New South(ern) Landscapes: Reenvisioning Tourism, Industry, and the Environment in the American South

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APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Commenting on two distinct bodies of visual culture, this thesis examines how the American South has been depicted in photography, advertisement, and popular media. Exploring images of the South ranging from Depression-era Virginia to present day lower Louisiana, these papers seek to better incorporate views of a region traditionally underrepresented in visual depictions of the American landscape. Underlying both projects is an interest in utilizing visual culture as a means to understand humanity's relationship with the nonhuman world. Taking a closer look at promotional materials from the early years of Shenandoah National Park, as well as the (post)industrial/posthumanist landscapes of Cary Fukunaga's television serial *True Detective* - and the Richard Misrach photographs that inspired them - this thesis works to better understand how Americans came to understand the nonhuman world around them.

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Assembled here under the title New South(ern) Landscapes: Reenvisioning Industry, Tourism, and the Environment in the American South, the following projects seek to direct new attention toward visual representations of regional landscapes that often fall outside the canonical iconography of the United States. Rather than the oft-rendered mountains and valleys of the Northeast, or the monumental geographic wonders of the West, these two works highlight visual depictions of the American South; a region with a rich literary and political history, but whose landscapes rarely receive commensurate attention. In framing these two works as a regional project my interest lies not in lionization but rather filling a perceived lacuna in the study of the American landscape. Moreover, at the heart of both projects is an interest in examining how Americans envisioned not just the nonhuman world around them, but their interactions with that wider world as well. By putting both projects in conversation with each other, I hope to build towards a broader discussion of how America's understanding of its relationship with the environment has been reflected in its visual culture. Drawing on material that covers a range of time periods and geographic areas, this research – while not attempting to present an exhaustive survey of southern landscapes – nevertheless offers an opportunity to consider the change in experiences Americans shared with the nonhuman world from the early twentieth century until today.

In my first chapter, "Somebody's Memory of a Town': Cary Fukunaga's *True Detective*, Richard Misrach's *Cancer Alley*, and the Posthumanist

Landscape" I investigate the relationship between the haunting photographs of the lower Mississippi River taken by Richard Misrach with the cinematography and setting of the HBO serial *True Detective* which they partially inspired. Approaching this research from the perspective of critical posthumanism – an emergent theoretical project which seeks to challenge the tenant of human exceptionalism – I suggest both Misrach and director Cary Fukunaga offer powerful visions of an actively posthumanist landscape, one in which nonhuman elements react and respond to encroachment and abuse by human actors. Drawing on the work of scholars like Pramod Nayar, Donna Haraway, and Jane Bennett I work to turn my own understanding of posthumanist critique toward an investigation of visual culture, offering an interpretation of the works that explores the interaction between human and nonhuman elements along a highly industrialized and polluted stretch of the Mississippi River. Challenging the constructedness of a human/nonhuman divide, this paper examines the more responsive, more responsible possibilities a posthumanist visual culture might offer.

Tracing another story of human intervention into the environment, "A Paradise for Leisurely Travel: Automobility in Shenandoah National Park" investigates early promotional imagery from the nation's first eastern national park. Drawing on the visual culture of early park promotion, this project explores how technological progress and commercial development was naturalized in the branding and advertising of Shenandoah National Park. Similarly to the previous paper, this project is built on the personal conviction that humanity's relationships

with the nonhuman world are deeply informed by visual culture, leading the "natural" landscape to be, in Thomas Patin's words, "always already artificial even in the moment of its beholding." Following that belief, this project looks to an early moment in American tourist history, when new technologies enabled new forms of recreation, and how both their advertising and the experiences themselves impacted American relationships with the environment.

Both projects address in some way the large-scale zones of interaction between human and nonhuman worlds. In the case of both tourism to the outdoors and the industrial exploitation of nonhuman resources however, these macro-level processes consist of numerous individual interactions. Rather than lingering on the often dire environmental outcomes following human and nonhuman interaction, I hope these works are capable of provoking individual introspection, encouraging readers to reexamine their own relationships with the nonhuman world. If in the past visual culture has facilitated the creation and maintenance of a human/nonhuman divide, I believe that a more critical reading of the same can offer a more responsive alternative. By focusing on the potentialities such a reading might allow, I hope these works dodge the enviropessimism that can be difficult to avoid in a political climate that often moves much too slow.

More broadly, both chapters are concerned not only with how the natural world has been depicted in American visual culture, but also how such images have helped define humanity's role in its environment. As I build toward my

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¹ Thomas Patin, editor, *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2012), xii.

dissertation, I hope to turn more attention toward depictions of zones of interaction between human and nonhuman worlds. As mentioned earlier, these two projects also signal a slight geographic turn in examinations of the American landscape. Whether one is admiring the settings of this season's blockbuster films, or listening to political debates about immigration and border security, the American West still figures prominently in the nation's cultural psyche. While my two portfolio projects address identifiably southern landscapes, I see future opportunities to incorporate other regions, both inside and out of the continental United States, into my exploration of American visual culture.

The two projects presented here represent the steady narrowing of scholarly focus and personal interest over a sometimes winding academic career.

Emerging from my first year of research at William & Mary, they highlight a continued interest in visual representations of the American landscape, along with an expanded set of theoretical tools used to approach them. Their contrasting formats, a scholarly article and an exhibition proposal, reflect my background and future interests in both the academic and museum worlds.

Drawing their subject matter from a wide range of forms of visual expression, from contemporary art photography and popular television to commercial advertising, these projects follow my interest in exploring all varieties of visual rhetoric and culture.

Perhaps most importantly, both works look to turn academic inquiry towards activist ends. Along with an increased understanding of the works themselves, it is my hope that these investigations into depictions of the American landscape

can in some way help address the pressing environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. While shaping public policy might be a lofty goal for humanities research, I believe this type of work can help better explain our past interactions with the nonhuman world, as well as our present responsibilities to it.

"Somebody's Memory of a Town": Cary Fukunaga's *True Detective*, Richard Misrach's *Cancer Alley*, and the Posthumanist Landscape

"This place is like somebody's memory of a town, and the memory is fading. It's like there was never anything here but jungle."

Spoken by Matthew McConaughey's enigmatic Detective "Rust" Cohle, the quote above only reinforces what the viewer already sees. Exiting a county coroner's office midway through *True Detective*'s first episode, Cohle stops to examine the desolate remains of the built environment surrounding he and his partner "Marty" Hart. Their car sits in a vast, empty parking lot, bordered by abandoned storefronts, weeds, and potholes; in the decay of the vacated strip mall, the only signs of humans left alive are inside the county morgue.

Released to critical acclaim in early 2014, director Cary Fukunaga's *True Detective* wraps itself in the landscapes of the backwoods, bayous, and bygone industry of southern Louisiana. Inspired by Richard Misrach's exhibition of photographs of the region entitled *Cancer Alley* and the retrospective book project that followed (*Petrochemical America*, with essays by landscape architect and professor of urban design Kate Orff), Fukunaga and cinematographer Adam Arkapaw turn lower Louisiana's industrialized milieu into the suffocating, sinister backdrop for the series' twisting plot. This paper will argue that Fukunaga, Arkapaw, and Misrach's views of Louisiana come together to form a posthumanist landscape, becoming a character unto itself. Serving not simply as

a stage for human and nonhuman conflict, their landscapes act as an independent force that challenges ideas of human exceptionalism, and the strict rigidity of humanist taxonomies. Interpreting both works through the lens of Pramod Nayar's critical posthumanism, this paper will examine the portrayals of human and nonhuman actors alike, and the sharp critiques of the humanist/industrialist regime they seem to suggest.²

Drawing on the work of sociologist Maureen McNeil, Nayar's critical posthumanism rejects concepts of human exceptionalism (that humans stand uniquely apart from the rest of nature), and human instrumentalism (that this exceptionalism bestows a right to shape and control nonhuman entities).3 Rather than viewing humanity as masters of their own domain, critical posthumanism argues for a more nuanced, more equitable relationship between humanity and its environment. Instead of placing humanity distinctly above and apart from nature, critical posthumanism views human existence as a product of, and collaborator with, a range of nonhuman agents. Going beyond the moralization of decayed environments commonly a part of the Southern Gothic genre, True Detective's representations of landscape and human/nonhuman interaction present a decidedly posthumanist critique of human exceptionalism. Not only is human influence on the environment is in a constant state of flux, Fukunaga and writer Nic Pizzolatto craft a narrative in which boundaries between human and nonhuman are, if not altogether permeable, much less clearly defined than

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² Although a substantial amount of scholarship is being conducted under the aegis of posthumanism, my understandings and formulation of the theory are particularly indebted to the work of Pramod Nayar, Donna Haraway, and Jane Bennett.

³ Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 8.

traditional humanist constructions allow.

Following detectives Marty Hart and Rust Cohle on a decades-long hunt to uncover a mysterious and well-connected murder cult, *True Detective* opens with a crime scene. An overhead shot orients the viewer to the Louisiana countryside (figure 1): the geometrically divided landscape is mostly green with crops, with one deadened square of farmland burnt brown in the distance. The neatly manicured fields, well-ordered trees, and a perfectly straight dirt road shooting towards the horizon indicate an environment thoroughly controlled by human hands. The field of burnt sugarcane and the meticulously arranged body the detectives find inside signal the upsetting of this order, and a shift towards the depiction of a more uncontrollable nature which follows.

As the detectives approach the crime scene itself, Fukunaga introduces the viewer to the murder cult's strange iconography. The carefully orchestrated details of the scene (by both killer and director) help set the tone for the rest of the series. With each strand of new evidence hinting vaguely at nonhuman forces at work, these clues reward a posthumanist interpretation. The victim's body, ritually positioned underneath a lone, ancient tree in the middle of a burnt sugarcane field, has been transformed into a human/nonhuman hybrid. Kneeling, with her hands bound in a gesture of prayer, she appears to be giving thanks to a sign of the natural world, a towering tree. Through its presumed age, and its odd placement in the middle of a planted field, the weathered tree speaks both to a time before human habitation, as well as a history of human stewardship over the land - leaving the occasional tree uncut on developed land provided shade for

laborers and animals, and stood in the Anglo-Saxon tradition as a mark of good land husbandry. Hanging from the tree and placed around the body are several pyramidal arrangements of branches and leaves, vaguely nest-like in appearance, but in the context of the crime scene, undeniably nefarious. Returning to the body, the victim's hair has been arranged to obscure her facial features, and a crown of sticks and animal horns has been placed on her head. While still recognizably human, the ornamentation and placement of the body suggest a transformation, and at least a partial integration with the nonhuman world.

Without clothes, in a "natural" (although highly mediated) agricultural setting, the victim could be read as having been returned to nature, but a posthumanist interpretation of the scene might question the fundamental divisions which would lead to such a return. Rather than viewing humans and nonhumans as starkly separated by biology, culture, or consciousness, critical posthumanism sees a codependent interconnectedness. The hybridized body of Dora Lange, part human, part animal, part tree, suggests an environment of comingling life forms; humanity is not life defined as distinct of all others, but inextricably connected to a larger world (figure 2). The biological reality of this connectedness is suggested in a later episode, in which Cohle orders his partners to arrange a deceased suspect before his blood settles. The death of these human entities signals not only the end of their human lives, but also the end of the countless cells and microorganisms that exist in tandem with human consciousness. In *True Detective*, the dead act as posthumanist reminders of the

biological constructedness of the person, and even at a bodily level, the innumerable dependencies we share with the nonhuman world.

Having introduced the first clues of the mystery, Pizzolatto's script follows the two detectives up and down the coast of southern Louisiana. Fukunaga and Arkapaw frequently return to wide-angle overhead shots of Cohle and Hart's car alone in an otherwise undeveloped landscape (figure 3). Driving on empty highways, the overhead shots visually echo Cohle's early lines about "the memory of a town." Seemingly built for no one, the roads to nowhere indicate a human presence quickly receding into wilderness. When signs of a built environment do enter into these shots, their decrepitude reinforces this message. (figure 4) As Cohle travels through a small strip of mobile homes and barns with rusted roofs, the forest appears barely kept in check, moving to overtake the structures at the first sign of weakness. Later, on the way to a small fishing community, sunlight reflecting off a handful of buildings is the only sign of habitation in a vast expanse of bayou (figure 4).

Cohle's in-car dialogue often comments on this state of flux and conflict between nature and human civilization. In the third episode, he notes "this pipeline's covering up the coast like a jigsaw, place is going to be underwater in thirty years," without passing judgment on whether or not the gulf's absorption of the land would count as a victory for nature or not. Cohle also seems drawn to zones of interaction between human and nonhuman agents, often finding valuable clues in the process. Sites of natural reclamation, a broken-down shed, a burnt-out church, and an overgrown school, all figure into the detective's search

for the killer, and represent intermediary spaces between human and nonhuman actors. In a narrative sense, these spaces of receding humanity provide the murder cult areas outside of human civilization's view in which to commit their crimes, but in their various states of decay they also challenge ideas of human exceptionalism. The desolation of human structures in True Detective's Louisiana signal a failure of humanity to fully dominate nature. Humans, rather than the masters of their domain, are brought down to being simply participants in a larger, multi-species struggle. Although humanity's technological prowess allows for individual triumphs when its power is continuously applied, Fukunaga and Arkapaw's landscapes show an equally powerful nonhuman world just outside the gates. Though nature participates in *True Detective's* narrative as much as any of its human characters, it is depicted without anthropomorphism and as powerful on its own terms. Even when referencing the famous, named hurricanes which brought widespread destruction to the region (Andrew in 1992, Katrina in 2005), the personification of nature is kept to a minimum.

When crafting their visual style for *True Detective's* contested landscapes, Fukunaga and Arkapaw drew inspiration from the work of photographer Richard Misrach. Commissioned to document the American south by Atlanta's High Museum in 1998, Misrach chose to photograph a 150 mile section of the Mississippi River known as "Cancer Alley." The region is one of the most environmentally toxic in the nation, home to more than one hundred large industrial plants producing a quarter of the United States' petrochemicals.⁴

⁴ Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, *Petrochemical America* (New York: Aperture, 2014), 17.

Returning to the project in 2010, Misrach collaborated with landscape architect Kate Orff to publish *Petrochemical America*, a collection of photographs and essays cataloging the environmental and ecological impact of Cancer Alley's industrial sites, and suggestions for coping with an environmentally disastrous consumer lifestyle. Cited by Fukunaga and Arkapaw as a major influence, Misrach's photographs both informed *True Detective's* visual style, and stand as posthumanist works in their own right.

Misrach's photographs of southern Louisiana from Baton Rouge to New Orleans capture the abrasive conflict between human and nonhuman agents reflected in Fukunaga and Arkapaw's cinematography. Focusing on the impact of the major industrial plants operating on the Mississippi River, Misrach depicts a conflict with few victors. Human efforts to control both nature and their own industrial waste are shown as incompetent and ineffective, as in *Hazardous*Waste Containment Site, Dow Chemical Corporation (figure 5), in which a chain link fence erected to keep humans away from stored chemical byproducts fails to halt the high floodwaters of the Mississippi from washing into the containment site, potentially carrying back toxic pollutants to the public water supply. Another photograph, Abandoned Trailer Home, shows a smaller-scale site of contamination, where household garbage is piled underneath a decaying trailer home falling into the Mississippi River (figure 6).

Along Misrach's Mississippi, the only well-kept signs of human habitation are the refineries and manufacturing plants themselves, though even these are subject to reclamation by nature, as in his photographs of an abandoned Kaiser

Aluminum Plant. Residential housing and agricultural development are built in the literal shadows of industry, underneath mammoth storage tanks and oil pipelines (figure 7). Intermixed with images from abandoned communities, either bought out by the petrochemical firms deep pockets, or forced out by their disastrous industrial accidents, the photographs of "habitable" areas seem to exist on borrowed time. Drawing its name from the reportedly high cancer rates of the region, some of the highest in the nation, Cancer Alley is depicted as no longer a place for either human or nonhuman habitation. The desolate series of photographs has an easy to grasp environmentalism that meshes well with posthumanist ideas of interconnectedness. They represent the effects of an unrepentant human exceptionalism, ultimately destructive to humans and nonhumans alike. Pollution's impact on cancer rates also suggest a posthumanist reading, as human abuse of the nonhuman environment ultimately turns the land, as well as our own cells, against us. Out of control industry has created a polluted natural environment capable of fighting back, with toxic groundwater that introduce carcinogens into our bodies, massive fish die-offs which threaten our food supply, and a weakened landscape ready to recede into the Gulf of Mexico.

Along with Misrach's powerful photographs of a polluted and precarious lower Louisiana, *Petrochemical America* contains essays and infographic images from landscape architect and professor of urban design Kate Orff. This second half of the book describes in detail the unseen infrastructure and effects of the petrochemical industry. Orff's indictments do not fall solely on the producers themselves, but the larger consumer culture dependent on their products. Linking

the indecipherable names of petrochemical products (like ethylene dichloride, vinyl acetate and polyvinyl chloride) with the brand names and logos of twenty first century America, Orff demonstrates how Cancer Alley's problem extends far beyond its 150 mile stretch. (figures 8-9). She extends this critique beyond the damage being done to the human world in an infographic showing pollution's impact on nonhuman agents. In Orff's chapter "The Ecology of Waste," the image and related text show the shared ecosystem of human and nonhuman alike. Rather than portraying humanity at the top of the figurative and literal food chains, Orff incorporates human life into a larger ecological framework (figure 10). Her diagrams of human anatomy impacted by pollutants fall side by side with diagrams of nonhuman animal life, ordering the human and frog as coparticipants in the Louisianan ecosystem (figure 11). Humanity's ability to mismanage and destroy nonhuman life is ever present in Misrach and Orff's work, but humanity is never placed outside of the disaster it creates. What happens to the river, they argue, happens to us all.

Drawing upon Misrach's photographs, Fukunaga and Arkapaw incorporate the petrochemical industry into the background *True Detective's* police work. As in Misrach's *Cancer Alley* photographs, industrial development looms in the distance of many of the series' scenes, often as a counterpoint to a looming nonhuman world. Running down a series of leads, the detectives approach a mysterious church their victim frequented. Lost in a seemingly neverending wasteland of above-ground pipelines, they finally arrive at a half-collapsed,

⁵ Misrach and Orff, *Petrochemical America*, 152-153.

overgrown structure. As their car pulls up to the front of the church, the camera frames the broken-down building in the foreground, light shining through a stained glass window, while a massive refinery complex sprawls across the horizon (figure 12). As steam and smoke billow from countless towers, the machinery of industry seems to be alive in the bayou, if not much else. In a scene mentioned earlier, Cohle comments on the disruptive effects of the oil extraction industry, noting that pipelines were quickly eroding the Louisiana coast.

While petrochemical dollars might keep nature temporarily at bay, remnants of structures being reclaimed by nature dot *True Detective's* landscape. Just as elevated cancer rates in Cancer Alley indicate a nonhuman challenge to human pollution, for every backgrounded industrial plant in *True Detective*, overgrown buildings represent the nonhuman environment's ability to reclaim lost territory.

Beyond simply drawing inspiration from Misrach's work, Fukunaga incorporated some of the artist's photographs into the show's opening credits. Featuring at least six images from *Petrochemical America*, from a critical posthumanist perspective the credits create an interesting blending of human figures and nonhuman elements. In a montage of environmental scenes and human actors, Misrach's photographs are often superimposed onto (and inside of) the outlines of McConaughey, Harrelson, and others. Occasionally thematic, as in Hart's pairing with images of suburban life (his domestic situation is chronically disastrous), the opening suggests a deeper connection between

landscape and lived experience (figures 13-15). Literal reflections of their environment, the characters both shape and are shaped by their surroundings. In the confines of the opening credits, both landscape image and actor are on their own incomplete, and dependent on one another. This fundamental connection between person and space resonate with critical posthumanist thoughts on the construction of personhood, and the codependent links between the human and the nonhuman (figures 16-18).

While drawing on Misrach's imagery to create their own vision of a posthumanist Louisianan landscape, Fukunaga, Arkapaw, and show creator Nic Pizzolatto incorporate other themes and narrative motifs that reflect critical posthumanist theory. Building on the concepts of human and nonhuman hybridization discussed earlier, Detective Rust Cohle can be seen to embody a type of posthuman assemblage. His brain chemistry permanently altered by heavy drug use during years of deep undercover work, Cohle is prone to bouts of intense hallucination. These visual disturbances occasionally take the form of omens if not outright clues, alerting Cohle's attention to a larger world beyond his own perception. Approaching a site of the killer's activity, Cohle perceives a flock of birds forming a spiral, an iconographic sign found on past murder victims (figure 19). In his final confrontation with the head of the murder cult, Cohle seems to see a spiral galaxy opening above him, referencing the killer's iconography and his attempts to transcend an earthly consciousness. These visions, brought on by nonhuman agents (traces of hallucinogens remaining in his system), transform Cohle into something more than human. In addition, Cohle is referenced to have an advanced tracking ability, learned from his father on hunting trips. His perceptions, augmented by both cultural and chemical technology, extend beyond his biological capabilities. As a posthumanist detective, Cohle's senses are attuned to the nonhuman world (through his hunting experience), the human world (through his training as a detective, and his seemingly innate ability to evaluate people), and the supernatural world (through his hallucinations).

Perhaps due to this heightened awareness, Cohle is portrayed as having undertaken deep philosophical self-reflection. Espousing a pessimistic nihilism deeply in debt to the weird science author Thomas Ligotti's *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, and other anti-natalist thinkers, Cohle describes a philosophy as equally rejecting of human exceptionalism as critical posthumanism. In an often discussed series of exchanges between Cohle and his partner, he describes humans as simply "sentient meat," human consciousness as "a tragic misstep in evolution," and life as simply "a dream about being a person." While lacking the negative connotations of life that Cohle's philosophy contains, critical posthumanism shares in its deprivileging of human existence. While Cohle seems to feel nonhuman life would be better off without us, critical posthumanism suggests that a more cooperative existence is possible.

As in Misrach's photographs cataloging human mismanagement of the environment, *True Detective* contains thematic elements which reject human instrumentalism, and an inborn right of human control over the nonhuman world.

This rejection can be seen not only in the dilapidated buildings and collapsed economies of the show's lower Louisiana, an environment in which humanity exerted a destructive, if only temporary, control, but also in a subtle motif of lawn care. In Hart's realm of suburban home ownership, the lawn is a microcosm of well-ordered domestic life, and acts as a personal garden of eden; it is the individualized version of man as master of his domain. When Cohle returns his partner's lawn mower, and takes the initiative to mow Hart's lawn in payment, he sets off an intense flare up between the two detectives. Seen as a violation of his domestic duties, Hart's rage reflects insecurities about his relationship with his wife, his own marital infidelities, and his ability to control his domestic sphere. For Hart, the maintenance of his own yard, or, by extension, the ability to bend the nonhuman world to his will, is an unquestioned right. This emblematic control over the landscape represents a range of other power relationships, and is seen to be ultimately corrupting.

Another example of lawn care gone astray is that of Errol Childress, the series' mysterious serial murderer. Eventually revealed to be a parish maintenance man who uses his access to church schools to find young victims, Childress is met twice by detectives working the case before the final confrontation, both times sitting atop a riding lawnmower. Childress's profession, keeping Louisiana's forests and swamps temporarily at bay, and his predation in areas where that control of nature has been abandoned, are seemingly at odds, but both can be read as assertions of human control over the environment. Even when working outside spheres of human control, Childress bends the nonhuman

world to his advantage, using the dense wilderness as a cover for dark deeds.

Like Hart's demand to mow his own lawn, Childress's use of the landscape, and his cult's adoption of nonhuman iconography, reveal a distinctly humanist hierarchy, where the needs of the nonhuman are consistently subordinated.

True Detective is far from a perfect embodiment of critical posthumanist belief. While raising issues of nonhuman agency, and questioning human exceptionalism, it fails to address the ways in which humanist thought has lead to the ordering and othering of categories within humanity. Like many works in the detective genre, its female characters are relegated to the roles of either victim or sexual object. Serving merely as obstacles for the male detectives to overcome on their way to a confrontation with a male villain, these portrayals fail to challenge culturally defined gender norms. And while posthumanist themes permeate its eight episodes, the eventual mellowing of Cohle's pessimism in the show's final minutes introduces an element of humanist spirituality to its conclusion. Despite this lack of philosophical purity, Fukunaga's direction, Arkapaw's cinematography, and Pizzolatto's script, as well as the Richard Misrach photographs that inspired them, all reflect a strand of critical posthumanism that argues for a more responsive relationship with the nonhuman world. True Detective and Petrochemical America both speak to this desire, testifying to the dangers of human environmental hubris, and advocating for a responsible, shared human and nonhuman coexistence.

Illustrations



Figure 1, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, @04m:35s (2014)



Figure 2, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from True Detective, season 1, episode 1, @06m:16s (2014)



Figure 3, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from True Detective, season 1, episode 1, @52m:33s (2014)



Figure 4, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 3, @47m:23s (2014)



Figure 5, Richard Misrach, *Hazardous Waste Containment Site*, *Dow Chemical Corporation, Mississippi River, Plaquemine, Louisiana* (1998), pigment print



Figure 6, Richard Misrach, *Abandoned Trailer Home, Mississippi River, Near Dow Chemical Plant, Plaquemine, Louisiana* (1998), pigment print



Figure 7, Richard Misrach, Home, Destrehan, Louisiana (1998), pigment print

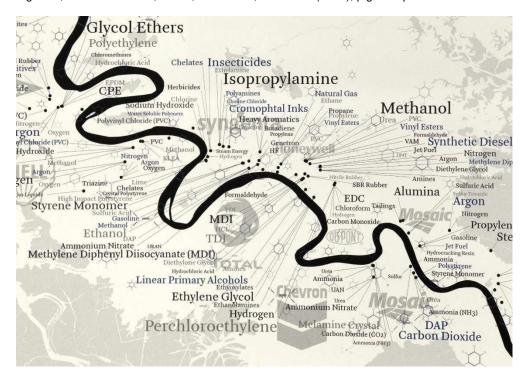


Figure 8, Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, from Petrochemical America (2012)



Figure 9, Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, from Petrochemical America (2012)

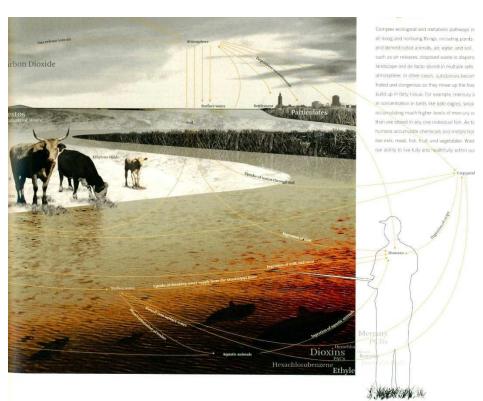


Figure 10, Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, from Petrochemical America (2012)

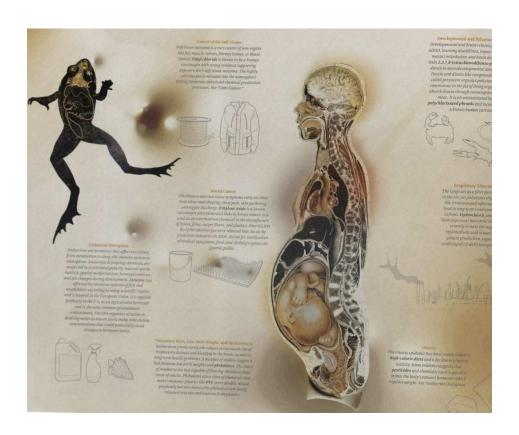


Figure 11, Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, from Petrochemical America (2012)



Figure 12, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 2, @53m:50s (2014)



Figure 13, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, @01m:18s (2014)



Figure 14, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, @00m:30s (2014)



Figure 15, Richard Misrach, *Trailer Home and Natural Gas Tanks*, *Good Hope Street, Norco, Louisiana* (1998), pigment print



Figure 16, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, @00m:15s (2014)

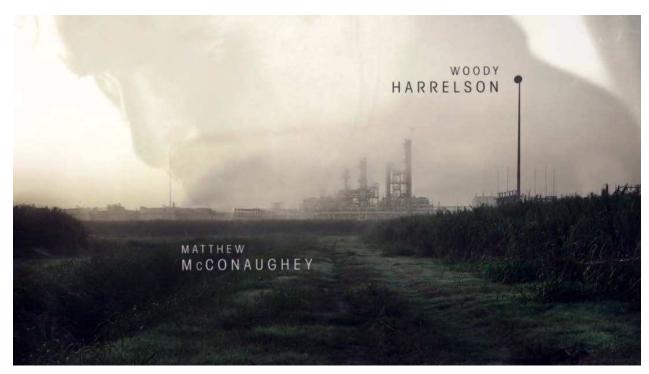


Figure 17, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, @00m:07s (2014)



Figure 18, Richard Misrach, Sugar Cane and Refinery, Mississippi River Corridor, Louisiana (1998), pigment print



Figure 19, Cary Joji Fukunaga (director), Adam Arkapaw (cinematographer), video capture from True Detective, season 1, episode 2, @54m:05s (2014)

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel - Exhibition Proposal

The proposed exhibition, *A Paradise for Leisurely Travel: Automobility in Shenandoah National Park*, will explore the portrayal of automobile based tourism to "nature" in early Shenandoah National Park promotional material. After a lengthy lobbying campaign by state and federal boosters in the early twentieth century, Shenandoah National Park became the first national park formed in the eastern United States. Opened to the public in 1935, Shenandoah quickly became the nation's most visited park, hosting upwards of one million visitors annually by 1940. This park's popularity was closely related to its accessibility. Aided by the rise of the personal automobile, whose rapid adoption by the American middle class put the park within driving distance of east coast urban centers. Shenandoah was claimed to be within a day's drive of forty million Americans, and its advertisers capitalized on the newly available technology, marketing the attraction as a driver's wonderland.

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel will examine the visual culture of early park promotion, analyzing the images and words of park advertisements through the lens of automobility studies. The exhibition will show the central role the car played in the minds of park boosters, government officials, and vacationing tourists in their various constructions (both literal and imagined) of the park.

Drawing on recent studies in automobility and tourism studies, interpretive texts will shed light on the seemingly complicated relationship between promises of technological invention and natural solitude, and how early twentieth century actors pictured the park.

The exhibition will consist of over forty objects, drawn from various statewide collections. Divided into four sections, it will highlight early visions of the Virginia landscape, the training of the tourist's gaze, humanity's presence in the park, and the car in Shenandoah's continuing legacy. In each section, visitors will find artistic and promotional images of the park contrasted with quotations from early park promoters, officials, and reporters. These historical texts will ground the visitor in contemporary attitudes towards the automobile, park development, and the tourist's place in nature.

Drawing on the collections of the Shenandoah National Park Archives, the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the University of Virginia's Fralin Museum, the exhibition will bring together a wide range of artwork and advertisements from across the state. *A Paradise for Leisurely Travel* will follow contemporary art historical trends by deprivileging "high art," elevating commercial images and advertisements as worthwhile objects of cultural expression meriting serious study. The exhibition's themes of automobility and human development of the environment touch on current cultural keystones, and its focus on local history should ensure strong state and regional interest.

Suitable for a small exhibition space, *A Paradise for Leisurely Travel* would find interested audiences at any of the lending institutions. If exhibited at Shenandoah National Park's Harry S. Byrd Sr. Visitor Center, the show would be more accessible to residents in the western part of the state, as well as more than one million annual park visitors. The Virginia Historical Society would open

the exhibition to a much larger metropolitan population, as well as the significant number of tourists anticipated to explore Richmond as part of the 2015 World Cycling Championships. At either location, an exhibition year of 2015 coincides with Shenandoah National Park's 80th anniversary, and should shine new light on a nationally-known attraction.

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel examines contemporary issues of tourism, movement, and environmental awareness through the images and texts of the past. As much of the world looks increasingly critically upon the automobile's detrimental impact on the environment, and urban governments turn towards transportation alternatives which move away from a reliance on personal automobile traffic, A Paradise for Leisurely Travel will examine public sentiment on a natural wonderland developed explicitly with the car in mind. The exhibition hopes to leave visitors with a better sense of how American travel culture developed in tandem with one understanding of the natural world, and raise questions as to how it will negotiate the changing understandings of today.

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel - Section Panels

[PANEL 1]

"A substantial park to contain forests, shrubs and flowers and mountain streams with picturesque cascades and waterfalls overhung with foliage, all untouched by the hand of man" - Shenandoah National Park Association, 1926

Until the early twentieth century, tourist travel within the United States was an elite proposition. Movement beyond one's home region was limited by the nation's patchwork series of local roads and privately owned turnpikes, difficulties limiting leisurely movement to those with the financial freedom to overcome them.

During the nineteenth century, most domestic travel was limited to the mountains of the northeast. New York's Adirondack and Catskill Mountains, as well as the White and Green mountain ranges of New Hampshire and Vermont, served as natural getaways to the north's upper class. In the Catskill Mountains along New York's Hudson River, the United States' first independent school of artists came together, portraying the American landscape as a second garden of Eden. Widely distributed in the form of prints, the paintings of the Hudson River School captured the emotions of many white Americans, who saw the continent as divinely provided for the expansion of democratic government.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the federal government had established several national parks in the western United States, protecting areas of undeveloped nature for future recreation. However, their great geographic distance from the population centers of the east left the early parks inaccessible for many Americans. Seeing an opportunity to boost local economies, business boosters and government officials in Virginia, Tennessee, and other southern states lobbied for the creation of an eastern national park. After an intense lobbying campaign, authorization was given in 1926 to form a park in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Park planners counted on a relatively new invention, the automobile, to make the park accessible to an estimated audience of forty million Americans.

[PANEL 2]

"If you want them all [the wonders of nature], if you want to sink deep into them as you sink deep into music, revel in them, then try that road which lies between Roanoke and the Shenandoah Valley." -American Motorist, July 1926

The demand for an accessible national park was fueled by the increased mobility granted to Americans by the automobile. By marketing his car at the masses, Henry Ford enabled a new class of Americans to a type of travel previously the privilege to the upper class. The earliest Shenandoah National Park promoters tied their vision explicitly to the automobile, listing the possibility of a mountain crest "Skyline Drive" as one of the region's great benefits. The automobile was

not only a means to get visitors to the park, but a pivotal player in the park experience.

In park promotional material from the period, the automobile is ever-present.

Cars and the roads that carry them are incorporated into images of the natural landscape and prose singing the praises of the park's undeveloped environment. Instead of intruding into the natural environment, the automobile is made an extension of a naturalized, human movement. The park was promoted as offering a retreat to work-weary urbanites, who in the wilderness could reassert their natural selves in the forests. In the park, the car might have reminded the vacationer more of their freedom of movement than their commute to work.

In advertisements and news stories, the automobile is portrayed as indispensable to the enjoyment of the natural world. It allowed for a new type of independence previous forms of travel did not; unlike the railroad or the steamship, the car allows the driver to travel at their own pace, to their own destinations, and to pull over and enjoy the view.

[PANEL 3]

"A great many things are going to change. We shall turn out to be masters rather than servants of nature." - Henry Ford

Early descriptions of the park often highlighted its supposedly undeveloped

character. Government officials desired any eastern park to follow the same template as their western counterparts; old growth forests, settlement free, with no signs of human development. By the early twentieth century however, the majority of the east coast had been subject to centuries of human habitation. The lands which would become Shenandoah National Park were occupied by residents of all economic classes, from small homesteaders to large commercial agriculturalists. Articles written during the park's development paradoxically acknowledged the human habitation of the land, while asserting its untouched character.

Following in a discourse that had justified the United States' dispossession of Native American lands, park promotional materials seemed to draw an unspoken line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of development. Similar to American assertions that native peoples did not successfully cultivate or work the landscape, and thus had no claims of ownership, poor Shenandoah Valley residents were evicted from their homes under a blanket condemnation law. Like the Native Americans before them, the homesteads and small farms of these mountain people were seen as not improving upon the land, allowing park promoters to ignore their presence when promoting the idea of an untouched park.

These unacceptable types of developments stood in contrast to the massive construction projects needed to make the park accessible. Miles of new roads

were cut, graded, and paved, ensuring smooth traffic flow through the mountains. When a path could not be cut around the mountains, engineers blasted through, as in Mary's Rock Tunnel, completed in 1932. Although these additions to the park were much more visible than the small hollow farms which had previously dotted the terrain, advertisements naturalized their presence into the landscape, promoting the park as a drivable wilderness.

[PANEL 4]

"Nature in the beginning, was properly balanced by the Almighty; man, in general, has a tendency to disturb the equilibrium." H.K. Hinde, **The**Shenandoah National Park Travelogue, 1937

The promoters of Shenandoah National Park saw no contradiction in the automobile's place in a vision of undeveloped nature. In advertisements, news articles, and interviews, car travel was consistently integrated into the park's offer of a wilderness retreat. After its opening, Shenandoah quickly eclipsed the attendance numbers of its western relatives, and remains a major destination for the road-tripping tourist. The park itself and the Skyline Drive are highlighted as a natural treasure of both nation and state, and Virginia residents are able to purchase Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive license plates for their vehicles. Just as in the first half of the twentieth century, the park and the automobile remain interconnected.

As science increasingly links automobile use and fossil fuel dependency to global climate change and environmental damage, the role of the car in recreational travel becomes more complicated. The National Park Service's mission calls for the preservation of land for the public's enjoyment, a task that might suggest contradictory goals, but one that highlights the importance of encouraging public use to gain support for conservation.

As citizens look for new ways to responsibly enjoy natural spaces, the early history of Shenandoah National Park can serve as a reminder of how technological development and a tourism of nature have been linked from the beginning. As in all arenas, the environmental costs of touring natural sites by automobile must be weighed against their benefits. By examining how Shenandoah National Park was promoted and perceived, we can evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using human development to open up areas of natural beauty.

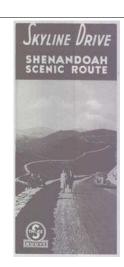
A Paradise for Leisurely Travel – Sample object labels



Although most artists of New York's Hudson River School concentrated on local subjects, some traveled outside the northeast for inspiration. Frederic Edwin Church, the school's most commercially and critically successful artist, occasionally traveled abroad in search of new types of landscapes. In 1870, on his way to South America, Church stopped in Virginia and painted this scene of the Natural Bridge. One of early America's most well-known natural attractions, the Natural Bridge was commonly viewed as a divine creation. By the early twentieth century, the Natural Bridge served as a physical one, crossed by U.S. Route 11.



At the time of Shenandoah National Park's authorization, the lands which would become the park were home to over 1,400 mountain families. Early descriptions of park land, however, often characterized the mountains and valleys as uninhabited and unimproved by human civilization. In this editorial cartoon by Fred O. Seibel of the Richmond Times Dispatch, earlier inhabitants, including Native Americans, were perceived as having no lasting effect on the park landscape. Here, a well-dressed white tourist stands on a paved overlook, observing a Shenandoah Valley that was unchanged, "as it was in the beginning."



Advertisements for the Shenandoah National Park are not always what they appear. This popular promotional photograph, used in a number of advertisements over at least a ten year period, appears to be an edited composite of several separate images. Both sets of pedestrians have been added to an image of a car on the Skyline Drive (which is occasionally edited into a bus, or omitted altogether in other version). Additionally, the route of the Skyline Drive has been heavily accentuated, make the organically twisting, riverine highway leap out from the background. In these images, highways both blend in and stand apart from their natural surroundings.



In many images, prospective travelers are visually instructed on how to function as tourists. For many Americans, leisure travel by automobile was a new phenomenon; a type of mobility previously enjoyed only by the elite. In photographs taken from Shenandoah National Park, model American families are shown stopped at overlooks, enjoying the scenery below.

Automobile travel allowed a flexibility and independence of movement unprecedented in previous types of transportation, a freedom the cultural historian Guillermo Giucci labels kinetic modernity. Liberated from collective forms of transport such as the railway and steamboat, car owners were free to stop and go as they pleased. Promotional photographs like this one demonstrate to the new motorist that the scenic overlooks of the Skyline Drive are theirs for the taking.



Automobiles, overlooks, and highways are an ever-present feature of Shenandoah Park promotions. Blended into the surrounding natural environment, human development seems to enable an unmediated access to nature. Scenic overlooks place viewers on the edge of infrastructure, offering a view of wilderness from the platform of civilization.

Hand-colored photographic postcards were a primary method of distributing images of the park, and offered a small degree of artistic freedom to the firms which published them. In these two images of the view from Franklin Cliff, based off the same photograph, one firm has chosen to highlight a car's presence in the scene, while another omits the car entirely.



The addition of highways, bridges, and tunnels to the Shenandoah Valley was one of the major development projects of the park, and provided the infrastructure which carried visitors from outside the region through the wilderness area. These improvements were often contrasted with advertising citing the undeveloped and untouched aspect of park lands, hinting at no contradiction between the massive building projects and the promise of pristine forests.

Mary's Rock Tunnel was one of the park's engineering marvels. A six hundred and ten foot long tunnel blasted through Mary's Rock mountain, it was one of many feats described as engineers helping nature make its sights accessible.



If roads and highways were seen as positive modes of development, other signs of human habitation were viewed in a more negative light. Of the 1,400 families living on park land at the time of its authorization, many lived in functional dwellings of their own design. These residents, evicted as part of a blanket condemnation law, were relocated outside bark boundaries, and offered aid in constructing "modernized" dwellings.

The buildings of former residents were viewed by park planners as both obstacles in showcasing a pristine wilderness, and at the same time not advanced enough to threaten Shenandoah's untouched image.

Historian Marguerite S. Shaffer argues that much of prewar American tourism was centered around the building of better citizens through experiencing the natural landscape and retracing the steps of earlier Americans. After the park's opening, advertisers invoked the history of Virginia pioneers and mountain men who originally settled the valley before moving west, often ignoring the presence of their descendants who remained behind, only to be removed by the park's creation.



Very few promotional images of Shenandoah National Park were produced without acknowledging the presence of the automobile. Of the relatively rare images of the park that do omit cars, roads, or other signs of human presence, captions and context often remind the viewer that humanity's touch is close at hand.

This hand-colored photographic postcard was published in the series *Views of Skyline Drive and Shenandoah National Park*. Many of the other postcards it was packaged with, along with its decorative envelope, contain images of buildings, roads, and automobiles. On one version of the postcard, a caption on the back lists the site as just "steps away" from a stop on the Skyline Drive.



Most advertisements and promotional images of the park feature solitary cars, with single families able to enjoy nature in solitude. In such images, the presence of technological intervention in the form of cars and highways is mitigated by the percentage of the scene dedicated to nature. In these images, automobiles exist in the background of nature, unassuming and unobtrusive, and the tourist is free to enjoy unimpeded movement along empty highways.

Depending on the season, however, the tourist's reality might have looked considerably different. Opened to acclaim in 1935, Shenandoah National Park quickly became a premier driving destination for east coast vacationers. Similar to conditions today, in peak season traffic can slow to a crawl along the Skyline Drive, as motorists crowd the roads. This image of a parking overlook near Mary's Rock shows the popularity of the park soon after its opening.



Functioning as a wildlife reserve, animals play a surprisingly small role in park promotional material. Rarely mentioning animals, the park seems to exist solely for the pleasure of its human guests. When the park's native fauna do make an appearance in text, it is often in reference to the automobile, as in the rabbits and deer a nighttime motorists might find illuminated in their headlights.

In this souvenir travel guide by Darwin Lambert, human and animal footprints exist side by side, as photographs highlight the engineering feat of Mary's Rock Tunnel, and a sparsely populated parking area.



As part of a 1948 Chevrolet advertising campaign, Shenandoah National Park falls into the background, symbolizing a freedom of movement that would have been understood by a national audience. The "Famous Drive" series of advertisements features a brand new Chevrolet in front of famous points of American scenery. The advertising copy for each locale differs, keying into popular conceptions of the different destinations.

Here, a white family of four motors "smooth 'n' easy" along the Skyline drive, winding naturally along the mountain crests. Like earlier promotional images, the highway blends in to the natural environment, and the family is able to enjoy a smooth, uninterrupted drive through nature.



Today, Virginians have the option of purchasing vanity Shenandoah National Park license plates for their car or motorcycle. With over one million annual visitors, the park continues to be a major tourist attraction, luring both back-country campers and motorists following the changing of the fall leaves.

While the automobile's environmental impact is well-documented today, the popularity of national and state parks, wilderness recreation, and the growth of ecotourism indicate a continued interest

in the automotive escape from the confines of urban life, even while the implications of fossil fuel use looms larger. The park planners and tourists of the early twentieth century saw no contradictions in the introduction of the automobile to nature. Today, armed with greater knowledge and a century of automobile history behind them, advocates of the national parks must renegotiate and redefine their own leisurely travels through paradise.

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel – Sample quotes for gallery wall

"Multicolored Mountains with crest-top motor roads, eastern America's most beautiful peaks and valleys adorned in red, yellow, brown, orange, and evergreen, and newly-opened regions formerly remote and inaccessible – this is Skyline Country!" - H.D. Crawford, in "Skyline Country", *Commonwealth*, 1965

"Parkway planners and engineers have helped Nature make formerly rugged and inaccessible regions available to easy and comfortable motoring. " - H.D. Crawford, in "Skyline Country", *Commonwealth*, 1965

"Not all advantages of traveling the Blue Ridge crest lie in the realm of the natural, however. Long stretches of the highway take the motorist through the homeland of the Southern Highland mountaineer whose distinctive "hill culture" has been the object of th much inters and study." - Paul Favour, "Skyways of the Blue Ridge Mountains", in *The Iron Worker*, 1954

"Oh to be carefree and unhurried again." - Darwin Lambert, *Illustrated Guide to Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia*, 1947.

"City noises distract, or our own small horizon closes in on us. In the offing is a National Park, in which we hold common stock, where we may taboo intensive civilization and live awhile in the lap of nature."- H.K. Hinde, *The Shenandoah National Park Travelogue*, 1937.

"The park service habitually strives for roads which will touch the finest scenic observation points and follow natural contours as to escape unsightly cuts and fills" - George Pollack, *Skyland: The Only Combined Dude Ranch and Resort in the East.* 1933.

"The Blue Ridge Parkway affords an unusual opportunity to view the natural beauty of a country heretofore virtually inaccessible –a country of bold panoramas, wild forest and exceptionally beautiful flora. Numerous parking overlooks provide safe points from which o view at leisure the country below." - National Park Service, *Blue Ridge Parkway*, 1941

"The motorists may take foot trails to the more remote and unspoiled beauty spots." - National Park Service, *Blue Ridge Parkway*, 1941

"The motorist traveling over Route 11 will be driving over a highway close to the western boundary of the Natural Bridge National Forest. After a while his car will roll over Natural Bridge itself, the tourist little dreaming that the lofty arch of the Bridge is the natural foundation of the highway...." - The Tourist Guide Book of Virginia, 1931

A Paradise for Leisurely Travel - Checklist

	Frederic Edwin Church, The Natural Bridge, Virginia 1852 Oil on canvas 1912.1 Fralin Museum of Art
	Jervis McEntee Natural Bridge 1877 Oil on board 2008.38 VMFA
Image forthcoming	Victor Mindeleff Skyland Cabin 1904 Watercolor on paper SHEN 21368
**************************************	From "Skyland: The Eaton Ranch of the East" 1925 SHEN 2195q
	Map insert from Illustrated guide to Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, 1947

	Fred O. Seibel "As it was in the Beginning" Richmond Times Dispatch 1939 SHEN
BUTC HEAD SERVICE SERVICE STATE OF THE PARTY	National Parks Service Blue Ridge Parkway 1941
January Days	Skyline Drive 193? SHEN 23301
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	The Travel Guide to Virginia 1937

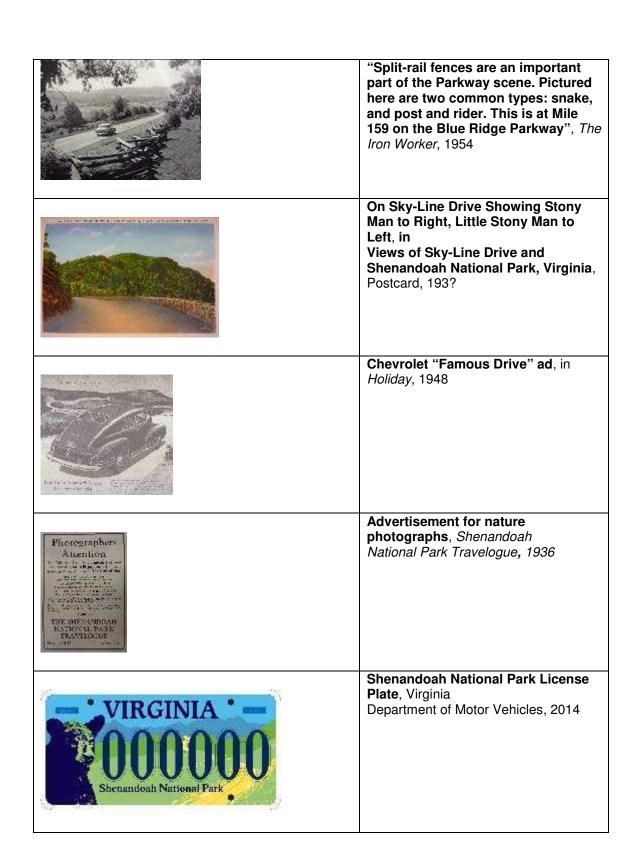
Shenandoah National Park Travelogue 1937
Shenandoah National Park Travel Guide 1937
Purgatory Mountain Parking Widening at Mile 92.2 on the Blue Ridge Parkway The Iron Worker 1954
"The world is vast and beautiful as seen from the Skyline Drive" Illustrated Guide to Shenandoah National Park 1947
Valley Overlook, Illustrated Guide to Shenandoah National Park, 1947

APPLE OF THE SECURITY AND A SECURITY	Kettle Canyon Near Stony Man on Skyline Drive, 193?, SHEN 22022
	Franklin Cliffs (Rock Formation) From the Overlook, 193?, SHEN 22022
THE RESIDENCE OF THE PARTY OF T	Franklin Cliff From the Overlook on Skyline Drive, 193?, SHEN 12672
	Skyline Drive Tunnel (Mary's Rock Tunnel), 1932-3?, SHEN 22023
	Looking Out of South Portal of Tunnel on Sky-Line Drive 1932-3?

Illustrated Guide to Shenandoah National Park and Skyline Drive, 1947
Unknown photographer Tunnel Parking 1935
Shenandoah National Park Travelogue, 1937
"The Parkway winds along this mountain a few miles below Virginia's Peaks of Otter in the Jefferson National Forest", Commonwealth, 1965
Crossing of Lee Highway and Skyline Drive at Panorama, VA, Postcard, 193?, 29221

	Skyland, the Eaton Ranch of the East (left), 1923
	Skyland, the Eaton Ranch of the East (right), 1923
	"An Exodus From Mountain Cabins Like This -", Shenandoah Nature Journal, 1936
TU EPIST	"- Will Bring About A Different Home Life in Modern Houses Like This Homestead in Ida Valley", Shenandoah Nature Journal, 1936
	Shenandoah National Park Travelogue, 1937

Shorting Drive TREMANDORN RELIGINAL FAIR THE TOWNS	Views of Sky-Line Drive and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Postcards, 193?
	Views of Sky-Line Drive and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Postcard, 193?
	Cascade Falls, in Views of Sky- Line Drive and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Postcard, 193?
	Overlooking Lee Highway from Sky- Line Drive, in Views of Sky-Line Drive and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Postcard, 193?
1800 00	"'Skyland,' Altitude 3,850 feet." in Views of Sky-Line Drive and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, Postcard, 193?



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