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Letter from the Editor

Like “mind” and “heart,” the word “soul” is often on our lips. But what do we mean by our respective use of these three words?

We have a clear association of the mind with the brain and the heart with the organ that pumps blood throughout our bodies and also acts as the sentimental symbol for love. “Soul” is a more ambiguous word. Because of its immateriality, some deny its existence altogether; others use it metaphorically to denote a particular quality – as in “soul food.” More often it is linked with the notion of the spiritual, often as the means of communication with God, however elusive that may be. Think in this regard of the word “enthusiasm,” which is etymologically derived from the Greek adjective *entheos*, meaning

“the god within you” – a sense of our core being as an animating spiritual force.

However we may wish to define it, the soul and the meaning of place are interwoven in our consciousness. “Soul space,” as it might be called, is for many a psychologically resonant place in nature; for others it may be a sanctuary for worship, prayer, or meditation. For members of particular faiths it is a pilgrimage site: a place for demonstrating religious reverence through celebratory worship after long and arduous travel by foot. Cemeteries, if undisturbed by neglect or vandalism, are landscapes where the souls of the dead rest in peace; institutional sanctuaries, if thoughtfully designed, are refuges for prayer and meditation. To explore these phenomena in various ways – religious, psychological, political, practical, cultural – the theme of this issue of *SiteLines* is “Ritual, Refuge, Reverence, and

Reflection: Landscapes of the Soul.”

Here we consider the significance of faraway ritual places in cultures that may be unfamiliar to us. Scott Heyes, an Australian landscape-studies scholar, writes about conceptions of the sacred among the Indigenous peoples of Nunavik, Canada, and the Fiji Islands, and how, for both the Inuit and the iTaukei, such conceptions are inseparable from the land itself. Willis Jenkins of the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Virginia discusses how Bhutan’s traditional landscape hosts, interprets, and manages the external forces bearing upon the perceptions of its sacred Himalayan Buddhist features. In recounting her participation in a ritual celebrating the advent of spring in a village in the northern region of Turkmenistan,

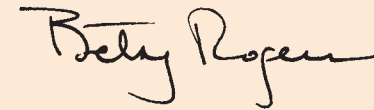
Allison James documents the influence of Sunni Muslim and pre-Islamic traditions on the community’s spiritual relationship to nature.

Within our own culture, cemeteries are places of memory. Hospital sanctuaries are places of prayer for the sick and the dying as well as meditation refuges for institutional caregivers. In his essay “Sacred to the Memory: African American Cemeteries in Richmond,” John Beardsley focuses on the neglect of two historic Black cemeteries in Richmond, Virginia, highlighting recent efforts to restore them and interpret the rituals of remembrance associated with them. In “Spiritual Places: The Design of Sanctuaries in Twenty-first Century Hospitals,” Reuben Rainey, professor emeritus of the University of Virginia, and Kim Tanzer, former dean of the university’s School of Architecture, examine the designs of places of

worship and meditation in modern hospitals as spaces catering to the spiritual needs of patients, staff, and visitors of various religious persuasions. Their study focuses on who uses these spaces, how they are used, and the manner in which they are designed, drawing on examples from hospitals across the United States.

Reuben Rainey, the coeditor of this issue of *SiteLines*, joins me in reminding you that the intellectual quality and literary lifeblood of this journal comes from donations by our readers. We urge you to mail us your contribution to the Foundation for Landscape Studies in the enclosed envelope.

With good green wishes,



Elizabeth Barlow Rogers
President

On the Cover:

The recently restored Walker family gravesite, Evergreen Cemetery, Richmond. Photograph by J. Matthew Cowan; courtesy of Enrichmond Foundation.

Ritual, Refuge, Reverence, and Reflection: Landscapes of the Soul

Embracing Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Spiritual Dimensions of Place

We inhabit and traverse many landscapes in a lifetime. We learn to love the land, connect to it, and belong. And those who are lucky enough to know their surroundings well may even learn to feel part of them. But do we ever truly know the essence of a landscape – its soul and its spirit? Are we ever an integral part of a landscape system, or do we merely scrape the surface as passengers through it? I write this essay – as a non-Indigenous Australian who has spent two decades encountering and studying Indigenous landscapes around the world under the tutelage of First Nations people – to explore the spiritual dimensions of land.

My reflections on spirit landscapes in this essay are based on the time I have spent with the Inuit in Nunavik, Canada, and the iTaukei of Fiji. I am humbled to have been given the opportunity to learn about Indigenous homelands through my Indigenous friends and informants. I use this moment to pay my respects to First Nation Peoples around the world; to honor their past, present, and future Elders; and to acknowledge the rich and diverse ways of knowing in Indigenous contexts. In Australia I live and work on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, where the country's capital, Canberra, is located. I thank all my Indigenous friends who have shared their knowledge and entrusted me with their stories – some of which are presented here.

During my training as a landscape architect and in my role as a professor, I have often felt uncomfortable with the notion of non-Indigenous landscape architects and others in the built-environment professions serving as “experts” in designing, managing, and maintaining land. For this reason I have made it my mission to expand landscape-architecture thinking to embrace Indigenous knowledge systems – particularly in Australia, where Indigenous Australians have been custodians of the land for more than sixty thousand years.

One important lesson I have learned through my interactions with Indigenous communities is that the spiritual dimensions of landscape should never be regarded as a

“layer.” (Authors of landscape assessments and cultural-heritage reports are prone to this oversight, albeit generally without malice.) To compartmentalize a spiritual understanding of the land, reducing it to its own category of knowledge, is to disregard holistic thinking and being. All land is sacred to Indigenous peoples, and all living and nonliving things are connected; indeed, rocks and plants and mountains are often considered sentient beings. The stories that follow from my fieldwork in Indigenous settings expand on this way of knowing and seeing the environment. The Indigenous storytellers who passed on these stories to me and consented to them being shared did so to illustrate the deep connection they maintain with the land. The stories of the Inuit and the iTaukei highlight how the land is narrated in their respective cultures, and how such conceptions of place give meaning to it.

My understanding of Inuit conceptions of place has developed over the course of twenty years through ongoing interaction with Inuit of Nunavik, Eastern Canada. My first visit to Nunavik, facilitated by Peter Jacobs (a landscape-architecture professor with forty years of experience among the Inuit), was in the early 2000s, as part of my graduate studies. I lived with Inuit families and traveled with them on land and sea to document their understanding of and connections to place. I recorded oral histories and traditional place-names; I also traced how land-based knowledge was transmitted among and across hunting-family units and generations. I learned that the land and its bounty belonged to all Inuit. And on many hunting and fishing excursions with Inuit, as well



as in interviews with male and female Elders, I learned about the significance of the sea-ice (*siku*) realm. Made up of more than seventy types of ice, it serves as an important platform for Inuit to reach their favorite hunting grounds. The hunters are well acquainted with the properties of this ephemeral environment. It is named vertically and horizontally, above and underneath, and regarded as an integral part of the Inuit homeland. Elders tell stories of how the first breakup of the sea ice each year is caused by *Nanukuluk*, a giant polar bear jumping up and down, causing a wave to form under the ice that generates enormous cracks. The bear's huge paws are mighty.

Tertiary design students in Teeluk, South Australia, learning about Aboriginal culture as part of their coursework on indigenous landscapes. Elder Doug Nicholls talks to students about his Country. All photographs by Scott Heyes.

The sea ice is a highly volatile and moveable space; it lifts and tears and repairs with the passing of each storm and tide. Children are told that they should never enter sea-ice caverns, or play with crystallized ice – a type of freshwater ice that forms giant chandeliers that sparkle and make inviting sounds but can be dangerously brittle. Elders explain how malevolent spirits such as Sedna, a female spirit with power over all living and nonliving things, will try to draw children into such perilous places. Whether traveling on foot, by dog team, or on a snowmobile, passing over sea ice is a hazardous and unpredictable venture.

In my fieldwork with the Kangiqsualujjumiut (the Inuit from the community of Kangiqsualujjuaq), Elders related a treasure trove of stories that revealed their connections and associations with sea ice. In these narratives the sea ice is described as harboring a number of nonhuman entities, some benevolent and

others malignant, that can transform themselves into foxes, wolves, bears, birds, caribou,

Kangiqsualujjumiut fishing for Arctic char along an ice lead in early spring at the mouth of Ujarasujulik Lake, Nunavik, Canada.

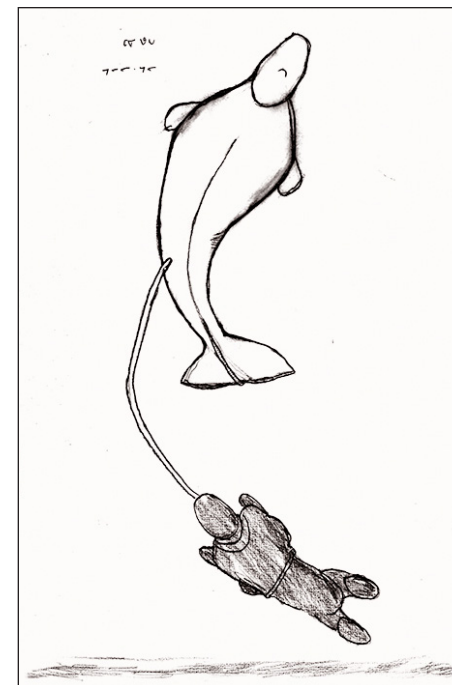


fish, and other animals. The feather-covered *mitilik*, for example, tricks unsuspecting hunters by lounging on the edge of an ice floe disguised as a seal or some other creature. When approached, it reveals its true form and calls upon other *mittiliit* to chase down the humans in its domain. The hunters can only escape capture by racing towards *nuna* (land), where the *mittiliit* are unable to follow.

It has been documented in oral-history projects in other parts of the Arctic that portions of the sea ice are often avoided by traveling Inuit in the belief that these regions are haunted or occupied by spirits. In effect, such places have become preservation zones, akin in function to no-go areas within national-park systems and reserves. Such is the reverence afforded to these places that Inuit refrain from setting fishnets in them in order to leave food for the spirits that dwell there. If they must pass through, they speak softly while doing so, to avoid drawing attention to themselves. Small offerings such as a cigarette, rifle bullet, or tea bag may be made in such places, to lessen the chances of being annoyed at night while camping, for example. Stories abound of upset spirits disrupting sleeping hunters by pulling out tent pegs or flicking stones onto the canvas. Appeasing these spirits is a time-honored tradition.

The Lumauk Inuit legend. The story is interpreted here in an illustration by Inuit Elder Tivi Etok in 2005. Scott Heyes, private collection.

The Inuit story “Lumauk” unfolds in the sea-ice realm, as explained to me by Inuit Elder Tivi Etok. The story (considerably abbreviated here) tells of a young blind boy who was mistreated by his mother. He was fed dog meat and forced to live in the entrance of his family’s igloo. His sister, unhappy with his mistreatment, cared for him without their mother’s knowledge. One day the boy encountered



two loons when fetching water for his family at a nearby lake. They explained that they could help him regain his sight if he followed their instructions. The loons encouraged him to go beneath the cold water until he ran short of breath. When they brought him to the surface, they asked him to open his eyes; yet the boy saw nothing. Next the loons asked him to dive down again and stay under for longer.

This time, upon resurfacing, the boy told the loons that he could see “a little bit of land.” Again he went under, this time to the point of struggling to breathe. He surfaced to say “On that faraway mountain I see green grass and lemming holes.” With his eyes now sharper than those of an eagle, the boy was instructed by the loons to go under one last time to enable him to see as other humans do.

With his sight repaired, the boy returned to the camp pretending to be blind. On a hunting outing with his mother and sister at the edge of an ice floe, the boy observed a young, grey-skinned beluga whale pass by, swimming alongside its mother, who was pure white. Deceiving his mother to avenge his mistreatment, the boy told her to tie a harpoon tether around her waist. The boy then harpooned the white whale, which instantly dragged his mother into the icy waters. She yelled out “*lumauk, lu lu lumauk*” (my son), but he looked on as the white whale took her further out to sea, refusing to help her because of the way in which she had treated him. She remained alive for a long time, becoming a half-human, half-beluga creature, and the sound of her cries could be heard from great distances. Tivi Etok tells of how his father heard them and had even seen relatives of the lady beluga along the coast. It is said that hunters who heard her cries eventually captured her and buried her on land, so that she could be finally at peace.

“Lumauk” draws attention to harsh aspects of human nature, revealed in an unforgiving landscape. But it also highlights how natural phenomena – in this case, sounds that move across the water – are imbued with stories that are central to Inuit belief systems and perceptions of the environment. It also suggests how porous the boundaries between the environment and the animals that inhabit it can be: a lake contains legendary properties revealed by two birds and a woman who lives on land is transformed into a creature enslaved by the sea. Legends such as this not only emerge from a hunting-and-gathering life but also are interwoven with it; although these legends animate the landscape, the Inuit ability to hunt on land, sea, and sea ice is critical for them to sustain the resonance they hold. Both the rituals of daily survival and the stories they generate embody the Inuit’s spiritual understanding of place.

Inuit society has changed drastically in the last few generations. Most Inuit are now Christians. Their economy has gone from preindustrial to cash-based in just under sixty years. Making a living through hunting and fishing is not possible for all, and seasonal camps have been replaced by permanent villages where nine-to-five jobs are the norm. As a result, regular, extended travel across the land, sea ice, and sea is far less common for current generations of Inuit than it was for their grandparents. And yet one still has the feeling, when out on the land with their descendants, that the old ways are present and giving meaning to the natural world. Sensing the spirit landscape that initially grew out of shamanistic beliefs honors the land and the ancestors who inhabited it, thereby bridging the past and the present. In this sense, the act of hunting and fishing across these territories is sacred. The spirit landscape is there for all Inuit, and it will remain there, ready to be engaged with, provided that the names, places, and stories that define it are passed on to future generations, to bring the landscape and seascape to life.

The stories told in Fiji reveal a very different spiritual landscape. There is an adage among the Fijians (*iTaukei*) that the “the land has eyes,” a reference to the spirits that are said to watch over their territories (*vanua*). In Fiji *vanua* denotes more than just the environment itself; it also encompasses the spirits that animate the land of any given region and the societal relationships among the people who live there. This means that, for outsiders, a sense of the sacredness of land and an

appreciation of the *iTaukei*’s deeply rooted sense of place can only be accessed through rituals that enable one to become a part of a particular *vanua*.

I was introduced to the Fijian village of Vuna in 2014 by an *iTaukei* architect, Setoki Tuiteci, who was working on a project there. Knowing of my interest in documenting Indigenous oral histories, he connected me to the Vuna people, who wanted to record their oral history for future generations. My perspectives on the spiritual dimensions of *vanua* are based on that cultural-heritage research. Whereas the Inuit regard the land and its stories as belonging to everyone (flat structure, no hierarchy to ownership), the *iTaukei* guard their land and its stories tightly and enforce a strict set of rules for *entrée*.

All villages in Fiji operate under the direction of a chief, who is appointed from members of a “chiefly” clan. Besides the clan of the chiefs, the main clans that define each *vanua* are the heralds, warriors, fishermen, carpenters, and priests (through birthright). Conduct within the *vanua* is also monitored by ancestral spirits; repercussions may follow misbehavior or disrespect. In the past transgressions could even lead to death – sometimes through accidents, sometimes through execution.

Vuna, however, which is located at the southern end of Taveuni Island, is no ordinary village: its name means “root” or “origin.” It was founded as a “paramount chiefly” (chief-

Traveling on the sea-ice terrain by snowmobile near the mouth of the George River, Ungava Bay, Canada.



of-chiefs) village and is believed to have been Fijians’ first landing point in the archipelago. It is said that the rest of Fiji sprang from it. For countless generations Vuna ruled several distant villages, controlling tremendous tracts of land and sea. And although the nearby village of Somosomo now holds the title of the region’s paramount chiefly village as a result of internal wars, the Vuna people remain proud of their heritage. In Fijian society, Vuna is a revered ancestral space.

Paramount chiefly villages are said to have been created by the gods, and oral histories mention ten gods of Vuna. Its chiefs are anointed by these gods, and therefore they hold special powers compared to other citizens. The paramount chief’s *vanua* is also regarded as a product of their traditional gods, and all living and nonliving things associated with Vuna carry symbolic power: wherever Vuna villagers travel, they carry the power of the *vanua* with them. For this reason the Vuna people are deeply admired throughout Fiji.

They say in Fiji that there is a key to every village. Setoki served as mine, accompanying me on my first visit to Vuna. Even though Fijians have largely converted to Christianity, the procedures surrounding village entry and conduct upon acceptance have been strictly maintained, as gaining formal entrance into a village carries with it the responsibility and honor of admittance to the *vanua*. By means of the welcoming ceremony, the guest becomes a citizen of the *vanua*, sharing in its wealth, bounty, and pride.

The type of ceremony performed depends on the traditional societal status and hierarchy of the guest, and whether that visitor is arriving by land or sea. A welcoming ceremony called an *isevusevu* is the most common. In it guests state their business in the chief’s (*Ratu*’s) *bure* (house), always from a seated position on the floor and in the presence of the chief’s heralds. They speak softly with heads bowed in deference. They are accompanied by a village spokesperson known as a *matanivanua*, a hereditary position. The *matanivanua* speaks and chants in the Fijian language on behalf of the guest and presents the chief with a gift of gratitude, usually a bundle of dried yaqona roots. The guest is invited to speak briefly towards the end of the ceremony, and then the chief decides whether or not to grant entry. If he agrees, the mood becomes more relaxed. A drink made from yaqona is carefully prepared and inspected, with the first bowl

The bathing pools at Vuna, visible at low tide amongst the rocks, are a short walk from the village. Vuna is protected by a ring of coral reefs.

served to the honored guest and the next to the *matanivanua* before the rest in attendance are served. A certain pattern of clapping, using a hollowed hand, precedes and follows each drink. The entire ceremony is at once precise and eloquent.

Upon leaving the chief's *bure*, the guest is free to move about – and even enter people's homes – in accordance with the customs of that *vanua*. The entire village is informed through word of mouth of the new addition to the community. My acceptance into the *vanua* of Vuna was a critical first step in learning about its spiritual landscape and documenting its history. I was now on the other side of an invisible border – albeit one that was invisible only to me.

Building trust in Fijian society occurs through *italanoa*, effectively a form of conversation devoted to sharing information freely and patiently with each party present. This can include communicating deeply personal narratives. It is a form of deep listening and storytelling and is often carried out while consuming *yaqona* together. *Italanoa* allows time to get to know one another. The village headman (*turaga ni koro*) in Vuna was appointed by the Chief to help me engage in *italanoa* with knowledgeable Elders in the village who could speak with authority on Vuna's oral history. The *turaga ni koro's* devotion to the project, which also included taking me to the significant cultural sites identified by Elders through *italanoa*, allowed me to gain a detailed picture of the *vanua's* spiritual realm.



To faithfully document such places, the *turaga ni koro* and I carved paths through dense rain forest. We entered remote caves, fished and dived off of reefs, interviewed pig hunters, and spoke with farmers who were working their crops in the mountain mist. The *vanua* is replete with both war stories and battlegrounds that bring the past to life. There are forts and ramparts and stone prisons throughout the *vanua*, now overgrown with forest or trodden on by feeding cattle. The end of a battle between Vuna and Tongan warriors is marked by a large tree. A Tongan warrior was hiding behind it when the head Vuna warrior threw a spear straight through its trunk, piercing the heart of his foe. In this critical moment, the spirits of the *vanua* assisted the Vuna warrior in the defeat of the village's longtime enemies. The power and presence of this tree, which stands proudly in an open field used for grazing, is palpable: it embodies the venerated stories of the past.

Many cultural sites around Vuna are spiritually very powerful; I share only what can be retold. The appointment of a paramount chief in Vuna, a highly detailed, secretive, and lengthy process, involves the use of many landscape features

within the *vanua*. One of the last stages in the process involves the designate bathing in a small and inconspicuous rock pool near the village. Wearing traditional *masi* (fiber) clothing, he or she wades in the pool in the hope that a shark might be drawn to the shore. It is said that a shark passing by the soon-to-be chief is acknowledgement of an old agreement that the first paramount chief in Vuna made with sharks: that the Vuna people would not hunt them if the sharks did not attack them. This mutual engagement has ensured that the Vuna people can swim on the reefs without fear. The rock pool is maintained out of respect by the clan members associated with it, and villagers steer away from it in recognition of its significance. As inviting as it may be, it is taboo for anyone except incoming chiefs to enter its water.

The pool is one of four along Vuna's coastal frontage where freshwater upwells. In each of these pools water passes through aquifers in the bedrock with enough force to generate a patch of freshwater within the seawater. The non-salt area can be seen as a rippled film in the water column. The other pools include one used by women and young children for bathing and cleaning, another exclusive to men, and a third where teenagers of both genders socialize and play. These gender- and age-specific pools are used daily by all residents of the village, for they provide the only access to freshwater, and therefore are critical to life. There are no signs describing their meaning and designating their use, but these facts are known to all who live in the *vanua*.

The women's bathing pool is also connected to the important harvest of *balolo*, an eunicid worm that comes to the surface of reefs around Vuna to breed in the last quarter of the moon in October and November. Elaborate ceremonies and rituals take place to ensure a bountiful capture. The signal that the worms are preparing to surface and ceremonies should commence is first received at the women's bathing pool. The chief's fishermen await the arrival of little red fish that are the harbinger of the *balolo* run. After these special fish appear, the village must remain perfectly quiet for several days so as to not disturb the waters, and those involved in the harvest abstain from certain activities.

The *balolo* harvest is a feast enjoyed by the entire village. But there are years when the red fish do not appear, causing consternation among the local villagers, who wonder what has been seen by the "eyes" of the land and caused its displea-

sure. Indeed, the absence of a freshwater stream in Vuna is said to have been the result of transgressions that upset the gods. The villagers have trouble accessing freshwater to this day, other than what falls on their roofs.

Stories abound of those who try to lay pipes and make dams only to find themselves with problems. It is said that the only place where freshwater could be collected in historic times was a small rock overhang a short canoe ride from Vuna; the rock itself was said to produce water. This place was guarded fiercely by two blind, white-skinned sharks that encircled the waters beneath the rock. Their role was to protect the place from desecration by warring parties wishing to harm the Vuna people because of their status as residents of a paramount chiefly village; the villagers had to be constantly on guard to defend their land and people. The blind sharks aided them in that effort, serving as sentries of the *vanua*.

In Vuna *yavu* is the name given to the solid stones that form building foundations: *yavu* support the *vale* (thatched houses) built upon them. It seems fitting to end a discussion of spiritual landscapes by introducing the concept of *yavu* because it illustrates how the *vanua* grows and renews with every generation. In Fijian villages it is customary to build upon *yavu* that were laid out by one's ancestors rather than choosing a new site. If a *vale* collapses, burns down, or is damaged by a hurricane, it is generally restored in the same place. Modern buildings use the same *yavu* as those that supported traditional *vale*. Each generation lives upon ground where their kin established themselves. In this manner *yavu* embody the spirit of ancestors. Their reuse both extends and renews the *vanua* with every generation, carrying stories from its past and expanding it with the stories yet to come.

The braiding of ritual and story and landscape seems an apt metaphor for the sacred in Indigenous environments. For Inuit, it may be that hunting along vast networks of ancestral trails over land and sea keeps their invisible landscape alive. The tangible and intangible home territory of the iTaukei is contained within a much smaller, well-defined, and collectively held space. And yet in both cultures the landscape is inseparable from the spirits that inhabit it, the stories that are told about it, and the actions that are performed within it. There is no layer. And only if one is willing to listen to and embrace different ways of knowing can one begin to comprehend such Indigenous landscapes and the people who call them home. – Scott A. Heyes

Listening to the Hidden Land Tradition in Bhutan

If a sacred forest is desiccated by warming temperatures or a mountain hermitage is overwhelmed by tourists or a pilgrimage circuit is abandoned during a pandemic or a venerated river is polluted into eutrophic death, how do the communities who value these sites make sense of such changes? Sanctuary Lab, a transdisciplinary research initiative at the University of Virginia (UVA), investigates how planetary stresses interact with places set aside from everyday activities and managed as special. All our research locations are UNESCO World Heritage sites that are both suffering from significant ecological degradations and regarded as sacred by some religious community. A scholar of religion and environment, I codirect the lab with two other UVA Religious Studies faculty, Martien Halvorson-Taylor and Kurtis Schaeffer – scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures and Tibetan Buddhism, respectively. For each site visited, Sanctuary Lab assembles a team of researchers from multiple fields – always including the sciences and the arts – along with local experts. We work together to create lines of inquiry into how a particular sacralized landscape interacts with the anthropogenic shifts and forcings of planetary ecological systems, as exemplified most acutely by the climate crisis.



In December 2019 the lab team gathered in Bhutan, a land dense with sacred sites, some of which have been continuously protected for many centuries. An independent Buddhist kingdom never conquered by Britain, India, or China, Bhutan has long been a sanctuary for Vajrayana Buddhism. In recent decades Bhutan has gained global prominence for prioritizing Gross National Happiness (GNH) over GDP and, through its mandated forest cover, sequestering more carbon than it emits. Its leaders often emphasize that these policies protect its Buddhist heritage. At the same time, its enlightened economic and climate policies have made it in the imaginations of admiring outsiders yet another kind of sanctuary: a refuge from excessive capitalism. Our team of ten scholars included five specialists in Himalayan Buddhism, three of whom were from the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), as well as UVA faculty from environmental science, law, music, and religious studies. Through our different ways of knowing, we asked

Sanctuary Lab codirectors Martien Halvorson-Taylor and Kurtis Schaeffer approach a stupa overlooking Phobjika Valley. Photograph by Willis Jenkins.

how Bhutan's traditional landscape hosts, interprets, and manages the external forces bearing upon it.

Bhutan's identity as a place of refuge is shaped by the Vajrayana tradition of the *beyul*, the "hidden land." A concept with several layers of meaning, *beyul* may mean a secluded valley, a place with spiritual treasures hidden by previous masters, a location apt for a meditation retreat, or a sanctuary for those seeking political asylum. Across the Himalayas there are places designated as *beyul* that have been associated with great masters and the discovery of spiritual treasures (usually scriptures or teachings) for centuries. We decided to visit one of the most significant of the traditional *beyul*, the Bumthang Valley,

a religious site associated with the fourteenth-century master Longchen, as well as a modern secular sanctuary, the Phobjika Valley, which is a conservation site associated with recent efforts to protect the Black-necked Crane. Our itinerary of inquiry included both types of special valley on the hypothesis that the *beyul* tradition probably informs how Bhutan negotiates new political forces and ecological pressures and may itself be changed by the process. We wanted to ask if this traditional notion of sacred landscape was being mobilized by Bhutanese to interpret climate change, reckon with globalizing capitalism, or manage tourist flows. We also wished to ascertain how such responses might alter the way that landscapes are experienced.



Our hypothesis was informed by contextual precedent. Through a process that the scholar Toni Huber calls “mandalization,” Himalayan Buddhism has for centuries incorporated regional landscapes into a universal cosmography through narratives of great masters taming the powers of unruly regional deities and enlisting them as protectors of Buddhism. Local deities or beings that predated Buddhism, along with their places of dominion, were thus assimilated. Might we see that process playing out anew, inscribing sacred places into a geographic mandala that depicts the subduing of the suprahuman forces of climate crisis or global capitalism?

The *beyul* concept also seems apt for describing the rising international regard for Bhutan. With its many Buddhist pilgrimage sites, Bhutan attracts thousands of pilgrims to important temples, monasteries, and festivals. Some regard the entire nation of Bhutan as a kind of sanctuary for authentic or pristine religion. These patrons are underwriting a religious building boom, making it possible for many monasteries and temples to restore their buildings, add capacity, and commission religious art. Bhutan is also a significant conservation destination, attracting thousands of visitors to its protected lands. Some patrons from this constituency regard the country as a refuge from overdevelopment; they are underwriting nationally scaled public-private conservation partnerships. By moving from Bumthang to Phobjika, a traditional *beyul* to a new sacred valley, our lab could explore

connections between the two kinds of pilgrim and their patronage. Perhaps the whole of Bhutan might be regarded as a hidden land with invaluable treasures that must be protected from dynamics of global change.

Located midway up a 4,000-meter-high mountain ridge above the Bumthang Valley, Tharpaling Monastery lies near the center of Bhutan, about 50 kilometers due south from, and several thousand meters below, the high mountain border with Tibet, and about 150 kilometers due north from, and several thousand meters above, the Brahmaputra River. It was in this spot, seven centuries ago, that Longchen, who had been abbot of an important monastery of Tibet until he was forced into exile, sought political refuge on the other side of the mountains and discovered a hitherto unrecognized *beyul*. At Tharpaling he composed a famous synthesis of Buddhist teachings known as *Seven Treasuries*, as well as a poem describing the valley of Bumthang as a divine hidden land. Translated from Tibetan into English as *Forests of Poetry and Rivers of Composition* by the contemporary Bhutanese scholar Dasho Karma Ura, the poem is influential across the region, quoted in many folk songs and stories. It recounts Longchen’s felicitous discovery that the valley in which he had taken asylum turned out to be a *beyul*, especially apt for pursuing liberation. In Ura’s translation the master asserts that “this mountain is the key sacred center of precious attainment.” He describes a mandala with Mount Tharpaling at the center of the universe, Bumthang Valley arrayed below it, and all beings postured in obeisance toward it. “Happiness

Matthew Burtner prepares to record the bell at Tharpaling Monastery. Photograph by Erika Share.

among scholars should grow” when they arrive in the valley, Longchen proclaims, for just one particle from the place

could transport them across “the ocean of conditioned existence.”

Despite the billing, my own expectations were low. Expert neither in Himalayan culture nor Buddhism, I was already weary of temples when our little convoy stopped outside the gates of Tharpaling Monastery. We had visited dozens of monasteries, stupas, shrines, and temples over the previous week as we made our way east toward Bumthang. While the subtleties of each site absorbed our expert scholars, the interest among the rest of us novices had begun to dim. As we stepped out into the plaza of the main temple and our colleagues from the RUB, who often lead fields trips here for their students, began explaining the layout of the monastic complex, I looked longingly up the ridge. A few hundred meters above and a couple kilometers away, something glinted in an inviting cleft of sky and rock: a good place to clear one’s head, I thought.

Meanwhile the music professor with us, Matthew Burtner, had been attracted to the massive iron bell in front of the main temple at Tharpaling Monastery. The bell was suspended from its own shelter; this had four posts ornamented with *norbu* (stylized gems that represent Buddhist teachings as valuable jewels), and a ceiling filigreed with lotus petals and sacred syllables in religious script. Nearby, four elderly women, their time-creased faces surrounded by red-wool head coverings, slowly turned a row of five prayer wheels, each twice their height and inscribed from top to bottom with mantras in Tibetan script. As they circumambulated the cylinders, spinning them on their axes, a high-pitched chime rang out every few seconds, marking another prayer made and released.

From our first day in Bhutan, Matthew had been drawn to the soundscape of prayer: the gongs and bells, the hand-turned prayer cylinders, the water-driven prayer wheels, and especially the prayer flags. He repeatedly asked the Buddhist Studies scholars to explain how the flags and waterwheels are involved with human prayer. After these items are imprinted with mantras, the scholars explained, the flags are strung and the waterwheels installed so as to let wind and water make continuous prayers. In contrast, chimes and bells are often designed to translate the kinetic action of certain devotional

movements (circumambulation, for example) into sound waves. Matthew made recordings of all these sounds.

A three-foot, polished timber gong hangs horizontally next to Tharpaling's massive iron bell. Unable to resist its invitation, Matthew arranged a microphone in the bell's mouth, pulled back the gong, and sent it firmly into the bell's shoulder. A deep reverberation resulted, rising in volume as it gathered both mountain and valley into its sonic rings. Seconds later a startled monk rushed out from the temple, speaking in a burst of admonitory Dzongkha. The bell marks time for monks in solitary retreat higher up the mountain, signaling the ritual rhythm of the day. This mistimed gong would confuse them, drawing their minds down to the temple complex and disrupting the rhythm of the proper cycle of meditation. The elderly women laughed at the exchange, seemingly delighted by the mishap. The monk's chiding made us realize how the bell participated in a whole mountain of prayer, and several of us novices wondered if we might venture into the wider landscape while the experts examined the buildings.

We sought out the monastery's head monk to ask if it would be permissible for some of us to walk up toward the ridge. It turned out that he was a *khenpo*, a scholar of the highest monastic rank. Upon learning about our purpose in coming – especially that we had all read Longchen's poem about Bumthang in preparation for the visit and that some of us were experts on Longchen's Tibetan opus – he suggested that we might be interested in hiking to the rock where Longchen had composed his master works; from there we could better appreciate the geography of the text. He offered to lead us himself.

Single file we followed his maroon-robed figure up the steep slope, tacking back and forth through winter-browned grass. Sometimes the *khenpo* would pause and, speaking in Tibetan, point out a cave or outcropping

or depression that had played a role in Longchen's life or texts. Eventually we reached a spine of rock, atop which sits the shrine known as Longchen's Throne. It turned out that it had been a glint of sunshine glancing off this shrine that had caught my eye below. Longchen had apparently identified the same cleft of rock and sky as a good place to seek solitude away from the monastery.

At the summit we walked through a thicket of prayer flags, strung from poles and laid out in rows contoured to the slope. They snapped in the wind pouring over the ridge. From the "throne" at the top marking the spot where Longchen came to liberate his mind, one can look down into the valleys on either side; this particular day was so clear that we could see all the way to the snowcapped mountains marking the border with Tibet, from whence Longchen had fled. While the Buddhist Studies scholars huddled with the *khenpo* over *Forests of Poetry*, deliberating various place references in the poem that were visible from the ridgetop, Matthew set up a listening station in the thicket of flags.

After spending a day working with his recordings, Matthew invited the lab members to hear what he had made of them. Interested in the idea that each flap of each flag represents a discrete prayer released into the world, he had slowed the recording to one-quarter speed and filtered out the high frequencies in order to focus audition on the flag. What remained was a low, "whoom-whoom" pulse: a bass line of prayer. He joined that line to a recording of the cylinders' chime, connecting prayers from the top and the bottom of the mountain, ones from the elders and those from the wind, letting the single ching of the turning

cylinder answer the slow unfurling of the flag. Then, through machinations more skilled than I can explain, he had used the rhythm of the prayer flags to modulate the pitch of the large meditation bell so that the wind-tuned flags at the top of the mountain played the bell at the base of the monastery.

Several lab members later referred to hearing Matthew's composition as a turning point in the team's collective inquiry. Up to that point we had approached sacred landscapes as if acquiring data – something that the specialists did with expertise and enthusiasm and the non-specialists with faltering confidence and energy. We had not supposed that the landscapes might participate in the inquiry or ask questions of us. To be sure, scholars will enter a landscape through our disciplines' ways of knowing: philological expertise in texts; scientific expertise in ecological dynamics; policy expertise in governance. Yet if we cannot express how we are addressed by the landscapes, we may miss a key question. "How can we hear the spirit of this land? That's what I want us to ask ourselves," Matthew explained. His composition was a skilled form of listening, giving expression to human and nonhuman relations that sacralize a landscape of prayer. By offering his expert training in an interpretive act that fused his own experience of a place with those expressions, he invited the rest of us to do something similar.

Asking ourselves how we experience the aliveness of a place need not compete with the critical knowledge we also seek and produce. Maybe, the law professor in our group ventured, a lesson we can take from the *beyul* tradition is that we should critically approach the lands we study as if radically transformative possibilities lie within them. If we thought that, this specialist in U.S. environmental governance continued, it would change the way that we regard and manage landscapes. They would be more than places threatened by environmental problems or shaped by cultural memories; they would also be presences that make their own claims; that enter into the political interpretation of problems and the curation of memories. The music professor's composition of the sacred landscape had, in a sense, opened for our secular scholarship a way into the *beyul*. It had suggested that there may be a hidden treasure by which to mandalize the new stresses on this geography.

Whereas Bumthang is a *beyul* named by a master teacher and known for centuries across the Himalayas, Phobjika represents the emergence of a new kind of sacred valley. Three



The head monk and *khenpo* of Tharpaling Monastery leads Sanctuary Lab members up the ridge to Longchen's Throne. Photograph by Willis Jenkins.

mountain passes and a day's journey west from Bumthang, Phobjika seems in the process of being made special by interactions between secular conservation projects, cultural tourism, and conventional religious bodies. It is a valley sought by a different sort of pilgrim.

Each winter, the rare Black-necked Crane migrates from Tibet to Phobjika. The glaciated alluvial plain is broad and marshy, and its cultivated fields suit the crane's feeding habits. Seemingly by mutual arrangement, the cranes come just after the farmers finish harvesting and graze through the stubbled fields. Tradition holds that when they arrive for the year, they circle Gangtey Monastery on its hilltop prominence, paying their respects before settling into the wetlands below.

Cranes generally have been regarded as auspicious beings in Himalayan Buddhism; they appear in story and art as emissaries of gods. In Phobjika their annual arrival has long been noticed and welcomed. In fact, the name of the nearby fortress, Jakar Dzong, built centuries ago, translates as "white-bird fortress." Until recently, however, the Black-necked Crane did not enjoy any specific legal protections.

Populations of many crane species declined across Asia over the last century, as wetlands were lost to development. By the 1990s the annual arrivals of Black-necked Cranes into Phobjika had diminished to fewer than two hundred birds. When told of this decline, the fourth king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, charged Bhutan's Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) with protecting the crane habitat at Phobjika.

While the RSPN is an independent conservation organization, it enjoys popular support and a close relationship with the government because it was

founded by the royal family. Still, protecting crane habitat was not an easy mandate. The wide plains of Phobjika are also the best place in Bhutan to cultivate potatoes, a valuable domestic-market crop. The valley's vibrant cultural festivals had developed a following among regional tourists and were a growing source of income. In the late 1990s a proposal was advancing to drain the marshy plain to expand the potato fields and provide more freshwater infrastructure for guesthouses, creating a wider economic base for prosperity. Even with the support of the popular royal family, deciding to manage the valley in a different way would require a compelling narrative that could garner broad civic support.

The story of the Black-necked Crane's conservation is often presented by government leaders and the RSPN in a way that comports with Bhutan's broader story as a sanctuary. Nearly every mention of the bird alludes to the way its migration connects Tibet and Bhutan. A painting hanging in the RSPN central office in Thimphu depicts flocks of Black-necked Cranes flying between the most important sacred sites of the two lands. The poignancy of that connection lies in what is left unsaid: the tragic separation of the two Buddhist mountain kingdoms by China's annexation of Tibet. The Black-necked Crane, emissary of the gods, recognizes no such separation and crosses the border at will, where it finds refuge in Bhutan.

Black-necked Cranes graze a recently harvested field in Phobjika Valley. Photograph by Erika Share.



While we were in Phobjika, the art historian on our team, Ariana Maki, who was on a Fulbright fellowship to the Royal University of Bhutan, noticed new murals in a renovation of the nearby Longchen temple, Nyelung Dechenling. At the direction of the overseeing lama, cranes had been inserted into the depictions of the masters and incarnations of this place. And they were not the generic white Gruidae that often appear in Himalayan Buddhist art; they were marked with distinctive dark necks and red crowns. The Black-necked Crane had made its way into the cosmography of this valley, taking its place alongside Longchen and his successive incarnations. Remarkably, just two decades after secular environmental governance efforts had made Black-necked Crane conservation a priority, an official religious institution had adopted and elevated mythmaking around the species.

Meanwhile, winter migration of Black-necked Cranes has steadily increased, rising to more than six hundred birds. The RSPN suspects that habitat encroachment on other winter sites, in southern China, may partly explain the rise. This, therefore, becomes more than a conservation story; it recapitulates the story of Bhutan as a refuge for Vajrayana Buddhism. As development in China invades crane habitats, the Black-necked Crane finds sanctuary in Phobjika, repeating a centuries-old pattern of Bhutan serving as a refuge for emissaries of the gods.

That religiously inflected conservation success story has in turn become the basis for a new form of cultural expression and a new reason for pilgrims to seek out this valley. Contemporary tourist brochures invite people to enjoy the protective passion that the people of Phobjika have for the Black-necked Crane, which extends even to their dance and religious art. Indeed, in the late 1990s the RSPN sponsored the creation of a new cultural festival focused on the Black-necked Crane. Although a lay festival, it is nonetheless hosted in the courtyard of the monastery and features dancers from both lay and monastic troupes, performing in elaborate crane costumes. Many visitors now come to Phobjika not only to see Black-necked Cranes but also the cultural celebrations of their conservation, narrated within the broader story of Bhutan.

While certainly possessed of its own rich religious history and a respectable num-

ber of temples, stupas, and monasteries, Phobjika has not historically been considered a sacred valley in the way that Bumthang has. Now, however, as it is increasingly sought by transnational pilgrims, resonances between religious and secular mythmaking may be sacralizing it. Chosen as a refuge by the Black-necked Cranes that have been celebrated and protected by important social institutions, Phobjika Valley is increasingly regarded by people near and far as set apart and special. In this sense, the valley may represent a new incarnation of the *beyul*: a sacred landscape under secular governance with religiously informed cultural support; a sanctuary in which birds and humans seek different sorts of refuges; and a destination that is sought by pilgrims, both traditional and secular, for its spiritual treasures.

Early one morning, well before dawn, I went with Matthew and Kurtis as they sought to record the call of the Black-necked Crane. Eventually, at first light, the birds bugled clamorously. But before then, as we waited, we heard other sounds of the valley floor. The calls of Eastern skylarks, ruddy shelducks, little grebes. A mixed herd of yak, horses, and cattle moving across the frozen ground. Slow-moving water gurgling and trickling through marshy soil, gathering into the concentrated rush of an unseen river. As I stood there in the dark, I realized that I was listening to the intricate workings of the ecology protected by Phobjika: the range of birds who find habitat in its protected marshlands; the herders and their animals that coexist within its diverse ecosystem; the absorbent soils in the glacial plains that slow water as it rushes off the high mountains.

All the new pilgrims in this valley create new pressures on the sanctuary. The RSPN worries that ecotourism has begun to overdraw the water needed to maintain the marshes and incentivizes illegal timbering by encouraging the proliferation of guesthouses. It is unclear how this kind of threat – the pressures paradoxically created by the sanctuary’s success – will be negotiated in policy. Yet here too the situation of Phobjika exemplifies broader tensions for the nation of Bhutan, which must negotiate how to protect itself as cultural, religious, and ecological sanctuary while also encouraging the external regard that helps make that possible. Whatever policies are made in Phobjika, they will likely be informed by the hidden valley tradition: the inherited idea of a sacred place of refuge and spiritual treasures. – Willis Jenkins

The Ritual Practice of Making *Semeni* in Northern Turkmenistan

The transition from harsh winter to spring demands ritual. All great religious traditions recognize this. There is a need to cast off what came before, an imperative to shed the problems of the old year and embrace the new. Thus the Persian New Year is celebrated in spring in many parts of Asia. When I was in Turkmenistan in 2000, I had the great honor of being invited to participate in the ritual act of making *semeni* (its Turkmen name), a sweet wheat paste derived from sprouted wheat berries for the local Persian New Year celebrations. The holiday, known as Nauruz, a Persian term that means “new day,” takes place on the vernal equinox. The religious history of Nauruz is deep and vast. Of Zoroastrian origins, Nauruz has been celebrated in Central Asia, Western Asia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea Basin, the Balkans, and South Asia for over seven thousand years.

Turkmen and Uzbek cultures are collectivist. Sunni religious practices are embedded in the landscape in every imaginable way, and nature is sacred. The belief that God is in nature stems from Islamic doctrine but also from pre-Islamic traditions of nomadic Central Asian tribes. The Soviet regime forced nomadic families into state-mandated collective farming communities, where they continued to live after the fall of the Soviet Union.

In August of 1999, when I was twenty-four years old, I left my hometown of Des Moines, Iowa, and arrived in Ashgabat. I lived in a community just outside of town, where I trained with a group of five other Peace Corps volunteers, studying Turkmen language and ways of life. This was our first introduction to the language, and the culture shock was considerable. Three months later, I went to live with an Uzbek family in the town of Ýylanly in the northernmost region of Turkmenistan, which borders the Kara-Kum Desert.

I was the first Peace Corps volunteer in Ýylanly, and the first Westerner whom most people in the town had ever met. (The country had closed its borders after the fall of the Soviet Union.) This role was exciting but also challenging. It took an entire year of rigorous work – baking the bread, milking the cow, making the food, carrying the family’s supply of water, and drinking tea in the home of anyone who invited me – to gain the trust of the community. My assignment was to teach English at the Turkmen school for the first year and then to come up with a development project in response to the town’s needs.

Living in Ýylanly, I was acutely aware of the seasons. The town of Ýylanly (the name means “with snakes”) is surrounded by eight collective farms. The climate is challenging, with temperatures dropping below zero in the winter and rising as high as 120 degrees in the summer. My first few months there were especially rough. As a newcomer, every time I walked down the street I was observed with curiosity and what felt like suspicion. And although many people invited me into their homes, as a single woman in my twenties – unless accompanied by a male or a group – I was expected to stay with my host family most of the time and be in by 6 p.m.

Winter was long and grey, and the streets turned to mud. My walks to school took practice. At first I would arrive with mud all the way up the back of my long skirt. I learned to wear an additional skirt on top, so that I could remove the dirty one upon my arrival. I still don’t know how my colleagues managed the half-hour walk without a single drop of mud to show for it. The streets were laid out on a grid, with a bazaar in the center and a few municipal buildings surrounding a Soviet-style concrete-block office and a plaza that was named “Santa Barbara” by locals after a dubbed American soap opera that played for several years on the Russian TV station. Few trees could be seen along my route other than the coveted fruit trees, which held their own power. Superstition ran high in the culture, touching every aspect of life. Families hung glass bottles of salt in their apricot trees to ward off the evil eye, fearing that jealousy from another would ruin their crop. Luck was something that was God-given, but could also be protected by the one on whom it had been bestowed. God’s grace had to be worked for and, once it had been given, protected.

At first, the culture seemed formal, quiet, and reserved. A buttoned-up home with shuttered windows kept the evil eye from wandering in and taking away what had been given to the family by God. Once invited inside, however, the guest encountered a beautiful world of color. Walls were painted in pastels, adorned with stenciled patterns, and hung with prized rugs and silk flowers. Furniture was scarce by design, but floral-patterned mats were laid out for guests around tea tables on the floor. Anyone entering a house was offered tea, fruits, and sweets – homemade jam and bread at the very least. Nauruz was a time to freshen the home, let in the sweet air, clean out the old, and make room for the new.



Courtyard in Yylanly, Dashoguz, Turkmenistan. All photographs by Allison James.

All aspects of life in Turkmenistan were structured in support of kin. Rituals were no exception. The rite of spring was more than a house cleaning, although that was the first action taken in preparation for Nauruz. The holiday also marked the opening of the gardening season. Nature was as much a part of the inside of the home as it was of the outside. From late spring through fall, courtyard gardens were the center of family life. Turkmen and Uzbek courtyards were surrounded by mud-brick walls, baked hard by the hot sun and dry desert air.

In spatial layout, adornment, and design, each courtyard was as unique as the family that inhabited it. An essential fixture within these private spaces was the *tapchan*, a raised wooden bed covered in carpets and cushions that is used for eating, drinking tea, and sleeping. After we finished the chores, we would walk to the *tapchan*, drink tea under the grapevines, and gossip about whom we had seen at the bazaar buying dresses for a dowry. Every night from spring through fall, my host sisters and I would also haul heavy blankets to the *tapchan* and sleep under the stars in the cool desert air. There were moonflowers planted along the path that would open up after sunset. After the rooster woke us at dawn, we

would eat homemade bread with butter from their cow and drink green tea (black tea is a winter-only beverage). Before breakfast, my host father would pray for the family.

At the center of the town's courtyards there was usually a vegetable garden for growing tomatoes, cabbage, onions, peppers, and garlic. Adjacent wooden barns housed livestock (cattle, sheep, and chickens). Mud-brick pathways led from the garden to the well, chicken coop, barns, and *tandyr* oven. Baking bread in a *tandyr* oven was one of my

favorite ways to pass the time. Bread was sacred in Turkmen and Uzbek culture. If bread accidentally touched the ground, someone had to pick it up and kiss it, then place it on a shelf or a table. Nothing was ever wasted. Once bread got hard, it was mixed into feed for the animals.

My favorite time of day was five o'clock in the afternoon, when my responsibility was to collect the household's supply of water. I would gather nine buckets and rush outside to be with all the young women at the water spigot. I would walk down a series of mud steps carved into the earth until all I could see was the sky and the faces of my friends crowded around the hole. The pipes would be flooded with canal water, the spigot would begin to drip, and at last the water would gush out. I looked forward to the smell of the clay mud, the view of the sky framed by the opening above us, and the latest gossip.

On the Sunday before Nauruz, my host sisters Baljon and Dermonjon went to the bazaar to buy special food. After a barren winter with little more than carrots and potatoes from

the root cellars, the new cabbages, bright greens, and vibrant tangerines at the market were a welcome sight. Baljon and Dermonjon each bought something new to wear as well – a shirt and a floral scarf. Traditionally, everyone should wear at least one new item of clothing during Nauruz, symbolic of new things in life. Back at home, we made *manti* (lamb-filled dumplings with yoghurt sauce), and Dermonjon baked an apple cake. We cleaned the house from top to bottom, washing everything. Rugs and mattresses were hung outside in the sun, windows washed, walls and ceilings dusted. Spring air was let into the house.

Also in preparation for Nauruz, a ritual was performed in order to expel the evil eye. My host mother called us into the corridor. Lighting a metal dustpan full of sage, she circled the smoke around our hands and feet to cleanse our bodies of any evil that might have crossed our paths. Life in Yylanly was not easy. Luck came and went. Bad luck is believed to be cast upon the unfortunate one.

That first spring I was struggling with a welter of feelings: the winter had been long, the climate was harsh, our village was very remote, and I was an outsider. I missed my family terribly. One morning during Nauruz, I walked the usual half hour to the switchboard operator's office to make a payment for my weekly call to the U.S. – the highlight of my week. My community seemed besieged with hardship. Many families were plagued with economic insecurity, especially after the disastrous salinization of the water following the excessive channelization of the Aral Sea; heroin use was also rampant. I was on the verge of leaving my post and heading back to the U.S. Then, when I returned to the house and made my call home, it was inexplicably disconnected after only three minutes. I was heartbroken. I sat by the phone for an hour trying unsuccessfully to will it to work.

Witnessing my distress, my host mother decided to intervene: she came into the room and asked me to get my coat. She said that life there was hard, yes, but reminded me that I had signed up to work. Then she handed me a glass jar filled with sprouted green wheatgrass: I was to accompany my host sister Dermonjon to the collective farm to make *semeni* for the family in celebration of Nauruz. The act of making *semeni*, she explained, would bring the family luck in the new year; as an adopted member, I would need to participate. Humbled by both her firmness and her kindness, I did what I was told.

Spring in Turkmenistan was still harsh, full of cold wind and muddy streets. Beyond the mud-clay houses and concrete municipal buildings, the landscape was vast and flat, the same brown color as the houses. Dermonjon and I walked

through a sandstorm, our faces covered in cotton scarves. After an hour, we came upon a field of garlic shoots. The green of the shoots was a welcome relief after the relentless browns and greys of winter. We walked along the raised mud divisions through the field until we arrived at a large barn. Dermonjon opened the door.

The barn was made of the same mud brick as the houses, but the interior had two levels: a ground floor and a kitchen area upstairs, connected by a ladder-like staircase. The floor of the lower level was unfinished dirt. This room was packed with women, all in colorful Uzbek work dresses. The dresses were handmade of brightly colored floral cloth imported from Iran or Russia. I had been told to dress in work clothes and so was wearing an appropriate long skirt and sweater.

The women welcomed us with tea. Without exception, tea is always offered to anyone entering a home. It is a sign of respect for both the host and the guest to drink a cup of tea together, while sitting on a mat on the floor and leaning on a short table. The elder women yelled across the room, giving instructions on the *semini*-making process, making jokes and enjoying each other. Just inside the barn's entrance drying tobacco leaves hung from the ceiling. Below them, lit with a gas flame, was an enormous cauldron customarily used to make large quantities of *plov* – a traditional rice dish of Persian ancestry.

As I drank my tea, I watched the women work. In this gendered ritual space, hierarchy was based on age: in recognition of their status in the community older women were in charge. One took my jar of wheatgrass, ground it in a meat grinder, and dumped it into a hollowed log; the next pounded the grass into a paste. Someone came in from the well with a bucket of water and dumped it into the cauldron of paste. Other women were sitting along the wall on the floor making *manti* for dinner. All worked seamlessly, creating a space for connection in the midst of ceaseless activity, catching up with one another and sharing stories even as they were continuously on the move.

I asked them to let me help. At first, because I was

seen as a guest, they refused. After I insisted, I was given a bucket and allowed to follow my friend Sonya down the road to the well. The wind picked up and the sand and dust came with it. We held on to each other as we fought the wind. When we arrived at the well, I gave her the bucket and she pulled up the water with the rope. On the way back our voices grew louder as the wind and sand hit the back of our heads. We finally delivered the bucket safely, carrying it through the barn door and pouring the water carefully into the cauldron. We repeated this sequence of acts over and over until no more water was needed.

Next I was given a wooden pestle to take my turn at grinding the wheat berries in the hollowed log. I stood there pounding until the contents were smooth. Then we dumped the white mash into the cauldron with some rock candy to sweeten the mixture. After some time, I took my turn at the meat grinder as well. On we went, grinding and pounding, laughing and talking late into the night.

At 11 p.m. we sat on the floor. By now there were so many women and children crammed together that we were sitting shoulder to shoulder. Everyone was either serving or being served a bowl of fresh *manti* and yoghurt. As we ate, we talked about farming, husbands, who was going to be married off, and who was pregnant or had just given birth, and we gossiped about those who were missing. As always, gossip was our entertainment at the end of the working day. That was a fact of life. Now we talked of these things in the barn while drinking tea and keeping watch on the cauldron.

After the meal, those of us in our twenties cleared the plates and heated the water for washing. We worked until all was clean. Then it was time for the older women and children to retire upstairs. There was a room on the second floor next to the kitchen; this was where the old and the young curled up with their coats and fell asleep together. The



twenty-somethings gathered around the cauldron. **Making *semeni* in Ýylanly, Dashoguz, Turkmenistan.**

The lights went out as the wind picked up and cut off the electricity, and we were left with the flame beneath the pot. As we took turns stirring the *semeni* over the fire, the women began to tell stories about the year that was passing. One talked about her husband, who had been struggling with addiction (the recent heroin crisis affected every family). To support his habit, he had sold most of her clothes, the tea table, and the floor mats. They had nothing left. The next talked about the drought and how her family had lost most of its crops that year. The salinated water that had come on the heels of the Aral Sea disaster was to blame. Another talked about her recent stillbirth; stillbirths were common in rural villages in the region. Then all the women started making wishes for the new year.

After sitting for a time in silence, one woman began to sing. She chose a well-known folk song in Turkmen and Uzbek, “Eje, Jonam” (“my sweet mother”). In Islam, the mother is always honored; this ritual honors the first mother



Turkmen family making bread in a *tandyr* (traditional wood-fired clay oven). Dashoguz, Turkmenistan.

of Islam, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. Khadijah was the daughter of Khuwaylid ibn Asad, a leader of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, and Muhammad's first wife. Khadijah and her daughter Fatimah are two of the most revered female figures in Islam. Shi'as believe that Muhammad was married to Khadijah for twenty-five years. She is said to have been the first to convert to Islam.

As the woman sang, she also began to cry. Her crying grew increasingly intense, and she beat her fists into the ground as she sang. The woman next to her started singing as well, and soon everyone was crying. The cathartic act of letting go of the past year and welcoming the new led to bonding for these women. I felt a part of the community in a new way. There is a desolation that comes with carrying one's hardships alone. After our collective catharsis, our burdens felt lighter. I now understood my place and felt honored to have one.

An hour later, the *semeni* was done. We washed our hands and faces and went to sleep on the floor with the others. At dawn those who were still asleep woke up to the sound of babies crying and women opening and closing doors. Tea was ready. We sat together again. One of the younger women talked about the act of making *semeni* as an offering to God, and how the ritual was carried out by Khadijah in the new year, and so it was passed down to them. The older women said that if the first one up sees Khadijah's handprint in the *semeni*, the families of the participants are all blessed and good luck will come in the new year. One of the women announced that the handprint had, in fact, appeared. Then we all sampled the *semeni* with our tea. Spread on bread, it tasted earthy and sweet, and had a caramel color almost like apple butter. Everyone who had participated left with a full jar of *semeni* to bring to their families. Eating it is considered to bring good luck for the new year.

After breakfast, we walked home with the fruit of our labors. The wind was gone, and we moved effortlessly through the fields of garlic shoots. The night before I had been homesick and detached. After this ritual I felt a new sense of place, and a deep feeling of belonging. I also realized that I had something to contribute to this community. I wouldn't be going home so soon after all.

A few weeks after Nauruz, I hit upon my development project, with the help of a local agronomist. We built two greenhouses to produce peppers and tomatoes for our town during the harsh winter months. – Allison James

Sacred to the Memory: Richmond's Cemeteries in Black and White

Racial inequities persist even after death, as is all too apparent in the landscape. Consider the historic cemeteries of Richmond, Virginia. On the west side of town is the storied Hollywood Cemetery, established in 1847 and designed in a picturesque idiom by John Notman of Philadelphia. Spanning some 135 acres of hills and vales along the James River, it is the resting place of presidents Monroe and Tyler, who are entombed overlooking the river in what is grandly called Presidents Circle. But Hollywood is perhaps even better known for its Confederate burials. The South's only president, Jefferson Davis, is interred there along with twenty-eight Confederate generals and over eighteen thousand enlisted men. The soldiers were memorialized in 1869, when a ninety-foot granite pyramid, designed with the help of engineer Charles H. Dimmock, was erected in their honor conspicuously near the cemetery entrance.

Across town is the city-owned Oakwood Cemetery, established in 1854 with the purchase of 60 acres of undulating farmland overlooking Stony Run, a tributary of the James. The city engineer laid out winding roads and paths reminiscent of Hollywood's, and individual and family plots were sold to "any white resident of the city." The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* soon described Oakwood as a "quiet, well-arranged, secluded city for the dead." During the Civil War, more than sixteen thousand Confederate soldiers filled a section set aside for them, with many of the dead brought from nearby Chimborazo Hospital. A women's Oakwood Memorial Association was formed in 1866 to care for these graves. The group's work included the raising of a memorial obelisk in the Confederate section in 1871.

Just across Stony Run to the east of Oakwood, two historically Black cemeteries tell a very different story. Founded in 1891 and 1897 respectively because white cemeteries would not accept Black burials, Evergreen and East End together cover some 75 acres and contain something in the range of twenty-five thousand graves – the precise number is difficult to determine since many graves are overgrown or no longer marked. The two cemeteries are the resting places of many of the city's leading African American citizens of the Reconstruction era and beyond, many of whom were born enslaved and went on to make enormous contributions to Richmond, the Commonwealth, and the country. They include newspaper editor, civil rights leader, and businessman John Mitchell Jr.; Maggie L. Walker, the first Black woman to found a bank in the United States; pioneering educator and suffragist Rosa D. Bowser; the Rev. J. Andrew Bowler, an educator and the

first minister of Mount Olivet Baptist Church; Dr. Sarah Garland Boyd Jones, the first woman certified by the Virginia State Medical Examining Board and cofounder of a hospital for African Americans in Richmond; and Dr. Richard F. Tancil, a Howard University-trained physician and bank president. But African Americans from all walks of life share the ground with them – cooks, porters, barbers, and grocers as well as ministers, journalists, and bankers.

Just as Hollywood and Oakwood were important cultural loci of white Richmond, Evergreen and East End were sacred spaces at the heart of Richmond's African American community, visited not only for burials and Memorial Day picnics but also by relatives who tended the graves. By the end of the twentieth century, however, these culturally and historically significant landscapes had largely reverted to woodland, with a thick, tangled understory of invasive plants like ivy, kudzu, privet, and thorny brush. Some of the reasons for this are by now familiar: both the economic and political repression of the Black community during the Jim Crow era and the exodus of the Great Migration contributed to the virtual abandonment of these cemeteries. As African American families died off, moved away, or were driven out by racially motivated acts of terror, their burial grounds were overgrown and vandalized. What is less understood, however, is the role that American tax dollars played in the destruction of Black heritage and the memorialization of a particularly ugly aspect of its white counterpart.

Since 1902, when Virginia's all-white legislature provided funding for the care of Confederate graves, those at Hollywood have been maintained at least in part with public funds – initially through an annual appropriation and later through the endowment of a perpetual care fund. The same is true at Oakwood, where the Confederate section has been receiving state funds for over eight decades – both for immediate repairs and ongoing care. These white cemeteries have benefitted from a larger pattern of support for Confederate sites across the South.

As detailed in a December 2018 *Smithsonian Magazine* article by photographer and journalist Brian Palmer and investigative reporter Seth Freed Wessler, "The Costs of the Confederacy," American taxpayers have directed over 40 million dollars in the last decade alone to Confederate monuments – statues, homes, parks, museums, libraries, and cemeteries – and to Confederate heritage organizations, many of which are directly or indirectly engaged in perpetuating myths of white supremacy. Virginia has spent \$174,000 in the

past decade to maintain the statue to Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue in Richmond, and it cost Richmond police over half a million dollars to protect the monument and keep the peace during a neo-Confederate rally in September 2017. The accounting of public expenditures during the most recent protests over the memorial is still to come. But it is probably safe to say it will still be a drop in the bucket compared to the funding directed to Confederate cemeteries. Palmer and Wessler estimate that close to 9 million in today's dollars has been spent over the past century to maintain Confederate graves in Virginia, much of it dispersed through the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Maintaining graves might seem innocent enough. But Confederate graves have been the locus for some disturbing rituals. Palmer and Wessler attended Confederate Memorial Day celebrations in May 2018 at Oakwood, where participants included the Sons of Confederate Veterans (established in Richmond in 1896) and the Virginia Flaggers, a more recent group whose Facebook page announces that they are "Citizens of the Commonwealth who stand AGAINST those who would desecrate our Confederate Monuments and memorials, and FOR our Confederate Veterans." Flaggers are known primarily for trying to make the Confederate battle flag as visible as possible, carrying it at demonstrations and other public events, and erecting it on private land. These flags can be seen along major highways and have been the target of controversy and legal efforts to have them removed. According to Palmer and Wessler, participants at the Oakwood event stood at attention for an invocation read by a chaplain in period dress and, hands on hearts, saluted the Confederate flag.

It will come as no surprise that African American leaders have long objected to Confederate memorials, recognizing their role in perpetuating narratives of the Lost Cause, the pseudo-historical doctrine that the Southern effort in the Civil War was heroic and just – a struggle to maintain state's rights and a distinctive way of life in the face of Northern



aggression – and not a defense of slavery. John Mitchell Jr., an African American journalist and a member of Richmond's city council during Reconstruction, fought fiercely against the effort to erect the monument to Robert E. Lee and tried to block funding for its dedication. But the state issued bonds to support its construction, and the city underwrote dedication events on May 29, 1890, that were attended by some 150,000 people.

Writing about the celebration in *The Richmond Planet*, the paper he edited, Mitchell predicted, "This glorification of States Rights Doctrine – the right of secession, and the honoring of men who represented that cause, fosters in the Republic, the spirit of Rebellion and will ultimately result in the handing down to generations unborn a legacy of treason and blood." His prophesy has been borne out time and again down to the present day, as in the 2015 massacre of nine African Americans by a white supremacist at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015 or the killing of a counterprotester during a neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville in 2017 – not to mention the relentless takings of Black lives by white police officers. His condemnations were echoed four

A volunteer clearing the grave of Samuel Meredith (d. 1927), a director of the East End Burial Association. Photograph by Brian Palmer/ brianpalmer.photos.

decades later by sociologist and historian W. E. B. Du Bois, who said of Confederate memorials, "The plain truth of the matter would be an inscription something

like this: 'sacred to the memory of those who fought to Perpetuate Human Slavery.'"

Richmond's African American cemeteries are sacred to an opposing set of memories. East End is the more modest, with individual headstones and small monuments along with a few family plots outlined with granite or concrete curbs. It forms a rough grid along level ground to the north of Evergreen, which is the larger and more imposing of the two sites. Founded by leaders of the city's African American community, the latter might be seen as a response to Hollywood Cemetery or to the grand memorials then rising to the Confederacy along the city's Monument Avenue. This 60-acre cemetery is situated on a rise above Stony Run, which borders the site to the west and divides Evergreen and East End from Oakwood. Sections, plots, and roads were laid out in a more or less rectilinear framework in the early 1900s by civil engineers and surveyors James T. Redd & Sons. The main entrance was from the south, off what is now East Richmond Road. A cobbled drive crossed the low ground along Stony Run and climbed gradually up the slope. This road was lined with eastern red cedars, some of which still survive; they create a distinct processional route. The overall effect must have been one of rolling hills marked with marble and granite statues, obelisks, and monuments.

In 1901, eleven years after John Mitchell unsuccessfully lobbied against the erection of a statue in honor of Robert E. Lee in his city, enormous crowds gathered in a square in the lower section of Evergreen for the August 26 unveiling of a monument to his younger brother Thomas, who had been his colleague at the *Planet* and had died the previous year. According to contemporaneous accounts in the same newspaper, the event began with a parade eight blocks long from downtown Richmond to Evergreen, featuring horse-drawn carriages, marching bands, and hundreds of mounted and marching Knights of Pythias, uniformed members of a fraternal organization and secret society in which both of the Mitchell brothers were officers.

A crowd estimated at ten thousand witnessed the unveiling of the 12-foot granite obelisk, which was crowned with an elaborate helmet (since lost to vandals). As told in the *Planet*, "When the cemetery was reached a strange sight met the

eye. All around the square, in the centre of which stood the grey monument, were what seemed to be black walls, formed by the thousands of spectators who filled the grounds. To the north and west there were two solid lines of humanity. People had crowded to the grounds hours ahead of the parade in order to secure even standing room.”

Burials at Evergreen began on the cemetery’s western edge along Stony Run and in the flat land at the southern edge of the site, and over the years expanded uphill to the north and west. Roads and steps connect the lower and upper sections. At the top of the hill, the road divides; one fork doubles back to a promontory that offered views over Oakwood and downtown Richmond before reforestation blocked the vistas. Some of Evergreen’s most imposing graves – including those of Maggie Walker and her family – and the cemetery’s one mausoleum are located here along an oval path: Evergreen’s answer to Presidents Circle. Photographs in the collection of the Maggie L. Walker



Maggie Lena Walker and grandson Armstead Walker III at the Walker family plot in Evergreen Cemetery, c. 1922–1924. Courtesy of National Park Service, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

National Historic Site show Walker with various family members decorating graves at Evergreen on Memorial Day in the early 1920s – apparently a family tradition.

Unfortunately, both Evergreen and East End were established prior to any requirement that cemeteries offer perpetual care; families were expected to provide upkeep. As they fell behind, volunteer efforts were initiated to help maintain both sites without the regular infusions of money that local white cemeteries received. It was a Sisyphean task. In the 1970s, the Maggie Walker Foundation and representatives of the National Park Service mobilized volunteers to clear and maintain parts of Evergreen. Veronica A. Davis, of a group called Virginia Roots, reinvigorated these efforts in the 1990s, but the challenge was too great.

Then in the last decade, the tide began to turn. Friends organizations were established for both cemeteries under the leadership of Marvin Harris at Evergreen and John Shuck and later Brian Palmer and Erin Holloway Palmer at East End. Their efforts have been epic. According to a 2018 article about East End in the *Richmond Free Press*, Shuck reported that volunteers had made eight thousand visits to the cemetery over 360 work days in the previous five years, cleared about half of its 16 acres, uncovered three thousand graves, and removed

vast piles of illicit trash – including fifteen hundred tires.

These campaigns caught the attention of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a quasi-public state agency set up fifty years ago “to preserve the natural, scenic, historic, scientific, open-space and recreational areas of the Commonwealth.” VOF holds one of the largest portfolios of open-space conservation easements in the country, most protecting farmland

in rural areas. According to VOF executive director Brett Glymph, the agency had been looking for opportunities to expand its efforts into Virginia’s cities, where it might serve greater numbers of people and more diverse constituencies. “We came across some articles about the volunteer efforts to restore Evergreen and East End,” she recalled, “and realized our funding could be a game changer. After meeting with city officials, volunteer groups, and potential partners, we asked the VOF board to allocate four hundred thousand dollars from the Preservation Trust Fund to the project, which they did in June 2016.”

The Enrichmond Foundation, a local organization with a particular focus on improving public space, city parks, and recreation, was the fund recipient. The organization had already been in negotiations to buy Evergreen from its last owner and was able to secure financing to complete the purchase in 2017. It received the grant money after recording a conservation easement with VOF on Evergreen in 2018, assuring the cemetery’s status as open space in perpetuity. Ultimately East End was protected through these efforts as well. Its management entity, the East End Burial Association,

had dissolved long ago, and in 2019 a Richmond judge, with the support of the office of the Virginia Attorney General, awarded ownership of East End to Enrichmond. The same year the conservation easement was extended to include East End.

Equally as significant, in 2017 the Virginia legislature agreed to extend to historically Black cemeteries the same benefits it has long provided to white ones. VOF helped craft the legislation – ultimately sponsored by Delegate Delores McQuinn – that made available a minimum of five dollars per grave to maintain both Evergreen and East End. Two years later, funding was extended to many other Black burial grounds around the state that are owned by a public body or charity.

With preservation assured, the focus at both sites has shifted to research, restoration, and community engagement. Enrichmond established an advisory group for Evergreen in 2017, including representatives of descendant families and local institutions; the group held a series of community conversations about the future of the site in 2017 and 2018. Subsequently Enrichmond retained the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis at the Virginia Commonwealth University’s Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs to prepare a report on existing conditions and community-engagement strategies; this was issued in February 2019. More or less simultaneously, the Virginia Department of Forestry provided a forest-management plan, laying out strategies for controlling invasives, culling trees, and improving the fertility of the soil. That spring soil-restoration work began. Sections of the site were deeply mulched to control weeds and build soil nutrients. At the same time an urban horticulture team that focused on hiring local residents began work to maintain and add public amenities, including a picnic area.

Last year Evergreen was accorded both national and international recognition. First, in June, it received UNESCO designation as a “site of memory” associated with the African diaspora. The next month the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded a seventy-five-thousand-dollar grant through its African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund to help launch the first phase of the cemetery’s restoration. Volunteer efforts continue to grow – on Martin Luther King Day in 2020, five hundred volunteers showed up to work. As of spring 2020, 22 acres – about 35 percent of the cemetery – and five miles of roads and paths had been cleared of vegetation.

Meanwhile Enrichmond hired the planning, design, engineering, and construction firm Pond and Company to develop a master plan for managing and restoring the burial ground and enhancing its potential as a public and commemorative space. The plan was unveiled on February 29,

2020, at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in downtown Richmond. The steps outlined in the plan – which are designed “to inspire present and future generations to honor the nation’s African American cultural, historical, and spiritual inheritance” – include restoring and protecting gravesites and other cultural resources in the cemetery; celebrating Richmond’s African American legacy; stewarding the landscape in more sustainable ways; and enhancing the experience of visitors through improved physical infrastructure, interpretation, lighting, and security. While there is no specific timeline in the plan, outlays in excess of 18 million dollars are anticipated.

With East End now under the auspices of Enrichmond, some of the same strategies are being applied there – a forestry plan for East End was issued in September 2019. Meanwhile, Friends of East End have continued to pursue some of their own initiatives. While working with volunteers and descendant families on restoration, they have created an exemplary interactive website that “seeks to reclaim the history of the cemetery and the community it served from obscurity.” Focused on people (the identity of those buried at the cemetery), place (the cemetery’s physical character), and context (its larger cultural setting), the website is also designed to accept content from users, including photographs, documents, and personal narratives. (Full disclosure: the website received modest support through a project grant from Dumbarton Oaks when I was director of Garden and Landscape Studies there.)

While Hollywood and Oakwood are legacies of the old South, Evergreen and East End are expressions of the post–Emancipation era, with all that it promised and then cruelly withdrew. They recollect the lives of individuals, to be sure, but they also commemorate a vigorous African American urban culture created in Reconstruction and ruthlessly dismantled by Jim Crow. In that sense, they are a reminder of what apartheid looked like in America, with not only separate and unequal cemeteries, but also separate and unequal schools, housing, economic opportunities, medical facilities, and justice systems. Evergreen and East End were as much sites for enacting rituals of remembrance in the African American community as Hollywood, Oakwood, or Monument Avenue were for the white community. But while the latter enshrined myths of white supremacy, Evergreen and East End are sacred to the memory of those who struggled against the social and spatial inequalities that are still evident all around us today. – John Beardsley

Spiritual Spaces:

The Design of Sanctuaries in 21st-Century Hospitals

In the hospital environment they are called by many names: “chapel,” “interfaith chapel,” “quiet room,” “reflection room,” “reflection space,” “sacred space,” or “sanctuary.” But whatever the label, these spaces share a common purpose. They serve the spiritual needs of those who work, visit, and receive care in one of the most daunting and stressful environments most of us will ever encounter: the acute-care hospital. They provide a quiet retreat where the bereaved and anxious can seek comfort and spiritual renewal. They offer not only venues for traditional religious services, such as Catholic masses, Protestant prayer services, and Muslim Friday prayers, but also memorial celebrations for staff and patients. In essence, they are strongholds of the spirit, embedded in the high-tech machine for healing that is the twenty-first-century hospital. Their quiet otherness, sharply contrasting with the disturbing cacophony of their surroundings, offers us a place to connect with the deepest values governing our lives, whether we are members of a traditional religious community or not.

As designers with a special interest in creating medical environments that are attentive to not just the physical but also the mental, emotional, and even spiritual needs of those in hospital communities, we have just begun to study these important spaces. We were surprised to discover that they had received almost no attention in the extensive literature on the design of hospitals and other medical facilities. The best analysis is found in a single chapter of Wendy Cadge’s *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*.

And yet such spaces are extremely common. Although many people are unaware of this, if you want to build a new hospital in almost any state, you are required by law to include a multifaith sanctuary in the plan. To receive reimbursement for medical care administered to patients under the Medicare and Medicaid programs of the federal government, a hospital must be accredited, and that accreditation requires addressing the spiritual needs of all patients, regardless of their beliefs. Also, the Facilities Guidelines Institute publishes a set of extremely thorough and detailed specifications for the design and construction of hospitals. Almost all state governments require adherence to them. Among these strict requirements is the inclusion of “at least one dedicated quiet space to support meditation, bereavement, or prayer.”

That said, there is no body of evidence-based design research pertaining to this “quiet space,” nor does the Facilities Guidelines Institute provide specific requirements for key features such as its scale, furnishings, form, or materials.

Most sanctuaries’ plans are created by the hospital’s architect or interior designer, working in concert with an appointed design committee. We hope our research will contribute to the better understanding of this under-studied element of hospital design.

But what form should these spaces take to meet such a diversity of spiritual needs and practices? Should they display symbols of many faiths? If so, will this offend some individuals and discourage their use of the space? If multiple symbols are included, which ones? If all symbols are excluded, will the result be a banal, generic space appealing to no one? How does one create a space with an atmosphere that fosters prayer, contemplation, and communal rituals? What materials contribute to this? What forms, colors, and scale? Is there scientific evidence that some design elements are especially effective for relieving stress? Who among the hospital population will make most use of the space – staff, visitors, or patients? How will they use it? Where is the best place to locate it?

The design of these “sanctuaries” (as we prefer to call them to avoid the Christian connotation of “chapel”) is no simple task, if they are located in a secular, public or private, nonprofit hospital in the United States. They must accommodate the spiritual needs of all members of a hospital’s community in the most religiously diverse nation in the world. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center indicates that 25.4 percent of us are Evangelical Protestant, 6.5 percent Historically Black Protestant, 14.7 percent Mainline Protestant, 20.8 percent Catholic, 1.6 percent Mormon, .5 percent Orthodox Christian, 1.9 percent Jewish, .9 percent Muslim, .7 percent Buddhist, .7 percent Hindu, and .8 percent Jehovah’s Witness. Another 1.5 percent of us are of other faiths, 3.1 percent atheist, and 4 percent agnostic. The remaining 16.9 percent responded to the survey either “Nothing in Particular” or “Don’t Know.”

But numbers are only part of the story: adherents of a faith comprising a low percentage of the general population nevertheless may use such sanctuaries regularly. Our observations in large hospitals across the country reveal Muslims to be among the most frequent hospital sanctuary users, even though they represent only .9 percent of the nation’s population. The geographic location of a hospital also affects which communities of faith use its sacred spaces most often. Rural hospitals tend to serve more homogeneous Christian populations, while larger urban ones often care for and employ people with widely diverse spiritual beliefs.

The importance of hospital sanctuaries is underscored by the results of national surveys indicating that most

Americans view their faith as integral to the outcome of science-based medical intervention. For example, 80 percent of Americans are convinced that prayer and other forms of spiritual practice can aid medical treatment. Among this 80 percent, 25 percent believe they have been cured of an illness through their individual prayers or by those of others. Such widespread beliefs strongly suggest that places for prayer, quiet reflection, and group worship should not only be included in any hospital design but also be a focus of extensive study and inquiry.

Over the past five years we have visited thirty-eight sanctuaries in twelve states. These rooms were situated in both large urban hospitals and smaller regional hospitals in the Far West, Midwest, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Deep South. The purpose of the visits was to study the architecture of the spaces, including their form, scale, materials, location, use of symbolism, and other design features. “Chapel” was the most frequently used name (61 percent), followed by “meditation room” (17 percent). The remaining 22 percent had a wide range of designations, such as “quiet room,” “sacred space,” and “reflection room.” Scale varied from spacious, church-like interiors to small rooms about the size of an extra-large walk-in closet. Most, however, had roughly the area of a typical dining room in a suburban house (give or take 500 square feet).

The majority were located on the first floor, near the hospital’s main entrance (55 percent). The remainder were near waiting rooms for operating suites (21 percent) or scattered about in a variety of hard-to-find locations. Twenty-one percent were in Roman Catholic hospitals and displayed religious symbols exclusive to that faith. Of the remaining 79 percent, 49 percent contained the religious symbols of a wide range of beliefs. The remaining 51 percent totally lacked any specific religious symbolism. Seventy-five percent of the latter contained representations of nature – especially trees, leaves, and flowers – in place of symbols of a specific faith tradition. The remaining 25 percent lacked any form of representation.

Seventy-two percent of sanctuaries offered scheduled religious services accommodating a variety of traditions, such as masses, interfaith prayer services, and Muslim Friday prayers. (Ninety percent of all hospitals visited employed interfaith chaplains.)

Architecturally the sanctuaries revealed preferences for certain materials, forms, colors, and floor plans. Most were rectangular rooms with fixed pews or movable chairs facing a central altar or focal point (64 percent). The remainder displayed a wide array of other configurations, such as circles, octagons, and hexagons – some oriented to a focal point and others not. Some were abundantly furnished with chairs or pews while others had almost no furniture at all (like the Reflection Room in the Sutter Santa Rosa Regional Hospital, which had a single couch facing a small, backlit panel of colored glass). Most seating, regardless of room form, was adjustable for various types of ritual activities (80 percent). A slight majority had recessed ceilings with embedded lights (52 percent). The most frequently used material was wood, with its natural grain visible (75 percent), followed by colored glass (60 percent). Only 42 percent utilized natural light. Most of the artificial lighting was adjustable (90 percent), with the preferred setting bright, nonglaring illumination (82 percent). (Duke University’s Cancer Hospital’s Quiet Room featured a console offering fifteen choices of lighting, including a “one-hour loop of the daily light cycle,” “night,” and “sunrise in motion.”) Depictions of nature were frequent in all types of sanctuaries (71 percent), whether or not they displayed religious symbols. Natural forms included plant motifs on altars, wainscoting, and upholstery, and paintings or photographs of landscapes, flowers, and birds. However, only 15 percent of sanctuaries contained actual plants, and half of these were artificial. Pools and fountains were almost totally absent because of the danger of waterborne patho-



gens, especially in cancer facilities. The most common color scheme combined beige or off-white walls with furnishings and other architectural details in cool colors (especially green, blue, and grey) (72 percent). Prayer registers were included in 75 percent of the spaces, and 90 percent included interfaith religious literature. Finally, virtually all of the thirty-eight sanctuaries (98 percent) shared a common trait: they were exceedingly quiet.

What does this survey reveal other than a wide variety of sanctuary forms and varying degrees of symbolic display? Characteristics that stand out are the frequent use of natural material, especially wood, and cool colors. Also conspicuous are the many representations of nature and the lack of noise. Such design features are identical to those recommended in scientific research studies for effective stress relief in other parts of the hospital environment, including patient rooms, staff lounges, and waiting rooms. The type of rigorous research devoted to these issues is known as “evidence-based design.” It makes use of a wide range of methods, including surveys, questionnaires, and physiological measurements of stress hormones, blood pressure, brain wave frequencies, and skin conductance. Although many of its findings are observational and establish correlation rather than causality, it nevertheless provides strong circumstantial evidence identifying design features that are effective in relieving stress.

This is critically important, since science has proven beyond doubt that stress slows healing, increases susceptibility to illness, and is highly fatiguing, both mentally and physically. Not only do patients suffer from it, but it profoundly affects staff and may make them prone to medical errors and depression. Since a primary role of sanctuaries is to relieve stress through serving spiritual needs and practices, those who design them should make the best use of cool color palettes, natural materials, representations of nature, and noise-reducing technology. The latter is especially important, since evidence-based design studies have established conclusively that noise is the number-one stressor in a hospital environment. We were pleased to observe that many of the built sanctuaries in our survey already exhibited these evidence-based design features. Some, however, did not, which in our opinion made them less effective. More research also needs to be done to discover additional design strategies to optimize such elements as room form, texture of materials, color combinations, and sound.

After our initial survey, we wanted to learn more about who uses these spaces and how. This led us to initiate a study in 2019 which focused on four sanctuaries of differing design

Interfaith Chapel, UF Health Shands Hospital, Gainesville, Florida.

in three separate teaching hospitals – The UF Health Shands Hospital (633 beds), the UF Health Shands Cancer Hospital (192 beds), and the UF Health Heart and Vascular Hospital and UF Health Neuromedicine Hospital, which are in the same building (216 beds) – all of which are located on the medical campus of the University of Florida in Gainesville. Students sponsored by the university’s Center for Arts in Medicine spent sixty-nine hours observing the use of the four sanctuaries, under the supervision of Nicole K. Morgan, research coordinator for the center. They engaged in “behavioral mapping,” a method for recording the activities of users by making notations on a floor plan of each sanctuary. The four sanctuaries fit well on the spectrum of types noted in our survey of thirty-eight national examples, as their symbolic content ranges from the use of specific spatial typologies and religious symbols to no symbols at all.

The oldest sanctuary, the Interfaith Chapel in the UF Health Shands Hospital, dates from the 1990s. It was designed by Flad Architects and a design committee including local artist Kenneth Pacetti. Located on the first floor next to the chaplain’s office, it is a typical pew-altar arrangement seating forty-eight. The wall behind the altar displays thirteen circular medallions symbolizing the religions of the world, which are mounted on a wooden map of the Middle East, India, China, and Japan. Each medallion is located at the place of origin of a particular religion. Additional panels on the rear wall explain the history and core beliefs of each religion at some length. An inscription near the entrance expresses the hope that “worshippers of all faiths feel welcome in the chapel.” Also included are a prayer request box checked daily by the hospital chaplains, a small receptacle for holy water, a shelf of Muslim prayer rugs, and a piano. An altar rail with a kneeling pad accommodates those receiving Communion. A cabinet adjacent to the altar contains vestments and a cross for the priest conducting mass. In addition to the frequently scheduled masses the space serves as a venue for Protestant prayer services, memorial services for staff and patients, and individual contemplation.

Despite the pronounced didactic feeling of the space, whose rear wall reads like a textbook on world religions, the extensive use of attractive wood furniture and detailing and



Sanctuary of Silence, UF Shands Cancer Hospital. (The water wall has been removed to prevent germs from infecting cancer patients with lowered immune systems.)

the quiet ambience render it a welcome retreat from the noise and grim, tile-and-chrome décor of the rest of the hospital. Also, it is especially well designed for the formal religious services that are frequently conducted in it.

The Cancer Hospital contains two sanctuaries dating from 2009. They are located on the second floor, adjacent to the waiting room for the surgical suite, and share a common anteroom. The smaller of the two, the Sanctuary of Silence, was designed for individual or small-group meditation

by a team composed of Christina M. Mullen, Director of UF Health Shands Arts in Medicine; Alana Schrader of Flad Architects; and Michael A. Singer, a developer of medical software and author of books on meditation and spirituality. Its unique elliptical ceiling, soothing pink walls, grey-green wall-to-wall carpet, dark blue upholstered meditation chairs, and extreme quiet create an atmosphere far removed from that of the adjacent surgical suite’s noisy waiting room. Downlights embedded in the ceiling soffits can be adjusted to control the degree of darkness. Photographs of the planets and multigalactic cosmos adorn the walls, evoking an awareness of the immensity of the universe. Originally this cavelike space contained a water wall, which emitted a soothing sound. Recent hospital-safety regulations mandated its removal as a potential source of waterborne pathogens. With its welcome silence and careful accommodations for meditation, this sanctuary is an ideal place for staff and visitors to relax and reflect, removed from the hubbub of the hospital.

Next door is the Sanctuary of Peace, designed by Schrader and Mullen. With its thirty-two wood-backed chairs, arranged in rows facing a central altar, the room is reminiscent of a church or synagogue, although it lacks any specific religious symbols. Natural light streams in from a bank of

windows along one wall. They provide a soothing view of the lake and healing garden in the middle of the UF Shands medical campus. Nature symbolism pervades the space. Green walls echo the plants of the healing garden. A hand-crafted wooden altar and lectern are backed by a triptych depicting an abstract rendering of the fractal patterns of tree branches. On the back wall a large color photograph depicts the sun emerging from a bank of clouds over a seascape. Prayer rugs are stacked in a cabinet and a rear countertop contains a prayer box. The floor has enough furniture-free space to allow for the traditional form of Muslim prayer. It is a congenial space for communal worship services, and it serves as a venue for Muslim Friday prayer and memorial services for staff and patients.

In the building that houses both the UF Health Heart and Vascular Hospital and the UF Health Neuromedicine Hospital, one can visit the newest of the four sanctuaries – the Sanctuary of Wisdom – which dates from 2017. It is located on the second floor, near the waiting room for the surgical suite. Designed by Singer and Mullen, this sanctuary is quite different from the other three. Somewhat reminiscent of a lounge in a boutique hotel, it is replete with nine generously stuffed easy chairs and couches arranged in clusters of three. One wall displays large photo portraits of Mother Teresa, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, and Mahatma Gandhi, with thought-provoking and comforting quotations from each. An illuminated screen features a repeating cycle of four different photographs of Albert Einstein, along with his reflections on the meaning of life, such as “One starts to live when he can live outside himself.” A unique feature is a sand table with a computerized stylus tracing mandala-like patterns. It both fascinates and calms. Prayer rugs are available in a cabinet, along with a Bible and collection of Psalms. One wall contains a large, backlit, blue stained-glass window. Its rippled texture suggests a waterfall, and it floods the space with a calming blue light. This is an elegantly designed space with captivating distractions and inspiring quotations. Like the Interfaith Chapel, it has a pronounced didactic quality, featuring the insights of great religious leaders. However, its clustered furniture and lack of an altar table render it a difficult venue for traditional group worship.

Although these sanctuaries are distinct from one another, they are located in three separate buildings, so they do not offer potential users much opportunity for choice. Professional responsibilities require staff members to remain where they work, and visitors prefer to stay where their friends and loved ones are hospitalized. The exceptions are the Sanctuary

of Silence and Sanctuary of Peace, which are next to each other in the UF Shands Cancer Hospital. There one can choose a more traditional pew/altar arrangement or a unique space for meditation.

What did the students' sixty-nine hours of observation reveal about the use of these four contrasting sanctuaries? Observation of spontaneous individual or small-group participation indicated 68 percent of users were staff. The remaining 32 percent were visitors. Only one patient was observed. This is hardly surprising since in today's acute-care hospitals most patients are too sick to leave their rooms. When they are well enough to move about, they are immediately sent home. Also visitors tend to remain in patient rooms or stay in areas very close to them. Seventy percent of participants were female. About half of the visits were brief, lasting one to five minutes. Very few were over twenty minutes. Most participation was by individuals or groups of no more than two. The most frequent activities were prayer or quiet reflection. (The two were difficult to distinguish.) Infrequent behavior included checking smart phones, texting, working on laptops, sorting through documents, and in one case personal grooming.

The four sanctuaries were used with approximately equal frequency, averaging about one visit per hour by individuals or small groups. This low number is most likely accounted for by constraints on staff, who are the majority of users. During their shifts they have to remain mostly on the floors where their patients are located. When they visit the sanctuaries, they tend to do so just before or after their shifts. In the UF Shands Cancer Hospital, where two very different sanctuaries were next to one another, individual and small group usage was virtually the same for both.

Observation of participation in scheduled religious services revealed that attendance at Muslim Friday prayers held in the Sanctuary of Peace was strong, averaging thirty-nine participants per service. Participation in the weekly Catholic mass and Protestant prayer service held in the Interfaith Chapel was slightly less, averaging about thirty for each rite. To obtain further information on usage we interviewed the Rev. Debra Hepburn, who heads the team of five board-certified chaplains serving on the UF Health Gainesville medical campus. She confirmed that the four sanctuaries serve mostly



staff and families, with staff the most frequent users; she emphasized their importance in providing a "quiet space" to "step away and see things in perspective." (Some staff, she informed us, also make use of small rooms on the floors where they work to create quiet retreats, perhaps furnished with a rocking chair, sage potpourri, and a CD player.) She also felt that the regular scheduled services in the Interfaith Chapel and Sanctuary of Peace were a significant source of strength and comfort.

Rev. Hepburn also stressed the importance of the prayer boxes in the Sanctuary of Peace and the Interfaith Chapel. The chaplains read these prayers and, if requested, pray for the patients and visit their rooms. The vast majority of her time and that of the other chaplains, she explained, is spent at the bedside of patients.

Our case studies confirmed how important these spaces are to members of a hospital's community, especially staff. We were initially surprised that the preponderance of users were staff members, but COVID-19 has made all of us acutely aware of the critically important and stressful roles staff members play in today's hospitals. In the face of death and suffering, these sanctuaries provide a quiet place to connect with the deepest values that shape their lives and sustain hope.

Usage patterns offer some insights into how better to design hospital sanctuaries, although much research remains to be done. Since these spaces are most in demand by staff, we suggest hospitals should have two types of sanctuaries. One type – for quiet contemplation – should be located on the

Sanctuary of Wisdom, UF Health Heart, Vascular and Neuromedicine Hospital.

floors where patients are cared for, so as to be easily accessible to staff and visitors alike.

These would be symbol-free

spaces with comfortable furniture, cool colors, wood detailing, adjustable lighting, and excellent sound insulation: all proven features for stress reduction and cognitive refreshment. Such spaces could be designed with contributions by staff on a given floor, which would provide a sense of ownership and empowerment.

The other type would be a larger space, located in a conspicuous place near the main entrance of a hospital, that would serve as a venue for scheduled religious services – but this, too, would be available for individual use. Between services, this sanctuary would not display any religious symbols. They could be stored in cabinets and readily available for rituals of specific faith traditions, such as masses or Muslim Friday prayers. Other features, such as movable altars and chairs, would allow a room to be arranged to meet the needs of specific types of services; each community of faith deserves a setting tailored to their familiar and time-honored traditions while they are engaged in group worship. Such communal spiritual practice is, for some, a much-needed supplement to individual prayer and meditation and a powerful source of support, solace, and hope.

What about materials, lighting, and other design elements? Like the small sanctuaries on patient floors, spaces for religious services should make use of the proven stress-reducing properties of wood, cool colors, adjustable lighting, exposure to natural light, and quiet. Room forms that contrast with the prevalent right angles of most hospital spaces, as well as representations of nature in paintings and sculpture, could be effective in emphasizing the distinct qualities of a sanctuary, in contrast to its hectic and jarring surroundings.

We do not wish, however, to propose a set of rigid design principles that would constrain the professional experience, intuition, and creativity of those who create such spaces. An effective design combines awareness of precedent, science-based knowledge, and creative intuition, grounded in democratic values such as justice and a deep respect for diversity. Just as there is no one way to design a mosque, a cathedral, a Buddhist temple, or a Quaker meetinghouse, there is no one way to create an interfaith sanctuary in a hospital setting. What we can be certain of is that sanctuaries belong in hospitals. They serve an extremely important mission, especially as the coronavirus ravages the nation and the world, creating hospital environments that are stressful beyond imagining.

– Reuben M. Rainey and Kim Tanzer

Book Review

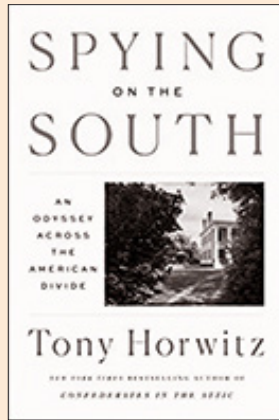
Spying on the South: An Odyssey Across the American Divide

by Tony Horwitz
New York: Penguin Press,
2019

Journalist and travel writer Tony Horwitz's *Spying on the South: An Odyssey Across the American Divide* is an engaging and perceptive tapestry interweaving history, biography, and travelogue. While downsizing his

personal library, Horwitz came upon one of his old college history books, Frederick Law Olmsted's *The Cotton Kingdom, A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States 1853–1861*. This classic of antebellum American history was based on dispatches to the *New-York Daily Times* (now the *New York Times*), written by the thirty-year-old Olmsted well before he co-designed Central Park and emerged as America's foremost nineteenth-century landscape architect. In 1852 Olmsted, eager to find a vocation that suited him, was commissioned by Henry Raymond, founder and editor of the fledgling *Daily*

Times, to travel incognito on two journeys to the South to report on politics, culture, and the institution of slavery. Raymond wanted a fair account: devoid of invective and tempered with “honesty of observation.”



When Horwitz rediscovered Olmsted's vivid and insightful travelogue, written under the *nom de plume* Yeoman, he was captivated immediately. It was the year of the

tumultuous and controversial 2016 presidential campaign, and Horwitz was struck by “inescapable echoes” of Olmsted's narrative reverberating in the contemporary United States: “extreme polarization, racial strife, demonization of the other side,” and “enflamed opinion [prevailing] over seasoned dialogue and debate.” Horwitz decided to investigate these sobering similarities by acting as Olmsted's doppelgänger. As precisely as possible, he replicated the second and longest of Olmsted's journeys: the 1853–54 expedition that extended from Maryland

to the West Texas border with Mexico. Traveling in Olmsted's wake, Horwitz recounts his experiences in the exact locations Olmsted described, using highly engaging and instructive cinematic flashbacks to compare them to his predecessor's. The result is both a succinct biography of Olmsted that focuses on his early life and a narrative of two adventurous journeys, interspersed with interesting sidetracks into regional history and a revealing CAT scan of Southern political and racial attitudes on the eve of Donald Trump's election. An added attraction is Horwitz's ability to provide vivid and sometimes humorous descriptions of the South's cultural landscapes.

Horwitz, who died recently at the age of sixty, was one of America's most distinguished journalists and travel writers. His national reporting for the *Wall Street Journal* won him a Pulitzer Prize, and his work as a foreign correspondent in Europe and the Middle East was highly regarded. The subject matter of his numerous books was wide-

ranging: John Brown's raid, the cultural landscape of the Australian outback, Viking exploration of North America, and the voyage of Captain Cook. His most popular book remains *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (1998), in which he reported on current attitudes towards the Civil War, primarily in the South. A highly respected historian as well as a journalist, Horwitz was elected to the prestigious Society of American Historians and served as its president.

Horwitz brings to bear his vast experience as a journalist in *Spying on the South*. He is gifted with the essential ability of all great interviewers: he knows how to get people to talk freely and candidly. He strives to be a nonjudgmental listener and report accurately on thoughts and attitudes. On occasion he becomes an active participant in his interviewees' activities, such as a wild mud fest of monster trucks in rural Louisiana or a service in a black church in New Orleans.

Olmsted traveled four thousand miles in nine months, whereas Horwitz spent two years and a day covering the same territory, ending a week before Trump's election. From West Virginia to the Texas border

with Mexico, he conversed with Southerners in many walks of life: bartenders, waitresses, farmers, factory workers, retired teachers, museum directors, guides at historical sites, former state legislators, coal miners, businessmen, shopkeepers, riverboat pilots, oil-field workers, clergymen, former sharecroppers, local amateur historians, coal-barge workers, historic-figure impersonators, traveling salesmen, and immigration officers. Like Olmsted, he endured the local food – monotonous, fried, and unhealthy. Regarding local bars as especially important venues for candid opinions, Horwitz frequented them, imbibing a plethora of strong and exotic drinks. He also attended a wide range of civic and recreational events: a gun show in Texas, a reenactment of the Battle of the Alamo in San Antonio, and a raucous boat race in rural Louisiana. He went so far as to replicate Olmsted's modes of transportation, utilizing trains, steamboats, and horses. Riding a mule in the Hill Country of Texas, he was head-butted by his ornery mount, suffering a serious concussion that

required him to return home to recuperate before resuming his travels.

Horwitz touches on a number of economic, political, and environmental themes, highlighting them with poignant, disturbing, and humorous commentary. He notes the decline of American manufacturing in many areas, especially West Virginia, and the unemployment it leaves in its wake. He describes strong currents of racism in East Texas; polluting industries of enormous scale in Louisiana and historic markers that whitewash slavery; and ugly and dysfunctional sprawl development in all the states he visits. He notes the prevalence of evangelical Christianity, with its anti-intellectual distrust of science, throughout the South. He visits the Creation Museum in Kentucky, which dates God's creation of the world to 4004 BC, depicts Adam and Eve bathing in a pool surrounded by dinosaurs, and claims the Grand Canyon was created by the flood described in the book of Genesis.

Among the people he meets there is much distrust of big government, which is perceived as limiting individual freedom. Democrats are almost nonexistent in

most areas. Radical, far-right political groups are on the rise, including one that advocates Texas's secession from the Union. In the town of Crockett in East Texas, the author encounters a group of locals convinced there is a terrorist-training compound in their vicinity. Horwitz presents them with clear evidence that this is actually the vacation home of a Pakistani doctor, but they refuse to believe it.

Horwitz's narrative is not entirely bleak. He notes the vitality of multicultural populations in New Orleans and Houston and the efforts of citizen groups to revise historical markers, museums, and house tours to reflect a more comprehensive and accurate view of the role of minorities in American history. He describes efforts to reinterpret the Battle of the Alamo to represent the Mexican perspective. While attending a black church service in New Orleans, he is moved by the openness and friendliness of the congregation and the strong spirit of community created by the hymns and preaching. At the end of his journey, while visiting the city of

Eagle Pass on the Mexican border, he is impressed by the family-centered optimism and energy of descendants of Latinx immigrants as well as their confidence that they will be able to achieve a better life in this country. While he laments ugly sprawl throughout the South, he finds that some of the beauty of the landscape Olmsted described still exists, especially in the pastoral grasslands of Kentucky and the Guadalupe River corridor of the Texas Hill Country.

Texas receives the most attention. As the state with the fastest growth rate, the most ethnically diverse city in the country (Houston), and the flash point of immigration along its borders, Texas is, to Horwitz, a bellwether of the nation. He notes that Olmsted devoted much of his travelogue to Texas too and was fascinated by the diversity of its landscapes, history, and population. He especially admired the German immigrant communities in and around New Braunfels, with their prosperous, free-labor agricultural system and highly

cultured residents. Olmsted hoped they would secede from the existing slave state of Texas and create their own free-labor state that would block the expansion of slavery to the West.

The portrait of Olmsted that emerges is nuanced and well documented. Horwitz carefully mined the extensive literature on Olmsted produced over the last thirty years by such scholars as Laura Wood Roper, Elizabeth Stevenson, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, Charles C. McLaughlin, Charles E. Beveridge, David P. Schuyler, Ethan Carr, and others. He is especially indebted to the works of McLaughlin and Beveridge, whom he knew personally. Readers unfamiliar with Olmsted's life will find Horwitz's biography informative, succinct, and perceptive. Those more familiar with the subject will find that Horwitz traverses familiar ground, but will appreciate his meticulous use of primary sources and careful selection of quotations. He skillfully analyzes Olmsted's shift from relatively objective reporter to ardent opponent of slavery. The neophyte journalist's opinions changed as he observed the cruelty of slavery firsthand

and experienced the white supremacist arrogance of the Southern upper class.

Horwitz highlights the young Olmsted's admirable championship of democratic principles and the older one's skill as a planner and designer of some of America's greatest parks and civic spaces. But he examines the complexity and contradictions of Olmsted's personality as well. At times Olmsted would behave as an "artist and republican"; at other times act like a "bureaucrat and imperialist," fueled by an obsessive work ethic.

Horwitz's biography is not a hagiography. He claims that Olmsted, with his advocacy of suburbs, was partially responsible for the cookie-cutter developments that pockmark the US landscape today. (He does acknowledge that Olmsted would be appalled at their quality.) He criticizes his failure to champion the welfare of former slaves by speaking out against Jim Crow laws and the rise of white supremacy in the South after Reconstruction. He also appears to disapprove of the fact that Olmsted accepted commissions from the superrich of

the Gilded Age at the end of his career. He views this as a waning of his subject's egalitarian and anti-aristocratic political views.

A once ardent opponent of elites and supporter of state initiatives to uplift the poor, Olmsted ended up designing an immense interpretation of a French Renaissance chateau in a dirt-poor region of North Carolina through which he had once ridden. This was Biltmore – the 250-room Vanderbilt estate near Asheville – the largest private residence in America. Horwitz does not give sufficient credit to the idealism of initiatives such as this, claiming that the Vanderbilt project revealed "a dimming of the democratic fire" of Olmsted's younger days. While he does note that Olmsted persuaded his client, the young George Washington Vanderbilt II, to initiate some socially beneficial projects – the nation's first school of scientific forestry and a research arboretum – he fails to mention that Olmsted went even further at Biltmore. He convinced Vanderbilt to create a commercial dairy, the herds of which would be used to improve the quality of the

cattle of the region's poor farmers. With Olmsted's encouragement, Vanderbilt also funded a well-planned village for employees of the estate. This was to include housing for the scientists working in the arboretum. These initiatives at Biltmore and similar programs incorporated into other commissions persuade me that Olmsted's democratic values remained strong. He expressed them as best he could in the Gilded Age by persuading his clients to include socially progressive elements in their projects. The alternative would have been to walk away and fail to exert any positive influence at all.

Horwitz concludes his book by comparing our divisive era with that of Olmsted's. He notes similarities: "The most glaring parallel was the retreat into tribal and partisan camps, tuned to frequencies so divergent that the reasoned discourse Yeoman had initially sought was a virtual impossibility." But he found that many of the Trump supporters he met on his journey were decent, friendly people with severe economic problems,

not hopeless bigots as they are sometimes portrayed. He concludes our national divisions are “not by a long shot” at the 1861 level, but a sense of national unity and mutual understanding is sorely lacking.

Despite these discouraging reflections, Horwitz ends with a narrative of hope. In the last chapter he recounts a visit to Central Park. Observing the ethnic diversity of park users and their positive interactions with one another, he concludes that Olmsted’s democratic vision of the Park is alive and vibrant. This perception is reinforced by a bicycle tour with a former commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Adrian Benepe, who remarks that “people come together serendipitously; they see others who don’t look like them, who are doing and enjoying the same things . . . That contributes to a tolerance and harmony you don’t see in many other cities.”

The last persons Horwitz meets in the park are a black boy and his younger companion. The older boy tells him his favorite thing to do in the park is to explore and go where he pleases – some-

times getting lost. Horwitz tells the boy that Frederick Law Olmsted, the man who designed the park, would be pleased he used it that way. As the boy departs, he replies, “Tell Fred he did good.”

This is how Horwitz ends the book, not with a sermon about the problems of the nation, but with an image of a black boy happily exploring the realms of America’s greatest civic space, embodying the deepest values of a democratic society. Despite his often grim diagnosis of the nation’s current health, Horwitz reminds us we have a great legacy of public places created by Olmsted and others: places that nurture tolerance, mutual understanding, and strong community bonds through shared rituals of remembrance and celebration. The fact that these spaces continue to exist and thrive confirms that we as people – despite our all-too-evident differences – have the capacity for mutual respect and empathy. – Reuben M. Rainey

Contributors

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