

Labor and Limestone: The Relationship between Stone and Life in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Quarry Town of Texas, Maryland

Adam Fracchia

University of Maryland, College Park

The small industrial town of Texas, Maryland, employed hundreds of Irish immigrants and later African-Americans in quarrying and burning limestone during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The stone was used in many of the national monuments in the United States, such as the Washington Monument and US Capitol. Serving as symbols of democracy and freedom, these gleaming white monuments contrast with the grueling work necessary to extract the stone used in their construction, work which exploited and decimated the workers and residents of Texas. This paper explores the connections between quarry work and everyday life focusing on the physical properties of the area's limestone. While the quarried and burned limestone was prized for its strength and composition as well as its marble-like qualities, the effects of converting this stone into a useable commodity were often ignored based on the priority of profit and industrial expansion. Archaeological excavations within Texas provide material and spatial evidence of the dynamic relationship between stone and life in the quarry town and serve as an example for contextualizing the present relationship between industry, nature, and capitalism.