Monumental Ambiguity at Harpers Ferry,” *Washington Post*, August 26, 1970; Joseph R. Prentice, Letter to Ben, August 28, 1970, quoted in *Memory B & W*, 103–4; and *Memory B & W*, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Eugene L. Meyer, “As Civil War Monument Returns, So Does Controversy,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 1995; and *Memory B & W*, 104–7.

<sup>33</sup> Josef Federman, “Controversial Monument Back in Harpers Ferry,” *Charleston Gazette*, July 15, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Greg Tasker, “Tribute to Victim of Brown’s Raid Still Controversial,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 3, 1995, emphasis added; and Meyer, “As Civil War Monument Returns.”

<sup>35</sup> Eugene L. Meyer, “NAACP Calls for Memorial to Be Hidden,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 1995; and Tasker, “Tribute to Victim of Brown’s Raid Still Controversial,” emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, “As Civil War Monument Returns”; and Meyer, “NAACP Calls for Memorial to Be Hidden,” emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> Tasker, “Tribute to Victim of Brown’s Raid Still Controversial”; Jack Deutsch, “War of Words Erupts over Monument,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, November 28, 1995; Rebecca Bailey, “Harpers Ferry Sign Angers Some,” *Civil War News*, August 1995, 22–23; and Janney, “Written in Stone,” 138n43.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, “NAACP Calls for Memorial to Be Hidden,” emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, “Healing and History: The Dilemmas of Interpretation,” in *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, ed. Robert K. Sutton (Washington, DC: Eastern National Press, 2001), [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/rthg/chap3b.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rthg/chap3b.htm).

<sup>40</sup> Nakia Herring, “NAACP to Honor Abolitionist John Brown,” *Baltimore Times*, July 20, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Brian White, “Organization to Honor John Brown,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, July 14, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives*, 185–86. On terrorism and Brown, see for example, David W. Blight, “John Brown: Triumphant Failure,” *American Prospect*, March 13, 2000, 44–45; Ken Chowder, “The Father of American Terrorism,” *American Heritage* 51, no. 1 (2000): 81–90; Nicole Etcheson, “John Brown, Terrorist?” *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 29–48; and Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*, 500–506.

<sup>43</sup> Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> The HFNHP Brown Museum also skirted the discussion of violence and racial justice in the contemporary context. John C. Spielvogel criticizes the exhibition for giving viewers the impression that racism that Brown and later activists had struggled against was finished in the past. John C. Spielvogel, "Interpreting 'Sacred Ground': The Rhetoric of National Park Service Civil War Historical Battlefields and Parks" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 83–90.

<sup>45</sup> *Memory B & W*, 111–12; and Janney, "Written in Stone," 138–39.

<sup>46</sup> Mills and Simpson, *Monuments to the Lost Cause*, xxv–xvii.

<sup>47</sup> Linenthal, "Healing and History."