

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



Policy on the National Park Service Interpretation Program of Civil War Battlefields (February 2003)



A statement made by Dr. John Latschar, Superintendent at the Gettysburg National Military Park, best describes the mission of the National Park Service and their interpretive policy on Civil War battlefields. According to Dr. Latschar, an Act of Congress in 1990 directed the Gettysburg NMP to interpret “the Battle of Gettysburg in the larger context of the Civil War and American history, including the causes and consequences of the Civil War and including the effects of the war on all the American people.” He further states that in 1999, a Congressional report added that Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg should “recognize and include the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War.”

The Constitution of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) clearly defines the mission or purpose of the SUVCW. Our primary mission is “To Perpetuate the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic...to teach ...the true history of our country...to oppose every tendency or movement that would weaken loyalty to, or make for the destruction or impairment of our constitutional

Union... to inculcate and broadly sustain the American principles of...equal rights, and of impartial justice for all.

In conformity to our Constitution and Congressional Charter the SUVCW maintains the most important goal of the National Park Service relative to Civil War battlefields should be: (1) The physical preservation of the battlefields, and (2) The NPS interpretative program, which is designed to inform the public about what happened on the battlefield should focus on the story of the battle that took place on the battlefield. At the Gettysburg battlefield the interpretative program, has traditionally included such things according to Dr. Latschar as, "tactical movements, the decisions of generals, the engagements of opposing units, and the heroism and valor of individual soldiers, both Union and Confederate." This seems to have also been the prevalent policy at other Civil War battlefields. Based on the aforementioned Congressional mandates the interpretative program now includes the slavery issue. The SUVCW has no quarrel with the inclusion of this issue in the NPS interpretative program as long as it does not impact in a negative way the other two goals previously mentioned, and as long as it is presented in a historically accurate manner. Under no circumstance do we support what has come to be referred to as "revisionist" history – "altering" historical facts to fit modern social philosophy.

There were numerous issues that culminated in the American Civil War. But, regardless of whether we make a short list, or a long list of the causes for the Civil War, they all invariably emanate from the issue of slavery. Thus, it seems only reasonable that the National Park Service should mention this issue in their interpretive program. We view the inclusion of the slave issue as an expansion of the existing program. The slave issue should not be used by the NPS as a substitute for their traditional interpretative program.

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