

scholars Myth and legend grow around significant events, and like vines on trees, over time obscure what lies beneath. Other writers then unwittingly recycle these inaccuracies, to the point where repetitively cited claims become embedded in the historical record, accepted by posterity as factual. Claims that cannot be substantiated by credible, original source material should be viewed with honest skepticism. Diligent scholarship by public historians and archivists constantly interprets and reinterprets events, unearthing new evidence that reshapes or even contradicts what we previously believed to be true. (Evidence of this process abounds: For example, we continue to learn more about the Underground Railroad, as records of itineraries and places continue to be excavated.) As I encountered such instances in my research, especially in the course of editorial review by the outside experts acknowledged herein, I either excised information or indicated in the text that a particular claim is controversial, or a story likely mythical. I encourage readers wishing sharper clarity about declarative statements to delve into the historical record and find the primary sources and original documents that undergird proper study of the past. Suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter will, I trust, be useful for some readers.

With copious information about historical places readily available in books and easily found online, why invest time and money to see them in person? The desire to know what came before is in our DNA—it is natural that we are drawn to the powerful forces that shape political conflict and alliances; to grasp the realities of terrain, weather, and illness on the outcome of war; and to build context and meaning around the present. But equally compelling should be the lives of our ancestors and the rhythms that characterized their daily lives, at work and play. Adding our own visual impressions of places and people to what we have previously learned shapes our imagination and creates indelible memories that lead to rich, lasting historical narrative for us all.

So let us put aside the old bromides about our dismal ignorance of history—the visitors who ask rangers why so many Civil War battles were fought in national parks, and the poll some years ago indicating a large percentage of American high school students believed that Malcolm X was a pope—and hit the road to enjoy firsthand the many splendors of America's mid-Atlantic past.