Breezes whispered to the men of the Jamestown Exposition Company as they docked at Brandon and Claremont estates in May 1903. Emerging from the steamship on the James River, they gathered at the plantations and gazed upon the glory of Virginia’s Lost Cause. Brick manors and intricate gardens obscured the enslaved labor that had managed the unruly marshes. The Exposition planners admired both estates before continuing their journey. They floated eastward, back in time to the first permanent British settlement on Jamestown Island. But this did not mark the end of their tour. They re-boarded the steamer. Before the James River met the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, the men and their boat veered southward. They turned into the Elizabeth River, casting their sights on the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth. Antebellum estates gave way to brick warehouses and shipping containers. A gnarly brine of urban decay and naval stores replaced the brackish wafts of the bay. The ship followed the Elizabeth River’s curve as it narrowed into Deep Creek, the northern terminus of the Dismal Swamp Canal.

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1 Ten years prior to the Jamestown Exposition planners’ excursion, the Association of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities assumed ownership of the island in 1893, an achievement that glimmered with colonial heritage for the men. The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), a white women-led organization to preserve revolutionary and Lost Cause memory, shepherded the vision of the exposition. The APVA joined a cadre of women-led historic preservation groups that formed nationwide in the late nineteenth century. Spurred by “a lingering fear of failure of the noble experiment of American republicanism,” the APVA and similar organizations felt the Civil War had disrupted the visions that early Americanists projected on the nation and sought to repair it through colonial revival. Emancipation, economic depressions, influxes of immigrants, and industrialization appeared to threaten “traditional” ways of American life per the desires of Anglo-descended people. See Anders Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia’s Eighteenth-Century Capital (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) for more on this history.
Whatever breeze had accompanied the men dissipated as they passed through the locks. A damp air descended upon the ship and beneath the men’s garments. Mosquitoes droned in their ears as they edged deeper into the Great Dismal Swamp.²

It is entirely possible that these men enjoyed a lovely day in May 1903 between the James River estates and the Great Dismal Swamp. Newspaper articles did not indicate that day’s weather. But May in Virginia is a fickle month. Heat can lure water moccasins and rattlesnakes out of dormancy, and humidity can stir up a mighty stench through the industrial waterways. Whether the weather was pleasurable or sticky, however, it was an odd choice to pair plantation with swamp. Given the fascination with old Virginia, the decision to visit the Great Dismal stood out like a snake-bit thumb. Why did the swamp join the ranks of places like Brandon, Claremont, and Jamestown; and what was the men’s intention in bringing these sites together?

Because the Great Dismal Swamp encompassed land once owned by George Washington, the Jamestown Exposition Company men imagined it as reflecting Virginia’s founding history and the colonial planters’ agricultural visions. One of many such groups, Exposition Company promoted the swamp as an exotic adventure where visitors could immerse themselves in primeval wilderness a short drive from urban locales like Norfolk, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. This dual imagery—colonial tourist attraction and untamed wilds—resulted in contradictory understandings of the Great Dismal Swamp. The aspirational imagery also conflicted with the material reality of the swamp, a corporately owned managed forest, where ecology thwarted the intentions of business and state boosters. Rather than the jungle wilds of

other southern wetlands like the Santee Swamp of South Carolina, the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia and Florida, or the Everglades in Florida (all of which, too, were rife with human infrastructure), the Great Dismal Swamp was actually a stretch of corporate timberland permeated by mosquito-festered standing water. The swamp’s extensive ditch networks, many of which enslaved laborers carved prior to the Civil War, scarred the “virgin wilderness” that visitors might hope to find.

Following the Civil War, lumber companies descended upon the swamp and reactivated the Dismal Swamp Canal. They purchased more acreage for logging. They bought farming families’ remaining stands. By the early twentieth century, the swamp had become an advertisement for the economic redemption of the postwar South. Companies like Camp Manufacturing, a lumber company that had purchased the former “George Washington tract” on the swamp’s western end, attempted to convince the broader public that scientific forestry embodied not only a colonial heritage, but New South revitalization as well. Yet these efforts exhausted the swamp’s resources; by the mid-twentieth century, the swamp yielded few profits and the owners no longer wanted it. They tried to donate it. They found support in local government and early conservation groups, who tried to convince the federal government of its worth. Of its colonial heritage. Of its swampiness. Yet the federal government rejected their calls.

Between 1900 to 1945, corporate and state boosters attempted to place the Great Dismal Swamp’s colonial history alongside other historic sites that received preservation status in Virginia. Journalists, corporate representatives, and political boosters wielded the swamp for their respective purposes yet always tethered the wetland to colonial heritage. But efforts to
conserve the swamp as a vestige of George Washington’s legacy failed repeatedly. The Great Dismal Swamp was not the untouched wilderness many desired to promote, nor was it a bounded slice of potentially lucrative colonial history. The wetland could not please anyone: it conflicted with visions for both heritage and leisure, and it failed to fill entrepreneurs’ coffers as they gnawed at its remaining cedar stands. And the swamp responded. It dried out, caught fire, and dodged the goals of the many parties who tried to mold the wetland to meet their desires.

One of only two natural lakes in Virginia, Lake Drummond lured naturalists and sportsmen following the Civil War with its mysterious origin and bounteous wildlife. While its nascence remains uncertain, geologists conjecture that it formed from an immense peat fire four millennia ago. Their findings support Nansemond tribal storytelling, which describes a great firebird that descended on the swamp and left behind a gaping hole. The cavity pooled with blood of the firebird’s young, slaughtered by a huntsman. The fledglings’ sanguineous traces remain in the lake’s tannic waters and its riparian veins. Lake Drummond features prominently in the swamp, which straddles the North Carolina and eastern Virginia border.3

The swamp and its nearby rivers, the Nansemond, the Elizabeth, and the Pasquotank, long enticed Euroamerican interest. In 1728, William Byrd II led a group of surveyors into the 

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swamp as they mapped the Virginia and North Carolina borders. Byrd himself decided not to foray into swamp, claiming “there was no Intelligence of this Terra Incognita to be got.” Instead, he relied on assistant surveyors to traverse the oozing depths of muck as they swatted away swarms of mosquitoes.\(^4\) Byrd pleaded with colonial governments to drain this viscous beast. Forty years later, George Washington and his colleagues sought to realize that dream as they established “Adventurers to Drain the Great Dismal Swamp.” Across fifty thousand acres, Washington and his colleagues envisioned rice plantations and logging enterprises. Free and enslaved labor fulfilled the demands of George Washington and the canal and lumber entrepreneurs who followed in his footsteps.\(^5\)

After Appomattox, ditches carved by enslaved laborers still scarred the landscape. In the decades that followed the Civil War, northern and southern entrepreneurs expanded the infrastructure necessary to timber cypress and juniper in the swamp. Plank roads, canals, and narrow-gauge rail allowed lumbermen to penetrate deeper and slash the swamp forest. Stumps memorialized the labor of loggers, many of whom descended from the enslaved men who worked this and other southern wetlands. But owing to the swamp’s new infrastructure, boosters also struggled to portray the wetland to attract public consumption. Was it a wild, exotic land awaiting tourist exploration? Or was it a historic site, delineated by the waterways

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that Washington’s Dismal Swamp Company demanded? Southern wetlands have long been subject of this duality of description, from the Everglades in Florida to Santee Swamp and Congaree National Park in South Carolina. As Laura Ogden remarks about the Everglades, early twentieth-century naturalists struggled to acknowledge the prominence of human impact in a place they imagined as “undiscovered and isolated.” They and others conducting ecological research enshrouded southern wetlands in narrative tropes that effaced human presence—except when conservationists chose to romanticize the vanishing Indian.6

The discourse of post-Civil War Southern memory also deepens when we turn to so-called “natural” environments. Scholars working in this vein shift the reader’s gaze away from extravagant places like plantations to the surrounding, seemingly mundane built environment. They bring attention not only to the big houses but the ecosystems in which they are nested. Planters made environmental decisions that both shaped and were shaped by these ecosystems, the repercussions of which landed on the shoulders of enslaved and indentured men, women, and children. Their labors manifest on the landscape, sometimes centuries later, in the forms of irrigation ditches and in formerly open fields where advantageous tree species grow today. In his exploration of “the care and uncaring of dirt and domicile” at Rose Hill Plantation in South Carolina, for example, James Giesen asserts that landscape shapes how people conceive of their past and plan for their future.7 How official actors accentuated certain

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features while minimizing others enabled perpetuation of Lost Cause nostalgia. Giesen writes that “erasure” of environmental features is a process whereby Confederate and colonial memory may amplify.\(^8\)

In publicizing the Great Dismal Swamp’s colonial heritage, newspaper articles and national magazines of the early twentieth century diminished the wetland’s dynamism as a space of black and Native refuge, movement, and migration prior to and following the Civil War. Studies of marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp have gained prominence in the past fifteen years, following Daniel Sayers’ archaeological research on freedom-seeking and self-emancipation. Scholars have scoured archives and collected oral histories to expand understandings of slave resistance and means of survival. Kathryn Golden, for example, insists that “when federal ownership and use of land is entangled with the history and cultural heritage of marginalized or oppressed groups, institutions have an ethical responsibility to represent the history and honor the knowledge and memory that groups possess about the land and its past.”\(^9\)

While I agree with this call to action, I also believe that robust acknowledgments cannot proceed until we also excavate the full reasons why the Great Dismal Swamp became a national wildlife refuge, and why it appears the way it does today. The 1974 decision by the logging

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company Union-Camp (formerly Camp Manufacturing) to “gift” the Great Dismal Swamp to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must be evaluated in light of more recent histories of logging, ditching, burning—and boosterism. Those ecological, infrastructural, and political histories find their lineages not only in Native and black submersion and dispossession, but also in the historical memories and landscape imaginaries of white Virginians.

The 1903 James River boat trip to the Great Dismal Swamp marked four years before the Jamestown Exposition, a year-long event that celebrated the tercentennial of British settlement in Virginia. Replete with exhibits, entertainment, and corporate sponsorship, the Jamestown Exposition resembled the World’s Fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over the course of 1907, the Exposition welcomed visitors from twenty-four nations and thirty states to an elaborately constructed four-hundred-acre property where the Elizabeth and James Rivers met. The event curated a narrative of white-led progress, dating from British colonists’ encounter with Pocahontas and the Powhatan Chiefdom.

The Exposition organizers had visited the Great Dismal Swamp, where George Washington staked claims in the 1760s, to find inspiration beyond Jamestown. Like European

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10 In February 1901, Virginia’s General Assembly passed a joint resolution to support a year-long event to commemorate Virginia’s tercentennial. For more, see Robert T. Taylor, “The Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition of 1907,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 65, no. 2 (April 1957): 169-208.
11 No Native peoples are known to have attended, and black Virginians were relegated to present and attend in the Negro Building. Built by black laborers and architects, the Negro Building offered a sanitized version of racial uplift under the thumb of white goodwill. For more on displays and the whitewashed narrative design of the Jamestown Exposition, see Lucy Brown Franklin, “The Negro Exhibition of the Jamestown Tercentennial of 1907,” *Negro History Bulletin* 38, no. 5 (June 1, 1975): 408–15; Carl Abbott, “Norfolk in the New Century: The Jamestown Exposition and Urban Boosterism,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 85, no. 1 (January 1977): 86–96; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Meta Warrick’s 1907 ‘Negro Tableaux’ and (Re)presenting African American Historical Memory,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003): 1368–1400; Frederic W. Gleach, “Pocahontas at the Fair: Crafting Identities at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 419–45.
colonists across North America, George Washington gaped at what Annie Proulx describes as the “mind-numbing abundance of virgin resources.”\textsuperscript{12} Washington, along with fellow “Adventurers of the Great Dismal Swamp,” as they titled themselves, attempted to drain the swamp for rice and hemp cultivation. They began in 1763 by enslaving fifty-four African American men, women, and children to dredge ditches on the swamp’s western boundary. Following American victory at Yorktown in 1781, Washington’s company—renamed the Dismal Swamp Company—secured approval from the states of Virginia and North Carolina to dig a canal on the swamp’s eastern end. Dredged by enslaved laborers between 1790 and 1812, the Dismal Swamp Canal continued to ferry goods and raw materials when the Jamestown Exposition men visited in 1903.\textsuperscript{13} The canal, like the swamp itself, signified early attempts to civilize and engineer a landscape that colonial Americans desired. This was the heritage the men sought to celebrate.

For the Exposition, event organizers emphasized a legacy of Anglo progress since 1607, which they argued was best enjoyed beyond the halls of the exhibits in Tidewater Virginia. Visitors could book yacht trips from the Exposition to Jamestown Island, Yorktown, the Norfolk Naval Yard, or the Dismal Swamp. The Jamestown Exposition Company trained local students as tour guides, preparing for crowds that ranged from seventy-five to two hundred visitors. Tourists could pair a visit to Jamestown Island with a trip to Yorktown, where they could envision Americans’ victory battle against British soldiers in 1781. Or they could stroll the Naval Yard in Norfolk and Portsmouth, first established in 1767. They could also choose to

\textsuperscript{12} Annie Proulx, \textit{Barkskins} (New York, Scribner, 2016), 98.
immerse themselves in the Dismal Swamp, advertised as a foreboding experience veiled in humid green.\(^\text{14}\)

Newspapers also stoked swamp intrigue for Exposition visitors, intent on convincing skeptics that the wetland reverberated with tourist possibility:

Next year when the Jamestown Exposition is being held on Hampton Roads, [the Great Dismal Swamp]... will resound with the voices, the laughter and the noise of hundreds of thousands of human beings...[W]hat is now the most mysterious, mystic, romantic and weird region of the world will become as popularly well known as Central Park, New York... The means of getting to and from the swamp, now difficult and inadequate, are to be improved and rendered adequate and comfortable, so that even delicate ladies who desire to visit the region, can do so without discomfort or inconvenience.\(^\text{15}\)

The men reporting for the *Richmond-Times Dispatch* enjoyed favorable conditions when they visited the swamp in fall 1906. The previous spring and summer, rains saturated the wetland’s depths of peat. Though summer downpours are common in Tidewater Virginia, it is unusual that much standing water remained by November. Typically, the swamp is brittle by autumn, a mass of kindling between Virginia and North Carolina, susceptible to the flames ignited by rail and logging equipment. But smoke did not blanket the Great Dismal Swamp’s surroundings that fall. Rather, journalists enjoyed the cool, damp swamp from dry towpaths that flanked the canal and ditches.

Places like Jamestown, Yorktown, the Norfolk Naval Yard, and even the Great Dismal Swamp signified what James Lindgren calls Virginia’s “civil religion.”\(^\text{16}\) White elites treated these sites as sacred spaces that evoked colonial and Confederate heritage. They understood the

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eighteenth- and nineteenth-century built environment in conversation with the watery landscape, from the Chesapeake Bay and James River to the Great Dismal Swamp. These waterways served as the transportation links to progress: connective tissue that transformed raw materials into commodities, upon which their ancestors migrated and established plantations. The ditches and canal of the Great Dismal Swamp proved a different kind of waterway than other riparian landscapes in the mid-Atlantic.

Unlike rivers that Washington forded or the shorelines of plantation manors where Virginia’s First Families strolled, the Great Dismal Swamp was imagined as a primeval wilderness that evoked Washington’s first contact with the place. With white southern heritage and military prowess on full display, Exposition organizers tried to portray the Dismal as a missing puzzle piece to early American settlement. Visitors could revel in this wetland, free of the industrialization that had crept across the towns that comprised Virginia’s Hampton Roads region. The Great Dismal Swamp represented a lasting vestige of “untouched” wilderness upon colonists’ arrival.

At the Jamestown Exposition, moss-draped wetlands and bucolic plantation landscapes did not appear anachronistic against displays of New South industrialization. Boosters deployed both sets of narratives to convince outsiders not only of postwar recovery, but that present-day Virginians successfully achieved the founding fathers’ vision. As Marguerite Shaffer writes, tourism infrastructure at the turn of the twentieth century “encouraged white, native-born

middle- and upper-class Americans to reaffirm their American-ness [by] teaching tourists what to see and how to see it.” Former Confederate states like Virginia tried to convince northern and western entrepreneurs of their commitment to reintegration through economic development. Southern chambers of commerce and advertisement companies beckoned outsiders to spend their vacations and dollars at historic sites, industrializing cities, and natural wonders. Rather than Lost Cause memory, which could alienate potential visitors, Reiko Hilyer argues that “southern boosters created usable historical pasts in locally varying ways.”

Economic calculations guided southern boosters to promote colonial, opposed to Lost Cause, heritage revival, Hilyer claims. By making colonial heritage central to tourism in Tidewater Virginia, boosters minimized Confederate influence to entice Yankees. Virginia boosters treated places like Jamestown and the Great Dismal Swamp as sites of colonial ingenuity through circulating and codifying selective memories of early America. These places were deemed important not only because British colonists and their descendants staked claim to that land, but because early Virginians enacted their ideas of private property and infrastructure there. In other words, they embodied white Anglo-Saxon ideals of civilization.

As a consumer activity, tourism of the Great Dismal Swamp appealed explicitly to white travelers. As Grace Elizabeth Hale has argued, consumption promoted anti-blackness and cemented segregationist practices across physical space and through purchase of goods. At the turn of the twentieth century, journalists, politicians, and tourist bureaus committed to

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20 Hillyer, 88-93.
“segregation as culture.”\textsuperscript{21} Popular media imbued the swamp with colonists’ desire to civilize their new territory, in turn blotting out unwanted (i.e. black and Nansemond) peoples. In branding the Dismal Swamp as cut from the same fabric as Jamestown and Yorktown, they disavowed the wetland of its previous status of safe harbor for enslaved people. No matter that thousands of black and Native peoples labored, as well as found refuge and community, within the swamp. Boosters wove Washington’s presence into the ditches dredged by enslaved laborers, constraining official cultural memory as one defined solely by settler colonialism.

Whereas Exposition boosters promoted the swamp from beyond its amphibious boundaries, a group of lumbermen touted its economic potential from within. Yet, unlike Exposition boosters who illustrated the swamp as exotic wilderness, lumbermen advertised their control over nature. Logging companies aimed to convince state and federal foresters of their commitment to scientific forestry, a profit-driven conservation concept that gained traction nationwide at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{22} Through extensive ditching, roadbuilding, and installation of railbeds, they sought to make the wetland legible. Though these groups differed in their


representations of the swamp, both the boosters and loggers emphasized the swamp’s colonial legacies to demonstrate Virginia’s postwar recovery.

By 1899, the Dismal Swamp Land Company was ready to dismantle their organization and relinquish their namesake tract. An outgrowth of the original company established in 1763 by Washington and his colleagues, the Dismal Swamp Land Company had struggled since the Civil War. Though their dredging efforts successfully drained water, they found that agricultural pursuits in the swamp drained their accounts. Where the Dismal Swamp Land Company saw futility, a lumberman named William Nelson Camp saw opportunity. For $1.92 an acre, totaling $76,500, Camp purchased “Washington’s tract” of nearly 49,000 acres.\(^{23}\)

Since 1887, the Camp brothers had established their name as sawmill owners on the Blackwater River in Franklin, Virginia, where baldcypress and loblolly pine abounded. They had grown up near the river, where their family had owned a farm and enslaved African Americans prior to the Civil War. Financially astute and keen toward postwar economic recovery, the Camps expanded their logging operations throughout Virginia’s Southside and into northeastern North Carolina with the assistance of rail, political connections, and philanthropic investment. When William Nelson Camp sold his Dismal Swamp tract to Camp Manufacturing Company in 1909, the wetland became their shining achievement. While they were one of many lumber companies to operate in the swamp, Camp Manufacturing was the only one that held the tract that once belonged to Washington and his fellow “adventurers.” The Camps delighted in welcoming guests to the swamp and encouraged sportsmen to maintain or

establish hunt clubs there. 24 Even by the first decades of the twentieth century, when they had accumulated capital across southeastern Virginia, northeastern North Carolina, and parts of South Carolina and Georgia, the Camps proudly displayed the Great Dismal Swamp as theirs to harvest and steward.

Despite the economic woes of World War I and the Great Depression, Camp Manufacturing’s business thrived into the 1930s. Younger generations of Camp men had assumed management of the company, facing new challenges to lumber practices and increasingly competitive markets throughout the American South. 25 Yet, at the Virginia Forestry Association’s inaugural meeting in February 1930, Paul Ryland Camp felt undaunted and mighty. Carrying the torch of three generations of Camp men before him, Camp now arose as the first vice president of the Virginia Forestry Association. Camp perceived of his family business as a southern phoenix that arose from Yankee destruction.

Before the audience of the Virginia Forestry Association conference, Camp presented himself as living proof of the post-Reconstruction South, redeemed. Since 1865, Southern landowners and entrepreneurs struggled to recover from the ecological losses of wartime. Propertied white men felt emasculated by the empowerment of black men and insulted by northerners who parachuted on their fallow and decimated fields. 26 Men like Camp and his forefathers lamented the ravaged landscape but also saw promise amidst the despair. Camp

understood himself to carry on their legacy. This presentation was not just about his father and grandfathers. His speech also celebrated their place in American history. After all, he was a son of Virginia, the home of the British colony’s first permanent settlement. To his audience Camp described,

When Captain John Smith sailed into the Virginia Capes and on to Jamestown island, on every side the great primeval forest reached to the water’s edge. [T]he forests were so immense and thick that they were a menace to the early settlers. For protection against the Indians and to furnish fields for the growing of necessary crops, they were cut down and burned.  

Apart from Camp’s romanticized narrative, John Smith drew upon the Great Chain of Being, a concept that asserted a hierarchy of living beings and matter. Naturally, men—that is, Christian, civilized men—found themselves located just beneath the heavenly creator. Smith and his colleagues justified their colonization, and later the great timber harvests, because they understood their superiority in the Great Chain of Being. Unlike the Powhatans who, as Frederic Gleach writes, “saw the universe as an entity in which they were merely participants,” the British colony logged in service of the crown, Christ’s divinity, and colonial survival.  

Future generations of settlers came to know this forested abundance as “natural resources.” Through systems of categorizing and evaluating species, colonists delineated ecosystems, as well as who was granted rights of access to the resources, within the Tidewater region. Likewise, their knowledge of supply, regrowth, and depletion evolved. For Camp and his peers, they

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understood themselves as beneficiaries of colonial productions of knowledge.\textsuperscript{29}

Camp and his southern peers believed they were responsible for upholding their ancestors’ legacies. Camp’s self-perceptions encapsulated not only his familial identity, but his profession and the land his family owned, as well. Camp continued,

After the close of the War Between the States, followed by the destructive so-called Reconstruction Period, the problem of keeping labor on the plantations became difficult of solution. In many cases, the agricultural use of extensive areas was conducted under trying conditions for a decade or two, only to collapse finally with a version of the land for forest seeding. In these instances, the soil, being worked ground, was especially receptive to pine forest growth.\textsuperscript{30}

Camp blamed Federal imposition for his peers’ agricultural and economic woes. As Erin Mauldin has written, land use and regional conditions “primed the environment to be damaged by wartime operations and troop movements.” When he recalled the “War Between the States” and its aftermath, Camp held Yankees accountable for southern lands’ devastation and farmers’ struggles to recover. Steeped in personal and federal debt, farmers intensified cultivation without the use of slave labor and forwent the use of fallows and other means to enrich the soil. Camp’s malice toward federal presence during and after the war articulated similar grievances as many commercial and subsistence farmers at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{31}

Cut-over lands exacerbated the South’s recovery in the immediate years that followed the Civil War. Train lines unfurled across the region. Beneath canopies of oak and baldcypress, railway men laid miles of these same trees, rived for railroad ties that led even more wood


\textsuperscript{30} Camp, “Handling Forests in Tidewater Virginia.”

\textsuperscript{31} Erin Stewart Mauldin, \textit{Unredeemed Land: An Environmental History of Civil War and Emancipation in the Cotton South} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 44.
products out of the forest. An insatiable appetite for lumber bound rail companies and loggers. By 1900, a third of the nation’s timber supply hailed from the U.S. South. The outlook for southern forests appeared bleak; William Boyd calls the post-Reconstruction era as a “relentless assault on the region’s forests.” Northerners flooded the south, speculating and purchasing millions of acres owned by the federal government at meager prices.

Unlike so-called carpetbaggers who southerners believed destroyed forest health and regional communities’ well-being, the Camps perceived of themselves as model southern lumbermen who committed to regenerative forestry practices. Serving on the Appalachian Forest Service Advisory Council since 1927, Paul Ryland Camp invested in locally-driven ecosystems research through public-private partnership. Camp understood his family to carry the torch of John Smith’s foray on foreign lands, George Washington’s drive for independence, and their great-grandfathers’ insistence upon preserving southern customs. When Paul Ryland Camp ascended that stage, he claimed victory on behalf of his fellow logging entrepreneurs. Southern logging had become a story of reconciliation. Baldcypress and juniper were their olive branches. Through collaboration and scientific forestry practice, the Camps uplifted themselves and inspired a rapt audience.

Paul Ryland Camp stood on that stage in February 1930 to declare all that he, and by extension, his family’s name, had gained. His redemption speech resonated with the audience at the Virginia Forestry Association, where together they outlined a set of principles, goals, and

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recommendations about land use, property ownership, and timber education. Members called for a land utilization survey, state-wide fire prevention, study on forest taxation, and the establishment of demonstration forests. In developing timber education, logging companies aimed to enhance product output while sustaining yields. They believed themselves to be the proper stewards of the virgin forests that John Smith once gazed upon in the early seventeenth century. Northern aggressors may have tormented their kin and croplands, but Camp and his peers’ investment would rejuvenate the soils and carry out the visions of their southern predecessors.

Scientific forestry would serve as their vehicle for ecological restoration, as well as the source of their redemption narrative. Recognizing that the South’s “virgin timber” neared the point of exhaustion, Camp and his fellow lumber entrepreneurs scrambled to prove that southeastern companies could rescue southeastern lumber. As logging companies in the Pacific Northwest expanded operations in the twentieth century, the inaugural Virginia Forestry Association conference declared their commitment to conservation and community. Their initiatives in scientific forestry aimed to redeem their families’ legacy, heal postwar corporate losses, and reassert their place in the national economy. As Camp proclaimed, “The same wonderfully productive climate, the same deep fertile soil are just as favorable today to rapid tree growth in Virginia as in the days that are gone. There exists no real reason for going across a continent to obtain the lumber that is needed in the South and East.” By 1930, juniper and

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cypress were in short supply. By allocating research funds to their recovery, the Camps and their colleagues aimed to foster the regrowth of their most profitable tree species, in turn reviving the same types of forests once encountered by their ancestors.

Camp had imbibed the same nostalgic sentiments that first energized Virginia’s white elites between the 1889 formation of the Association of the Preservation for Virginia Antiquities and the 1907 Jamestown Exposition. Camp’s words extended this effort beyond historic preservation to the natural resources economy, as he claimed scientific forestry commemorated Anglo-descended progress. Conservation represented a different kind of redemption narrative, which, when paired with colonial revival, offered a potent revitalization for southern tourism and industry by the 1930s.

By 1938, Paul Ryland Camp and his staff boasted a modern facility that combatted the public image of southern struggle during the Great Depression. Welcoming their peers and competitors of the sixty-third annual conference of the American Forestry Association (AFA) to their logging operations, Camp Manufacturing demonstrated their expanded production into the kraft and pulp markets. Despite the 1938 federal *Report on Economic Conditions*, which declared economic and social suffering throughout the South, Camp Manufacturing was thriving.37 The company delighted in modeling best practices in scientific forestry and paper technologies. Yet this was not the only outing attendees enjoyed during the AFA conference. Following tours at Colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown, AFA attendees capped their trip at the

Great Dismal Swamp. For what reasons did the AFA arrange trips to the Great Dismal Swamp with tours of these colonial sites? What effect may this have had for conference attendees?

As with the 1907 tours that launched from the Jamestown Exposition to the Great Dismal Swamp, the American Forestry Association bound the wetland with colonial memory. Both implicitly and explicitly, Camp Manufacturing and the AFA instructed visitors to contemplate a lineage of British settlement, Washington’s command in the war for independence, and the Camp family’s stewardship over a prized tract. What marked this event as different from those hosted by the Exposition was the voyage’s purpose. Whereas the 1907 trips served tourist desire, the AFA outings aimed to inspire responsible logging. Profit motive, combined with entertainment, drove the activities facilitated by AFA. Lumber entrepreneurs departed these meetings with their minds stacked with colonial bricks, windswept sails, and ditches lined with juniper plank roads. Such imagery imbued their understandings of Virginia with wetland lore and notions of cavalier gentility. The Camps represented themselves as the achievement of Anglo-Saxon descendants, working the land that George Washington once owned. They portrayed themselves as embodiments of colonial heritage.

In the years following the inaugural 1930 Virginia Forestry conference, the Camps showcased the benefits of collaboration with the federal government, and the Great Dismal Swamp was their stage. For the companies that logged in the Great Dismal Swamp, sustainable forestry performed as what David Blight calls redemptive and reconciliationist projects. Virginia

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38 “American Foresters Hold Annual Meeting,” *Southern Lumberman* 156 (June 1, 1938): 36.
boosters and lumber magnates also found support from syndicated journals and forestry magazines who promoted the Great Dismal Swamp’s colonial glory. Though they appealed to distinct audiences and chronicled different types of information, *National Geographic* and forestry journals shared rhetoric when it came to describing the Great Dismal Swamp. Both portrayed the wetland as a place where white descendants carried out George Washington’s fantasies: first as primeval wilderness, and second as an economic arcadia that replenished itself with evergreen wealth.

As documented in the technical bulletins of the U.S. Forest Service, lumber companies like Camp Manufacturing supported the goals of Virginia’s Department of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service, both of which sought to blend profit with sustainability. Scientific forestry emphasized ecological resilience and regrowth as key to lumber interests. When foresters conducted studies on the Atlantic white cedar, known locally in the Tidewater region as juniper, they sought to uphold the swamp’s vitality simultaneously with the development of lumber companies’ resources. Juniper drew intrigue from loggers and naturalists alike, as its lumber propelled the mid-Atlantic shingles trades in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Shingle-getting from the Great Dismal Swamp was a lucrative enterprise, which expanded Norfolk’s international port as well as the necessity for slave labor prior to the Civil War. Antebellum destruction of “juniper swamps” like the Great Dismal transformed ecosystem behaviors by the late nineteenth century. Depletion of juniper stands, increasingly replaced by gum and maple, contributed to the Great Dismal Swamp’s decline as a valued logging tract. Camp Manufacturing and other lumber companies’ collaboration with the Virginia Department of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service served the goal of quite literally regrowing their
investments.\textsuperscript{40}

As with their colonial predecessors, twentieth-century lumber companies and government employees sought to harness and make the swamp productive. In the 1923 U.S. Forestry Bulletin “The White Cedar of the Dismal Swamp,” state forester Alfred Akerman depicted the harm of unplanned logging. Loggers’ marks—slash, axes, and fire-burnt pockets—accompanied the antebellum ditches, traces of prior extraction. Akerman remarked beneath the image, “Looking down Washington Ditch, reputed to have been surveyed before the Revolution by George Washington, to facilitate logging in the Swamp.”\textsuperscript{41} The majority of photographs are devoid of humans, but evidence of loggers’ work plastered the scenes. When paired with the nineteenth-century ditches and railbeds that remained inscribed in the landscape, this evidence illustrated an ecosystem rife with human infrastructure.

\textsuperscript{40} Geologists, forest biologists, and naturalists have long flocked to the swamp. Their fascination with this wetland paralleled the nationwide production of scientific knowledge across universities, museums, and federal agencies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Meghan Black has argued, this production of knowledge solidified the “environmental management apparatus within the American state.” Naturalists’ research of the Great Dismal Swamp, though perhaps motivated by adventurers’ intrigue and genuine commitment to conservation, also stemmed from an education rooted in Euroamerican classification systems. These systems upheld hierarchies that delineated species’ ecological and economic values in ways that opposed and at times disparaged nonwestern epistemologies. Megan Black, \textit{The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.

\textsuperscript{41} Alfred Akerman, “The White Cedar of the Dismal Swamp,” 30 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, Office of the State Forester, 1923).

Camp Manufacturing and other logging companies collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service. The photographs in these bulletins suggest a tension in the swamp’s (re)development in the post-Reconstruction era. In some scenes, the photographs documented an organized
woodland, recovering from cut-over practices of the late nineteenth century. Images depicted scraggily hardwoods and detritus piled aimlessly amid neatly stacked timber, appearing as totems to the one-time woodland. Elsewhere, men appeared as measuring tools to document forest cultivation, overgrowth, and regrowth. They became organizing features as part of the effort to make the swamp legible. The men’s erect posture and slightly nervous non-smiles identified them as strangers to the swamp. The reader could almost hear the men utter a whimper as they lodged themselves between gnarled cypress and bristling juniper. But where was the actual swamp in these photographs? What happened to the water? Such images are seldom, though remaining forest groves lurk in the background. In many of the photographs, forests frame cutover lands. Tucked away on the photographs’ horizon, these woods appear to withdraw from the intrusion of loggers and foresters. Yet, between the landscapes that foresters photographed, standing water, unruly groves, and muck were never far off.

Whereas U.S. Forest Service technical bulletins depicted the swamp as a tract of managed forestland, this portrayal conflicted with the public image of the Great Dismal Swamp. Like boosters at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition, popular magazines like *National Geographic* illustrated the swamp as pristine wilderness. Reaching mailboxes across the country, a 1932 issue featured a spread on the Great Dismal Swamp, its vines reaching beyond the page to wrap around readers’ wrists. In portraying such opposing descriptions, technical bulletins and popular magazines convey the swamp’s inability to satisfy all parties who sought to extract profit from the wetland, be it through tourism or timber. Yet these two different images both fueled the endurance of George Washington’s presence in historical memory: the swamp as
wilderness as he encountered it in 1763, and the swamp as a civilized wetland as he desired it.

For this 1932 issue, the National Geographic magazine assigned journalist John Ariza and photographer H.W. Gillen to chronicle life in the Great Dismal Swamp. They animated a landscape rife with reeds, pockmarked with fire-holes, and stumble-prone with seasonal puddles. Their words and photographs spilled with glee, the product of two man-boys on a pioneering expedition. Their journey marked a departure from the strains of the Great Depression and an escape into the remaining vestiges of the mid-Atlantic’s “vine-matted jungles.”43 The resulting article “Dismal Swamp in Legend and History” narrated the

perseverance of colonists and founding fathers. It romanticized a life, simplified, primitive, and even exotic. The journalists enchanted readers as they described how it felt to stumble upon a “bear well”—a pothole dredged by bears to access drinking water in times of drought. Readers’ eyes traced the outline of downed cypress trees, their roots like tentacles outstretched from a freshwater sea. They chuckled at the sight of “swampers,” poor white folks who strung their kill—otters, raccoons, muskrats—with twine around their necks. Or they found tranquility in the paddle, where springtime floods made the wetland’s ditches navigable. Ariza noted that “Washington made at least six visits to the great wilderness, to which he refers in correspondence as a ‘glorious paradise.’”

Unmoored from the Great Depression, readers took comfort in the pages of National Geographic. Like Ariza and Millen, they, too, could traipse into the wilderness and dial back the clock on industrialization and economic devastation. This article joined a slew of others, published since the nineteenth century, which portrayed the Dismal Swamp’s wildness for public audiences.

Such scenes enticed white Americans of means in the 1930s, who could peel these words off the pages and take to the roads. New Deal-era infrastructure and roadbuilding facilitated the boom of the outdoor recreation industry. With increasing affordability, automobiles enabled middle-class Americans to tour public lands, where they could escape the

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44 Ariza 121.
urban wilds for more “natural” settings.\textsuperscript{46} Paved along the Dismal Swamp Canal, the “George Washington Highway” was designed with tourism in mind by the cities of Portsmouth and Norfolk. Newspapers harped on the road’s economic implications, expected to stimulate growth on the borders of Virginia and North Carolina. Local politicians and residents celebrated the highway’s opening in 1925, where they gathered at the Wallaceton plantation.\textsuperscript{47} The plantation, cradled in the white hands of the Wallace family since prior to the Civil War, remained a cornerstone of Dismal Swamp settlement. Placenames like “George Washington Highway” and plantation homes like Wallaceton delineated which tourists and locals were welcome at the Great Dismal Swamp. White skin and keys to a car drove the intended visitors to this glorified wetland.

In 1934, the National Park Service deployed agent Roger Toll on a fact-finding mission to the Great Dismal Swamp. The federal government was intrigued by the wetland whose economic potential once lured George Washington. When Toll arrived by way of the George Washington Highway in 1934, the \textit{National Geographic} article primed his expectations.\textsuperscript{48} On behalf of the National Park Service, Toll scouted if the swamp could engage in dialogue with other recently designated historic sites and national parks in Virginia, like Colonial National Historical Park (1930), Colonial Williamsburg (1932), and Shenandoah National Park (1935). Places like Colonial

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\textsuperscript{48} “Get a copy of the Nat Geographic for July, 1932,” scribbled Toll to himself. Handwritten note, Roger Toll, undated (likely 1934).
Williamsburg served as rhetorical devices to symbolize the endurance of Anglo-Saxon command over the land, while Shenandoah National Park declared the types of visitors the state and federal governments encouraged. Established in 1932, Colonial Williamsburg was curated to renew faith in the country, sanitize the past, and enshrine the visions of Virginia’s Founding Fathers. When John D. Rockefeller III assumed his board position with Colonial Williamsburg, he steered with the belief “that sites like Williamsburg should not simply be used passively to inform but actively to indoctrinate visitors to the importance of American ideals.”

Meanwhile, in the western part of the state, the 1936 creation of Shenandoah National Park was predicated upon the state-mandated dispossession of hundreds of predominantly poor white families. This forced removal was in service of a tourist-motivated manufactured wilderness that resembled what conservationists believed early pioneers may have witnessed. Corporate magnates and state officials thrust both Colonial Williamsburg and Shenandoah National Park into being, guided by Jim Crow attitudes and regulations. As Douglas Smith has written, state and local legislatures cordoned boundaries determined by race and rights to public space by “managing white supremacy” in the interwar era. It is not coincidence that Colonial Williamsburg and Shenandoah National Park emerged during the same era as Virginia’s 1924 Racial Integrity Act, which forbid miscegenation, or the 1926 Public Assemblages Act, which enforced segregation in public space. Lost Cause nostalgia and colonial revival undergirded Virginia’s historic preservation and conservation movements.

51 Sara M. Gregg, Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Katrina M. Powell, “Converging Crises:
From Tidewater Virginia to the Blue Ridge Mountains, historic sites and national parks echoed a discourse of white supremacy. Within the swamp, however, that echo reverberated from the swamp’s traces of colonization and enslavement, as well as from more recent extractive scars. These human disturbances had transformed the swamp in ways that Toll found unattractive. Upon his arrival, Toll found watery tracts strewn with logging roads, tramways, and overgrown ditches. He wrote to NPS Director Arno Cammerer:

The area that visitors can see is cut-over land. Considerable areas have been burned and rendered worthless by the loss of the peat soil. Some of the cut-over land has been cleared and is being farmed. The timber is not spectacular nor does the swamp possess features that make it a national attraction. The primitive conditions of the original inaccessible swamp have been greatly altered by man.\textsuperscript{52}

Toll recommended that “some of the swamps in more southern states will be found to be more picturesque and of more general interest than the Dismal Swamp. Swamps that are accessible by boat, on natural waterways are more likely to prove suitable than the Dismal Swamp which is accessible only by artificial canals or by logging railroads.”\textsuperscript{53} Toll left disappointed, despite the lore and ecological mystery that first drew him.

Toll discarded the swamp as the next national park because it lacked the features that Ariza had romanticized. The Great Dismal Swamp of the interwar era had shed its cloak of colonial intrigue, carved instead into tracts of private property and exhausted resources. Visitors would not be able to conjure and imagine the lore recited in Thomas Moore’s 1803 poetry of the swamp:

\begin{flushleft}

\textcolor{red}{\textsuperscript{53} Toll to Cammerer, November 26, 1934.}
\end{flushleft}
But oft, from the Indian hunter’s camp,
This lover and maid so true
Are seen at the hour of midnight damp
To cross the Lake by a fire-fly lamp,
And paddle their white canoe!^54

Any canoe would jam in the ditches congealed with mud. The fire-fly lamp might set aflame the kindling that piled atop cut-over groves. As the peatland dried, Toll determined the “present problem of the Dismal Swamp is one of forestry,” an issue solved not by the National Park Service but among its present owners, the lumber companies. Toll encouraged his supervisor to look further south, where swamps there “are more primitive and more scenically interesting.”^55

Journalists, boosters, and lumber companies strung words through the swamp, performing the wetland like a marionette. Was it gloomy and unknowable? Did it evoke the landscape that Washington first encountered? Or had it achieved Washington’s goals—a wilderness made legible by private and commercial property schemes? Did it appear in some parts cut over or untouched, other parts expertly managed under the close surveillance of scientific forestry? Retained in the hands of southern lumber magnates, the Great Dismal Swamp brought delight to Camp Manufacturing, taking pleasure in what they understood to be their colonial legacy. Scientific forestry served as their vehicle for realizing Washington’s vision. The possibilities that scientific forestry held for southern lumbermen challenged a declensionist narrative of southerners downtrodden by war. Yet corporate entities struggled to remedy the swamp for


^55 Toll to Cammerer, November 26, 1934.
capital gain, as it was unproductive for southern lumber companies that increasingly turned to pulp and kraft. The swamp also conflicted with cultural productions of the swamp, which popular media depicted as Washington’s one-time playground.

That the federal government’s representative did not consider the Great Dismal Swamp beautiful or aesthetically pleasing explains why the lure of the swamp’s colonial heritage flopped. Amidst the interwar fervor for historic preservation in Virginia, the Great Dismal Swamp seemed to mock the majesty of antebellum plantations and living history museums. Whereas white visitors could imagine themselves as descendants of royalty on Jamestown’s colonized soils or as pioneers in the Blue Ridge Mountains, they would be too busy swatting at and leaping from all things that snap, sting, bite, and lurk in the swamp.

Still, local boosters carried the torch of the swamp’s significance in colonial memory. In the fall of 1935 and 1936, the State Chamber of Commerce hosted the “Lake of the Dismal Swamp” pageant. Drawing inspiration from Thomas Moore’s poem, the pageant featured as part of the state’s “Autumn Travelogue,” which included special outings to Yorktown on the anniversary of Cornwallis’s surrender. The swamp pageant centered around an “Indian village” where Boy and Girl Scouts gathered with their families. Succotash, venison, and bonfires warmed the visitors as they gathered at the northern end of Lake Drummond. Together they planted a flag where Washington was believed to camp in 1763.56 Between 1933 and 1945, over fifteen organizations, including chambers of commerce, state conservation commissions, and wildlife advocacy and civic groups, expressed their support for the swamp’s designation as

Despite ongoing calls for historic preservation and conservation, the promotion of the Dismal Swamp’s colonial heritage could not match the establishments of Colonial National Historical Park, Colonial Williamsburg, and Shenandoah National Park. It would not be until 1974 that advocates achieved victory when Congress designated the Great Dismal Swamp as a national wildlife refuge, a victory that resulted from increased environmental awareness. Yet even in the Secretary of the Interior’s feasibility study of the Great Dismal Swamp as a national wildlife refuge, congressmen and conservation advocates underscored the swamp’s colonial connections.58

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58 Public Law 92-478, “An Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to determine the feasibility and desirability of protecting and preserving the Great Dismal Swamp and the Dismal Swamp Canal,” 9 Oct. 1972. See also W.E. Ashley, Jr., Before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: United States Senate Ninety-Second Congress Second Session on S. 2441: “A Bill to Authorize the Secretary of the Interior to Conduct a Study to Determine the Best and Most Feasible Means of Protecting and Preserving the Great Dismal Swamp and the Dismal Swamp Canal” (Washington, D.C., May 9, 1972); Letter to Chairman Wayne N. Aspinall, Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives (Washington, D.C., May 12, 1972); Honorable W.M. Abbit of Virginia, Before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: United States Senate Ninety-Second Congress Second Session on S. 2441: “A Bill to Authorize the Secretary of the Interior to Conduct a Study to
Over the twentieth century, official narratives continued to emphasize George Washington and obfuscate stories of African American and Nansemond placemaking. Had the swamp become a national park, forest, or game sanctuary in the 1930s, as many advocates urged, it likely would not have allowed black and Nansemond descendants the opportunity to continue cultivating community within the wetland. Since at least 1644, these groups had found refuge in the swamp, an ecosystem that veiled modes of living that rejected and could thrive independent from white supremacy and settler colonialism. As loggers employed by companies like Camp Manufacturing, descendant communities continued to live on the edges of the swamp throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether as homeowners or tenants on farmsteads and lumber camps, these residents received permission by lumber companies to hunt, fish, forage, and grow food in the swamp. The swamp’s delineation as federal “public” land in 1930s Jim Crow Virginia would have spelled doom for many, as residents would have lost access to land that bound them to their ancestors. But it was precisely because state and federal agencies did not preserve the swamp that its reputation as wasteland endured. While official actors continued to perpetuate narratives of colonial heritage (and thus settler dominance), it was the swamp’s oppositional ecology that allowed for the endurance of historic black and Native placemaking and the potential for present-day commemoration.