

THE DIFFICULT PLANTATION PAST:
OPERATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP MECHANISMS
AND THEIR IMPACT ON RACIALIZED NARRATIVES
AT TOURIST PLANTATIONS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public History

Middle Tennessee State University

May 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot begin to express my thanks to my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Kathryn Sikes. Without her encouragement and advice this project would not have been possible. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my dissertation committee members Drs. Mary Hoffschwelle, Carroll Van West, and Brendan Martin. My very deepest gratitude extends to Dr. Martin and the Public History Program for graciously and generously funding my research site visits. I'm deeply indebted to the National Science Foundation project research team, Drs. Derek H. Alderman, Perry L. Carter, Stephen P. Hanna, David Butler, and Amy E. Potter. However, I owe special thanks to Dr. Butler who introduced me to the project data and offered ongoing mentorship through my research and writing process. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Kimberly Douglass for her continued professional sponsorship and friendship.

The completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without the loving support and nurturing of Frederick Kristopher Koehn, whose patience cannot be underestimated. I must also thank my MTSU colleagues Drs. Bob Beatty and Ginna Foster Cannon for their supportive insights. My friend Dr. Jody Hankins was also incredibly helpful and reassuring throughout the last five years, and I owe additional gratitude to the "Low Brow Crowd," for stress relief and weekend distractions. Many special thanks to the Harris and Koehn families, as well as Midge and Ron Wood for their support and encouragement. I am grateful that Dr. Lynn Denton and Dr. Rebecca Conard each believed in my potential as a public history practitioner. I thank Dr. Pippa Holloway for her reassurance and patience during my first few years in the public history program. Thanks to far away friends Michael Twitty and Toni Tipton Martin whose good

work keeps me inspired. Additionally, I owe a great deal of gratitude to my friends Alyson McGee, Mary Mikel Stump, Lise Ragbir, Susan Gordon, Dr. Lisa Budreau, Leslie Biggs-Randolph, and Angellique Sunter. And I shall always be grateful for the mentorship of Jane Karotkin.

I am also grateful to D. Finney Brown, Dr. Amanda Mushal, and Jane Harper Dollason for hosting me for dinners and visits during my travel research. Thanks to Dr. Ralph Williams for allowing me to attend his family business class and for providing me helpful texts. I cannot leave Middle Tennessee State University without mentioning Christy Groves, Chair of User Services at Walker Library. Thank you for repeatedly extending my library due dates, allowing me access to much needed texts. I also wish to thank Ashley Rogers, Shawn Halifax, Jack Neale, Jay Schexnaydre, and Jennifer Hurst Wender for their helpful conversations and correspondence.

ABSTRACT

Southern plantations are laden with historical meaning and cultural symbolism. When these sites of antebellum agriculture are transformed into places toured by the visiting public, these symbols and stories emerge. Though they speak to the experiences of those previously enslaved at the sites, site narratives are primarily influenced by the intentions and decisions of the site owner, management, staff, and docents. This dissertation study examines interviews with all levels of staff and management of these sites gathered by the Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes project from a sample group of fifteen publicly-toured plantations located in Charleston, South Carolina, the James River Valley in Virginia, and the River Road region of southern Louisiana in order to link academic critiques of plantation narratives in the literature of public history to the mentalities and personal views behind site operational and narrative decisions, ownership and governance models, and allocations of funding and personnel. The dissertation concludes with recommended strategies for aligning the plantation institution's management with public education that incorporates histories of enslavement throughout the site and provides greater community benefit through accountability to stakeholders and descendants.

PREFACE

Over the course of 2016 and 2017, as racially targeted mass shootings, white supremacist marches, and attempted removals of Confederate public symbols commenced, I had many conversations with friends, family, and strangers about politics. While some shared my political views, others argued as defenders/apologists for slavery, trying to convince me that it “wasn’t that bad.” Some argued that removing memorials of Confederate soldiers and slave traders was “erasing the past,” and that “our heritage” should be protected. It seemed that political events had emboldened many people to openly profess opinions concerning race they had previously hidden.

Studying the history of slavery and its legacy has altered my perspective of southern heritage sites. While I used to enjoy visits to antebellum southern houses, I now think of these places differently. On a visit to Belmont Mansion in Nashville, I learned that Adelia Acklen used enslaved people to construct the house. The project was financed with money made by her former husband Isaac Franklin’s slave-trading business. Our tour group was told about the valuable decorative arts collection in the house. The docent picked up a small stone statuette of a horse describing how Acklen had purchased the statuette during a grand tour of Europe. My emotional response surprised me. I looked at the horse and imagining the people who were traded in order to afford that “tasteful” souvenir.

After months of sorting through the data gathered for this research, with its weighty subject matter, I dreaded my site visits. I especially feared visiting sites where I knew enslavement was discussed in detail, and the inevitable emotional impact of those site’s stories. However, my visits to such places were enlightening and revelatory. I

realized that *denial* of the factual past, no matter how horrible, was far more painful than the facts themselves. To my surprise, the sites that *ignore* the significant link of forced labor to accumulated wealth were the most disturbing, while those places that honestly deal with their difficult pasts encouraged a purgative catharsis. Though the history of slavery is painful, until its significance and impact are completely interwoven into the public's understanding of United States history, we must discuss it, even if our initial conversations are clumsy. Until every American understands the basic chronology of institutional racism from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to commercialized incarceration, such inculcation is necessary. Through this work, I ask for the consideration of the human, the moral, and the kind—the consideration of people over industry, but above all, a renewed commitment to patience and understanding in thinking about race.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAM	American Alliance of Museums
AASLH	American Association of State and Local History
APVA	Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities
DHPT	Drayton Hall Preservation Trust
HCRP	Henrico County Recreation and Parks
MAP	Museum Assessment Program
MPC	Marathon Petroleum Corporation
MPF	Middleton Place Foundation
MPLC	Middleton Place Landmark Corporation
MVLA	Mount Vernon Ladies Association
NCPH	National Council on Public History
NPS	National Park Service
NTHP	National Trust for Historic Preservation
PV	Preservation Virginia
RESET	Race, Ethnicity, and Social Equity in Tourism Initiative
SOL	Standards of Learning
SPNEA	Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy
UT	University of Texas
VTC	Virginia Tourism Corporation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During an interview at a publicly-toured plantation along the James River in Virginia, the site's manager expressed disappointment that tour content focused on the lives of former, wealthy, white residents during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though the number of enslaved Africans and African Americans exponentially outnumbered the former, white residents of the site, the historical interpretation conveyed a dearth of information regarding the enslaved black majority that had once inhabited and worked at the place. The site manager admitted to difficulty implementing racially-balanced historical accounts, indicating that the site's funding limited the pace by which the staff could satisfactorily conduct research and implement an updated public narrative. Didactics, docent scripts, employee training, and even tour paths all required alteration. The manager explained that changes revising the site's messaging necessitate time, effort, and funding that detract greatly from regular operational duties. As a result, this manager resigned to the eventuality of the changes, and their possible attainment at an unknown, future time.¹

For a variety of reasons, many administrators who operate plantations for public tours concede to similar frustration, unsure how to deal with these challenges. Meanwhile, operators of some highly visited, well-funded plantation sites with the resources to make changes, ignore opportunities to update narrative history. Instead, such sites employ commercialized presentations of the past, peddling southern nostalgia via

¹ Interview with manager, July 17, 2016.

docents valued for their ability to entertain, and their willingness to work for low wages. Though unfamiliar with recommended museum best practices, identifying their sites as “tourist attractions,” some of these sites profit consistently, steering their income into expansive commercial, entertainment or hospitality endeavors rather than educational efforts.

Jennifer Eichstedt’s and Stephen Small’s *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* exhaustively examined the “strategic rhetorics” or “discursive strategies” used to identify the ways that historic plantation site interpretation avoids, rejects, and ameliorates historic narratives concerning slavery.² Their work descriptively details the presentation or elimination of these narratives with methodical criticism, identifying and cataloging the detailed language used in interpretation.³ However, the origin and implementation of such narratives is complicated, as they are conceived, edited, and enacted by many institutional staff members including owners, docents, and hospitality workers. Though Eichstedt and Small indicate that their research goals included an examination of museum industry operations as a component of their work, their scope limited findings to aspects of plantation landscapes and narratives observable during site visits.⁴ Eichstedt’s and Small’s work did not encompass or detail the bearing of sites’ leadership mechanisms or organizational systems on narratives. Their research examined an exhaustive array of

² Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 8.

³ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 3.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

plantations with pinpointed focus on the variety of presented narrative messages.

However, first-person observations only reveal aspects of the institution made visible to the public and fail to uncover management philosophies and operational methodologies.

This dissertation creates a qualitative, comparative study that examines data gathered from fifteen southern United States publicly-toured plantation sites during the National Science Foundation grant-funded Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes project (from here on referred to as the Transformation project), complemented by site visits, and additional primary research. This dissertation considers each site's adherence to or ignorance of public history best practices, such as shared authority, critical reflection, and equitable story telling in the creation and dissemination of the historical narrative. This is accomplished by considering the operational processes as detailed in the Transformation project data and showing how administrative processes manifest the "discursive strategies" discussed by Eichstedt and Small.⁵ Building upon the work of Eichstedt and Small, and a substantial body of critical literature, this examination of the Transformation project's data identifies the plans, ideas, and choices made by institutional administrations that encourage or avoid the employment of racialized narratives. When considered in this manner, ownership models, administrative methodology, and budgeting priorities reveal the leadership mechanisms and organizational frameworks by which these sites deal with history.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes

The Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes project began in 2014 with grant funding from the National Science Foundation.⁶ The project is a multi-university research effort conducted in collaboration with the RESET Initiative (Race, Ethnicity, and Social Equity in Tourism).⁷ Principal investigators include Dr. David L. Butler, Middle Tennessee State University, Dr. Derek H. Alderman, University of Tennessee – Knoxville, Dr. Perry L. Carter, Texas Tech University, Dr. Stephen P. Hanna, Mary Washington University, and Dr. Amy E. Potter, Louisiana State University.⁸ The investigators, each knowledgeable of historic plantation tourism, contacted site operators, inviting them to take part in the project. Participating sites gave the researchers access to their staff and visitors for interviews, conducted by principals, and students from each investigator's perspective universities. The Transformation project team collected survey data, created site and tour maps, transcripts of interviews conducted with site docents, management, and other staff, transcripts of tour audio materials, such as cell phone tours and orientation videos, transcripts of live programming performances, and observations of visitors recorded by project participants

⁶ National Science Foundation, "Award Abstract #1359780: Transformation of American Southern Commemorative Landscapes," Where Discoveries Begin, accessed April 11, 2018, https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1359780.

⁷ David L. Butler, Derek H. Alderman, Perry L. Carter, Stephen P. Hanna, Amy E. Potter, Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes, application for grant funding from the National Science Foundation, September 2013; Derek H. Alderman and Carol Kline, "Tourism Reset: Race, Ethnicity, and Social Equality in Tourism," Tourism RESET, March 3, 2015, accessed August 1, 2017, www.tourismreset.com.

⁸ Butler, et al., Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes, 7.

during tours. The official project instruments included staff interview questions, pre- and post-tour visitor interview questions, and visitor surveys. The project synthesized the inquiry data into reports presented to site owners, with recommendations that might support site marketing and interpretive efforts. At sites struggling with financial sustainability, owners and operators expressed excited desire for such information, valuing its potential to assist the site in gaining, or regaining, a foothold in the plantation tourism industry.

According to the grant application, the project aims to uncover “. . . the processes and politics of incorporating slavery into the built (material), textual (representative), and performative (bodily) aspects that can advance and significantly affect the production and consumption of public memories of the enslaved.”⁹ In this process, they identify and promote efforts that renegotiate racial interpretations at these sites, pulling focus from the plantocracy, toward a narrative that largely features contributions of African American actors. The study considers the interpretive products in terms of its memetic affect upon itself, repeating and building upon fictional or nostalgic themes for the benefit of entertainment. Lastly, their project considers the extent to that racialized narratives have been incorporated over time.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10-12.

Theoretical Framework

Some of the sites may be considered historic house *museums*, or *museums* generally, due to their obvious dedication to public education through exhibition.¹¹ Other places seem more like tourist attractions that explore some aspect of the past, whether factual or nostalgic, while offering hospitality services including restaurants, shops, and lodging. The Transformation project principals primarily refer to publicly tour plantation sites as *tourist plantations*, a term I adopt in this study. This term describes any southern historic home site that was formerly a commercial farm worked by enslaved people of African descent, but that is now toured by visitors. While the fifteen project sites vary in their commercial aims, they have been grouped in a sample for examination, with the same queries and investigative methods applied at each. Thus, the same term shall be used for these sites throughout this dissertation.

Tourist plantations also differ by region, commercial aims, organizational models, and interpretive philosophies. However, they all share a common history. Each publicly-toured plantation once enslaved people based on their race, exploiting their unpaid, forced labor. Without chattel slavery, the plantation's original owners could not have amassed the wealth that built the grand structures and purchased the objects visitors buy tickets to see. Consequently, whether tourist plantation owners/operators acknowledge it, slavery can be credited as a central money generator for successful plantation tourist

¹¹ Candace Forbes Bright, Derek H. Alderman, and David L. Butler, "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (2016), 1744.

businesses.¹² That these sites commodify history, interpreting their racially charged pasts sensitively or ignoring them, means that the products offered, staffing models used, and even training methods are all influenced or impacted by this difficult past.

As such, Eichstedt's and Small's discursive strategies, the terminology the authors use to discuss how tourist plantations neglect, deny, or incorporate the history of the enslaved, may then be linked or applied to the commercial endeavors of these sites. The "discursive strategies" include: "symbolic annihilation and erasure," "trivialization and deflection," "segmentation and marginalization of knowledge," and "relative incorporation."¹³ While their fieldwork extensively evaluated the tour process and tourist landscapes, Eichstedt and Small admit that their "fieldwork did not explore the workers' beliefs, attitudes, or ideologies" limiting insight into the personal motivations behind the interpretative patterns they observed.¹⁴ However, the Transformation project data allow deeper exploration into these motivating factors. While the Transformation project research aims to "contribute to the theorization of the transformation of racialized southern heritage landscapes," this dissertation work attempts to uncover the concatenation of personal and professional motivations behind the organizational decisions.¹⁵

The subjective insights into business practices, mentalities, as well as the private and unconscious tactics of plantation operators and employees invite analysis that breaks

¹² Bright, et al., "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery," 1756.

¹³ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 8-12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Butler, et al., *Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes*, 12.

down contributing factors to the sites' telling of racially balanced history. For example, an owner/operator interview that emphasizes the importance of funding extraneous capital products, such as a concert venue on the plantation site, over the preservation and interpretation of historic slave structures exemplifies "symbolic annihilation" of the site's history as an place of slaveholding.¹⁶ The theoretical framework of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" allow an analysis of tourist plantation business practices that uncovers the factors that inspire the tone and implementation of the sites' historic narratives.¹⁷

Research Methodology

This dissertation considers primary data gathered during the Transformation project, through site visits and tours, as well as extensive examination of articles written about the study's tourist plantation sample group. Of this data, the Transformation project staff and operator/owner interviews are the most informative data in this analysis. The interviews and surveys were thorough and consistent, resulting in 101 docent interviews, 36 interviews with site owners/operators, and 243 pre-tour visitor interviews.¹⁸

Project principals and their student research assistants digitally recorded interviews with plantation site visitors. Research assistants and contract workers

¹⁶ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 104-110.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸ Stephen Hanna, email message to author, January 6, 2019.

transcribed the interviews verbatim. While the interview process was consistent, the transcription process varied depending on recording quality or transcriber error. Because interviews were frequently conducted outdoors, background noises like wind, animals, children, or motor engines prevented the transcriber from understanding the speakers. Sometimes transcribers used electronic dictation services which resulted in homophones or other grammatical mistakes. Eventually, the Transformation project data collection will be housed at a public institution available for future research.¹⁹ However, at the time this dissertation was written, the data were not made public, precluding citations that indicate the current location of the collection.

All data produced by the grant-funded study are subject to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research standard applied in an effort to protect the subjects of study from any negative repercussions from their participation.²⁰ Thus, all interviews conducted will remain anonymous. Great effort has been made to protect the identities of participating interviewees, and therefore each interview will be redacted of any identifying information. Furthermore, in this dissertation interviewees are cited by date only, with no other identifying criteria. However, within the text, interviewees may be identified by role, plantation site, region, or a combination of these as long as the speaker's identity is still concealed.

Though the constraint of anonymity complicated citation, it fostered a friendly interview atmosphere, inspiring interviewees to reveal personal biases, mentalities,

¹⁹ Butler, et al., *Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes*, 14.

²⁰ "Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research," ICPSR, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/index.jsp>.

opinions, and emotions. The staff interviews run from minutes to hours in length, depending on the interviewer. Beginning with a set of twenty basic questions grouped by topic including “personal background, daily operations at the plantation, and philosophy on representing slavery,” the inquiry often reveals the owner’s education, personal affiliations, and racial biases.²¹ While questioning is consistent, interviews frequently stray off topic, inspiring the interviewees to discuss politics and personal beliefs, as well as financial information that impacts their work. These discussions illuminate valuable connections between mentality, biases, and narrative choices, that I use to show the personal or private influences driving operational decisions.

Following a thorough examination of the project data, I visited each Transformation project site in June 2018, taking tours and wandering the grounds of each place. The staff and management interview content was synthesized and weighed against observations made during fieldwork. Through the examination of data, on-site observations, and correlating “discursive strategies,” this research identifies the notions and understandings that guide and impact interpretive authors at historic sites and the “logic underlying their inquiries.”²²

Lastly, secondary sources including journal articles, press releases, newspaper articles, and web sites provided additional insight to the work done at many of the Transformation project sites. Primary interviews given to newspaper reporters provided

²¹ Butler, et al., *Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes*, 6.

²² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 8-12; Alexander Lyon Macfie, "Invitation to Historians," ed. Alun Munslow, in *Authoring the Past: Writing and Rethinking History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 166.

information not detailed in project interviews, discussing future interpretive projects, new exhibits, and recently implemented programs or training. Furthermore, publicly published resources allowed me to identify individuals at specific sites.

Dissertation Approach

Providing a firm footing for the analysis of data, the second chapter provides a literature review of historiographical and ideological sources that contextualize this work. Texts concerning the operational components of tourist plantations explore how each institution performs aspects of museum, tourism, and commercial business within their work. Therefore, texts regarding the work and ethical management standards for each of these industries will provide an understanding of the ideological frameworks governing plantation sites. Every tourist plantation may be considered a historic house museum, a subset of the larger museum industry. Therefore, works outlining the development of this heritage sector will help explain the impulse to preserve historic plantation houses, and to transform them into publicly toured museums and attractions. Lost Cause sympathies set the narrative tone at many southern plantation sites. Texts discussing the link between preservation, memory, and the Lost Cause will be explored. More recent writing about historic house museum methodology encourages the interpretation of servants and enslaved people at historic houses. These writings explain the storytelling opportunities available to museums in domestic spaces when focus is pulled away from wealthy

homeowners to include the many other people living and working at these houses.²³

Other work included examines the plantation landscape in an effort to redefine the meaning of these sites overall.

Eichstedt and Small argue that there is a “notable relationship between organizational structure and rhetorical strategies most commonly employed.”²⁴ Though they recognized this relationship, they stopped short of dissecting the sites operational devices to discover *how* each dictates the quality of historical site narrative.²⁵ Chapter three identifies similar organizational structures characterizing the project plantations, using interview data to describe the operational mechanisms and business philosophies that impact narrative production. Staff interviews provide a breadth of insight that allows a deeper, more detailed consideration of how organizational characteristics engender the appearance of the “discursive strategies.”²⁶ These characteristics apply to regions, site history, commercial endeavors, and local cultural trends. For example, Louisiana site owners rely heavily on the tourist board and local touring companies for marketing support, and most identify their sites as tourist attractions rather than museums. River Road sites impact one another greatly, marketing collaboratively as the Plantation Parade while simultaneously competing for tourist business. While some of these sites have neglected the history of the enslaved, Whitney Plantation directly addresses this history,

²³ Jennifer Pustz, *Voices from the Back Stairs: Interpreting Servants Lives at Historic House Museums* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 59.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-12.

recently inspiring competing sites to incorporate some information concerning slavery, resulting in “relative incorporation.”²⁷

Chapter three further considers sites by ownership and governance models. Eichstedt and Small differentiated public from private sites based on their funding sources and accountability to the public or government. However, the Transformation project data provides an entrée beyond these basic categorizations, and this chapter delves into the inner workings of each type of site, as discussed by site owner/operators and staff. These details link the decisions made by operators to daily staff implementation of management directives. For instance, a National Park Service employee interview explains the federal mandates that govern hiring and budget practices. An NPS employee at Appomattox Plantation explained, “We are also mindful of hiring veterans . . . When the president signed that into law . . . veterans certainly weren't getting a shake. I can almost guarantee when we put a job out . . . the top ten to twenty names are going to have veteran's preference.”²⁸ That means that legislation dictating NPS hiring standards might favor a veteran candidate over a civilian applicant. On the other end of the spectrum, county-owned plantation sites like Meadow Farm advertise doctent job postings, identifying them as “Office Assistant Three,” because the county government failed to create a job category for museum work.²⁹ During his/her interview, a Meadow Farm staffer explains that qualified applicants might be confused or repelled by the posting

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁸ Interview with staffer, October 7, 2016.

²⁹ Interview with staffer, July 17, 2016.

title, since office assistant and docent positions are not the same. If such impositions preclude the hiring of trained museum professionals, the site tour might lack critical research and sensitive interpretation necessary to avoid the trivialization of contributions made by those previously enslaved at the site.³⁰

Staff and owners of family owned and single owner sites, also characterized in chapter three, sometimes operate in service to family or personal legacy. Rather than providing a purely professional environment, family-owned sites tend to reinforce a friendly, “familial” working atmosphere. Within this work environment, owners may encourage staff to stay for many years, promoting them beyond their professional competence. For instance, a manager working for a family owned site for over thirty years attributed his/her multiple promotions, to availability rather than professional qualification, “As I started working more and more here, I eventually came into the management position.”³¹ As a closed shop the family not only runs the place, but they occupy the site, elevating their status to family as authority, family as history, family as tour subject, thus trivializing the enslaved at the family site.

While Eichstedt’s and Small’s research relied completely on observations of docents during tours, interviews provide first person accounts, offering insight into docent behavior, demographics, and beliefs. To make up for this deficit, Transformation project interviews provide great detail into the inner workings of tourist plantation docents. Due to the large number of interpretive guides employed at tourist plantations,

³⁰ Site visit, June 2018.

³¹ Interview with staffer, July 14, 2016.

the majority of staff interviews were conducted with docents. The fourth chapter examines staffing structures at tourist plantations, looking for correlations between the absence of racialized history and incomplete staffing complements. These correlations reflect that sites who neglect to hire specialized educational or curatorial employees are more likely to demonstrate Eichstedt's and Small's discursive strategies. From over-worked, multitasking skeleton crews to large, task-specific departments and positions, the size and complement of plantation site staff directly impacts all aspects of the business, both commercial and interpretive.

During interviews, owners, curators, and docent staff alike all discussed their impetus for coming to work at a tourist plantation. While some of the staff interviewed were educated with higher degrees in public history and museum studies, others were drawn because of romantic nostalgia, or hobbyist interest in the past. By examining admitted personal biases, interests, and fears, the "discursive strategies" may be linked to personal characteristics disclosed in employee interviews.³² Some interviewees revel in the nostalgic aspects of the plantations, seemingly in an effort to protect themselves from the horrors they fear occurred at the site. Interviews also detail hiring processes, preferences, and tendencies. Interviewees complain of high docent turnover, and difficulty finding good staff, though few sites conduct performance reviews, or provide adequate pay or continued training following initial orientation. Therefore, this chapter considers the weighty responsibility of interpreting difficult, conflicted history as the least valued employees at the site.

³² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 10.

Chapter five looks at the interpretive and commercial uses of objects and structures at tourist plantation sites. While Eichstedt and Small describe how sites use collections and architecture to signal antebellum slaveholding wealth, this chapter describes the motivations behind curatorial directives.³³ At one plantation, the curator's power is undermined frequently when curatorial choices, no matter how historically accurate, stray from the site owner's nostalgic vision.³⁴ Such obstruction catalyzes narrative confusion, encouraging the trivialization or annihilation of accomplishments by the formerly enslaved.³⁵

The relegation of racial narratives to unsupervised secondary spaces, such as basements, kitchens, and other outbuildings, reflect low interpretive priority. When management apportions staffing budgets toward the big house, rather than outbuildings, it is obvious which are the less-precious of the two spaces.³⁶ While objects valued by connoisseurs garner conservation and research, "slave" objects sit in windowless quarters, exposed to the elements. Interviews discuss ongoing upkeep of the main plantation house, prioritized over spaces inhabited by the enslaved, potentially resulting in the eventual disappearance of these slave houses and work spaces.

The structures at the plantation sites in the Transformation project include functional or commercial buildings, erected purely for visitor entertainment and profit. This chapter considers the enormous commercial potential and financial burden of

³³ Ibid., 72-89.

³⁴ Interview with owner, March 2015.

³⁵ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 81-82.

³⁶ Ibid., 67.

pleasure gardens at plantation sites. Fantasy gardens serve as backdrops that romanticize the plantation landscape, ameliorate harsh history, attract potential wedding rentals, while redirecting potential staffing, education, and preservation funding elsewhere. The promotion and funding of commercial and entertainment-oriented projects at tourist plantations reflects the prioritization of entertainment over education or commemoration. Through such observations, this chapter illustrates how pleasure gardens, concert venues, wedding rentals, and restaurants at tourist plantations all obfuscate the central role slavery plays at these sites.

The final chapter makes practical recommendations to help plantation sites better suit the needs and desires of their audiences. Kristin L. Gallas' and James De Wolf Perry's *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, provides the framework for these recommendations.³⁷ Their work suggest embedding site history within a broad geographic and temporal context, representing perspectives of a variety of historical actors, interweaving stories of African American experiences into overall site narratives. Because racialized narratives are central to tourist plantation interpretations, staff and visitor conception of race must be examined. The chapter discusses consultant facilitated workshops and trainings for all levels of staff and governance, in order to empathetically address the guilt and shame associated with racial history. The chapter will look at inventive community programing at historic plantation sites like Stagville Plantation that

³⁷ Kris Gallas and James DeWolf. Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2015).

celebrate African American foodways and history.³⁸ Such programs will be shown as educational, but also entertaining and way to bring local community together through shared interests and historically accurate culinary novelty.

The final chapter makes recommendations for plantation sites to create a mutually supportive relationship with the regional community. Transformation project interviews reflect divergence within staff's and owners' understanding of the site history, but more importantly, the essential purpose for conducting tourist plantation businesses. Again, as each of these sites share a past that largely features chattel slavery, site owners, staff, and governors must refuse to blindly commodify the past suffering and horror of the plantation landscape, to embrace the nuanced history and experiences of all the historical actors who lived at the site. This chapter discusses the necessity of continued training, education, and evaluation in order to adequately address and interpret this fundamental history. Therefore, recommendations propose a variety of exercises, projects, and programs implemented successfully at tourist plantations that enfold and celebrate this history, thwarting the potential for the appearance of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" at plantation sites.³⁹

³⁸ Randall Kenan, December/January 2014, and Julia Reed, "Michael Twitty: The Antebellum Chef – Garden Gun," *Garden & Gun*, accessed August 01, 2017, http://gardenandgun.com/feature/michael-twitty-the-antebellum-chef/?utm_source=facebookutm_medium=socialmediautm_campaign=May2017_facebook.

³⁹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 10.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF INTERPRETIVE PRACTICES

Throughout the twentieth century, southern tourism commissions advertised nostalgic tropes of “moonlight and magnolias” to promote visitation at plantation museums and other southern heritage sites.¹ In response, some academic historians labored to reverse romanticized propaganda, emphasizing and detailing the prime historical significance of these places, including the atrocities of chattel slavery. At the intersection of these competing public influences, tourist plantations demonstrate the application and impact of these ideas, moderated by regional culture, memory, and tourist economy. Because tourist plantation operations span many realms, this chapter divides literature review into three sections: the inception and development of preservation associations and historic house tourism; memory, history and narrative authority; and interpreting slavery at historic sites.

Historic House Tourism and Preservation in the Southern United States

Preservationists began transforming southern plantations from agricultural enterprises into tourist sites in 1860 when the Mount Vernon Ladies Association

¹ Karen L. Cox, “The South and Mass Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (August 2009), 677-690.

preserved and interpreted George Washington's Mount Vernon for the public.² Patricia West argues that Mount Vernon's preservation and interpretation traditionalized the incorporation of politicized history within historic house museums.³ Using grass roots fundraising efforts, preservation groups restored historic estates, creating interpretive narratives that reflected the cultural ideals of their time, imposing accepted class, gender, and racial hierarchies upon historic narratives.⁴ Mount Vernon and other historic house museums proved useful as a platform to instigate "public commentary controlled by disenfranchised though politically engaged women."⁵ Inspired by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the United Daughters of the Confederacy used preservation to "vindicate" ancestors, through the preservation of historic sites like the Capitol of the Confederacy.⁶ These sites are entrenched with symbols of white supremacy as they celebrate Confederate soldiers as valorous heroes who honorably sacrificed themselves in battle. Thus Cox argues, the Lost Cause legacy gained legitimacy and popularity through its dominance of the historic southern landscape.

Historians such as James Lindgren, detailing the development of historic preservation associations in the early twentieth century, write that these groups attracted

² *George Washington's Mount Vernon Official Guidebook*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen A. McLeod (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016).

³ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of Americas House Museums* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁴ West, *Domesticating History*, 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶ Karen L. Cox, *Dixies Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (University Press of Florida, 2003).

members drawn to a romantic historical ideal.⁷ Groups including the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, and Charleston's Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings saved endangered historical structures that represented and reinforced the regional significance of particular historical actors and families. SPNEA's and APVA's emphasis on decorative arts and architectural history inspired the growth of American material culture research. However, the connoisseurship often focused on *fine* art and objects, disregarding the historically significant contributions of African American builders and craftsmen, reasserting the historical importance and ingenuity of white homeowners. Similarly, Anders Greenspan writes that southern preservation projects touted the architectural significance of endangered historical structures, while celebrating "genteel culture against a variety of changes in the post-civil war era."⁸

No historical preservation or interpretive project has received as much attention, notoriety, and criticism as Colonial Williamsburg. Greenspan writes that the powerful influence of administrators, donors, and special interest groups governed the tone and development of its preservation, interpretation, and visitor experience.⁹ Financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and organized by W.A.R. Goodwin, Colonial Williamsburg became a

⁷ West, *Domesticating History*, 48; James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2000); Sidney R. Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past, Shaping Its Future: The Life and Times of Susan Pringle Frost* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994); James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸ Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Eighteenth-century Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 17.

⁹ Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*.

beacon of patriotic reverence to educate Americans about the “unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good.”¹⁰ Through the restoration of historic structures, the recreated eighteenth century village heralded the treatment of historic homes as tangible, authentic manifestations of the past, albeit a past sanitized of slavery.¹¹ By the 1960s, the Foundation’s research focus turned to the enslaved in Williamsburg, with Thad W. Tate Jr.’s work *The Negro in Eighteenth-century Williamsburg* prepared for Colonial Williamsburg’s Research Department.¹² The comprehensive study of primary documents relating to enslaved Virginians, casts the enslaved within passive terms, without agency or autonomy. The enslaved are contextualized as belonging to and serving white people, giving minimal or no personal perspective.

Though Tate found that “every part of the civilization of colonial Virginia bore the impress of slavery,” until the late twentieth century, the restored town of Colonial Williamsburg neglected to accordingly reflect their presence.¹³ This neglect continued as almost twenty years after Tate published his research, Carroll Van West and Mary S. Hoffschwelle write that Colonial Williamsburg still failed to sufficiently portray African Americans, poor white people, and women.¹⁴ The authors indicate that Colonial

¹⁰ Carroll Van West and Mary S. Hoffschwelle, “Slumbering on Its Old Foundations’: Interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg,” *Southwest Atlantic Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 161.

¹¹ West and Hoffschwelle, “Slumbering on Its Old Foundations’: Interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg,” *Southwest Atlantic Quarterly*, 83, no. 2 (Spring 1984); Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 2002); Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia’s Eighteenth-century Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹² Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965), 180.

¹³ Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-century Williamsburg*.

¹⁴ West and Hoffschwelle, “Slumbering on Its Old Foundations,” 158-160.

Williamsburg interwove elitist narratives so tightly into all aspects of narrative presentation, little space remained for ordinary, or “other” people.¹⁵ Alternatively though the site was segregated until the 1960s, Ywone Edwards-Ingram argues that African American employees interpreting coachmen, kitchen attendants, and crafts demonstrators, symbolically represented the enslaved to the visiting public, echoing the important roles played by their historical counterparts in service to white elites. Edwards Ingram argues that from its opening through the 1970s, African Americans were vital to Colonial Williamsburg’s operations, performing jobs in “landscaping, construction and maintenance, culinary and hospitality, and at exhibition buildings, as well as in archaeological work.”¹⁶¹⁷

In 1990, Eric Gable’s and Richard Handler’s ethnographic study *New History at an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* looked into the site’s interpretation once more, making important observations concerning the rapid expansion of Colonial Williamsburg’s commercial endeavors. Gable and Handler write that the commercial and organizational growth of the place made balancing historic interpretation and hospitality difficult. They argue that the commercialization of the town and its surroundings drew funding and focus from interpretive aims. Furthermore, Colonial Williamsburg was yet to fully incorporate “new characters and topics.”¹⁸ Rather, site

¹⁵ Ibid., 173.

¹⁶ Ywone Edwards-Ingram, "Before 1979: African American Coachmen, Visibility, and Representation at Colonial Williamsburg," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (February 2014): 13.

¹⁷ Edwards-Ingram, “Before 1979,” 21, 18.

¹⁸ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 2002), 221.

narratives continued to operate as “vehicles for an uncritical retailing of some old American myths and dreams . . . the drama of consumer desire, the wisdom of progress . . . the primitiveness of the past.”¹⁹ Cary Carson writes that Handler and Gable’s research coincided with the implementation of an inclusive, interpretive master plan *Becoming Americans: Our Struggle to Be Both Free and Equal*.²⁰ While the “new characters” had been planned and implemented, Carson argued that the inclusion of white, enslaved, and Native people within narratives failed to reach visitors with the same interpretive bravado as that of the “patriot.”²¹ However Carson explains, no matter how well written, carefully implemented, or well meaning, if staff rejects new narratives either willfully or passively refusing to incorporate them, they fail. Even after training, staff “are strongly inclined to revert to the same methods and messages that have served them well in the past.”²²

The difficulty expanding historic house narratives and tour experiences beyond wealth and domestic grandeur has inspired much research. In Jessica Foy Donnelly’s collection *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, essays encourage the interpretation of ordinary people, rather than the elite, drawing interpretive themes from scholarship as well as community consultation, in the interpretation of the *entire* residential landscape.²³ At tourist plantations, interpreting the daily activities of the enslaved black majority relies

¹⁹ Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 221.

²⁰ Cary Carson, "Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums," *The Public Historian* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1998):41.

²¹ Carson, "Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums," 36.

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

²³ Jessica Foy Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

on exhibition spaces beyond the big house, and the essayists suggest such interpretive emphasis helps reflect the actual residential demographics. Similarly, Jennifer Putsz advocates the implementation of social history at house museums to gain the attention of a broader audience in addition to reflecting the household appropriately.²⁴ Putsz argues that most visitors can more readily relate to the ordinary lives of servants, than the experiences of wealthy homeowners.

Academic surveys of historic plantation landscapes further encourage the expansion of interpretive capacities of tourist plantations, spanning beyond the main mansion house into surrounding structures and to the “fugitive landscape.”²⁵ John Michael Vlach’s perennially cited *Back of the Big House*, details the utility and residential structures used by enslaved people on the plantation.²⁶ Likewise, Clifton Ellis’ and Rebecca Ginsburg’s 2010 essay collection *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery* provides an encyclopedic consideration of southern plantation landscapes.²⁷ Dell Upton’s included essay, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia,” looks at racialized plantation spaces.²⁸ Beyond work and utility areas, Upton identified social spaces, away from the

²⁴ Putsz, *Voices from the Back Stairs*, 33.

²⁵ Rebecca Ginsburg, “Escaping Through a Black Landscape,” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

²⁶ John Michael Vlach, *Back Of The Big House: The Architecture Of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993).

²⁷ Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, ed., *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010).

²⁸ Dell Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia (1985)” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 121-140.

slaveholder's surveillance where the enslaved gathered for private moments.²⁹ This discovery bolsters Edward Chappell's suggestion that interpreting the plantation landscape requires examination of multiple historical perspectives and methods. He writes, "No single source of evidence tells us all we want to know about the spectrum of living conditions and typicality, or reasons for change," but the reliance on material culture in addition to written resources combined, "suggest forces and processes that the historian working only with documents is likely to overlook."³⁰

Memory, History, and Narrative Authority

At southern history sites, interpretive staff, may be highly influenced by personal beliefs and memories, and other subconscious associations with the character of *southernness* or nostalgia, an ideological mode that looms largely over southern heritage production. W. Fitzhugh Brundage asserts that even the term *southerner*, and therefore southernness, is applied only to white people. Brundage affirms that "claims to material resources, political power, and moral high ground are at the center of contemporary debates over the South's history."³¹ Karen L. Cox builds upon this work, exploring the ways twentieth century popular culture selectively co-opted southern heritage, inventing

²⁹ Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia (1985)," 121-140.

³⁰ Edward Chappell, "Museums and American Slavery," ed. Theresa A. Singleton, in *"I, Too, Am America": Archaeological Studies of African-American Life*, 240-258 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 241.

³¹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 318.

a romantic, nostalgic version of the past.³² Advertisers used this vision to sell products from films to household goods, simultaneously assuaging the difficulty some southern white people had when faced with the rapid technological and economic progress of the twentieth century. The nostalgic vision Cox identifies exemplifies current tourist plantations marketing language that conjures visions of luxury and romance to supplant images of slavery and violence of the historic plantation landscape.³³

Historic sites, such as tourist plantations, Confederate monuments, and museums represent embedded messages that ever-presently advertise the intent of their creators. In fact, Tony Bennett writes that the “cultural governors” that build these institutions, used them as potent tools to exert social power and didactic authority.³⁴ Thus, “displays of power” showcase the evolving progress of “great men, great wealth, or great deeds,” with particular attention paid to “victors in the marketplace, or [white] man as the crown of creation.”³⁵ Certainly, this interpretive framework has dominated themes at many tourist plantations, whose “great men” may include both the *original* and current property owners. Therefore, whether conceived by the site owner, curator, or descendant community, the narrative’s author dictates story based on their own historical

³² Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

³³ Candace Forbes Bright, Derek H. Alderman, and David L. Butler, "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (2016); Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 89-90; David L. Butler, "Whitewashing Plantations," *International Journal of Hospitality Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3-4 (2001): 163-75.

³⁴ Tony Bennett, *Pasts beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 28.

³⁵ Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3; Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery* 4; Tony Bennett, *Pasts beyond Memory*, 3.

understanding, personal beliefs, and memory.³⁶ Patricia Mooney-Melvin notes the inevitable influence of memory and belief upon staff, preventing objectivity, and reinforcing age-old hegemonic ideals. She writes that in rejection of outdated “displays of power,” practitioners “need to be aware of how our value systems and frames of reference impinge upon our focus as we participate in any particular interpretive situation.”³⁷ Interpreting contentious history requires awareness of personal biases and sensitive professionalism. In the case of family-owned plantation sites however, the careful culling of *unpalatable* history protects the owning family’s reputation to the detriment of the broader history of the site. Influential memory theorist Michael Kammen identifies this impulse as the “American inclination, to depoliticize the past in order to minimize the memories (and causes) of conflict.”³⁸

The refusal to interpret the experiences of the enslaved for the sake of profit demonstrates how present choices frame our understanding of the past.³⁹ According to Alun Munslow, history is “present-oriented” in that we perceive preceding people and events, commenting on the “relationship between the past and its traces, and the manner in which we extract meaning from them.”⁴⁰ As enacted by the owner, manager, and staff, the function of the place dictates the function of the history, potentially to reinforce

³⁶ Richard Sandell, *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2006), 18-21.

³⁷ Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Harnessing the Romance of the Past: Preservation, Tourism, and History," *The Public Historian* 13, no. 2 (1991): 13, doi:10.2307/3378421.

³⁸ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Division of Random House, 1992), 707.

³⁹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 3 (1995): 370; Gallas and DeWolf. Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, 2-4.

⁴⁰ Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

romantic ideals. Reiko Hillyer asserts that administrative choices, themselves historical performances, emphasize a specific retrospective while claiming authority.⁴¹ However, tourist plantation interpretations that facilitate dialogue on race and other current issues, have the power to provide valuable social forums for reunification and healing. Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen write, “The most powerful meanings of the past come out of the dialogue between the past and the present, out of the way the past can be used to answer pressing current-day questions about relationships, identity, immortality, and agency.”⁴²

Plantation owners/operators skillfully invoke nostalgia to misdirect visitors, especially at sites where the reputation of the white owner-family’s lineage is at stake, and at “plantation chic” sites who promote the hospitality of plantation life without disclosing its cost.⁴³ Nigel Worden and Elizabeth van Heyningen assert, nostalgic tropes obviate unpleasant facts, memories, and associations that would otherwise challenge tourists’ attempts at pleasure seeking without challenge to their “sense of identity and community.”⁴⁴ Michael Kammen notes nostalgia’s most likely appearance, “in times of

⁴¹ Hillyer, Reiko. "Relics of Reconciliation: The Confederate Museum and Civil War Memory in the New South." *The Public Historian* 33, no. 4 (2011): 38.

⁴² Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 178.

⁴³ Jessica Adams, "Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture," *Cultural Critique*, no. 42 (1999): 166; Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 129.

⁴⁴ Worden, Nigel, and Elizabeth Van Heyningen. "Signs of the Times: Tourism and Public History at Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (Signes Des Temps: Le Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Entre Tourisme et Histoire Pour le Public)." *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 36, no. 141/142 (1996): 216; Kathleen Newland and Carylanna Taylor, *Heritage Tourism and Nostalgia Trade: A Diaspora Niche in the Development Landscape*, report no. September 2010, Diasporas Development Policy Project, Migration Policy Institute (Washington, DC), 5.

transition, in periods of cultural anxiety, or when a society feels a strong sense of discontinuity with its past.”⁴⁵ Transformation project interviews reflect the power of nostalgia, and its sanitizing “mode of remembrance,” which Ewa A. Adamkiewicz describes as “celebrating a specific time and place in history by erasing narratives of racism.”⁴⁶ She notes how the heavy-handed white southern nostalgia seemingly holds the black narrative for ransom, particularly at Louisiana River Road sites.⁴⁷ In her examination of nostalgic marketing language, Patricia Mooney Melvin observed the proliferation of historic site advertisements encouraging visitors to step back in time.⁴⁸ However, that nostalgic journey takes visitors to an antebellum landscape *without* slavery, creating a *new* product, disparate from documented history, which approximating the past through careful editing, rather than recreation or remembrance.⁴⁹

In addition to memory studies, a growing body of literature concerning museums and equity explore the interpretive representations of people, particularly those who have been marginalized or misrepresented. Richard Sandell’s essay collection *Museums, Society, and Inequality* considers how institutions might address public needs by reflecting community identity through exhibits, programs, and branding.⁵⁰ In this work,

⁴⁵ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Division of Random House, 1992), 618.

⁴⁶ Ewa A. Adamkiewicz, "White Nostalgia: The Absence of Slavery and the Commodification of White Plantation Nostalgia," *As Peers*, 2016, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://www.aspeers.com/sites/default/files/pdf/adamkiewicz.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Mooney-Melvin, “Harnessing the Romance of the Past,” 36; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 3 (1995): 370-371.

⁴⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," 370.

⁵⁰ Richard Sandell, *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Sandell discusses the formation of International Coalition of Historic Sites of Conscience, whose program, Dialogue on Difficult History is being implemented at Bacon's Castle. In complement, Sandell's *Museum, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* analyzes the museum's role in facilitating public dialogues in order to inspire social change.⁵¹ While Stephen Weil's *Making Museums Matter*, explores competing ideas surrounding the social value of museums. The text proposes that museums, as inherently benevolent organizations, align themselves with education and human rights. Another argument suggests that such idealism contradicts the didactic purpose of museum institutions. However, Weil asserts the first theory is faulty "romanticism," wherein any educational presentation, realistic or philosophical, may be beneficial to the museum's community.⁵²

Interpreting Slavery at Historic Sites

In the last twenty years, public historians have written studies concerning the interpretation of slavery at historic sites. The essay collection *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* explores the painful nature of presenting racialized histories, detailing case studies at institutions throughout the United States. Within the collection, Lois E. Horton's essay "Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemmings, and the Uncomfortable Conversation about Slavery" discusses the

⁵¹ Richard Sandell, *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵² Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2006), 101-104.

controversy of interpreting the relationship between Jefferson and Hemmings at Monticello.⁵³ The public and academics alike hotly contested the meaning and details of their relationship before eventually accepting their familial entwinement. Julie Rose's 2006 dissertation titled *Rethinking Representations of Slave Life at Historical Plantation Museums: Towards a Commemorative Museum Pedagogy* constructs a that recommends using memory and emotion to process the erasure of the enslaved from the site story.⁵⁴ Rose found that docents' conscious acknowledgement of the erasure and mourning of the loss transformed perspectives. Humanistic stories of loss and triumph replaced worn plantation site tropes in narrative tours and programs. Antoinette Jackson's *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites* argues for site interpretations that emphasize the individuality of experiences of the enslaved and free through storytelling; stories change from person to person, and time to time. Therefore, sites like the Gullah–Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor that interpret the diaspora, should celebrate the vibrance and differences of people, rather than a singular, African American experience.⁵⁵ Through her across the low country South, Jackson works with community stake-holders composing interpretive themes that reflect individualism and regionalism. The essay collection *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* edited by Kris Gallas and James DeWolf Perry provides thoughtful recommendations for

⁵³ Lois E. Horton, "Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemmings, and the Uncomfortable Conversation about Slavery," ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ Rose, Julia Anne, "Rethinking Representations of Slave Life at Historical Plantation Museums: Towards a Commemorative Museum Pedagogy." PhD diss., 2006.

⁵⁵ Antoinette T. Jackson, *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites* (Walnut Creek: Routledge, 2012), 135-136.

sites that deal with the history of enslavement who are facing the difficulties of aligning institutional and interpretive goals, that address their communities.⁵⁶ Each written by museum professionals and historians, these works provide practical suggestions to benefit sites in their interpretation of racialized history.

In addition to literature authored by public historians, academic geographers, including the Transformation project principals, have made prolific and often-cited contributions to work concerning racialized history and tourist plantations. Works by E. Arnold Modlin, Jr. discuss plantation house tours, examining the tour process, the tour guide language, and the mythic miscomprehensions tour guides perpetuate.⁵⁷ David Butler's 2001 article "Whitewashing Plantations" examines the use of language in tourist plantation marketing materials, like travel brochures.⁵⁸ The work compares how often brochure copy references the slaveholder to appearances of references to enslaved people.⁵⁹ Butler links marketing language to the ownership and profit model of each place. Building on the 2001 study, Butler collaborated with Candace Forbes Bright, and Transformation project principal Derek H. Alderman, for the 2018 article "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship." This work examines the

⁵⁶ Gallas and DeWolf. Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*.

⁵⁷ E. Arnold Modlin Jr., "Tales Told on the Tour: Mythic Representations of Slavery by Docents at North Carolina Plantation Museums," *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008); E. Arnold Modlin, Jr., "Representing Slavery at Plantation-House Museums in the U.S. South: A Dynamic Spatial Process," *Historical Geography* 39 (2011); E. Arnold Modlin, Derek H. Alderman, and Glenn W. Gentry, "Tour Guides as Creators of Empathy: The Role of Affective Inequality in Marginalizing the Enslaved at Plantation House Museums," *Tourist Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011).

⁵⁸ David L. Butler, "Whitewashing Plantations," *International Journal of Hospitality Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3-4 (2001).

⁵⁹ Butler, "Whitewashing Plantations," 168.

mentalities of plantation owner/operators, their work as “memorial entrepreneurs,” and the commodification of plantation history.⁶⁰

Eichstedt and Small

Written in 2002 Jennifer Eichstedt’s and Steven Small’s *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* has been cited in countless studies of plantations and other southern heritage sites.⁶¹ Their comparative sociological study was groundbreaking and encyclopedic in its examination of the interpretation of slavery and racialized history at one hundred and twenty-two tourist plantations in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana.⁶² Eichstedt and Small’s work uncovered the ways that objects, places, tour scripts, and docent behavior influenced racialized storytelling. According to the authors, their work proposes a “systematic analysis of the strategic rhetorics,” that represent and promote “a racialized regime of representation that valorizes the white elite of the preemancipation South, while generally erasing or minimizing the experiences of enslaved African Americans.”⁶³

When the tour narratives explicitly detail the importance of the experiences of the white slaveholding family without ever mentioning slavery or enslaved residents, the

⁶⁰ Candace Forbes Bright, Derek H. Alderman, and David L. Butler, "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (2016): 1757-1758.

⁶¹ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

⁶² *Ibid.* 8-10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

enslaved have been *symbolically annihilated*, or *erased* from the historical picture.⁶⁴ Annihilation occurs when tour narratives present the enslaved “in minimal or perfunctory ways.”⁶⁵ Most commonly, interpreters use “universalizing” language that suggests a singular historical experience for all people living at the site.⁶⁶ For example, upon tour visitors entering the historic house, guides might say, “everyone was welcome here,” though the welcome was only extended to white visitors.⁶⁷ Though at most Transformation project sites the enslaved population made up the majority of people living and working there, the black majority does not figure into the thematic representation of the past. Whether the exclusion of enslaved people is unconscious or purposeful, this rhetoric was evidenced at 53 percent of the Transformation project sites.⁶⁸ One of these sites, Berkeley Plantation was included in Eichstedt’s and Small’s discussion of annihilation and erasure. Of Berkeley, the authors described the orientation video that details the “famous inhabitants and visitors to the plantation,” whereas tour themes stressed the luxury of the furniture and architecture, and the lack of “any meaningful discussion of the institution of slavery.”⁶⁹ Though their work was conducted at the turn of the twenty-first century, a 2018 tour proved there has been no progress to correct these issues. Through this dissertation research however, potential institutional

⁶⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 147.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁸ Site visits June 2018.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 110.

impetus for such deletions emerge. A single-owner model with a staff exhibiting limited training in academic history prevents appropriate tour interpretation.⁷⁰

Trivialization and *deflection* are identified as the belittling of the role of the enslaved through tour narratives that describe enslavement as “not that bad” and beneficial for “loyal” slaves.⁷¹ Trivialization appeared at 73 percent of Transformation project sites. With this strategy, the horrors of slavery are ameliorated through discussions of good treatment of the enslaved, or the necessity of the master’s care to their wellbeing.⁷² This strategy juxtaposes the white slaveholders’ “valor” with the dishonorable state of enslavement, a theme apparent at single owner sites like Houmas House.⁷³ In the implementation of this strategy, the importance of the historical owner is elevated, thereby elevating his proxy the current owner. The most pervasive appearance of this strategy occurs when the historical white residents are portrayed as having manifested their “own destiny from the sweat of their own brow,” rather than backs of enslaved workers.⁷⁴ This strategy appears in marketing language, particularly at sites that still operate as working farms, or those owned by descendants of the original owners.

The Transformation project site Meadow Farm is included as an example of sites employing trivialization in *Representations of Slavery*. Within both the author’s

⁷⁰ Site visit June 2018; “Berkeley Plantation | Home,” Berkeley Plantation, 2019, accessed March 1, 2019, <http://www.berkeleyplantation.com/>.

⁷¹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 147.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 149-150.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 159; Site visit, June 2018; “Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans,” Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

⁷⁴ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 165.

examination and a recent visit, the only mention of slavery was a brief nod to Gabriel's Rebellion. This story tells how two slaves betrayed the confidence of neighboring slaves who were planning a revolt, telling the slaveholder of the plan. In this representation of this story, the enslaved men prove their loyalty and cooperation to their enslaver.⁷⁵ In my investigation of Meadow Farm, I found that the managing interpretive staff has an off-site office that does not regularly oversee tours. Therefore, the regular, on-site docent staff may take advantage of the freedom to discuss history in whatever terms they choose.

The *segmentation and marginalization of knowledge* is most typically indicated by tours that separate the history of enslaved people from that of the white slave owning family, which is often referred to as the “‘regular’ or ‘normal’” tour by site staff.⁷⁶ As the authors point out, the benefit of these tours is the dedicated interpretation to the lives of the enslaved, their families and lifeways. However, historically the lives of the white family and the enslaved were not completely separate, but intertwined through service, plantation production, and potentially emotion as well. Not only are the stories separated, but artifacts assigned to each racial story are presented differently. While the slaveholder spaces remain clean and climate controlled, dusty, open-air slave spaces that exhibit utilitarian objects show neglect, downgrading their importance to the site's story. Furthermore, Eichstedt and Small point out that separating the tour forces many visitors choose that narrative upon that to spend their time and money.⁷⁷ If, as Transformation

⁷⁵ Ibid., 153; Site visit, June 2018.

⁷⁶ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 171.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 199.

project interviews illuminate, the separate “slavery tour” is not marketed properly, or runs on a separate schedule, visitors are furthered discouraged from exploring the lesser-advertised tour product.

At sites that employ *relative incorporation*, information concerning the experiences of the enslaved appear throughout the site sporadically, but not interwoven completely into the site narrative. These representations might provide insight into personal or emotional worlds, and clearly assign the master-enslaver’s part in the denigration of humanity in exchange for his family’s leisure. Labeling the head of the household as a slaveowner makes the hegemony imposed by the white plantation owning family explicit.⁷⁸ Recent changes at Oak Alley include the relative incorporation of slavery into the house tour. Cases display artifacts related to white and black plantation residents’ side by side, and in each room of the house guides discuss how enslaved people and the slave owning family used the spaces. The implementation of these changes relied on educating all site staff and resulted in several docent resignations.⁷⁹

The conflict from Lost Cause romance and historical reality continues to play out at many tourist plantations. In an effort to contribute to the academic literature that speaks to this struggle, this work uncovers systemic interpretive challenges faced by plantation staff. Furthermore, this work identifies the institutional mechanisms that impact the accuracy and success of interpretive narratives.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 203-205.

⁷⁹ Site visit, June 2018.

CHAPTER THREE: REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION, OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS MODELS OF TOURIST PLANTATIONS

The tourist plantations examined in the Transformation project study may be grouped by multiple categorical criteria, each of which influence the site's production of narrative history. Geographic location divides the fifteen sites into three regional groupings: the southern Louisiana River Road Region, the Charleston area along the Ashley River in South Carolina, and the James River region in Chesapeake Virginia. Site governance further divides the sites into those owned by the public, operated by federal or county governments, or privately operated by individuals, families, commercial entities, charitable foundations, or a combination of these. The funding models of the sites divide into non-profit, for-profit, or for-profit entities with a non-profit component, with both components administering aspects of site interests, assets, and funding. Each of the categories link to personal and professional attitudes that impact historical narrative creation and commercial standards at each site. Further, they correlate to the manifestation of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" concerning the representation of slavery at each site.¹ The study of such categorical characteristics assigned to each Transformation project site, invite further investigation into the organizational and regional power structures that dictate storytelling styles.

¹ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 10.

Regional Characteristics of Tourist Plantation Business

The geographic regions of this study's sites vary in history, including the regional evolution of slavery and the plantation economy, influencing the interpretive themes in each region and characterizing regional tourist businesses. In this way, regional history and its presentation at tourist plantations is "synecdochic of an entire region, summing up its value system and constructing its appeal, which is based on a certain sensual quality of place," packaged and marketed to potential tourists.² The language used by tourist boards and convention bureaus to market these sites to potential visitors is crucial to understanding public perception of their historical importance and purpose. Further, the examination of Transformation project plantations by region reveals patterns in attitude toward both commerce and history, influencing economic and educational drivers at these historic sites.

Louisiana

The commingling of French, African, Native, and Spanish people created the unique creolized culture of Louisiana.³ Native American peoples, including the Chitimacha, Muskogee, and Natchez tribes, inhabited the southern Louisiana area for

² Jessica Adams, "Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture," *Cultural Critique*, no. 42 (1999): 166; Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 170.

³ Gwendolin Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

Table 1 Instances of “discursive strategies” as observed during June 2018 site visits⁴

Plantation	State	Symbolic Annihilation	Trivialization/Deflection	Segregation	In-Between	Relative Incorporation	Black-Centric Interpretation
Whitney Plantation	Louisiana						1
Laura Plantation	Louisiana				1	1	
Houmas House	Louisiana	1	1				
Oak Alley	Louisiana			1	1	1	
San Francisco Plantation	Louisiana	1	1	1			
		2	2	2	2	2	1
McLeod Plantation	South Carolina						1
Boone Hall	South Carolina	1	1	1			
Plantation							
Magnolia Plantation	South Carolina	1	1	1			
Middleton Place	South Carolina		1	1			
Drayton Hall	South Carolina		1	1			
		2	4	4	0	0	1
Meadow Farm	Virginia	1	1				
Appomattox	Virginia		1			1	
Plantation							
Berkeley Plantation	Virginia	1	1				
Shirley Plantation	Virginia	1	1	1			
Bacon's Castle	Virginia	1	1	1			
		4	5	2	0	1	0
Total % of all sites		53%	73%	53%	13%	20%	13%

⁴ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 10.

millennia before European settlers arrived.⁵ Spanish explorers set up outposts along the River Road, named for its location along the Mississippi River. In 1699, the colony of Louisiana was officially established, and French capitalists began forcibly importing enslaved Africans primarily from Benin and Senegal to farm indigo and later sugar.⁶ The increasing number of enslaved people compounded the slaveholder's need for greater control. The Superior Council of Louisiana established the *Code Noir* in 1724, which made Catholicism the official religion of the region and outlined acceptable practices for slaveholders. According to the code, enslaved people were legally allowed to marry and have children. These families could not lawfully be separated should the slaveholder wish to sell one of the enslaved family members. Furthermore, the enslaved were not to be beaten, but baptized, fed, clothed, and well housed.⁷

Following the Louisiana Purchase, Americans from other states purchased Louisiana land for agriculture, particularly along the Mississippi River. Historian Richard J. Follett characterizes River Road slaveholders as “the plantation elite” who “drew upon the slaveholding culture of the American South and northern business practices, and it matched the cold-blooded exploitation of West Indian sugar lords.”⁸ Enslaved workers at River Road sugar plantations created output with factory-like precision, fueling the

⁵ Cécile Vidal, “From Incorporation to Exclusion: Indians, Europeans, and Americans in the Mississippi Valley from 1699 to 1830” in *Empires of the Imagination*, Peter J. Kastor and François Weil ed. (University of Virginia Press, 2009), 63.

⁶ Jack D. L. Holmes, “Indigo in Colonial Louisiana and the Floridas,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1967): 331.

⁷ Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 51-53; Vidal, *Louisiana Crossroads of the Atlantic World*, 21.

⁸ Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 8.

profits for enterprising slaveholders.⁹ The excessive wealth generated from slave-manufactured sugar resulted in the construction of massive plantation houses filled with objects purchased to further showcase the owner's wealth.

Following the prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, slave traders like Isaac Franklin and John Armfield marched coffles of slaves, chained to one another from Virginia to New Orleans slave markets.¹⁰ Slaveholders thought Africans were predisposed to withstand the illness that the swampy terrain and humid heat of southern Louisiana fostered.¹¹ Thus, an enslaved person sold from a northern location to a Louisiana plantation was "sold down the river," a phrase that spoke to the dismal living and work conditions.¹²

On its web site, the travel authority for the State of Louisiana advertises the River Road region as being located in "Plantation Country," a reference to the area's nineteenth-century sugar cane enterprises.¹³ During the twentieth century, chemical production replaced sugar as the local industry, "constituting one of Louisiana's most lucrative, and least regulated, industries."¹⁴ River Road plantation big houses, once surrounded by cane fields and cypress trees now stand in the shadow of oil refineries,

⁹ Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 17.

¹⁰ Follett, *The Sugar Masters Planters and Slaves*, 52; Mary Ann Sternberg, *Along the River Road: Past and Present on Louisiana's Historic Byway* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 69.

¹¹ Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press., 1992), 52.

¹² Ariela Gross, *Slavery and the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 63.

¹³ "Welcome to Louisiana Travel," Louisiana Travel, <https://www.louisianatravel.com/>.

¹⁴ Adams, "Local Color," 173.

intermingling with former tenant farming shacks, and desolate service stations. The Transformation project site San Francisco Plantation is even *owned* by Marathon Oil and Gas. The petroleum company's massive plant consumes the historic landscape, allowing a small green space for the historic house and outbuildings.¹⁵

Most River Road plantations lie west of New Orleans, accessible by an hour-long car ride. Due to this isolation, tourist plantation owners rely on collaborative marketing efforts with tourist associations, outside tour companies, and other plantations. The Louisiana Tourist Authority, the Louisiana Office of Tourism, and more locally the Parish Regions Tourist Commission all market River Road plantations as a top tourist attraction to southern Louisiana.¹⁶ These organizations use romantic plantation tropes in their advertising, reaching out to potential tourists through beauty and "southern charm," without mentioning than the harsher aspects of plantation history.¹⁷ Third party tour companies convey tourists from New Orleans hotels to each site via air conditioned coach and river boat. Tour companies like Old River Road Plantation Adventure, offer multi-site tickets that may be used over a few days, attractive to carless travelers.¹⁸ River Road plantation owners compete for bus tourists, working to foster mutually beneficial

¹⁵ Site visit, June 2018.

¹⁶ "Welcome to Louisiana Travel," Louisiana Travel, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.louisianatravel.com/>; "Welcome to Louisiana Tourism," Louisiana Tourism, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.crt.state.la.us/tourism/>; "GET INSPIRED. Learn about Our Culture.," New Orleans Plantation Country, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://visitnopo.com/>.

¹⁷ Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, "Louisiana Office of Tourism 2016 Annual Report," 2016 Annual Report, July 4, 2017, accessed January 14, 2019, https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/Tourism/research/documents/2016-2017/LOT1730_AnnualReport-FINAL_2017-04-06_Digital.pdf.

¹⁸ "Plantation Tours in New Orleans, Louisiana," Old River Road Plantation Adventure, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://plantationadventure.com/>.

relationships with tour companies.¹⁹ Four of the five Transformation project sites in the area, Oak Alley, San Francisco, Laura Plantation, and Houmas House banded together to create a marketing collaboration called the Plantation Parade on the Great River Road, a professional community inspiring both cooperation and rivalry.²⁰ The Plantation Parade web site provides links for purchasing multi-site tickets, basic information about site visits, and proposed travel itineraries to visit all four sites.²¹

Of the three project regions, owners of River Road tourist plantations describe tour narratives in terms of “culture,” rather than history, professing to work in the tourist industry, or hospitality business, rather than conducting museum work. In fact, several site managers said they felt no responsibility to educate their visitors in any way.²² All of the plantation site owners were born and reared in the area, but none of them have ancestral ties to the plantations they administer. Therefore, interviews with operators reflect an interest in entrepreneurial commercial projects, demonstrating awareness of the marketability of plantation hospitality.

¹⁹ Interview with staff, March 2015.

²⁰ "Plantation Parade," Plantation Parade, 2017, accessed June 27, 2018, <https://plantationparade.com/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview with staff, March 2015.

Virginia

Settled as a commercial endeavor by the Virginia Company of London, in 1607 Jamestown became the first permanent English settlement.²³ In 1619, the first west central African people arrived, at Port Comfort, marking the first trans-Atlantic shipment of enslaved people to the United States Colonies.²⁴ Investors in the Company speculated how they might exploit the land through mining or agriculture. Settlers and speculators alike quickly identified tobacco as the most lucrative potential export.²⁵ Edmund S. Morgan writes that the entrepreneurial potential of tobacco farming could change the fortune of a free man of meager means. With a small investment in a plot of land and a few servants, one's income would modestly exceed what was made in England, and with a gang of servant farm workers, one "might indeed make a fortune."²⁶

Potential fortune attracted tobacco investors, and therefore frequent shipments of indentured English and Africans, whose labor stoked Virginia tobacco production. Indentured servants included British people found guilty of crimes who were "transported" to the colonies for a fixed term of service, commonly seven years, but also

²³ Edmund Sears Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 44.

²⁴ J. Thornton, "The African Experience of the '20 and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia in 1619," ed. S. N. Katz, J. M. Murrin, and D. Greenberg, in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001).

²⁵ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

volunteers who contracted their labor in exchange for passage to the colonies.²⁷ However, master/employers sometimes abused the contracts held on indentured servants, refusing to release the servants once the contract period ended.²⁸ The mortality rate was high and without newly arrived immigrants, the number of children born in Virginia was insufficient to make up for those dying.²⁹ Thus, historian James Horn attributes Chesapeake Virginia's steady economic growth throughout the seventeenth century to the regular influx of English immigrants.³⁰

Both African and English servants worked Virginia's first large-scale agricultural projects. Though not social equals, "racial differences could be overlooked" during their potentially exploitative indenture period.³¹ Philip D. Morgan explains indentured servitude was not race-based, making the labor experience was similar for all.³² For Virginia servants "access to freedom was greater . . . than it would ever be again until the Civil War."³³ By the turn of the eighteenth century, laws linking race to lifelong and

²⁷ P. D. Morgan and Carole Shammas, "Settlers and Slaves: European and African Migrations to Early Modern British America," ed. Elizabeth Mancke, in *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 32-74.

²⁸ J. P. Horn, "Servant Emigration to the Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society*, ed. T. W. Tate and D. Ammerman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 5-95; Edmund Sears Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 295.

²⁹ Horn, "Servant Emigration to the Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century," 63-64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

³¹ "British Encounters with Africans and African-Americans Circa 1600-1780," in *Strangers Within the Realm Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, by Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 197.

³² Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 296.

³³ "British Encounters with Africans and African-Americans Circa 1600-1780," in *Strangers Within the Realm Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, by Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 179; Warren M. Billings,

hereditary labor eliminated those freedoms, while an agricultural economy that profited from race-based chattel slavery emerged. Enslaved people cultivated tobacco in gangs, and initially sheltered in barracks-style housing.³⁴ Thus, through the introduction of race into labor law, access to an influx of enslaved Africans, a thriving English tobacco trade developed in the Chesapeake, as well as a plantation system that elevated and enriched its wealthy, white, elite owners.³⁵

Today, tidewater historic sites including tourist plantations, capitalize on themes that feature the plantation elite blended with patriarchal patriotism. Virginia leverages its history as the birthplace of American democracy, interpreting preserved historic structures throughout the James River Region, attracting visitors to stand on the “sacred ground” of early America.³⁶ Though outdoor activities, art museums, and family friendly businesses all garners tourist dollars, the Virginia Tourism Corporation stresses the importance of historic sightseeing over all. The VTC website prominently features Monticello, Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, and Jamestown.³⁷ According to an infographic published by VTC, of three hundred and fifty-six domestic tourists polled, 84

"The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (1991): 56.

³⁴ "British Encounters with Africans and African-Americans Circa 1600-1780," in *Strangers Within the Realm Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, by Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 169, 190; Douglas Deal, "A Constricted World," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, ed. Lois Green. Carr, Philip D. Morgan, Jean Burrell. Russo, (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 276.

³⁵ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

³⁶ Interview with staff, July 14, 2016.

³⁷ "Virginia History," Virginia Indians - Virginia Is For Lovers, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.virginia.org/ThingsToDo/Historic-Sites>.

percent reported they travelled to Virginia to visit historic sites, while 40 percent of those polled specifically cited that visits to historic houses inspired their travel.³⁸

The Virginia Transformation project sites include two publicly-owned and three privately-operated sites. Though the two Virginia public sites were established before the nineteenth century, Meadow Farm in 1715, and Appomattox Manor in 1751, the historic interpretation of these two sites mainly concerns the Civil War. The other three sites, Berkeley Plantation, Shirley Plantation, and Bacon's Castle stress the region's significance as the first settlement of the American Colonies. A Virginia plantation owner/operator characterizes the overall interpretation of area plantations as including history, "... as it's always been told ... interpreted using hyperbole, overstatement, exaggeration ... the history of the great white fathers."³⁹ While Louisiana plantations profit from tour companies in New Orleans, Chesapeake tour companies package visits to better known historic sites in the region, such as homes of "founding fathers," rather than the surfeit of less popular, though still historically significant plantation houses.⁴⁰

Three Transformation project owner/operators reported a reliance on Colonial Williamsburg and Historic Jamestown to attract visitors to their sites. However, Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown have experienced a drop in visitation in recent years. Consequently, visitor numbers decreased at other area historic sites as well. One owner/operator expressed difficulty drawing broader audiences, and survey data reveal

³⁸ Virginia Tourism Corporation, *History Trip Profile to Virginia Fiscal Year 2018*, https://www.vatc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/History_TripProfile_FY2018.pdf, Richmond.

³⁹ Interview with staff, October 1, 2016.

⁴⁰ Interview with staff, October 1, 2016.

95 percent of James River plantation visitors self-identified as white.⁴¹ According to the interviewee, Virginia historic sites have not progressed, asserting that “Virginia’s just sat on its laurels,” promoting outdated tour narratives.⁴² In 2018, site visits corroborated this assertion, revealing that interpretations fail to fully integrate the contributions of the enslaved.⁴³ According to Transformation project survey data, the average age of James River plantation visitors is fifty-five.⁴⁴ Though a younger audience might be drawn to entrepreneurial commercial offerings like those found in Louisiana, James River plantations focus on traditional, house and grounds tours emphasizing antiques and architecture. None of the Virginia operations run auxiliary commercial services, offering neither lodging nor restaurants.⁴⁵

Charleston

Like the Commonwealth, Charleston, South Carolina began with a land grant to elite allies to the British Crown. When Charles the II regained the British throne, he rewarded his key political allies, known as the Lords Proprietors, a large land charter in the New World.⁴⁶ Within the bounds of the charter at the convergence of Cooper and

⁴¹ Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes, “Shirley Plantation” (private presentation, Shirley Plantation, 2016).

⁴² Interview with staff, October 1, 2016.

⁴³ Site visit June 2018.

⁴⁴ Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes, “Shirley Plantation” (private presentation, Shirley Plantation, 2016).

⁴⁵ Interview with staff, October 1, 2016.

⁴⁶ Richard Waterhouse, *A New World Gentry: The Making of a Merchant and Planter Class in South Carolina, 1670-1770* (Charleston, S.C: History Press, 2006); Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of*

Ashley Rivers, the Lords Proprietors established the port settlement of Charles Towne in 1670, from which enslaved Native Americans were exported to England.⁴⁷ In the following decades the port attracted Englishmen from Barbados, who trapped and sold animal skins back to English merchants.⁴⁸ French Huguenots seeking freedom from Catholic opposition, convened in Charleston, setting up merchant businesses similar to those they had operated in France.⁴⁹ With a decline of animal skin trading, Charleston developed into a commercial Atlantic port, attracting British slave ships from West Africa replacing enslaved Native Americans. Enslaved African people were sold at slave markets in Charleston to locals and out-of-town buyers. By the early eighteenth century, Charleston was populated by a black majority with black and white people living and working close to each other.⁵⁰ The large population of enslaved Africans propelled the continuation of native cultures including language, foodways, and music. In the Low Country, these Africanisms manifested as the Gullah and Geechee cultures.⁵¹

Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2; Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 47-48.

⁴⁷ Sherri M. Shuck-Hall, "Alabama and Couthatta Diaspora and Coalescence in the Mississippian Shatter Zone," ed. Robbie Ethridge, in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 258.

⁴⁸ Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-century British Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 18; 25.

⁴⁹ Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 211-213.

⁵⁰ Hart, *Building Charleston*, 185.

⁵¹ Bryan D. Joyner, *African Reflections on the American Landscape Identifying and Interpreting Africanisms* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2003), accessed May 3, 2018, <https://home1.nps.gov/heritageinitiatives/pubs/Africanisms.pdf>, 42.

Charleston plantation owners were economically dependent on the enslaved for their agricultural knowledge and the farming methods they brought with them from Africa. Enslaved Africans cultivated profitable indigo crops until the Revolutionary War when Britain no longer purchased indigo from the Americas.⁵² Recognizing their skill in cultivating rice, plantation owners exploited the labor and expertise of enslaved people captured from Africa's Rice Coast.⁵³ Though enslaved people cultivating rice in South Carolina worked together within a task-based system, Mark M. Smith points out that in Africa, "the crop was almost universally cultivated by women."⁵⁴ Therefore enslaved African males, already dishonored by the state of enslavement were further demeaned by the demand that they farm rice in fields alongside women.⁵⁵ Laws that throttled the freedom of enslaved Africans enhanced the wealth of a small number of land and slaveholding Charleston families.⁵⁶

⁵² Andrea Feeser and Maureen Daly. Goggin, *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800* (London: Routledge, 2017); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 76-77.

⁵³ Stephen Hardy. "'Colonial South Carolina's Rice Industry and the Atlantic Economy'" in Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks, ed., *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolinas Plantation Society* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Mark M. Smith, *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 93.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Stono*, 94.

⁵⁶ Stephen Hardy. "'Colonial South Carolina's Rice Industry and the Atlantic Economy'" in Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks, ed., *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolinas Plantation Society* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

Prominent white Charleston families intermarried forging lasting, lucrative economic and social ties.⁵⁷ Some of the most important families in the earliest periods still have great political and economic prominence in Charleston. Stephanie Yuhl writes how many of these families sought to preserve legacy and social standing through an instrumental role in the preservation and restoration of historic Charleston structures and landscapes.⁵⁸ Thus, Transformation project tourist plantations include plantations built by early Charleston families made rich through the labor of the enslaved, such as Drayton Hall, Middleton Place, and Magnolia Plantation. Robert Weyeneth writes that the “web of family linkages associated with this historic architecture” were as important to these preservation projects as the city’s overall “unique architectural environment.”⁵⁹ Preservation projects initiated by Charleston elites impacted the quality of life for descendants of the enslaved. Both Weyeneth and Yuhl note that many African American tenants were evicted, and their homes demolished to make way for preservation projects. While enslaved people may appear in exhibits at familial historic sites, some elite families carefully control *how* they are exhibited, offering narratives of black “dependence and primitivism.”⁶⁰

The Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau promotes the city’s historic architecture, unique cuisine, and luxury tourism in a way “that obscures much of the

⁵⁷ Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6; Waterhouse, *A New World Gentry*.

⁵⁸ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*.

⁵⁹ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 19.

⁶⁰ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 192.

conflict and oppression in the region.”⁶¹ Carefully restored historic houses, beaches, and region-specific restaurants attract tourists from all over the world. In fact, *Travel and Leisure* magazine readers voted Charleston America’s “number one city” five years in a row.⁶² Charleston values its historicism as a cultural commodity thus the City of Charleston’s Livability and Tourism department requires prospective tour guides to receive certification examinations before being licensed to guide tours.⁶³

Historian Peter Wood estimates that “forty percent of slaves reaching the British mainland colonies between 1700 and 1775 arrived in South Carolina,” many of whom landed at Sullivan’s Island right outside of Charleston.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, the influence of African culture and Africanisms permeates Charleston’s cultural tourist products. Charleston’s African influence is simultaneously celebrated and commodified at tourist and historic sites. Gullah women in the City Market create intricate sweet grass baskets, constructed using methods originated in Africa. These baskets, now an expensive Charleston souvenir, were originally used by enslaved people working on rice plantations to float the husks off of gathered rice grains. Chefs capitalize on African foodways, attributing them to Low Country culture or calling them simply *southern*, appropriating

⁶¹ L. Van Sant, "Lowcountry Visions: Foodways and Race in Coastal South Carolina," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* 15, no. 4 (2015): accessed February 27, 2019, 2.

⁶² "Charleston Area CVB - Official Site For Your Trip to Charleston," Explore Charleston Blog, accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.charlestoncvb.com/>.

⁶³ "2019 Tour Guide Exam Schedule," CITY OF CHARLESTON TOUR GUIDE EXAM, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.charleston-sc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1655>.

⁶⁴ Wood, Peter H. 1975. *Black Majority: Negroes In Colonial South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, xiv.

African tradition to attract hungry tourists.⁶⁵ Van Sant explains that Charleston's thriving food scene is marketed as "happily multicultural" because "the reality of a food history fundamentally marked by violence does not sell well."⁶⁶ Thus, food, music, and story-telling all provide a tourist-friendly approach to discussing Charleston's difficult racial past.

The Tourist Plantation Industry – Museum or Tourism Sector

Representations of Slavery explicitly states that Eichstedt's and Small's work concerns the "plantation museum industry in the South," identifying all the publicly toured plantations in their study as "museums."⁶⁷ However, not all Transformation project participants understand their workplaces to be museums. When interviewed, 73 percent of staff said they run museums, stressing their site's educational efforts, though most operators still discussed business in terms of commercial tourism. *Table 2* illustrates which sites' staff overall identified their workplaces to be museums or not. The cultural heritage tourism and the museum fields both promote professional practices that encourage ethical business operations, particularly at sites representing people who were hegemonized in the past. Without commitment to such standards, the path to interpretive integrity is nebulous, as commercialization leaves interpretation vulnerable to unbridled

⁶⁵ Michael Twitty, "Dear Sean, We Need to Talk," *Afroculinaria*, August 26, 2016, accessed May 27, 2018, <https://afroculinaria.com/2016/03/23/dear-sean-we-need-to-talk/>.

⁶⁶ Van Sant, "Lowcountry Visions," 2.

⁶⁷ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 1.

commodification of the experiences of enslaved people and the manifestation of the “discursive strategies,” particularly symbolic annihilation and trivialization.⁶⁸

During staff interviews, interpretive staff and site operators all described museums differently. A Bacon’s Castle employee described museums as stagnant places with “. . . glass and cases, and things to read.”⁶⁹ The guide indicated that Boone Hall is not a museum because “. . . it doesn't really feel like a museum. It's not as stuffy.”⁷⁰ Along the same lines, another site’s “curator would like it to be seen as a museum,” but that for marketing purposes, they would be better off if the site was known as “an attraction . . . We’re kind of caught between the two.”⁷¹ One owner/operator identified his/her site as a tourist attraction, operating in the hospitality sector, and several others identified their sites as a combination of museum, attraction, and home.⁷² Similarly, an Oak Alley docent stated they “. . . don’t say we are a museum, I say we are an attraction,” identifying the historic house as a domestic environment, rather than an educational space.⁷³

One operator explained that their collection qualified their site as a museum, “because we have one of the finest collections of antiques . . . all of the period.”⁷⁴ Thus, according to the qualification that museum collections contain valuable objects,

⁶⁸ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 8-12.

⁶⁹ Interview, July 16, 2016.

⁷⁰ Interview, February 26, 2016.

⁷¹ Interview, March 2015.

⁷² Interview, March 2015.

⁷³ Interview, March 2015.

⁷⁴ Interview, March 2015.

plantation *museums* should showcase objects amassed by wealthy, white families. In doing so, the emphasis on this wealth would thus trivialize “lesser” objects, such as those used or made by enslaved people.⁷⁵ Furthermore, this characterization of museums elevates the importance of objects over the enslaved people themselves.

Multiple tourist plantation owners who identify their sites as museums, stated that they feel obliged to provide and promote public education. A Middleton Place employee identified museums as “. . . places of non-traditional learning . . . to expose people to history.”⁷⁶ At Boone Hall, an employee commented on the immersive, educational opportunities of the plantation museum landscape. “We've got history that you can see, you can walk on, you can touch.”⁷⁷ As cultural heritage sites, tourist plantations provide psychological and physical experiences, which relay the character and history of the place, while adding value to the adventure with hospitality services.⁷⁸ Though most tourist plantations provide public educational tours, some owner interviews fail to connect education to tourism, prioritizing revenue from hospitality services, saleable merchandise, and non-educational products instead. As one for-profit site owner put it, “We’re in the hospitality business, and we are not here to educate people. I get a lot of people who are teachers . . . that want a job and I say no. This is the tourism business, not

⁷⁵ Interview, July 17, 2016.

⁷⁶ Interview, February 19, 2016.

⁷⁷ Interview, February 27, 2016.

⁷⁸ J. Christopher. Holloway, *The Business of Tourism* (Harlow: Financial Times Prentice-Hall, 2002),4.

Table 2 Sites categorized by state indicating sites where staff identified their workplace as a museum.

Plantation	State	Identified as a museum
Whitney Plantation	Louisiana	YES
Laura Plantation		NO
Houmas House		YES
Oak Alley		NO
San Francisco Plantation		YES
McLeod Plantation	South Carolina	NO
Boone Hall Plantation		YES
Magnolia Plantation		YES
Middleton Place		YES
Drayton Hall		YES
Meadow Farm	Virginia	YES
Appomattox Plantation		YES
Berkeley Plantation		YES
Shirley Plantation		NO
Bacon's Castle		YES

education.”⁷⁹ Though the experiences of enslaved people are deeply embedded within plantation site heritage, this site operator expresses no obligation to discuss them or to educate the public.⁸⁰ In doing this, the owner directs funding and human resources toward hospitality over research and interpretive efforts, rather than striving for a “nexus between recreation and scholarship.”⁸¹ Again, the legacy of enslavement is inextricable from plantation history. However, it is not obvious to all visitors, and therefore must be explicitly stated in educational offerings. Whether they identify as museums or attractions, without equal dedication to education, tourist hospitality products distract visitors away from the experiences of those enslaved. Therefore, site owners that identify their plantations as tourist attractions risk commodifying the forced work of chattel slaves a second time.⁸²

Ownership and Governance

Tourist plantations all share a similar history as industrial, agricultural production sites worked by enslaved African Americans and owned by wealthy white people prior to the Civil War. However, the interpretation and emphasis of this history differs as vastly as the way tourist plantations conduct business. Because the entity or individual that

⁷⁹ Interview, March 2015.

⁸⁰ Interview, July 10, 2014.

⁸¹ Corkern, "Heritage Tourism," 15.

⁸² Colin Michael Hall, *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place* (Chichester: Wiley, 1999), 176.

owns a tourist plantation dictates the way each site operates, examining the categories that characterize these sites gives insight into the factors that influence the business at each place. Likewise, the goals of the site differ greatly, depending on the site ownership and governance. The geographic regions where Transformation projects operate each has a particular business ecosystem, which creates competition between sites.⁸³

By dividing the sites into categories, such as privately owned for-profit, or a site held in public trust by a municipality, specific characteristics emerge. Each of these categories correlates to particular entrepreneurship, ethics, and attitude toward heritage production. While no broad conclusions may be made linking any particular category to the likelihood of the appearance of “discursive strategies,” understanding how these categories impact site operation is nonetheless important to the implementation of racialized history at tourist plantations.⁸⁴ Therefore, these categories will assist in the understanding of tourist plantations and their historical interpretation providing a foundation for understanding.

⁸³ John H. Falk and Beverly Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 18; Candace Forbes Bright, Derek H. Alderman, and David L. Butler, "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (2016).

⁸⁴ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 8-12.

Table 3 Publicly owned and operated tourist plantation sites included in the study.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP	government entity	county owned	Meadow Farm	Henrico County	Henrico County
			McLeod Plantation	Charleston County	Charleston County
		federally owned	Appomattox Plantation	National Park Service	National Park Service

Table 4 Privately owned tourist plantation sites with various management models included in the study.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
PRIVATE OWNERSHIP	for profit	single owner	Whitney Plantation	John Cummings	John Cummings
		family owned	Berkeley Plantation	Malcolm E. Jamieson	Malcolm E. Jamieson
		commercial entity	Boone Hall Plantation	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.
		owned and run by separate family-owned business entities	Laura Plantation	St. James Sugar Cooperative	Laura Plantation Company
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for- and non-profit component	single owner	Houmas House	Burnside Plantation, LLC	Houmas House Foundation
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation	The Hastie Family	Magnolia Plantation Foundation
		family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	Shirley Plantation LLC	Shirley Plantation Foundation
	non-profit foundation owned, with separate for-profit component	commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation	Marathon Petroleum Company	San Francisco Plantation (a 501c3)
		foundation owned	Oak Alley	Oak Alley Foundation	Oak Alley Foundation; Oak Alley Plantation, Restaurant & Inn
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Middleton Place	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle	Preservation Virginia	Preservation Virginia
	non-profit foundation owned, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	National Trust for Historic Preservation	Drayton Hall Foundation

Public Ownership

There are three publicly owned Transformation project sites, defined as places “substantially funded by public monies and staffed by government employees.”⁸⁵ The public sites include Appomattox Plantation in Virginia, a federally owned site, and two county-owned sites McLeod Plantation and Meadow Farm Plantation. While all publicly owned sites exist for the pleasure and education of their tax payers, local and federal government sites operate quite differently, not only in scope, but in standards and funding.

Table 5 Observed demonstrations of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" at publicly owned sites.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	REGION	Symbolic Annihilation and Erasure	Trivialization and Deflection	Segmentation and Marginalization of Knowledge	In-Between	Relative Incorporation	Black-Centric Interpretation
Public Ownership	James River Region, VA	1					
	Charleston, SC		2				
	River Road, LA						1

⁸⁵ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 61.

Public Ownership- Local Government

Like many local history sites, the Transformation project tourist plantations run by county government present region-specific history and lifeways from a specified interpretive period. A staffer at Meadow Farm Plantation in Virginia remarked, “Most people are coming here to learn what rural life was like in 1860,” which should include a representation of race-based slave labor.⁸⁶ However, county government organizational structure, and tax funding all affect these site’s interpretation of that history. While the historical narrative at Meadow Farm dwells within the realm of the white slaveholding family, McLeod Plantation Historic Site interprets the experiences of the people previously enslaved at the site, a unique perspective for a county tax-funded museum.

Both Meadow Farm and McLeod are under the purview of a county parks and recreation department, rather than a historical commission. This designation obfuscates the purpose of county owned plantation sites. Are these sites intended to commemorate the past and educate visitors, or are they public recreation facilities? On its web site, Henrico County Recreation and Parks reports that it provides access to leisure activities, “from visual arts to nature and outdoors,” and “. . . oversees the development, construction, and maintenance of many parks, recreation facilities, athletic complexes, and historic sites,” as depicted in figure 1 below.⁸⁷ The Charleston County Parks

⁸⁶ Interview July 17, 2016.

⁸⁷ "Recreation Parks - Henrico County, Virginia," County of Henrico Virginia, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://henrico.us/rec/>.

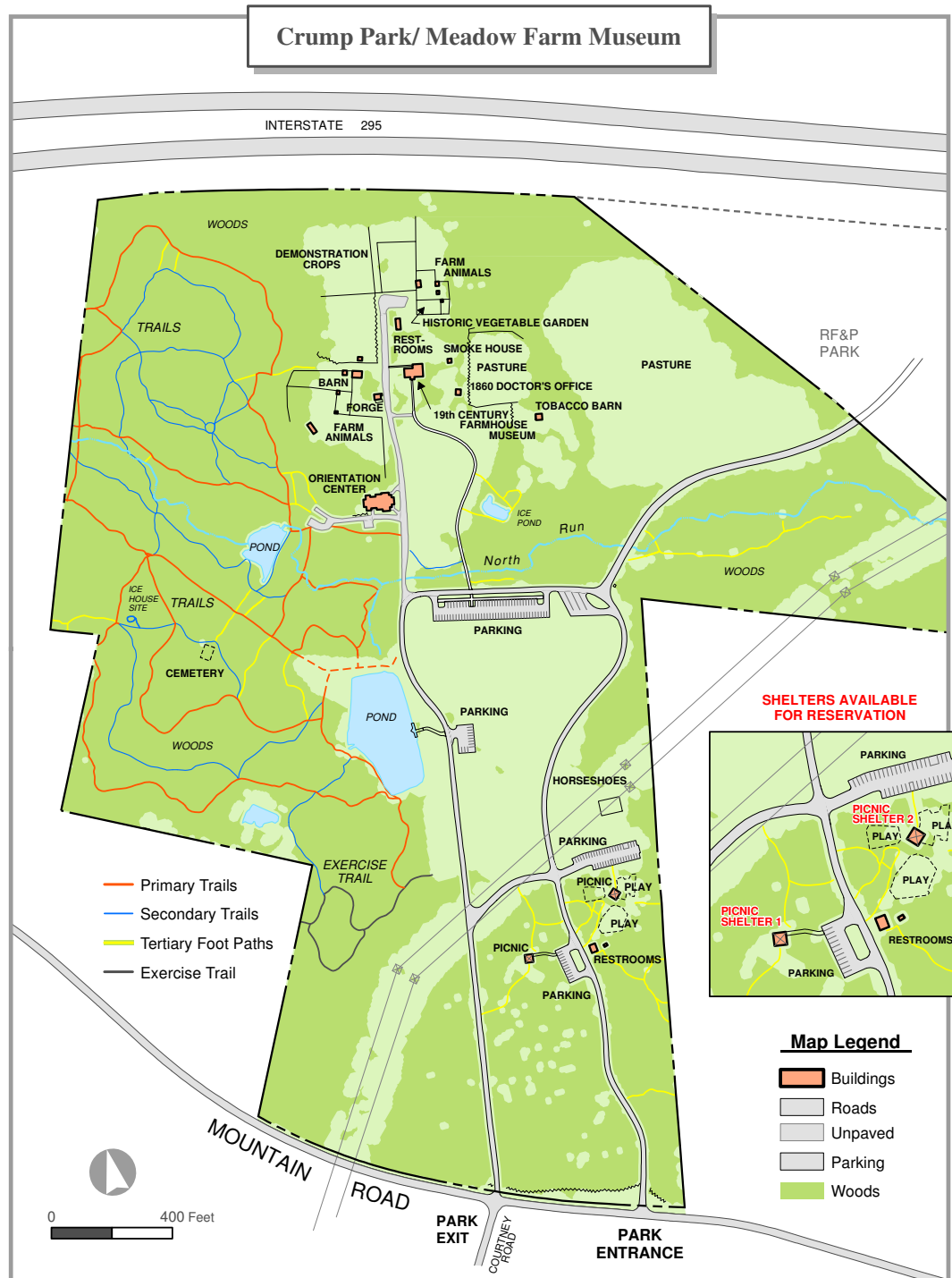


Figure 1. Map showing the various recreation and historic areas of Crump Park, where Meadow Farm is located. Source: "Recreation & Parks - Henrico County, Virginia," County of Henrico Virginia, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://henrico.us/rec/>.

Department's work is even more ambitious, operating:

. . . over 11,000 acres of property and includes four regional parks, three beach parks, four seasonally-lifeguarded beach areas, three dog parks, two landmark fishing piers, three waterparks, a historic plantation site, nineteen boat landings, a skate park, a climbing wall, a challenge course, an interpretive center, an equestrian center, vacation cottages, a campground, a marina, as well as wedding, meeting, and event facilities.⁸⁸

Though these recreation departments do admittedly oversee historic sites, most recreation facilities do not require sensitive historical interpretation. As Bryce Stanley, a preservationist with the Henrico County Museum Services group explained, some historic houses like Meadow Farm are part of land willed or otherwise donated as park land.⁸⁹ Because the house has historical merit, it is interpreted and preserved by the parks department, even though preservation and interpretation composes a small fraction of the departments' obligations.

Meadow Farm benefits from planning oversight from the Historic Preservation and Museum Services group within the Recreation Department.⁹⁰ The County does not allocate funding for specialized positions, such as collections or interpretive specialists, at each historic site, but instead provides consultations through the Historic Preservation and Museum Services group to its eight sites within the parks system. McLeod Plantation Historic Site receives no supervisory input from the County's Historic Preservation

⁸⁸ "About Us | Charleston County Parks and Recreation," McLeod Plantation Timeline | Charleston County Parks and Recreation, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.ccprc.com/3/About-Us>.

⁸⁹ Bryce Stanley, Phone interview with author, January 23, 2019.

⁹⁰ "Historic Preservation - Henrico County, Virginia," County of Henrico Virginia, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://henrico.us/rec/historic-preservation/>.

Committee of Planning Commission, a division of the county Zoning Department.⁹¹ Without the parks department expressing a clear charge to interpret history, the interpretive needs of county-run sites like Meadow Farm are potentially low priority. For instance, a 2016 bond proposed in Henrico County allocated 87.1 million dollars of funding to the parks department, however the bond assigned the funds to recreational equipment such as playing fields, with no money allotted toward preservation and interpretation.⁹² An employee at Meadow Farm stated, “I think within this [Recreation and Park] system, there’s not a lot of support for the work that we do.”⁹³ While poised to manage public land, parks and recreation departments do not typically interpret historic collections and structures.⁹⁴ Further, parks departments’ mission statements assert a desire to serve the public through recreational resources, and do not address preservation, much less racialized history. Staff at Meadow Farm admitted, “I think we get lost a little bit in the shuffle when it comes to being a historic site.”⁹⁵ Thus, with facilities dedicated to fulfilling such a diverse, specialized community needs some parks and recreation departments struggle to represent the history of the enslaved sufficiently.

⁹¹ "Meadow Farm Museum at Crump Park - County of Henrico, Virginia," County of Henrico Virginia, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://henrico.us/rec/places/meadow-farm/>; "Historic Preservation Projects," Historic Preservation Projects, 2018, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://www.charlestoncounty.org/departments/zoning-planning/projects-hpc.php>.

⁹² "Recreation Parks - Henrico County, Virginia," County of Henrico Virginia, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://henrico.us/rec/>.

⁹³ Interview, February 28, 2016.

⁹⁴ Interview, February 19, 2016.

⁹⁵ Interview, July 17, 2016.

The many-layered bureaucratic hierarchy of county government represents multiple constituencies and funding drivers that can potentially support or rebuff interpretive efforts. A Meadow Farm employee explained the chain of command at their site this way:

There's a mid-level division run by a director and an assistant director [in] Parks and Recreation. Underneath them, there's a division manager, and underneath them, there's . . . in the neighborhood of twelve mid-level managers. Those mid-level managers manage all the different parks and different community centers . . . and they control the direction of the department from there. I report directly to one of those managers.⁹⁶

Decision making concerning tour themes, must be discussed with parks department middle managers that may be trained in sports field turf management rather than historical interpretation. Furthermore, the Meadow Farm staffer admits that proposed interpretive changes are determined by middle management, and “ . . . sometimes they are not always in complete agreement. Unfortunately, I'm at the whim of that.”⁹⁷

In addition to McLeod, the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission manages the Caw Caw interpretive center and the Lighthouse Inlet Heritage Preserve. Each has a site manager, but the Commission recognizes that the professionalism and education of staff determines the success of site interpretation. Thus, the interpretation and preservation of historical assets require ancillary management and staff training, directing financial and human resources outside of the main departmental mission. Interpretation and Stewardship Manager, Mark Madden, and the Cultural History

⁹⁶ Interview, July 17, 2016.

⁹⁷ Interview, July 17, 2016.

Interpretation Coordinator, Shawn Halifax conduct research and programming for both naturalist and history interpretation.⁹⁸ Additionally, McLeod promotes continuing education for employees through professional certifications, collaborative training programs facilitated by the Commission, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Association of African American Museums, and the National Association for Interpretation.⁹⁹ Because of McLeod's interpretive focus mostly concerns the experiences of the enslaved at the plantation, such training makes up for interpretive methodology the parks department lacks.

A potential benefit of county-ownership is a perceived democratization of the site. If local residents feel entitlement to a site, having supported its management by paying taxes, they might be inclined to visit. As an employee of Meadow Farm Plantation reported, "I think residents of the Glen Allen community have really adopted us as the local park, the local museum, both for passive recreation and historic sites. I think they really identify Meadow Farm as being a part of the community."¹⁰⁰ But perceived ownership connected with tax funding has its drawbacks as well. A county-funded site docent at McLeod explained that parks and recreation commissioners received complaints about site interpretations that feature the history of the enslaved.¹⁰¹ If site evaluation is left to tax paying visitors, such complaints threaten continued site funding.

⁹⁸ Sarah Reynolds, "Charleston County Parks conducting workshop on interpreting African American History and Culture in conjunction with the Smithsonian and other national institutes," Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission, <https://www.ccprc.com/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/800>.

⁹⁹ Reynolds, "Charleston County Parks."

¹⁰⁰ Interview, July 15, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

Should a tax payer feel particularly unhappy about interpretation, they might lobby the commission to reject funding the site altogether. As the McLeod docent explained, “We’re being evaluated by the County in terms of – is it worth the money? They’re trying to break even here at the site. Is it worth having paid staff?”¹⁰² Local, tax-funded sites must answer to their stakeholders, the tax-paying public, to prove that the value of their work within the community surpasses or at least equals the expense. If interpreting slavery history does not resonate with parks department management, or with the tax paying community, those stories are at risk to be removed from the county parks cultural landscape.

Public Ownership- Federal Government

The Transformation project site Appomattox Manor is a plantation house interpreted as part of Petersburg National Military Park and on the Petersburg National Battlefield, an NPS property. The Plantation is located within the City Point Historic District in Petersburg, Virginia, and should not be confused with Appomattox Courthouse in Appomattox, Virginia.¹⁰³ The staff at Appomattox Manor maintains and interprets a historic landscape that includes a farmhouse, outbuildings, and a cemetery, and the site’s interpretation pertains to the military occupation of the site during the Civil War.

¹⁰² Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁰³ While the Courthouse located in Appomattox, Virginia, marks the site of the end of the Civil War, Appomattox *Plantation* was seized and used for Union Army offices in 1863; "116-0001 Appomattox Manor," DHR Virginia Department of Historic Resources 1270181 Comments, April 4, 2014, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/116-0001/>.

Interpretations of the landscape and the main house incorporate stories representing some of the 127 enslaved people owned by Dr. Richard Eppes.¹⁰⁴

Federally operated sites such as Appomattox Manor face some of the same issues as sites operated by local government. However, the scale of the organization and budget differ greatly. The NPS mission states its purpose is to preserve “. . . the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”¹⁰⁵ However, government mandate, rigid organizational structures, and the politicization of federal budgets affect the fulfillment of this mission, including the interpretation of cultural and historic sites. Interviews with NPS staff conducted at Appomattox Manor in 2016 reflect the difficulties of working within bureaucratic restrictions.

Throughout the entire system, NPS employs over 20,000 people, and welcomes the work of over 315,000 volunteers.¹⁰⁶ The bureaucratic organizational structure is immense, headed by the Secretary of the Interior who appoints the Director of NPS. The NPS Director supervises the Deputy Director of Operations, who oversees seven regional offices. The Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia administers Appomattox Manor, but works mainly to guide and support the site’s administrative functions. Under the regional office, individual sites like Appomattox Manor employ multiple levels of

¹⁰⁴ Site visit, June 2018; Laurant L. Lee, *Making the American Dream Work: A Cultural History of African Americans in Hopewell, Virginia* (Morgan James Pub., 2008), 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ "NPS Entering the 21st Century (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/nps-history-entering-21st-century.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ "Frequently Asked Questions (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/faqs.htm>.

park rangers. Staff at Appomattox Manor understand their standing in the massive hierarchy. One employee confessed that site staff have little say as to whether changes that require more funding or human resources are implemented. “We’re not the drivers of our own car. We have to rely on someone else higher up the food chain.”¹⁰⁷

Due to the bureaucratic chain of command, the budgets of NPS sites like Appomattox Manor are ultimately decided by Congress and cabinet members, who may be swayed by partisan and political interests. The recently resigned Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, for instance has been accused of furthering commercial drilling interests on Parks land, rather than focusing on conservation and interpretation.¹⁰⁸ The 2019 NPS budget proposed under Secretary Zinke, recommended eliminating 3,218 NPS jobs, a \$411,776 decrease in overall budget, and the Interpretation and Education budget for all NPS sites was cut by \$37,847 from previous years.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the budget proposed that NPS sites increase their revenue \$81,231, a potentially impossible feat in the wake of the 2019 government shutdown that forced park closures.¹¹⁰ Therefore, conservative funding dictates the timing and implementation of specialized projects and programming at NPS sites like Appomattox Manor. As a staffer discussed,

¹⁰⁷ Interview, October 7, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Julie Turkewitz and Coral Davenport, “Ryan Zinke, Face of Trump Environmental Rollbacks, Is Leaving Interior Department,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2018, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/15/us/ryan-zinke-interior-secretary.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Budget Justification and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2019, National Park Service, The United States Office of the Interior, 2018, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY2019-NPS-Budget-Justification.pdf>, SpecEx-8.

¹¹⁰ Budget Justification and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2019, National Park Service, The United States Office of the Interior, 2018, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY2019-NPS-Budget-Justification.pdf>, Overview-24.

Everything's budget driven . . . they want us to become more business savvy. I'm a historian. I prefer not to do that. But we are having to look at the realities of tighter budgets. We don't have enough resources to get our jobs done, or we really have to pick and choose between what do we do this year as opposed to next year, and what money will be there next year.¹¹¹

Sometimes minimal funding means considering interpretive choices that belie the historicism of the site in favor of sustainability.

In re-roofing this structure, there was an argument. Do we go with these faux shingles that can last for fifty years, or do we go with the actual wood, which we did, which can go for maybe twenty years? In maintaining the historical integrity of the house, which again, is very budgetary. That's, always been the real balancing act.¹¹²

In that way, tax payer funding may directly dictate whether structures representing the enslaved are preserved and interpreted or neglected.

Like county administered sites, NPS employees must also answer to stakeholders, which is particularly important at cultural heritage sites, like Civil War properties, and places where people have been enslaved. Appomattox Manor staff take advantage of stakeholders, consulting them when creating interpretive material. “ You want your stakeholders, the other people in the community, your universities, whomever, to have say . . . Someone might have some input that we aren't considering.”¹¹³ However, NPS has experienced pushback when implementing new interpretations, especially those promoting the important contributions of the enslaved to national history. In 1998, the

¹¹¹ Interview, October 7, 2016.

¹¹² Interview, October 7, 2016.

¹¹³ Interview, October 7, 2016.

agency drew the ire of the descendant organization the Sons of Confederate Veterans who protested refocusing and expanding interpretation. The group expressed outrage at the inclusion of slavery at Civil War sites, complaining that it was “disparaging, insulting, slandering, South-bashing propaganda.”¹¹⁴ However, these interpretations were instituted by congressional mandate. The legislation required that the War and its impetus be contextualized within Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County NPS Civil War site interpretation.¹¹⁵ With such mandates, Congress exercises its role as an exceedingly powerful stakeholder to NPS, with power to dictate park boundaries, budgets, and even the interpretive language at Civil War sites.¹¹⁶

Private Ownership

Tourist plantations held in private trust include those owned by individuals, families, corporations, and foundations. Single owner and family owned sites tend to enfold the owner or owning family into the tour product, particularly at sites where the owner resides in the historic plantation house. Due to the size of their commercial undertakings, corporate sites like Boone Hall Plantation direct financial and human resources toward profit-making endeavors, while individual owners confess to being central to the plantation’s day to day operations. Thus, the various arrangements of

¹¹⁴ ¹¹⁴ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, ““A Cosmic Threat”: The National Park Service Addresses the Causes of the American Civil War,” ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: New York Press, 2006), 176.

¹¹⁵ Pitcaithley, ““A Cosmic Threat,”” 172.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 172.

private ownership impact plantation institutions, from tour themes to the overall motivation of the business, deciding narrative focus, creation, and implementation.

Table 6 Observed demonstrations of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" at privately-owned sites.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	REGION	Symbolic Annihilation and Erasure	Trivialization and Deflection	Segmentation and Marginalization of Knowledge	In-Between	Relative Incorporation	Black-Centric Interpretation
Private Ownership	James River Region, VA	1	3	2		1	
	Charleston, SC	2	4	4			
	River Road, LA	2	2	2	2	2	1

Family Businesses and Single-owner Sites

Family-owned tourist businesses include those run by individuals, married couples, and expanded family units.¹¹⁷ Typically operating without a top-heavy management team, the owner/operator or family plays a sizeable role in management,

¹¹⁷ Donald Getz, Jack Carlsen, and Alison Morrison, *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality* (Wallingford: CABI, 2004), 5; Some of the Transformation project sites are owned by a family or individual but have opened an auxiliary non-profit foundation. These will be examined in the following section.

operations, and interpretation. This affords the operator great freedom to conduct business as they please, but it may also isolate the business from input of other industry professionals.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, due to the closed nature of this business type, the owning family's or owner's history may figure into interpretive themes, warping their importance in regional and site history. Thus, the owner's or owning family's attitudes toward history potentially profoundly influences the tone of interpretive messages, as the interpretive mission of the site may be defined by the "vision of its dominant family members."¹¹⁹

Two privately-owned Transformation project sites operate in a fully commercial capacity, with no non-profit component: Boone Hall and Laura Plantation. However, they exhibit some similar characteristics to family owned businesses, as the commercial entities are owned by married couples. Boone Hall Plantation is owned by William McRae, and the business is organized as Boone Hall Plantation, LP.¹²⁰ The land upon that Laura Plantation stands is owned by St. James Sugar Cooperative. Laura Plantation Company, LLC is owned by Norman and Sand Marmillion, who manage that tourist plantation business through this entity.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 2; 32.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁰ Mark Hammond, "Business Entities Online," BOONE HALL LIMITED PARTNERSHIP, 2019, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://businessfilings.sc.gov/BusinessFiling/Entity/Profile/95ed7dd2-372b-4694-a914-438dff98fb7f>.

¹²¹ Jay Schexnaydre, email with Jennifer Harris, January 9, 2019.

Table 7 Tourist plantations privately owned by individuals, couples, families, and corporations.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	for profit	single owner	Whitney Plantation	John Cummings	John Cummings
		family owned	Berkeley Plantation	Malcolm E. Jamieson	Malcolm E. Jamieson
		commercial entity	Boone Hall Plantation	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.
		owned and run by separate business entities	Laura Plantation	St. James Sugar Cooperative	Laura Plantation Company
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for- and non-profit component	single owner	Houmas House	Kevin Kelley	Houmas House Foundation
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation	The Hastie Family	Magnolia Plantation Foundation
		family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	Shirley Plantation LLC	Shirley Plantation Foundation
		commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation	Marathon Petroleum Company	San Francisco Plantation (a 501c3)

Southern plantations symbolize familial power, cemented through strategic kinship matches that fostered wealth and a closed society, shaping regional government and economics.¹²² Transformation project sites include family-owned legacy sites passed down through generations, as well as sites purchased by a family within the last century.¹²³ In this way family-owned sites represent generations of wealth, typically managed and interpreted to present an edited perspective of the family's past or identity. The preservation of family heritage was implemented at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston. "The Drayton family decided that Magnolia is their family's legacy, and they wanted it preserved. They wanted the gardens restored. They wanted their legacy preserved."¹²⁴ Therefore, wealth and kinship fostered over generations continues at tourist plantations, commemorating these fortuitous matches. Charleston site manager explained, "the owners – this is their family legacy . . . obviously that's very personal to them; they want to see that survive."¹²⁵ The plantation land also represents the generational wealth passed through families via inheritance. While bequests permit white landowners to exploit exponential, compounded real estate values, most descendants of African Americans enslaved at plantations are bestowed no such inheritance. Not surprisingly, none of the tourist plantation owners identify as African American, though several sites report employing descendants of people previously enslaved on the family

¹²² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 27.

¹²³ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 107.

¹²⁴ Interview, February 19, 2016.

¹²⁵ Interview, February 16, 2016.

site.¹²⁶ It is within this work relationship, that some white tourist plantation owners and their African American employees reenact the historic racial hierarchy of the plantation. Most poignantly, one family site owner refers to himself and his plantation-owning neighbors as *planters*.¹²⁷ A euphemism for *slaveholder*, the term planter situates the plantation owner at the center of agricultural endeavors, implicating him in the work of cultivation. Therefore, the use of this term inaccurately reflects the past, characteristically misinterpreting the agricultural work of the slaveholder and the enslaved.

Other site operators boast about the number of people that were enslaved at the site, a data point that underscores the wealth amassed by the former owners.¹²⁸ One operator describes the tourist plantation business as “. . . the Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous of the plantation world.”¹²⁹ Whether the site owner feels a connection to their former slave-owning relatives, or simply admires the business acumen of a prior plantation owner, personal identification with former slaveholders illuminates potential reluctance to interpret slavery within current themes. It also explains any insistence on presenting former slave-owning residents as “good slaveholders,” invoking the common trope that enslavers did not abuse their chattel slaves because of the great economic investment.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Interview, with site owner, February 2014.

¹²⁷ Interview, February 16, 2016; Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 4-5.

¹²⁸ Interview, March 2014.

¹²⁹ Interview March 2014.

¹³⁰ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 35, 66, 161.

Beyond bequest, the historical prestige of a plantation can be purchased, allowing the new landholder to assert narrative authority through ownership, rather than expertise. As an entrepreneurial venture, family or single owner tourist plantations have “low entry barriers [that] attract entrepreneurs with limited formal education or experience directly relating to the industry sector,” public history, museum work, or cultural heritage tourism in this case.¹³¹ Through their economic power and operational choices, family-owned site owner/operators make deliberate decisions to implement selected site narratives, founded in their personal identities and beliefs. Some family plantation business owners expressed that this identity was inspirational, and something worth fighting for. “You have to have loyalty to the family, to the people who have sacrificed before you . . . You do anything because people have sweated and bled for it before you. You don't want to let them down.”¹³² However, this owner figuratively describes the sacrifice of white ancestors, while wholly discounting the literal blood and sweat expended by the people his/her ancestors enslaved. This racially myopic mythology reflects the family’s historical importance, as observed at tours of Shirley and Magnolia Plantations.¹³³

Some owners live on the plantation property in auxiliary structures, though other owners dwell in the main plantation house permitting tours of their residences. In 1962 C. Hill Carter, owner of Shirley Plantation at the time, permitted visitors to tour his ancestral home.¹³⁴ During tours of Houmas Houses and Shirley Plantation where the owners reside,

¹³¹ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 34.

¹³² Interview with staff, October 15, 2016.

¹³³ Site visit, June 2018.

¹³⁴ "Home," Shirley Plantation, accessed March 12, 2019, <http://www.shirleyplantation.com/>.

docents spoke to the kindness of the owner for allowing visitors into the home praising them for their condescension.¹³⁵ The attitudes reflected by these statements recall tropes of the “kind slaveholder,” universalizing the hospitality offered from the plantation house. Whether the owner resides at the historic house or not, “emotional attachment associated with the physical space, in that it is often also the family home, constrains business growth,” and with tourist plantations it can constrain *interpretive* growth as well.¹³⁶

Residing at a plantation amid grand, opulent, historic structures imbues a particular sort of family or personal identity. One site owner expressed narrative authority awarded through ownership in the succinct assertion, “there’s no point in having an art collection if no one sees it . . . This is *my* museum and I’m able to show it.”¹³⁷ Sometimes the owning family incorporates its stories as part of the site’s branding. This reinforces the individuality of the business, while establishing the place as lasting, and in an attempt to increase the value of the site’s marketed and interpreted story.¹³⁸ On the other hand family secrets, including the plantation’s racial past, are still sometimes closely guarded or edited to cast the family in a better light. Other sites trivialize the site history of slavery by containing stories of the enslaved within the context of the white owners’ lives. A site

¹³⁵ Site visits, June 2018.

¹³⁶ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 32.

¹³⁷ Interview with staff, March 2014.

¹³⁸ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 84.

docent in Charleston claimed that site owners felt comfortable appropriating the history of the enslaved, narrating their experiences as part of their family's story. "We were slave owners but now we want to participate in telling their [the enslaved] story as well as *our own*."¹³⁹ Without careful collaboration, such interpretations may absorb the experiences of former slaves into the slaveholding family's story, synecdochic of the wealthy *planter's* experience. Thus, operators of family-owned tourist plantations, perceive the right to voice this past while simultaneously benefiting from the prestige of their slaveholding family's legacy and wealth.

Family involvement, whether as operational management or board service, provides opportunity to steer the site's story, making some operators feel like they are doing something noble.¹⁴⁰ A family-owned plantation operator explained, "It's an honorable thing to try to preserve family heritage."¹⁴¹ However, family supervisors, or board members can vet new information before incorporating it into site tours.¹⁴² In 2016 when project data was gathered, Magnolia Plantation had seven family members on the board of directors, one of whom scoured a family history used in staff training, censoring unflattering details.¹⁴³ Similarly, family stories constitute most of the guided tour of Shirley Plantation.¹⁴⁴ At another site, to ensure that guides do not implicate the family as

¹³⁹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Getz, et al., *The Family Business in Tourism and Hospitality*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Interview, October 4, 2016.

¹⁴² Interview with docent February 20, 2016.

¹⁴³ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Site visit, June 2018.

slaveholders, one owner decided to ignore slavery altogether. “In order not to be caught in a situation, of . . . making it [slavery] look nice, or making it look bad, I'm not getting into it.”¹⁴⁵

At plantation sites purchased in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, the owners also purchased cultural influence and an association with gentry. By running a tourist plantation, they become the administrative authority of an historic site, with the power to alter and shape history based on the facts they chose, without obligation to glorify an ancestral lineage.¹⁴⁶ Whether an ancestral or recently purchased site, many white, family owned plantation owner/operators protect the nostalgic tropes of southern heritage, potentially maintaining a racial hegemony through narrative control.¹⁴⁷ Through this process, plantation owners use slaveholding historical actors as proxies that promote and elevate the current owners' socio-economic status, reinforcing their cultural authority.

Corporate Ownership

Only one Transformation Project site is owned by a corporate entity, not owned or operated by family business. San Francisco Plantation, owned by Marathon Petroleum Corporation administers the site through its non-profit foundation, San Francisco Plantation, a 501(c)3, with a board consisting of Marathon employees.¹⁴⁸ When MPC

¹⁴⁵ Interview March 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Adams, "Local Color,".

¹⁴⁷ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ R. Kyle Ardoin, "San Francisco Plantation," Search for Louisiana Business Filings, accessed January 29, 2019,

purchased San Francisco Plantation in 1976, its acreage had been developed as a massive chemical plant by ECOL, Ltd., whom also had restored the historic plantation house (see fig. 2 below).¹⁴⁹ Had the property not been previously converted, preservationists doubted that MPC would have undertaken the restoration themselves.¹⁵⁰

Not long after MPC took over San Francisco in 1975, they purchased twenty-three-hundred-acre Welham Plantation located fourteen miles west. Instead of restoring the house, they clandestinely demolished Welham's mansion, bringing in demolition vehicles after sundown.¹⁵¹ The move brought criticism by legislators, historians, and neighbors.¹⁵² Perhaps this conflict inspired MPC to care for San Francisco Plantation to the extent that they do. When San Francisco requires funding for costs that exceed the annual budget, the staff petitions the Foundation board. The board then accesses funding directly from MPC, that the Corporation may then deduct from taxes paid.¹⁵³ During Transformation project interviews, owners of other area sites remarked that Marathon

https://coraweb.sos.la.gov/CommercialSearch/CommercialSearchDetails.aspx?CharterID=26218_551FA3CEEF.

¹⁴⁹ "Midnight Raid," *Preservation News*, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://prn.library.cornell.edu/?a=dd=PRN19791201.2.13srpos=2e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-%22san+francisco+plantation%22-----#.XFilyLbaLAo.link>. 19:12, 1 December 1979.

¹⁵⁰ "Fast Tracks for Marathon in Louisiana," *Preservation News*, June 1, 1979, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://prn.library.cornell.edu/?a=dd=PRN19790601.2.4srpos=4e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-welham-----#.XFizWD3rNmW.link>.

¹⁵¹ John McQuaid, "Transforming the Land from the Four Part Series Unwelcome Neighbors: Race, Class and the Environment," *Times Picayune*, August 12, 2016, accessed February 4, 2019, https://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2000/05/transforming_the_land.html.

¹⁵² "Fast Tracks for Marathon in Louisiana," *Preservation News*, June 1, 1979, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://prn.library.cornell.edu/?a=dd=PRN19790601.2.4srpos=4e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-welham-----#.XFizWD3rNmW.link>.

¹⁵³ Interview, March 2014.



Figure 2. A satellite image shows San Francisco location amongst Marathon Petroleum Corporation's many industrial and commercial structures. Source: Google Maps, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://maps.google.com/>.

provides San Francisco Plantation minimal assistance, implying that Marathon intentionally dooms the site's business to increase the corporation's annual tax write off.

As a representative from a nearby River Road plantation site said, "I think Marathon just doesn't really care, . . . I guess they have to have a certain number of *foot* traffic through the house and they just went through a huge restoration process of the house, so they're preserving it, and I think they do that mostly for the *community* . . . because they really don't want the house."¹⁵⁴ A representative from another River Road plantation commented that Marathon throttles San Francisco's business potential: "Marathon has an obligation . . . They're maintaining the house, but the house will never change."¹⁵⁵ Demonstrating such a cavalier attitude toward preservation and investing

¹⁵⁴ Interview, March 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, March 2014.

little to make the place thrive within the tourist and neighboring community, this corporate owner demonstrates willful ignorance toward best interpretive practices for cultural heritage sites.

Marathon's 2017 Citizenship Report touts the corporation's values: integrity, corporate citizenship, inclusive values.¹⁵⁶ The report advertises the ways Marathon serves the community, including operating San Francisco Plantation. The report features two pages of color images showing outbuildings at San Francisco, explaining that there was no discussion of the enslaved before 2017. "Personnel at MPC's Garyville refinery . . . began a research process in 2015 aimed at bringing greater prominence to the lives of those who helped build the nation's economy of that era."¹⁵⁷ The changes listed included the addition of interpretive signage, the display of a household inventory that included enslaved peoples' names inside a wooden cabin, and " . . . tours now include information about the social history of the home, including the role of enslaved people in everyday life."¹⁵⁸ However, the tour narrative demonstrated during a 2018 visit included no mention of the enslaved, symbolically erasing them from San Francisco's historic house. Thus, whatever funding Marathon puts toward research, hiring, training, and interpretation led to small, permanent, visual markers rather than a total interpretation of enslavement history at the site.

¹⁵⁶ Marathon Petroleum Company Public Affairs, *Citizenship Report*, 2017, https://www.marathonpetroleum.com/content/documents/Citizenship/2017/2017_Citizenship_Report_10_24.pdf, 4-5 (accessed February 17, 2019).

¹⁵⁷ Marathon Petroleum Company Public Affairs, *Citizenship Report*, 16-17.

¹⁵⁸ Marathon Petroleum Company Public Affairs, *Citizenship Report*, 16-17.

Foundation Ownership

According to the National Council of Non-profits, non-profit organizations registered as 501(c)3 foundations with the Internal Revenue Service must “earn the public’s trust through their commitment to ethical principles, transparency, and accountability,” ideals also supported by American Alliance of Museums and the National Council on Public History.¹⁵⁹ Within the Transformation project sites, each of the owning foundations were organized to preserve an individual site or several historical sites in the area. Similar to family-owned legacy sites, the site’s initial preservationists were family members, professionals, or enthusiasts, who factor into tour narratives as a featured part of the plantation’s evolution. The role of non-profit foundations at plantation sites will be discussed in more detail in the following section concerning profit models.

¹⁵⁹ "Ethics and Accountability for Nonprofits," National Council of Nonprofits, October 08, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/ethics-and-accountability-nonprofits>.

Table 8 Tourist plantation sites owned privately by a foundation.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	foundation owned	Oak Alley	Oak Alley Foundation	Oak Alley Foundation; Oak Alley Plantation, Restaurant & Inn
	foundation owned	Middleton Place	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation
	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle	Preservation Virginia	Preservation Virginia
	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	National Trust for Historic Preservation	Drayton Hall Foundation

Profit Models

Ownership models influence many aspects of business at tourist plantations; however, the profit model of the place determines to what extent the site must benefit the community. Of the twelve privately-owned Transformation project tourist plantations, four operate as for-profit ventures, two operate as non-profit organizations, and six split their institutions between a for-profit entity and a non-profit foundation. The business goals of the profit models differ, as do their obligations to public service, both of which impact interpretative work. Non-profit sites have ethical obligations to fulfill their missions, typically in the service of education, interpretation, and commemoration. For-profit tourist plantations have no such obligations, as long as they operate within the law. Such places use entrepreneurial business methods to add value through entertainment venues and hospitality services that increase revenue. As a docent at Boone Hall Plantation said of his/her workplace, “It’s a commercial entity, but they’re trying to be respectful of the past here.”¹⁶⁰ Some sites, like Houmas House in Louisiana completely disregard the history of those enslaved at the property in favor of commercial operations.¹⁶¹ With varying respect paid to the site’s past, such places attract criticism for revenue garnered from historically inaccurate interpretive and entertainment products.¹⁶² Lastly, the combination of non-profit and for-profit components, permits eligibility for grant funding to the site’s non-profit arm, while simultaneously allowing unbridled revenue from

¹⁶⁰ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁶¹ Site visit, June 2019.

¹⁶² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 62-63.

Table 9 Profit models for each participating tourist plantations.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	for profit	single owner	Whitney Plantation	John Cummings	John Cummings
		family owned	Berkeley Plantation	Malcolm E. Jamieson	Malcolm E. Jamieson
		commercial entity owned and run by separate business entities	Boone Hall Plantation	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for non-profit component-	single owner	Laura Plantation	St. James Sugar Cooperative	Laura Plantation Company
		family owned	Houmas House	Kevin Kelley	Houmas House Foundation
		family owned LLC	Magnolia Plantation	The Hastie Family	Magnolia Plantation Foundation
	non-profit foundation owned, with separate for-profit component	family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	Shirley Plantation LLC	Shirley Plantation Foundation
		commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation	Marathon Petroleum Company	San Francisco Plantation (a 501c3)
		foundation owned	Oak Alley	Oak Alley Foundation	Oak Alley Foundation; Oak Alley Plantation, Restaurant & Inn
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Middleton Place	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle	Preservation Virginia	Preservation Virginia
	non-profit foundation owned, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	National Trust for Historic Preservation	Drayton Hall Foundation

commercial endeavors. Therefore, in order to uphold public trust, non-profit and combination profit models must demonstrate dedication to interpretive standards, like those promoted by AAM, the Association for State and Local History, and NCPH, while maintaining financial transparency. Interviews and site visits reveal the difficulty of this achievement. Therefore, tourist plantation businesses often blur the line between public trust and personal profit, presenting race-based slavery as ancillary, marketing slaveholding history and hospitality as the central, saleable product.

Non-Profit Plantations

The main, agreed upon obligation of non-profit entities is to provide a benefit to the community.¹⁶³ The Internal Revenue Service recognizes two types of non-profit organizations, public charities and private foundations. Public charities rely on contributions from its public and patrons for support. In contrast, private foundations are typically founded with a large endowment rather than public donations. Furthermore, private operating foundations manage their moneys for the benefit of their own charitable interests. With tourist plantations this typically means funding their own operations and project costs, however the foundation may also make grants to outside institutions and

¹⁶³ John Riddle, *Streetwise Managing a Nonprofit: How to Write Winning Grant Proposals, Work with a Board, and Build a Fundraising Program* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2002), 4; "Ethics and Accountability for Nonprofits," National Council of Nonprofits, October 08, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/ethics-and-accountability-nonprofits>.

Table 10 Sites owned and operated by a non-profit entity

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Middleton Place	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation	Middleton Place Preservation Foundation
Private Ownership	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle	Preservation Virginia	Preservation Virginia
Private Ownership	non-profit foundation owned, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	National Trust for Historic Preservation	Drayton Hall Foundation

organizations. As investment interest from private foundations is still taxable, such donations may be deductible, offsetting taxable income costs.¹⁶⁴

There is no “official” list of best practices that govern a non-profit organization. However, nonprofit organizations typically observe “well-recognized ethical standards and accountability practices,” such as “ethical fundraising,” “financial transparency,” and to clearly state the organizational mission, dedicating all aspects of business toward mission fulfillment.¹⁶⁵ Two plantations included in the Transformation project operate solely as not for profit sites, without a government or for-profit component. These are Drayton Hall, owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, but governed and operated by Drayton Hall Preservation Trust, and Bacon’s Castle, a site owned and administered by Preservation Virginia. Because each of these foundations are registered 501(c)3 corporations, they are exempt from paying taxes, and donor contributions are eligible as tax deductions.¹⁶⁶ The advertised missions of the Transformation project non-profit plantations involve preservation, interpretation, and public education, with a focus on historic structure conservation, and public education for community benefit.¹⁶⁷ These

¹⁶⁴ "Internal Revenue Service | An Official Website of the United States Government," Internal Revenue Service, accessed February 03, 2019, <http://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/private-foundations/private-operating-foundations>.

¹⁶⁵ "Ethics and Accountability for Nonprofits," National Council of Nonprofits, October 08, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/ethics-and-accountability-nonprofits>.

¹⁶⁶ "Ethics and Accountability for Nonprofits," National Council of Nonprofits, October 08, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/ethics-and-accountability-nonprofits>.

¹⁶⁷ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>; "Bacon's Castle," Preservation Virginia, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://preservationvirginia.org/historic-sites/bacons-castle/>; "Middleton Place National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards Gardens," And Middleton Family Stories, Enslaved Charleston History, Plantation Life, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://www.middletonplace.org/>.

sites demonstrate the difficult balancing act of using private funding in an attempt to fulfill their missions.

The non-profit sites included in this study interpret the history of the enslaved. However, at times other themes like preservation work and architectural history may overshadow the telling of broader history. During a site visit to Drayton Hall, the interpretive tour included extensive discussions of architecture, family history, and preservation, but only a few mentions of the enslaved there.¹⁶⁸ Drayton Hall's web site states the Drayton Hall Preservation Trust's mission as, ". . . to research, preserve, and interpret Drayton Hall, its collections, and environs, in order to educate the public and to inspire people to embrace historic preservation."¹⁶⁹ The site further cites the staff and DHPT's role in this process is as ". . . intermediaries between artifact and student, estate and visitor, past and present."¹⁷⁰ Thus, the Trust prioritizes preservation as a main operational and interpretive focus at Drayton Hall, a priority reflected in the goals of Drayton Hall's owning institution, the National Trust for Historic Preservation.¹⁷¹ NTHP acquired the site in 1974 following over two-hundred years of ownership by the Drayton Family.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Site visit, June 2018.

¹⁶⁹ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

¹⁷⁰ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

¹⁷¹ "Drayton Hall | National Trust for Historic Preservation," Drayton Hall, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://savingplaces.org/places/drayton-hall#.XLB5DBNKjBI>.

¹⁷² "Drayton Hall | National Trust for Historic Preservation," Drayton Hall, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://savingplaces.org/places/drayton-hall#.XLB5DBNKjBI>.

DHPT oversees all operations of Drayton Hall including development. As a manager at Drayton Hall explained, the site was operated by employees of NTHP, who “ . . . see themselves in the business of *protecting* endangered sites rather than *managing* protected sites.”¹⁷³ In 2015 when NTHP no longer considered Drayton Hall *endangered*, they instituted a new relationship with Drayton Hall, and DHPT was founded. A staffer at Drayton Hall explained that the administrative shift “ . . . moved [NTHP and DHPT] into a situation called co-stewardship. The [NTHP] trust still owns the property, but a new nonprofit, in this case the Drayton Hall Preservation Trust, has been set up to manage the property.”¹⁷⁴

That change allowed Drayton Hall more autonomy over operations, and the ability to build a board that might better serve the local and visiting community. As of 2016 when site interviews were conducted, a member of the management team discussed DHPT’s board, describing it as varied geographically, but with “ . . . a lot of local Charleston folks. But we do have board members from all over east of the Mississippi, and a lot of them have been involved with Drayton Hall for many years.”¹⁷⁵ Several board members are members of the descendant community, “ . . . some Draytons, and some folks who are connected to Richmond Bowens, descendants of the enslaved here.”¹⁷⁶ Beyond geographic and racial demographics, the team member explained that the board represents a variety of professional fields. “We have historians on the board

¹⁷³ Interview, February 26, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, February 26, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, February 20, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, February 20, 2016.

and . . . attorneys and doctors and financial experts. It's an incredible, dynamic board that's pretty well-rounded."¹⁷⁷ Such members represent a broad array of academic, professional, and personal interests that will impact governance, particularly the prioritization of strategic planning.

Non-profits such as DHPT have dedicated staff for fundraising, and their development team has organized a multi-level donor/member.¹⁷⁸ After raising an estimated \$6,000,000, Drayton Hall opened the Sally Reahard Visitor Center in 2017, the majority of which was donated by the Center's namesake.¹⁷⁹ The Center allowed the former Caretaker's Cottage, previously used for gift shop and ticket sales, to become a dedicated exhibit space for the interpretation of Drayton Hall's African American history.¹⁸⁰ The work of the development team, along with the money raised, included areas for classrooms and galleries, and an orientation space. A recently-produced orientation video shown in the theatre advertises DHPT's dedication to preservation, outlines the family history, and emphasizes the impact of enslaved African Americans upon Drayton Hall's landscape.

Drayton Hall's web presence, guided tours, and orientation video successfully fulfills DHPT's mission to preservation and stewardship. Their web site includes images and references to African Americans at the site, explicitly stating the origin of the family

¹⁷⁷ Interview, February 26, 2016.

¹⁷⁸ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Behre, "Charleston's Drayton Hall Opens Its New Visitors Center," *Post and Courier*, April 28, 2018, accessed August 30, 2018, https://www.postandcourier.com/columnists/charleston-s-drayton-hall-opens-its-new-visitors-center/article_69cccdca-4705-11e8-a69f-ff210ec6441e.html.

¹⁸⁰ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed January 31, 2019, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

money: “Wealth was facilitated by the institution of slavery.”¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, guided tours do not always emphasize this point. A Drayton Hall management team member correlated that choice to a change in non-profit governance. Before DHPT took over operations NTHP themes at the site included the preservation work of NTHP and a “ . . . certain number of factoids associated with African-American history,” according to the manager.¹⁸² Therefore, the shift in operational control from NTHP to DHPT also shifted tour content. The manager explained that Drayton, “ . . . is not a plantation that’s purely about the African-American experience. There’s a heck of a lot more that’s important and integral to American history than just African-American history.”¹⁸³

Similarly to Drayton Hall, the historic preservation organization Preservation Virginia, owns and operates the place as a tourist plantation site.¹⁸⁴ Bacon’s Castle is one of six historic Virginia sites operated by Preservation Virginia, including Historic Jamestowne. As a PV management staffer explained, Historic Jamestowne is “ . . . the one site that is in the black. We’re able to disperse those funds to make up the deficit, so that all of these other sites can remain open.”¹⁸⁵ Funding may be prioritized toward Historic Jamestowne, due to visitor demands on the site, however, the revenue generated from this demand, can support the budgetary needs of the other PV sites. This economic flexibility is important to sites like Bacon’s Castle, since private donations are their main

¹⁸¹ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

¹⁸² Interview, February 26, 2016.

¹⁸³ Interview, February 26, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ "Home Page," Preservation Virginia, accessed August 30, 2018, <https://preservationvirginia.org/>.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, July 16, 2016.

revenue. PV's serves Virginia community projects, attracting a much smaller pool of donors than the much larger, national organization NTHP. The PV staffer explained, "You can always try to work towards getting more of an endowment, but . . . it's a lot of work," and donations gathered by PV are distributed to their sites, including Bacon's Castle at PV's discretion.¹⁸⁶ The staffer explained the source of these donations as, ". . . a lot of foundations, and then private donations . . . different organizations willing to give us money," indicating the wide variety of resources petitioned for funds.¹⁸⁷

Bacon's Castles funding limitations are obvious upon visiting the site. The modest orientation space, giftshop, restrooms are all housed within the newest portion of the historic house, rather than a separate visitor center. At non-profit sites like Bacon's Castle, limited funding can also limit programming, preservation, and interpretive efforts related to racialized history. Decision makers may perceive these efforts as tangential to the site's main mission, making adequate incorporation of enslavement history into tours even more difficult. However, a staffer explained that PV funding is tight. Regardless of need, ". . . any special projects or . . . any general maintenance or preservation issues that need to be taken care of comes from [outside] foundations."¹⁸⁸ Preservation Virginia gathered private donor money to fund the restoration of the site's historic smokehouse and slave quarters in 2018. This project allows visitors to enter these structures, which had been previously inaccessible. According to Jennifer Hurst-Wender, PV's Director of

¹⁸⁶ Interview, July 16, 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, July 16, 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, July 16, 2016.

Museum Operations and Education, “The slave quarter and smokehouse preservation allows us to explore the everyday lives of people who were enslaved and later, those who sharecropped the very same land,” marrying the mission of preservation with the interpretation of the site’s African American legacy.¹⁸⁹

For-Profit Sites

Sites owned by completely private entities such as an individual, a limited liability corporation, or a family, may conduct business as they please. At the time of data gathering, four Transformation project sites operated for-profit operations with no non-profit component, including Laura and Whitney Plantations in Louisiana, Boone Hall Plantation in Charleston, and Berkeley Plantation in Virginia.¹⁹⁰ While non-profit tourist plantations must direct revenue toward organizational projects and operations, for-profit tourist plantation owners are free to garner money generated beyond cost. Furthermore, for-profit companies’ missions tend to relate to their business goals, serving “customers” rather than communities. However, the majority of for-profit project sites defy assumptions one might make about commercial tourist plantations. Rather than working for increased profits, many of these sites demonstrate a dedication to education, while a few clearly prioritize the interpretation of racial history.

¹⁸⁹ "Historic Preservation, Education Advocacy," Preservation Virginia, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://preservationvirginia.org/>.

¹⁹⁰ In November 2018 William McRae founded the Boone Hall Foundation, but currently no information concerning this organization is publicly available, nor was there a representative at the site able to discuss this filing. Therefore, information concerning this place will reflect the data originally collected.

In Virginia, Berkeley Plantation cannot be accused of profit-forward business efforts. Berkeley Plantation is a sleepy site on the James River, owned by Malcolm E. Jamieson, grandson of John Jamieson who purchased the site in 1907.¹⁹¹ Interviews with staff reflect a conservative budget, a laissez-faire operational style, and a difficulty attracting visitors. The site advertises no particular mission, but an interview with a site associate expressed, “We provide a real service to the public from education.”¹⁹² During a June 2018 visit to the site, costumed history *enthusiasts* gave tours demonstrating a very relaxed interpretive ethic.¹⁹³ Although the staff was enthusiastic, the interpretive materials and methods they employed demonstrate a lack of investment and expertise in this portion of the business.

Boone Hall Plantation, opened to the public for tours by the current owning family the McRaes in 1956.¹⁹⁴ The Plantation sits on a large, working farm, owned and run by Boone Hall Plantation, Inc. Products produced on the farm, as well as other food items sourced locally and nationally, are sold down the road at Boone Hall Farms, a grocery, caterer, and restaurant run by Boone Hall Farms, Inc.¹⁹⁵ Like Berkeley Plantation, Boone Hall Plantation professes no mission on its web site, but vaguely states

¹⁹¹ "Berkeley Plantation | HOME," Berkeley Plantation | HOME, 2019, accessed March 1, 2019, <http://www.berkeleyplantation.com>.

¹⁹² Interview, October 5, 2016.

¹⁹³ Personal visit June 2018.

¹⁹⁴ "Boone Hall Plantation Gardens," Boone Hall Plantation Gardens, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.boonehallplantation.com/>.

¹⁹⁵ "Boone Hall Farms," Boone Hall Farms, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, <http://boonehallfarms.com/>.

that at Boone Hall, “visitors can experience what plantation life was like.”¹⁹⁶ Aside from interpretive offerings, the Plantation has a café, butterfly enclosure, and shops, as well as carriage tours. Boone Hall Plantation has re-invested some profits into the care and interpretation of its brick slave dwellings, nature programming, Gullah interpretive performances, as well as paying for extensive historical research at the site.

A for-profit site in Louisiana, Laura Plantation, sits on acreage owned by St. James Sugar Cooperative. However, the site is operated by the Laura Plantation Company, a family business owned by couple Norman and Sand Marmillion.¹⁹⁷ The Marmillions have 75 percent controlling interest in the company, with 30 other investors controlling the remainder.¹⁹⁸ They run a separate organization, Zoë Company a merchandise and publishing company that brings in approximately \$500,000 annually.¹⁹⁹ A staff manager associated with Laura told interviewers, “Anything that we make and sell, postcards, magnets, mugs, goes through the Zoë Company and Zoë Company gets 40 to 60 percent . . . Then the rest goes to the plantation, and the plantation makes a little profit off too.”²⁰⁰ Laura has had multiple setbacks including a fire in 2004, and huge visitorship and revenue losses due to hurricane Katrina. However, with those transforming events, the Marmillions reinvented the business. Through business loans,

¹⁹⁶ "Boone Hall Plantation Gardens," Boone Hall Plantation Gardens, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.boonehallplantation.com/>.

¹⁹⁷ Jay Schexnaydre, email conversation with author, January 9, 2019.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, March 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Interview, March 2014.

²⁰⁰ Interview, March 2014.

Table 11 For-profit tourist plantations and their various owning entities.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	for profit	single owner	Whitney Plantation	John Cummings	John Cummings
		family owned	Berkeley Plantation	Malcolm E. Jamieson	Malcolm E. Jamieson
		commercial entity	Boone Hall Plantation	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.	Boone Hall Plantation, Inc.
		owned and run by separate business entities	Laura Plantation	St. James Sugar Cooperative	Laura Plantation Company

they “ . . . created a whole new type of tourist attraction with a different feel. It’s a storytelling format where we talked about culture, not about a building, not about family, but about something much bigger than the place.”²⁰¹ Thus, Laura continues to grow its business through the dedication to its main product, interpretation of Creole cultural history.

At the time of the Transformation project data collection, lawyer John Cummings owned everything having to do with Whitney Plantation, from the land to the artifacts. A retired lawyer and real estate investor, Cummings bought Whitney Plantation in 1999, opening it as the nation’s “first slavery museum” in December 2014. Cummings financed the museum himself, investing \$8.6 million dollars to get the site ready for the public.²⁰² During an interview with management staff at Whitney Plantation, the interviewer asked how the business was organized. The interviewee explained that there was a 501(c)3 component in place but it was not in use. Governance and financial control still belonged to the for-profit business and the non-profit component was still a placeholder. The staffer discussed the inappropriate business assignation as, “a *C-corp* . . . it’s really not good for what we’re *for*.”²⁰³ In other words, the work conducted at Whitney might be better managed by a non-profit foundation, rather than organized as a commercial

²⁰¹ Interview, March 2014.

²⁰² Takehiko Kambayashi, "A Retired Lawyer Opens First US Slavery Museum with \$8.6 Million of His Money," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 24, 2016, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/2016/0324/A-retired-lawyer-opens-first-US-slavery-museum-with-8.6-million-of-his-money>.

²⁰³ Interview, March 2014.

corporation.²⁰⁴ For a for-profit corporation, Whitney has no revenue generating ventures on site, such as hospitality services. Its income completely relies upon ticket and gift shop sales.

Non-profit museum professionals have criticized for-profit museums, calling them “interlopers with lesser missions, fewer obligations and unfair advantages, threatening the field’s hard-won respect.”²⁰⁵ They are ineligible to be accredited by professional organizations such as AAM, who only approves institutions with non-profit standing. However, sites like Whitney Plantation challenge preconceived such ideas about for-profit ethics. The site presents a black-centric interpretation, directly tackling the ugly history of slavery.²⁰⁶ Similarly, Boone Hall Plantation invests in preservation, educational and interpretive efforts because they attract tourists. Lastly, Laura Plantation’s interpretation tells the story of Creole history at the site, how people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds worked in sugar cane production. Though many of these sites still have issues related to Eichstedt’s and Small’s “discursive strategies,” the appearance of these issues cannot be attributed to these places’ unrestrained profiteering.²⁰⁷ In fact, the freedom granted some of these for-profit sites provides a variety of benefits to historic interpretation, including the ability to proudly

²⁰⁴ As of March 8, 2019, Operations Director Ashley Rogers confirmed that though Whitney Plantation had applied to alter its status from a C-corp to a 501(c)3, but the change had not been finalized with the IRS. Once the change is complete, Cummings will donate the land and collection to the non-profit and a board will be put in place, to be chaired by Donna Cummings; Ashley Rogers, email to Jennifer Harris, March 8, 2019.

²⁰⁵ Leah Arroyo, "Sex, Drugs, and Pirates," *Museum* 87, no. 6 (November 2008): 65.

²⁰⁶ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 234-240.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

generate revenue that may fund well-researched and presented interpretations of racialized history at tourist plantations.

For-Profit and Non-profit Combination

Six Transformation project tourist plantations divide their governance, operations, and/or expenses and revenue between a combination of two entities, one for-profit and one not-for-profit. Each side of the businesses oversees assigned portions of the plantation business. Though this can complicate each entity's role at the site, interviews with owners and staff indicated multiple benefits to a combination profit model. By adding a non-profit arm, otherwise for-profit plantations become eligible for grant funding and donations. Some interviewees admitted to using the non-profit arm as a tax shelter. Public non-profit organizations must offer a product or service that charitably benefits the public, often described non-specifically as preservation or education. Interviews demonstrate how combination profit models at tourist plantations benefit and/or harm the implementation of racialized history.

At combination profit model tourist plantations, the ways business is divided amongst non-profit and for-profit arms varies. Commonly though, the income generated from the mission-constrained non-profit income might include revenue from tour tickets, programs, and gift shop merchandise. The commercial component of the site might operate auxiliary ventures such as restaurants, inns, and concert and wedding venues.

Table 12 Sites with combined ownership/operations models including both for- and non-profit components.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	OWNER	MANAGING ENTITY
Private Ownership	single/family/corporate owned with separate for non-profit component-	single owner	Houmas House	Kevin Kelley	Houmas House Foundation
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation	The Hastie Family	Magnolia Plantation Foundation
		family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	Shirley Plantation LLC	Shirley Plantation Foundation
		commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation	Marathon Petroleum Company	San Francisco Plantation (a 501c3)

Over-reliance on hospitality ventures for marketing purposes, can portray the interpretive aspects of the site as nothing more than a quaint backdrop for entertaining, rather than a site of historical and racial significance. This arrangement could greatly benefit the site's overall mission if for-profit revenue is reinvested in non-profit projects, such as interpretation. However, commercial ventures operated by for-profit entities have no obligation to adhere to the site's mission and are not held to the same ethical standards.

Financial sustainability seems to motivate the creation of the combination profit model. For instance, having a non-profit component makes an otherwise for-profit site qualify for outside grants and charitable donations. Houmas House, where the for-profit ownership has produced steady, entrepreneurial growth, set up a non-profit foundation, legally allowing tax-free donations to the site. Soon after, the site received "a record setting \$5.6 million [grant] that was awarded to the Houmas House Foundation for the construction of a River Overlook and Interpretive Center along the Louisiana Great River Road."²⁰⁸ The new interpretive structure will include "a 28,000-square-foot museum with a cafe and performance stage and a 10-foot-wide walkway that will wind through the gardens," entertainment ventures that will surely generate even more profit for Houmas House in years to come.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Jay Dardenne, *2012 Sunset Report*, report no. 2012 Sunset Report, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, State of Louisiana, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/documentarchive/sunset2012.pdf>, 64.

²⁰⁹ Ellyn Couvillion, "Life on the Mississippi: New Museum on Houmas House Grounds in Ascension to Give Look into the past," *The Advocate*, May 26, 2018, accessed February 5, 2019, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/ascension/article_920782ea-5ab9-11e8-9969-1780005b965f.html.

Interviews with management at most of the combination profit-model sites mentioned tax write offs, another economic benefit of the combination profit model. When the for-profit component donates to the non-profit, whatever goods or services given over are tax deductible. One owner explicitly praised the combination profit model, calling it a tax shelter. As the site owner explained, "Upon my death, the [for-profit business name redacted] is donated . . . to the Foundation, that way everything I've created here will be a tax deduction for my heirs . . . basically the tax deduction on this place will allow them not to have pay any taxes . . . it is a wonderful inheritance tax shelter."²¹⁰ The use of a plantation as a tax shelter undercuts the sacrifices and experiences of the enslaved for the current owner, a contemporary echo of the original plantation hierarchy.

The potential ambiguities of tax codes applying to non-profit sites and museums has attracted the attention of Congress. In 2015 the Senate Finance Committee began an investigation into museums and other non-profit exhibiting institutions, weighing their public benefit, and looking for exploitation of this perceived tax-dodging loophole.²¹¹ Sites that covertly or openly rely upon museum charities for personal benefit injure the entire field. "Tax-exempt museums should focus on providing a public good and not the art of skirting around the tax code," wrote Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah.²¹² By abusing

²¹⁰ Interview with site owner, October 5, 2016.

²¹¹ Elizabeth Merritt, "Is 'Tax-exempt' Becoming a Dirty Word?" *Center for the Future of Museums Blog* May 30, 2018, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/05/30/is-tax-exempt-becoming-a-dirty-word/>.

²¹² Patricia Cohen, "Tax Status of Museums Questioned by Senators," *New York Times*, November 29, 2015, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/30/business/tax-status-of-museums-questioned-by-senators.html?smid=pl-share>.

tax codes and public trust, such places threaten the viability of charitable status for all non-profit museums.

The Middleton Place Foundation, a 501(c)3 private foundation, owns and operates the Middleton Place tourist plantation site. In the early twentieth century, J. J. Pringle Smith inherited the property, restoring and moving into the South Flanker, the only standing portion of the house. Smith's wife Henningham Smith lead a massive garden restoration project, adding a farm complex in 1937, now used by costumed historic interpreters. Following the death of the Smiths, their grandson Charles Duell inherited the property. Duell founded the Middleton Place Foundation in 1974, opening the property to the public in 1975.²¹³ The Foundation advertises itself as an "educational trust" that conducts preservation and interpretive services "as a force for education, understanding, and positive change."²¹⁴ MPF owns and operates another historic house museum, Edmonston-Alston House, which is located in Charleston near the battery. It also operates a for-profit sub-entity, the Middleton Place Landmark Corporation, which manages hospitality services including Middleton Place garden market and Middleton Place Restaurant. Each of these venues sells taxable products directing all profits back to the Foundation.²¹⁵ The Restaurant web site states, "*All proceeds from the Middleton Place*

²¹³ "Middleton Place National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards & Gardens," National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards & Gardens, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.middletonplace.org/>.

²¹⁴ "Middleton Place National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards & Gardens," And Middleton Family Stories, Enslaved Charleston History, Plantation Life, accessed August 30, 2018, <https://www.middletonplace.org/>.

²¹⁵ Jack Neale, telephone conversation with author, January 31, 2019.

Restaurant support the mission of the Middleton Place Foundation.”²¹⁶ Such transparency, a rare occurrence with Transformation project sites, clearly advertises MPLC’s work exist solely in support of preservation and interpretive projects. As a private foundation, Magnolia Plantation and Gardens is a “for-profit garden with a nonprofit foundation.”²¹⁷ The Plantation donates its profits to the Foundation, which then raises more funds, reinvests them at the Plantation, and also distributes grants to other charitable causes.²¹⁸ Magnolia Plantation runs many ahistorical, profitable attractions including a petting zoo, as depicted in figure 3 on the following page. In fact, the emphasis on non-historical aspects of the place initially drew criticism but proved their value once the attractions were able to fund historical projects. “When Drayton Hasty Sr. ran the plantation . . . he took a lot of hits for turning Magnolia into a Six Flags – bringing in the petting zoo and the tours . . . That allowed him to make Magnolia solvent . . . and do the historical and the other stuff.”²¹⁹ This interview demonstrates the perceived economic interplay between the charitable and profitable components at combination sites; ahistorical revenue underpins the interpretation of the historical.

²¹⁶ "Middleton Place National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards Gardens," National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards Gardens, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.middletonplace.org/>.

²¹⁷ Interview, February 19, 2016.

²¹⁸ Interview, February 19, 2016.

²¹⁹ Interview, February 19, 2016.

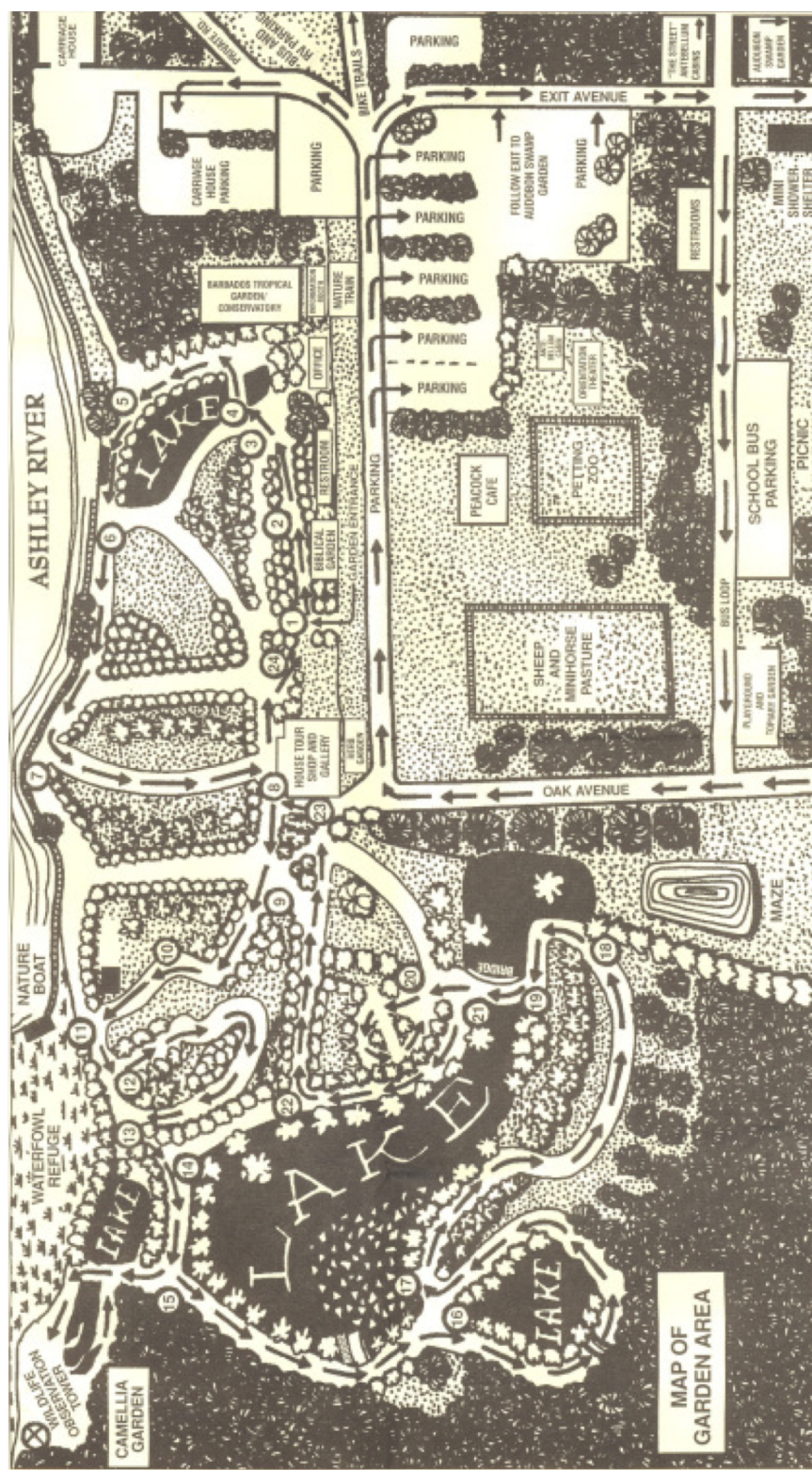


Figure 3: A map of Magnolia Plantation and Gardens showing the historic house, located near the center, surrounded by an abundance of non-historical areas, including the petting zoo. Source: Parker Meyer Garden, "Visiting Public Gardens – Magnolia Plantation and Gardens," parkermeyergarden.wordpress.com, September 30, 2008, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://parkermeyergarden.wordpress.com/2008/09/30/visiting-public-gardens-magnolia-plantation-and-gardens/>.

At Magnolia Plantation, the private non-profit foundation primarily funds projects at Magnolia. A manager at the site explained that when money is needed, they petition the board. “If something happens out of the ordinary, I just send an email to the family ‘I need an addendum to the budget . . . This is what I need. If you give it to me, I can do this. If you don’t do it, these are the implications.’”²²⁰ In addition to funding trams to transport visitors across the landscape for the From Slavery to Freedom Tour, the foundation has made sizable donations to the International African-American Museum, Joe McGill’s Slave Dwelling Project, and the genealogy project Low Country Africana.²²¹

At Oak Alley Plantation, the Oak Alley Foundation runs as a public charity, operating the historic house, ticket sales, and all exhibit spaces. The for-profit Oak Alley Plantation, Restaurant & Inn conducts hospitality services beyond a fence separating the non and for-profit entities geographically, with several restaurants and a bed and breakfast. An interview with site management revealed that ticket sales for historic house tours generates more revenue than the auxiliary hospitality ventures do, a unique occurrence at plantation sites. As a person associated with the site explained, with hospitality, “the commercial part of it, you buy product, you have to have staff, your liability,” absorbing potential profits.²²² However, even if the interpretive spaces demonstrate their revenue value, site interviews revealed that moneys are not prioritized

²²⁰ Interview, February 19, 2016.

²²¹ Interview, February 19, 2016.

²²² Interview, March 2014.

toward interpretive projects and programming. Future capital campaigns would invest into non-historical features in the landscape, like formal gardens. Meanwhile, the site's rebuilt slave quarters and their extensive interpretation were created "piecemeal," over time, as profits were gathered through ticket sales.²²³

The characteristic categories that separate the Transformation project sites prove that the institutional makeup of these sites vary greatly. The categories clearly define the entrepreneurial or ethical motivations of site owners and founders reflecting some patterns in administrative systems. However, the individuality of institutional efforts as expressed by site staff and owners indicate that the narrative issues caused by leadership choices must be approached through the lens of their administrative individuality. Further examination of staffing makeup and mechanisms will provide more insight into how individuals working in murmuration instigate narrative issues.

²²³ Interview, March 2014.

CHAPTER FOUR: STAFFING, EDUCATION, AND DOCENTS

The organizational size of Transformation project sites varies from the skeleton crew at San Francisco Plantation in Louisiana, to the extensive interpretive, agricultural, and hospitality staff of Boone Hall Plantation.¹ The larger the staff complement, the more specialized the staffing roles. A small staff complement requires a smaller payroll budget, but increases responsibility of owners, management, docents, and volunteers to complete tasks that might otherwise be delegated to specialized employees. This chapter examines interview data, collected from staff and owner/operators to understand how organizational makeup, task assignment, compensation, and administration complicate the presentation of narrative tours at plantation sites.²

Interviews with single-owner site operators revealed their enthusiasm for history as their entrepreneurial impulse. Whereas some operators lack historical training, they boast many years of commercial experience working in fields ranging from real estate to restaurants. Though many graduates of public history, history, and museum studies programs emerge each year, under-educated tourist plantation personnel pervade. Hiring managers choose candidates they perceive as being the best fit to their expectations. Therefore, management embed their own personal ideologies within narratives through the employees they choose. If harboring implicit or expressed racial bias, their work

¹ Site visits, June 2018.

² Interview instruments were created for docent and owner interviews. However, interviews with other staff had no dedicated instrument and were therefore a bit less specific. Additionally, because of the typically large docent pool at historic sites, the majority of interviews conducted were with docents. See appendix A for interview instrument.

practice and the consumer products offered at the site reflects these mentalities. By examining the interview data, the talents, fallibility, prejudices, and knowledge of tourist plantation staff emerge. Thus, the appearance of Eichstedt's and Small's "discursive strategies" link to a broad array of people and processes that develop racialized narratives at tourist plantations.³

Interpretive Staffing Complement

Site Owners/Operators and Management Style

The management model and style, as employed by the site's main leadership, its owner or operator, greatly impacts the final site interpretive theme and products.⁴ As "memorial entrepreneurs," owner/operators might welcome the input of the community and staff collaborations in the embrace of broad interpretation, or prevent anticipated conflict by ignoring the topic of slavery altogether.⁵ Operators employ management styles that include democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. The realization of these supervisory methods impact interpretation through the manner of guidance or control imposed upon staff when authoring and implementing site narratives.⁶ Management style

³ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 10.

⁴ Candace Forbes Bright, Derek H. Alderman, and David L. Butler, "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery: A Complex Relationship," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (2016): 1745.

⁵ Bright, et al., "Tourist Plantation Owners and Slavery," 1745.

⁶ Vincent Dutot, "Exploring the Double Influence of CEOs' Management Style on the Development of SMEs' Corporate Reputation," *Journal of Small Business Entrepreneurship* 29, no. 5 (2017): 354-355.

impacts the “employees’ perception of the corporate identity, image, and culture,” and at tourist plantations characterizes the site’s public identity.⁷

Table 13 Owner/operator management style by state, correlated to the appearance of Eichstedt’s and Small’s “discursive strategies.”⁸

Management Style	Occurrence	State	Symbolic Annihilation	Trivialization/Deflection	Segregation	In-Between	Relative Incorporation	Black-Centric Interpretation
democratic	2	Louisiana	1			1	1	1
autocratic	2		1	2		2	1	
laissez-faire	1		1	1	1			
			3	3	1	3	2	1
democratic	3	South Carolina		2				1
autocratic								
laissez-faire	2		2		2			
			2	2	2	0	0	1
democratic	3	Virginia	3	4	2		1	
autocratic								
laissez-faire	2		1	1				
			4	5	2		2	
democratic	7	Total	4	6	2	1	2	2
autocratic	3		1	2	0	2	1	0
laissez-faire	5		4	2	3	0	0	0

⁷ Dutot, "Exploring the Double Influence of CEOs’ Management Style on the Development of SMEs’ Corporate Reputation," 353.

⁸ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 8-10.

Discussions concerning operations with two Louisiana site owners reflect the autocratic management style, which is characterized by a top-down organizational structure, with decision making processes assigned to the top tier. Not surprisingly, one site is single-owner operated, and one is a family-owned business, business models which, due to the small size of such operations, tend to concentrate authority at the top of the organization. Interviews with both owners reflect the dangers of the autocratic management silo, particularly in reference to interpretation.

“You have to be able to deal with the world, and 99 percent of the people are very easy to work with, but you have got to be a policeman,” a site operator said in observance of perceived need for shrewd staff regulation.⁹ Autocratic managers dictate many aspects of the workplace, from mundane operations to interpretive language. “You have to be very disciplined with the people who work for you because, you have to make certain standards of quality in your tour, and the way things look, the way you treat visitors. If you don’t maintain those qualities, your business will falter.”¹⁰ In other words, the autocratic site operator must “. . . make decisions about everything.”¹¹ The other autocrat operator seconded, adding that agreeable employees are the key to executing the operator’s vision of success: “You have to hire the right people to implement your passion.”¹² Through rigorous control of staff members, the autocratic manager hopes to achieve their idea of a successful tourist plantation business.

⁹ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁰ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹¹ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹² Interview with owner, March 2015.

Autocrats complain that their management style is all consuming, however. One of the autocratic operators lamented his/her exhaustive involvement in the plantation enterprise. "It's a full-time operation. It's hard for me to leave for a day." However, this manager complains that without his/her involvement business will not operate correctly. "When I leave, people take the opportunity to do what they think. I don't care what they think. I want it my way. Designed by me, for me."¹³ Simply put in his/her own words, "The owner wants to be the dictator."¹⁴ This compulsion extends to tour narratives as well, as one owner asserted, "I'm not going to follow *your* interpretation. This is *our* interpretation that we think is valid," forgoing community input, and collaborative projects.¹⁵ In reference to interpretive staff, the owner asserted, "You have to control these people."¹⁶ Thus, the interpretation of the enslaved at such sites is completely dominated by the perspectives of the autocratic site owner, and are the most likely to sanitize site interpretation through systematic annihilation of enslavement in favor of narratives that elevate the historical or current owner.

Sites with owner/operators who employ a democratic management style demonstrate their willingness to accept the input of other staff, community stakeholders, and professional organizations through collaborative interpretive work.¹⁷ Until the late twentieth century, many museums used a hierarchical management structure with

¹³ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁴ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁵ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁶ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁷ Dutot, "Exploring the Double Influence of CEOs' Management Style on the Development of SMEs' Corporate Reputation," 353.

interpretive plans and processes conceived by the top tier of administration. However, recent democratizing trends reflect an appreciation of visitor input.¹⁸ Democratically managed Transformation project sites include McLeod Plantation Historic Site in Charleston, where the Charleston County Parks and Recreation department met with community stakeholders in early planning meetings, and held “public listening sessions and administered surveys” identifying the public desire for the large scale interpretation of African heritage.¹⁹ In response, the Interpretive Master Plan established McLeod as “. . . one of our nation’s foremost locations for interpreting the African American transition to freedom in Charleston, South Carolina, and the American South.”²⁰ Furthermore, interpretive scripts and site didactics were composed by Design Minds, a National Association for Interpretation approved exhibit design firm.²¹ Rather than restricting the interpretive process to suit his personal vision, site operator Shawn Halifax decentralized control of narrative creation with an aim of meeting the needs of the community. As Halifax writes in a 2018 article in the *Public Historian*, “I found I had nothing to lose by closing my mouth and opening my mind. In fact, I only had the world to gain.”²² Thus, sites managed in the democratic style are more likely to address the needs of the community, and present narratives that incorporate racialized history to some extent if not presenting a “black-centric” perspective.

¹⁸ John H. Falk and Beverly Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 22.

¹⁹ Shawn Halifax, "McLeod Plantation Historic Site," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (2018): 260.

²⁰ Halifax, "McLeod Plantation Historic Site," 256.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

²² *Ibid.*, 266.

Laissez-faire management is demonstrated at tourist plantations where owners and operators take a relaxed approach to management, allowing lower level staff to dictate operational pace and goals. During site visits in 2018, two sites were identified as being “left to their own devices” by management: Berkeley Plantation in Virginia and San Francisco Plantation in Louisiana. Interpretive tour data seemed dated, and a staffer at one of these sites explained, “We’ve kept the same tour for many, many years.”²³ These interviews are characterized with passive language, and employees who do not seem pressured to stoke financial growth. Ideal employees are described by management as “social,” “likeable,” and “friendly,” rather than educated, knowledgeable, or ambitious.²⁴

Curatorial Staff

One plantation employee admitted, “I would say that’s [curatorial work] probably about 30 percent of what I do . . . I’m curating this exhibit . . . I’m going to be collection’s manager and curator . . .” but many other assigned tasks include mundane operational chores, that assist in “. . . trying to keep people going and keep the lights

²³ Interview with staff, July 14, 2016.

²⁴ Interview with staff, July 14, 2016.

Table 14 Tourist plantation project sites that employ curatorial staff.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	SITE SPECIFIC CURATOR	CURATORIAL SERVICES SHARED WITH OTHER SITES	NO CURATOR
Public	government entity	county owned	Meadow Farm		1	
		federally owned	McLeod Plantation		1	
Private	for profit	single owner	Appomattox Plantation	1		
		family owned	Whitney Plantation	1		
		commercial entity	Berkeley Plantation			1
		owned and run by separate family-owned business entities	Boone Hall Plantation			1
		single owner	Laura Plantation			1
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for non-profit component-	single owner	Houmas House			1
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation			1
		family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	1		
	non-profit foundation owned, separate for-profit component	commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation			1
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Oak Alley	1		
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Middleton Place	1		
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle		1	
	non-profit foundation, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	1		
TOTAL				6	3	6

on.”²⁵ However, according to AAM’s Core Curator Competencies, the curatorial role goes “beyond trying to resolve the tension between the academic and procedural functions,” at museums.²⁶ They must “build trust and rapport with communities and act with uncompromising integrity, serving as overseers of the public’s most meaningful possessions,” a bridging function that can bolster outside support, while acknowledging and reflecting community identity.²⁷

Omitting curatorial staff not only reflects a low prioritization of curatorial duties, but it minimizes interpretive control.²⁸ At one plantation site along Louisiana’s River Road, the owner admitted that curatorial decisions were vaguely based upon what is “accurate to the period,” or “what was there,” though this particular historic house was purchased bare of all interior furnishings.²⁹ Without access to trained curatorial staff, the interpretation of objects will lack depth, failing to reflect human, historical aspects of the people who lived and worked in the house. Furthermore, vague interpretations elevate the importance of family objects or valuable antiques, thereby trivializing the contributions of the enslaved at the site.

²⁵ Interview with docent, March 2014.

²⁶ Standing Committee on Ethics, "CURATOR CORE COMPETENCIES," American Alliance of Museums, June 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CURATOR-CORE-COMPETENCIES.pdf>.

²⁷ Standing Committee on Ethics, "CURATOR CORE COMPETENCIES," American Alliance of Museums, May 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CURATOR-CORE-COMPETENCIES.pdf>.

²⁸ Arroyo, "Sex, Drugs, and Pirates," 65.

²⁹ Interview with owner, March 2014.

Meticulous study of the historic landscape, buildings, and artifacts requires the scholarly attention of museum professionals, and some tourist plantations put great effort into the stewardship of their historic collections, hiring staff specifically for this purpose. One site owner pondered, “Do we really want to be more of a museum kind of facility, that has collections and manages those collections and preserves those collections and all that means, including hiring curators and people that know how to do that? We don’t have anybody on staff that does that. What would that really gain us if we do that?”³⁰ At tourist plantations that fail to fund curatorial research and interpretation, the treatment of objects may be left to an owner, manager, or even a volunteer docent. Thus, without sensitive, purposeful curatorial dedication, tourist plantation sites risk erasing the enslaved presence from the landscape by directing funding to other areas, while maintaining the traditional emphasis on the white wealth of the big house.

Publicly owned institutions, like the two county-operated sites in this study, share curatorial staff with multiple county museums or sites. A site with shared curatorial staff noted that curatorial staff and educational staff collaborated to write the interpretive tour, thus providing more input and multiple perspectives.³¹ Similarly, interviews at other sites discussed the use of contract curators, “We had a full-time curator for when we were doing a big project, when we were cataloging all the items in the inventory. But we don’t

³⁰ Interview, February 19, 2016.

³¹ Interview with docent, July 16, 2016.

have one on staff now. We have outside consultants or curators that we will bring in,” which may result in a collaborative, objective interpretation of objects and structures.³²

Educational Staff

Nine of the fifteen Transformation project tourist plantations employ some sort of education staff to facilitate public programming. Six sites have dedicated site educators, while three share educators with other departments or sites. Of the fifteen project sites, only Drayton Hall, Whitney Plantation, and Middleton Place have a full staff complement including a curator and educator.³³ Bacon’s Castle, and Meadow Farm Plantation share their site educators with other sites within the Preservation Virginia and Henrico County Parks and Recreation system respectively.³⁴ Ideally, the tourist plantation educator would provide school and public tours and programs grounded in academic research in response to the diverse perspectives of their audiences and communities.³⁵

³² Interview with docent, October 4, 2016.

³³ Phone conversations with author, November 7, 2018.

³⁴ Phone conversations with author, November 7, 2018.

³⁵ Committee on Education, "Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards," American Alliance of Museums, 2000, accessed February 19, 2019, https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz_5mDyp81VsT114c1BtWFFLT1k/edit.

Table 15 Distribution of sites with educational staff:

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	SITE SPECIFIC CURATOR	CURATORIAL SERVICES SHARED WITH OTHER SITES	NO CURATOR
Public	government entity	county owned	Meadow Farm		1	
			McLeod Plantation		1	
Private	for profit	federally owned	Appomattox Plantation	1		
		single owner	Whitney Plantation	1		
		family owned	Berkeley Plantation			1
		commercial entity	Boone Hall Plantation			1
		owned and run by separate family-owned business entities	Laura Plantation			1
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for-profit component-	single owner	Houmas House			1
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation			1
		family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	1		
		commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation			1
	non-profit foundation owned, with separate for-profit component	foundation owned	Oak Alley	1		
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	foundation owned	Middleton Place	1		
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle		1	
	non-profit foundation owned, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	1		
TOTAL				6	3	6

Interviews reflect that some tourist plantations rely on site educators to perform multiple job roles, giving tours, facilitating programming, and acting as salespeople, showing event rental areas to prospective wedding rental clients.³⁶ Many tourist site educators also train the site's docent pool as well, which can potentially ensure that tour interpretation aligns with site educational curriculum. Otherwise, senior docents may be elevated as the designated docent trainer, chosen for their trustworthiness, past job performance, and time with the institution.³⁷

According to interview data, tourist plantations identified as tourist sites rather than museums, do not staff site educators, citing the emphasis on visitor *entertainment*. As one operator expressed, "They'll [visitors will] say, 'I learned a lot.' For me that's not what I want you to do! That's NOT my business. I'm not here to teach you . . . I'm in a different business than museums . . . I turned history into a cash product."³⁸ Such owner/operators, particularly those in Louisiana, repeatedly stressed that visitor education was not the goal, but a byproduct of entertainment. "We are in the hospitality business and we're there to entertain people. In the entertaining people . . . if we put them in the right mindset, they will learn more history, more sociology, more whatever than they have at any other place that they visit."³⁹ Plantation *museum* operators, on the other hand, expressed education as a major impetus for the institution's work, claiming education to be their central mission. Therefore, without a clear dedication to education, tourist

³⁶ Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

³⁷ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

³⁸ Interview with owner, March 2014.

³⁹ Interview with owner, March 2014.

plantation staff risks symbolic erasure of enslavement from the narrative, in favor of romantic, nostalgically-theme entertainment ventures.

Interpretive Contractors

Tourist plantation educators and other staff train interpretive staff, evaluating the capabilities and knowledge of the docent. However, some tourist plantations hire third party contractors to present special tours or programming, typically authored and performed by the contractor. Because they are not trained and evaluated directly by the site, contractors are not held to the same standards as direct hires. In Charleston, a Transformation project site uses a third-party contracting company to conduct educational performances interpreting Gullah culture, through stories and songs passed down in their families.⁴⁰ Through historic site performances, foodways, music, and lore, the descendant community is active and visible in Charleston. During an interview, a Gullah contract interpreter explained that she was hired specifically for his/her lineage.⁴¹ However, unlike site interpretive staff, the contractor was not trained in sensitive interpretation of slavery, nor how to sensitively fuse his/her performance with the site's interpretation of slavery. "I try to humanize it as best as I can. I'm still clumsily trying to figure out a way to incorporate all of that."⁴² In such cases, using third party contractors

⁴⁰ Site visit, June 2018.

⁴¹ Interview with docent, April 7, 2016.

⁴² Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

allows for educational programming that presents specific performative aspects of cultures not represented by site staff, but educators must take care to ensure the program aligns with site interpretation and philosophies.

Docents

Docents interact with the visiting public more than any other employee at tourist plantations and are expected to perform a variety of duties from janitorial tasks to stocking the gift shop. The size of front-line docent staff at tourist plantations varies. A small docent pool allows managers to closely monitor docent presentation, encouraging consistency in storytelling and tour presentation through evaluation. Sites like Whitney Plantation, Drayton Hall, and Boone Hall Plantation employ a large pool of part time tour guides. A larger docent pool means greater ease in filling scheduled tour slots, a potential issue faced by smaller sites. At sites with hospitality services, like Houmas House and Magnolia Plantation, docents might reach full-time employment by working at site gift shops, and restaurants.

Though their responsibilities are numerous, docents tend to be the least-valued employees on site. If paid at all, docent pay is typically low. Many site managers expressed clear expectations from docent staff. A museum educator in Charleston stated that he/she wants docents to make visitors to feel as if “ . . . they were treated in a respectful manner, that we were on our game, that all of our guides are telling the same

material.”⁴³ However, many docent interviews reflect a lack of consistency in training methods and materials, resulting in varying tour narratives. The overall interview data reveal that sites lack time and funding dedicated to docent education and evaluation. Furthermore, facilitating interpretive tours, particularly at sites where people were formerly enslaved, requires specialized training and emotional preparedness. However, after initial training, most tourist plantations do not provide continuing education or training for docents, such as professional interpreter certification.

Docent Selection

Docent Demographics and the Ideal Candidate

Transformation project docent interview instruments were designed to gather data reflecting interviewees’ personal and educational background, experiences working with the public, and the hiring and training process.⁴⁴ Interviews demonstrated a lack of diversity in docent staff, while education and aptitude varied greatly. A tourist plantation staff’s demographic makeup can determine the tone and personality of a site’s interpretation and implementation of narrative history. Almost all Transformation project docents interviewed identified as white people, and site visits demonstrated a majority of white staff members at the plantations in all three regions. If not all-white, few Transformation project sites’ staff had African Americans employed in interpretive or

⁴³ Interview with site manager, February 26, 2016.

⁴⁴ See Appendix A Docent Survey Instrument.

management positions, as observed on site tours, and recorded in interviews. One might blame “structural racism,” the amassing an all-white staff due to the hiring staff’s implicit racial biases.⁴⁵ However, hiring managers indicated most docent applicants are white. The frequency of white job applicants inspired a Charleston site operator to comment, “I’ve had a colleague of mine that was criticized on one occasion because all of her interns were blond haired, blue eyes.”⁴⁶ Furthermore during interviews, few plantation site hiring managers indicated an interest in staff diversity.

The lack of racial and cultural diversity at tourist plantations throttles broader storytelling, since a white majority “more often than not, work to maintain whites’ racial advantage” within site narratives.⁴⁷ Transformation project sites with an apparently diverse staff include Whitney Plantation, whose museum director who is an African native. Whitney attracts diverse, college educated docent staff, some of whom commute from as far away as Baton Rouge. Similarly, multiple African American interpreters and other staff were visible at McLeod Plantation Historic Site in Charleston. Thus, tourist plantation narratives that broadly exhibit pluralistic experiences seem to attract more diverse job applicants. Furthermore, the presence of a diverse staff seems to correspond to the continued production and promotion of racially diverse museum narratives.

If not racially diverse, the educational and experiential backgrounds of Transformation project site docents vary greatly. Plantation sites attract applicants with

⁴⁵ Kris Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2015), 25.

⁴⁶ Interview with operator, February 26, 2016.

⁴⁷ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 8.

wide ranging professional backgrounds including homemakers, former military officers, and fast-food restaurant workers. Frequently, docents are retired, having left careers as teachers or salespeople. Younger docents work part time while enrolled in college courses. Some owners said the energy of young tour guides makes them more entertaining. According to a docent in Louisiana, she was hired for her “acting skills.”⁴⁸ Rather than academic knowledge, the site’s manager sought “. . . college students with lots of energy, some with an acting background . . . who can be very emotion[al], very elaborate, . . . and present something in a way that makes people want to get into the tour.”⁴⁹ While a site owner also expressed his/her desire for entertainers, “I try to get people who have had some theatrical background because they are on performance; they are storytellers. So, if even in high school or college, if they were in plays, I consider that a big plus.”⁵⁰

Though many docents are concurrently enrolled in classes, most sites have no educational requirements. One owner of a Louisiana plantation site with no education requirement demands the most basic knowledge of American history. He/she explained the vetting process: “When I’m hiring a tour guide, I want somebody who says they *know* history . . . I’ll ask them who was the first president and they don’t know. I’ll ask them who was president during the Civil War, and they don’t know . . . but if they think they love history, then there’s a chance that they’ll be a storyteller.”⁵¹ Other sites are more

⁴⁸ Interview with docent, August 22, 2015.

⁴⁹ Interview with docent June 10, 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with docent June 10, 2015.

⁵¹ Interview with owner, March 2015.

stringent. Drayton Hall in Charleston requires docents to have a bachelor's degree, but allows volunteers lacking college to perform non-interpretive work.⁵² Extraordinarily, a tour of Whitney Plantation revealed docents enrolled in PhD programs at Louisiana State University, while others had at least an undergraduate degree, if not a master's degree in history.⁵³

The isolation of James River and River Road sites caused site managers to express the difficulty they have attracting and retaining docent staff. The gathered data reflect that the most attractive docent candidates live near the site and can work in shifts a few hours a week. A River Road owner explained, "We're not within an urban place; we have to pull people in sometimes an hour away. That goes hand in hand with owning a plantation whether here, or Georgia or wherever, because you're out in the middle of the country and that causes problems."⁵⁴ As a result, managers said docent staff has a high turnover, and that sites have great difficulty in attracting excellent docent candidates. "We lose personnel every year. If we can keep them, it's a successful year. Being off-site in a rural setting, personnel is our major problem. Getting and holding good staff is the biggest headache. It's what we lose sleep over anything else."⁵⁵ Geographic isolation forces some managers to choose from rural locals who need any work available. However, proximity is a poor substitute for occupational competence.

⁵² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁵³ Site visit, June 2018.

⁵⁴ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁵⁵ Interview with owner, March 2015.

Within federal agencies such as the National Park Service, hiring managers are obliged to give “veteran’s preference” when choosing employees. If two candidates apply who both meet the minimum job requirements and one is a veteran, the civilian even if equally qualified or educated, will be passed over in favor of the veteran candidate.⁵⁶ Additionally within the ranking of candidates, applicants with NPS experience are preferred. An NPS hiring manager attributes this to NPS culture. In an interview an NPS staffer said, “I’m looking for someone who worked at the National Park Service. Then below that would be, someone who might have been volunteering, or might has done park work in general. That’s not to say state parks, old parks are any less. It’s more of a cultural thing.”⁵⁷

Docent Hiring Process

Transformation project tourist plantation sites advertise job openings through various channels. As the younger readership of print newspapers declines, docent candidates who respond to newspapers “want ads” tend to be retired. Docents interviewed at Middleton Plantation responded to newspaper ads, and not surprisingly, the docent staff visible at the site were white retirees.⁵⁸ Tourist plantation sites with greater technical capabilities, like Boone Hall Plantation, provide online application

⁵⁶ "Hiring Flexibility for Supervisors: Navigating Through the Hiring Process," National Park Service, February 2007, 16, accessed February 20, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/training/tel/Guides/Hiring_Flex_pg_20070227.pdf.

⁵⁷ Interview with staff, July 5, 2016.

⁵⁸ Interview with docent, February 21, 2016; Site visit, June 2018.

portals for candidates to submit their resumes, while other sites advertise through social media, using Facebook.⁵⁹ While web postings cast a net to catch anyone who is interested in the plantation site, newspapers increasingly reach a smaller, older audience. Other sites rely on word of mouth. As one docent reports, “It wasn’t much of a hiring process—My wife came home and told me they needed someone.”⁶⁰

Docents report being invited to interview by phone or in person immediately, while some waited weeks from the time of application. The interview process ranges from brief meetings to in-depth conversations. A Charleston tourist plantation with a truncated hiring process hired a docent candidate immediately after introduction, much to the docent’s confusion. “I came in expecting to be interviewed. I was basically hired that day, although it was never really explicit . . . I think she assumed I knew I was getting the job, and I assumed that I was just being interviewed.”⁶¹ In Louisiana, a docent reported that his/her “interview” occurred over dinner after he/she and her family were invited to the owner’s home.⁶² With these two sites, the lenient interview process seems to assess the candidate’s ability to fit in with the site culture, rather than assess their interpretive qualifications. In stark contrast, a docent explained that during his/her hiring interview at Drayton Hall, the hiring manager discussed the site’s racial history, inquiring how the candidate might respond to difficult questions about slavery posed by touring visitors.⁶³

⁵⁹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016; Interview with docent, May 15, 2015.

⁶⁰ Interview with docent, May 13, 2015.

⁶¹ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

⁶² Interview with docent, March 2015.

⁶³ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

Docent Compensation

During interviews, some docents expressed that their wages were a bonus—their love of educating the public and talking about history was the *real* payoff. A recent job advertisement for guides at Magnolia Plantation in Charleston advertised a wage of ten dollars an hour, and a docent from the site explained that they are, “Paid in sunsets.”⁶⁴ However, Magnolia’s docents who are offered a full-time schedule are provided health insurance. Full time employees are more likely to stay, especially when offered benefits such as health insurance.⁶⁵

A Louisiana site owner/operator provides the bare minimum of “twelve dollars an hour [and] there are no benefits.”⁶⁶ This owner/operator compares guides to “server[s] in a restaurant. If they do a good job, they get nice tips.”⁶⁷ However, not all visitors are accustomed to tipping guides, and tipping is not suggested through verbal requests or signage. The Louisiana owner/operator recognized this, then admitted, “When I have been on tours of other historic houses, I have never, ever thought about tipping a tour guide.”⁶⁸ During site visits, docents in Charleston and Southern Louisiana received tips from most visitors, whereas James River docents were not offered tips.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ “Magnolia Gardens PCH, Inc,” Find Jobs and Careers, February 17, 2019, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.simplyhired.com/search?q=magnolia+gardensjob=lekguVhupJuc-XhHRZXJGcNBvGWn6x-AYn-6seLu5KeLi8T5mSKS3w>; Interview with docent February 28, 2016.

⁶⁵ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁶⁶ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁶⁷ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁶⁸ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁶⁹ Site visits, June 2018.

Due the volume of site visitors, docents are in high demand at most tourist plantations. They are poorly paid for part time work and replaced quickly after leaving. Though on the lowest rung and apparently the most expendable employees, docents have the heavy responsibility of accurately interpreting difficult plantation history to the public. Keeping up with the intellectual demands of guiding tours requires additional study outside of work, unpaid. Furthermore, while tipping docents helps show appreciation, docent wages paid by tourist plantations do not correlate to the responsibility of learning, interpreting, and living with plantation history.

Docent Training and Continued Education

Training Process and Materials

Typically, docent trainees read and memorize interpretive manuals, shadow trainers during tours, and lastly give their own tours under the supervision of their trainer. Site managers at places with a variety of tour products encourage docents to train for each presentation. That way they might be able to give tours in the historic house, slave quarters, and gardens equally well.⁷⁰

Docent interviews reflect an involved training process at Drayton Hall. The reading list was reportedly extensive, and “experts” from other institutions provided

⁷⁰ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

“hands-on or other types of instruction.”⁷¹ “There is presentation training, as well as overall general training . . . we were expected to do a lot of work on our own with an extensive reading list,” including “twenty-five different books, varying on African-American history, social history, the gambit of everything.”⁷² A River Road site docent reported that on-the-job learning was encouraged. The docent explained that training included a brief meeting with the site manager and three site tours. After that, the new docents were considered ready to give tours themselves.⁷³ Another site reportedly dumps tour scripts on the trainees and leaves them on their own. “They say ‘Here are some materials. Learn as much as you want . . . ’ So, they’re not trying to control the narrative.”⁷⁴ Thus, the tour narrative is left up to the docent, allowing for the absence, trivialization or incorporation of racial narratives.

During training, the docent is expected to learn, if not memorize, vast amounts of information contained within what docents typically refer to as a “huge book” compiled by a staff member. Training materials provide onboarding information such as dress code and employer expectations, as well as tour scripts, and historical information about the site. Docent interviews almost always reference the sheer volume of materials. For instance, a Charleston docent reports that educational programming information was contained in *two* binders, whereas house tours took up “*nine* separate binders with thousands of pages,” including information concerning the architecture, enslavement,

⁷¹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁷² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁷³ Interview with docent, March 2015.

⁷⁴ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

agriculture, and interpretive methodology.⁷⁵ Learning thousands of pages of information well enough to be comfortable giving tours means a large investment in study time. One docent described incremental process, “I committed fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes a night every so often just to dive into more material and then I'd take a subject matter and drill down into it.”⁷⁶ Transformation project site docents explained that they study site history at home, or during downtime at work. Supplemental materials can be found in staff spaces such as a shared office or shared library.⁷⁷ However, haphazard study of training materials that goes unnoticed may result in fictional tour improvisation.

For a variety of reasons including lack of funding, staff, or time, some sites fail to update training materials, using the same scripts for decades.⁷⁸ The stagnation of training materials stagnates the tour narrative, degrading the quality of interpretation. One docent explained, that even though there was not a current tour manual, “There was an old tour guide description of what to say in each room, but it was old. Some of the furniture wasn't in there anymore.”⁷⁹ One museum educator quipped that previously he/she did not prioritize interpretive updates, explaining the former belief that, “. . . history doesn't mean anything. It doesn't connect to today,” but through his/her work came to a contrary conclusion, “It's the exact opposite.”⁸⁰ The educator discovered that as culture and audiences change, so too must training materials in order that interpretative themes speak

⁷⁵ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016

⁷⁶ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

⁷⁷ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

⁷⁸ Interview with site manager, July 14, 2016.

⁷⁹ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

⁸⁰ Interview with educator, February 26, 2016.

to current audiences. Sometimes these updates occur with the hiring of new educational staff, who often update training materials, potentially reframing overall themes.⁸¹

After studying interpretive materials, trainees are sent on tours to observe experienced guides. A docent from Drayton Hall explained that prospective docents must perform their tour ten times for a senior staff member before being cleared to present to the public, while other sites require newly trained docents to provide a tour for the site curator, historian, or operator. In the case of two individually owned plantation sites, docent evaluators stated that the candidates always fail their first tours because they are intimidated by the evaluator.⁸² One evaluator even claims he/she purposely tries to unnerve the guide into ruining their tour.⁸³

The length of training periods varies, according to policy, staffing needs, or visitor demands. While a docent who lacks confidence might ask for a longer training period, docents are encouraged to begin giving tours quickly after training.⁸⁴ Sometimes the tourist season dictates the length of training for docents. During slow seasons, new employees may experience a lengthier and more intensive training period. One site trains for five to six months, with docent candidates following an experienced guide, listening to their tours and taking notes.⁸⁵ With a high demand, new docents at other sites report an expectation to give tours after two or three weeks of training.⁸⁶ Thus, for docents who

⁸¹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁸² Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁸³ Interview with educator February 26, 2016.

⁸⁴ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

⁸⁵ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁸⁶ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

work only two or three shifts a week, training may be limited to four to nine training sessions total. However, a docent at a Louisiana site reported dictating the length of his/her training. “You’re supposed to go with the owner . . . there’s stages. But I said, I want to give tours. I want to give tours *now*.”⁸⁷ The manager thought the trainee was not ready to give tours, but the trainee insisted until the manager relented. Allowing inadequately trained docent staff to give tours at tourist plantations invites faulty narratives informed by preconceived and nostalgic notions, presenting incomplete information that misrepresents the history of the place.

Evaluation and Continued Training

Some tourist plantations regularly evaluate their docent staff, even those with vast experience. Other sites’ docents admit that evaluations do not happen, or that they are conducted secretly. A site in Charleston evaluates its docents twice a year through tour observation and personalized meetings. At this site, tour evaluators give feedback to the docent verbally and in writing, adding a copy of the report to the employee’s file.⁸⁸ The site manager carefully fosters an educational environment with its evaluation. Docents who are evaluated understand the need for interpretive excellence, “They just don’t want people lying, saying stuff they are not supposed to be saying . . . I’ve already gotten

⁸⁷ Interview with docent, March 2015.

⁸⁸ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

followed once just to make sure that I'm saying what I'm supposed to be saying."⁸⁹

However, the terms of *truth* and *lies* and "being followed" versus *evaluated*, reflects suspicion or mistrust of site management, rather than the nurturing educational environment necessary for sensitively administering racialized narratives.

Some sites rely upon docents to evaluate one another, providing peers feedback after attending each other's tours.⁹⁰ Not all sites conduct evaluations, however. A River Road manager reports that the initial vetting and training of docent staff is enough to ensure continued tour quality. Unless a guest complains, the manager sees evaluation as pointless.⁹¹ The lack of formal evaluation indicates the level of importance of docent training, evaluation, and respect.

Even after more than a decade of giving tours, a docent reported "still get[ting] followed after tens of thousands of tours."⁹² In her work at Middleton Place in Charleston in 2006, Bethany Jay interviewed Chief Operating Officer, Tracey Todd. He noted that a large, loyal docent staff means that "many of them have been here fifteen to twenty years," and when "directors want you to incorporate new information, it's hard...we're talking about one hundred guides that give house tours. You can't get them all in a room. You can't get them all to read the guide's letter."⁹³ Accretions of information learned

⁸⁹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁹⁰ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

⁹¹ Interview with docent, June 10, 2015.

⁹² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁹³ Tracey Todd, interview by author, transcription of recording, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006, quoted in Bethany Jay, *The Representation of Slavery at Historic House Museums: 1853-2000*, PhD diss., Boston College, 2009 (Boston, MA: Boston College University Libraries, 2009), 292.

over the years and the development of comfortable work habits can result in misinformation or perpetuating outdated tour data. Therefore, seniority does not exempt docents from evaluation and in fact may be reason for regular assessment.

Sites that provide training or staff programs on a regular basis help to unify site interpretation and ensure tour data is up to date. Senior staff such as the “curator and our historian [at Middleton Place] they’ve been to different places and they’ve gone to conferences” returning to present talks concerning “historical subjects,” and methods for discussing “slavery in a way that is sensitive but factual.”⁹⁴ Sometimes staff are shown instructional videos of conferences and training sessions attended by other staff. Docents report the value of viewing these presentations, and the opportunity to learn “from the experts.”⁹⁵

No matter how well versed in historical information, interpretive staff may not be prepared for the emotional and psychological impact of tourist plantation narratives. A docent reports that she was unprepared for his/her own emotional response to tour data. “I’ve cried all year a lot, really, really stressful, sad . . . I’m still trying to figure out how to cope actually.”⁹⁶ One might argue that this docent may not be psychologically, intellectually, or emotionally equipped for giving tours on such a poignant subject. However, the docent’s response is natural, an empathetic human response to historic suffering. A site operator commented that docent managers at former sites of

⁹⁴ Interview with docent, June 13, 2014.

⁹⁵ Interview with docent, June 13, 2014.

⁹⁶ Interview with docent, February 28, 2014.

enslavement must recognize “the emotional toll that doing interpretation in a place like that can take on the interpreters.”⁹⁷ Another docent admitted that the emotions that arise from his/her daily work at a municipal plantation site must have an outlet, so he/she created an anonymous blog, sharing his/her work experiences online. The site managers read the blog, submitting it to the county commissioner to be published in a newsletter so that these experiences might be better understood by county authorities and local residents.

The Living Script- Fluidity of Story

Anyone who has conducted interpretive work at historic sites knows that docent training does not result in guided tours that recount the provided interpretation consistently. At most historic sites, tour narratives are fluid, contingent upon the docent’s understanding of the site’s official history, the audience, personal beliefs, or even their mood. Similarly, tour content is filtered through a docent’s intellectual curiosity, training, education, and personal background. Therefore, many elements affect a docent’s ability to present an accurate and appropriate tour, particularly during guided tours at tourist plantation sites, giving the docent great narrative power.

Tourist plantation tours run forty-five minutes to one hour.⁹⁸ However, as a Charleston docent noticed, the larger the tour group, the longer the tour. Moving masses

⁹⁷ Interview with operator, February 19, 2016.

⁹⁸ Pustz, *Voices from the Back Stairs*, 20.

of people through small doorways and down corridors slows tour progress.⁹⁹ The docent faced with dwindling tour time must choose what information to edit in order to remain on schedule. Interpretive site staff often complain that the site history is too broad for a forty-five-minute tour, even without the discussion of slavery.¹⁰⁰ If the docent considers the enslaved narrative to be peripheral, unnecessary, unsavory, or unimportant, tours may lose the benefit of that narrative.¹⁰¹ No matter how much planning is dedicated to inclusive site interpretation, the tourist plantation docent has the ultimate choice in whether or not to discuss slavery with visitors. Some docents expect that visitors are not interested in slavery, and the docent's job is not to change minds or broaden thinking. As one docent explained, "I think everybody has their own opinion of slavery and . . . I don't think it's something that I can expound on," choosing not to discuss it at all.¹⁰² Thus, when faced with limited time, docents not instructed on the prioritization of interpretive information are free to delete whatever they choose.

The rigor and professionalism of the training relates directly to the confidence of docents in discussing racialized history. A docent in Charleston said that she was a poor student of history, had no interest in slavery, refused to study the training materials relating to slavery, and does not discuss it on his/her tour.¹⁰³ Another docent admitted he/she did not feel obliged to discuss slavery, saying it is far too provocative. "It just

⁹⁹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 66.

¹⁰² Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

¹⁰³ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

might open up a can of worms. So, I don't really bring it up.”¹⁰⁴ Another docent commented that she discusses slavery briefly: “I always mention it. I have no problem mentioning it.”¹⁰⁵ Another docent admits his/her ignorance of the subject, “I have limited knowledge of slavery and I just kind of mention it in passing.”¹⁰⁶ A site in Charleston sets a requirement for discussion of slavery, obliging guides to “mention” slavery a minimum of five times during each tour.¹⁰⁷ In these three instances, the use of the term “mention” trivializes racial history minimizing its centrality to plantation history. Furthermore, “mentions” of slavery relegate racial history to the periphery in a supporting role to the main narrative of the white owner.

Segregated Tours

Some tourist plantations employ Eichstedt’s and Small’s discursive strategy of segregation by giving separate tours to discuss enslavement, or only interpreting this history within auxiliary spaces. Drayton Hall and Magnolia Plantation segregate racialized tour themes, presenting information concerning enslavement in depth in a separate program or tour. The main tour product is typically referred to as the “regular” or “normal” tour, which Eichstedt and Small observe to mean a tour about “white”

¹⁰⁴ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

people.¹⁰⁸ These programs are optional, separate from the main tour, running on a different schedule. Thus, visitors may not elect to participate missing a very significant portion of the site's historical narrative. A staffer at Drayton explains that separate tours are not ideal, but claims they are still valuable. "The Connections Program should be a way to get a fuller picture . . . It shouldn't be a separate program . . . We're still struggling with that."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the staffer recognized the delineation of the main history of the house from that of the enslaved. "I don't like setting up walls and saying that this is all about the white people and this is all about the black people. It's all one history."¹¹⁰

Visitor Feedback and Tour Narratives

Docent interviewees identified non-verbal visitor responses, such as body language, claiming that they guide the course of their tours as much as visitor questions and comments. Visitors reflect their unvoiced attitudes toward slavery with their bodies, shifting their postures in response to information, averting their eyes, or gazing intently. Docents admit they try to read their audiences, tailoring tours toward perceived guest expectations. One site manager explained that after "about seven or eight months they [docents] have created this conversation . . . telling people what they want to hear."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 171-172.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

¹¹¹ Interview with operator, March 2014.

Through this method of narrative production, docents put narrative history at risk of compromise, all dependent on the docent's ability to read visitor desires through their deportment.

Racial Biases and Tour Narrative

Other tour participants speak up, voicing opinions for the benefit of the tour group. Because tourist plantations regularly confront visitors with difficult racial narratives, some sites try to prepare docents with responses to racist, rude, or unusual guest interactions. A visitor to McLeod Plantation Historic Site felt the interpreted information threatened her family's honor. She interrupted the tour, exclaiming that her family had been good to their "help."¹¹² This docent responded that the site is "basing our stories off of research, off of oral histories, and a number of sources."¹¹³ While emotions and opinions are disputable, the docent argued that factual evidence of historical narratives should be sufficient. "People can't really argue with the fact that we're just presenting what we know for this site and for the area at the time."¹¹⁴ Another docent discussed a guest who wondered aloud during a tour at the lack of African American visitors, deducing that black people simply could not afford to pay the ticket cost. Since each moment of a tour is precious, docents must be skilled in deflecting such dialogue to

¹¹² Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹¹³ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

prevent the possibility of an uninformed guest hijacking the narrative into a discussion of racist beliefs.¹¹⁵

Interviews revealed few overt expressions of racism, though interviewees did reveal a heightened awareness of race and sometimes racial guilt. A docent at Bacon's Castle admitted, "When there are African Americans I am a little more conscious of the way I say things and wanting to make sure I put things across in the right way-- not be offensive or insensitive."¹¹⁶ While the docent attempted sensitivity toward the audience, this sensitivity revealed a difference in the tours given to white and African American guests. Other docents identified some visitor's "racial baggage," the accretions of memory associated with race that informs personal attitude.¹¹⁷ A Charleston docent explained that many visitors arrive with "preconceived notions . . . there's all kinds of different opinions and there's different interpretations."¹¹⁸ The docent connected the visitor's age with their willingness to face alternative presentations of history, "This is what they've know their entire life and no matter what you say contrary doesn't matter."¹¹⁹ Other visitors fear facing the atrocities of the plantation past. A Whitney staffer described visitors who "struggle with that kind of narrative; it's . . . white visitors who really, really, really want to hear something comforting. They want to hear that these

¹¹⁵ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Interview with docent, July 6, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Gallas and DeWolf Perry, "The Role of Race and Racial Identity in Interpretation," in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2015), 25.

¹¹⁸ Interview with staff, April 8, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Interview with staff, April 8, 2016.

[white] people weren't so bad."¹²⁰ At Magnolia Plantation, where the house tour barely mentions slavery, a guest commented that the house tour was good because, "they definitely gave it [slavery] it's due, but they didn't over-dwell and they didn't guilt trip."¹²¹

A docent in Charleston explains that guides have to use their intuition or ask basic questions, tailoring their tour data to visitors, "It's hard sometimes to know where people are coming from in their base of knowledge."¹²² Senior docents report having been trained many years ago to present racial history to guests differently, depending on which race they are. "When I have people of color on the tour . . . that's where I really watch how I say what I say."¹²³ The docent said they were told that if guests were black the presented narrative should ameliorate history, contextualizing enslavement at the site within a caring, paternalistic, familial tone.¹²⁴ Many white docents report feeling uncomfortable discussing the history of enslaved people at the site with black visitors. However, one docent advised that the tour information should not vary based on the visitor's racial identification. "Just because somebody is an African-American on Connections doesn't mean that they know any more or less about anything than the white person sitting next to them."¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Interview with staff, March 2015.

¹²¹ Interview with visitor, April 8, 2016.

¹²² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹²³ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

¹²⁴ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹²⁵ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

The language and grammar used during a tour also impacts its message greatly. Eichstedt and Small discuss the annihilation of enslavement narratives through the use of passive language. Another use of language that takes agency away from enslaved historical actors is the use of *historical present tense*, often used by docents during site visits. In this tense, past events are presented as if they are happening now. For instance, at Magnolia a docent explained that following the death of several family members, the daughter of the owner at the time, “Julia *takes* over in 1891 when her father *dies*.”¹²⁶ The use of historical present increases the drama of the historical narrative but in plantation tour narratives, it aggrandizes white historical characters by recounting their historical actions in the present, as if they are still dominating, accomplishing, hegemonizing today. At the same time, through language, the activities involving the enslaved happen presently, continuously casting all historical actors in roles of domination and subjugation.

Almost all docents interviewed claimed that visitors frequently ask whether the slave holders at that site were *good* to their slaves or how much slaves were paid. A docent suggested that within such inquiry, the visitor begs the docent to improve the past. “I think they kind of want to justify things, which we can’t do.”¹²⁷ Other docents recounted their defensive reactions racial questions or being challenged during tours. In such instances, personal prejudice, biases, or simply lack education overshadow site history. “I had someone on my tour one time that was kinda rude to me and he kept

¹²⁶ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹²⁷ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

telling me, ‘Oh, your people . . . enslaved us.’ Finally, I had enough. I say, ‘Excuse me, my people did not enslave you. I was not here. I was born in [the nineteen sixties].’” The docent when on in his/her defense, “Your people sold you, and we kind enough to buy you. It is what it is. I cannot change history, nor do I want to change it. It’s what it is. We have come a long way now.”¹²⁸

Independently Conceived and Improvised Tour Scripts

Most trainees learn or memorize training materials and are expected to recount them in their own words. However, interviews with docents at multiple sites indicate that guides are encouraged to create their own tour narratives based upon training materials and independent research. One Charleston docent reported that independent work allows too much variance from the central narrative. “I’m a little worried that our stories are so disparate now since we’re all doing our own research. We run the risk of telling entirely different accounts of things . . . we have to all agree on what the story is and we’re kind of not all there. We’re using different sources.”¹²⁹ When multiple types of tours are offered at a site (on a vehicle, on foot, at particular structures), some docents report that the information presented is not corroborated at other tour locations. “Like the tram guy was to say one thing. We say one thing. The other program will say one thing. The house will

¹²⁸ Interview with docent, August 22, 2015.

¹²⁹ Interview with docent, February 19, 2016.

say one thing. And a lot of times it's not wrong but it's not right.”¹³⁰ Thus, while many sites encourage docents to create their own tour scripts using the historical information learned from training materials, many factors impact whether or not the tour adequately covers racialized history or depicts it factually.

Educational Tours and Interpretive Flexibility

When presenting history to large school groups of one hundred or more students, the discussion must be tailored to younger audiences. Often these tour narratives are altered to meet the state’s mandated standards of learning, curricular subject matter that appear on state standardized tests.¹³¹ A Virginia museum educator described fielding phone calls from teachers scoping out potential field trip locations. According to the educator, teachers contact the site asking, “‘How many SOLs can you cover?’ Then we go through the long list . . . The slavery portion, it covers three different types of SOL: U.S. history, Virginia history, American history, so they usually request that program. Then the tour becomes a thirty-minute conversation about slavery.”¹³² According to the Virginia site’s educator, schools with higher standardized test scores qualify for more funding from the state.¹³³ Therefore, SOL-based lessons are an incentive attract for school field trip groups.

¹³⁰ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

¹³¹ Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

¹³² Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

¹³³ Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

Understanding how to approach the discussion of slavery with children can be difficult. “So many children have no vantage point of slavery. The first thing I had to do when I started the program was ask, ‘When I say the word ‘slave’ what comes to mind?’” The educator detailed the responses from students, “You’ll have little children four, five, six, seven, eight years old raise their hands and say, innocently, ‘White people made black people work for no money.’ Or ‘People were forced to work, grow things in the fields for no money.’ It’s usually racial.” However emotionally difficult the topic, children arrive at the plantation understanding the basics of racial hegemony. This interaction is exceedingly important, especially when this history may be neglected in the classroom, where schoolbooks may lack this history, or teachers may not feel equipped for the discussion. Furthermore, the site educator expressed that school tours reach adult chaperones that might not visit the site otherwise. In fact, he/she found that there received “more questions from the chaperones than they do the children.”¹³⁴ Another site manager recognized the benefit of student groups, providing programs that might encourage young visitors to return with their relatives. “We’re trying to do inexpensive activities for the children when they visit to hopefully get more families to us.”¹³⁵

Other tourist plantation juvenile education efforts are far less sophisticated. A Virginia site manager explained, “We’re trying to entertain the children while they’re here.”¹³⁶ The manager described a worksheet given to younger visitors that makes a game

¹³⁴ Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

¹³⁵ Interview with educator, July 14, 2016.

¹³⁶ Interview with site educator, July 14, 2016.

out of the tour. “They take that along with them as they go on the tour. If they complete the brochure, check off the items they have seen or they have questions they have answered, they are given a children's book” with a “colonial era” theme.¹³⁷ However, this site neglects to interpret slavery even with adult visitors. Therefore, in the interpretation for children it is likely that the site’s racial history is erased, in favor of a discussion of “seashells, or river rocks, or magnolia pods, or different things in the gardens.”¹³⁸

Whether presenting factual accounts of the plantation past, or simply highlighting the innocuous topics, tourist plantation tours develop young peoples’ notions of southern heritage and the plantation past. Thus, the representative tone of the tour narrative promotes formative thought concerning enslavement, or its erasure from the historical landscape.

Thus, an inadequate staffing complement promotes the appearance of Eichstedt’s and Small’s strategies by splitting the focus of staff. Well trained docents can manage tour time and skillfully edit tours, while inadequately trained docents delete the enslaved from narratives when they fear negative visitor feedback. Curatorial staff generates academic research and may advocate for broader history based upon data found in primary documents. Uneducated staff who perform curatorial projects may lack the training or knowledge to identify and interpret objects vital to the story of the enslaved, trivializing the importance of particular objects or structures. Therefore, specialized interpretive staff including curators, educators, and docent trainers greatly assist in

¹³⁷ Interview with site educator, July 14, 2016.

¹³⁸ Interview with site educator, July 14, 2016.

concentrated efforts to implement and promote racialized narratives, systemically thwarting the appearance of discursive strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETIVE AND COMMERCIAL ENDEAVORS

Heritage sites who allocate resources toward interpretative work on buildings, landscapes, and objects will ideally do so to holistically portray the past. However, some sites lack funding to properly care for and interpret their historic collections, while others use available funding for non-historical commercial undertakings. Whether lodgings, restaurants, luxury gardens, or concert amphitheaters, when these services are offered without equal efforts toward interpretive inclusivity, they potentially demean and belittle the experiences of enslaved people who were bonded to the site, as well as those who continued to reside on the property following emancipation. Such commercial endeavors improve the site, elevating its capacity to please visitors seeking entertainment. Further, when suppressing the story of enslaved people in favor of luxury-oriented attractions, lavish pleasures echo the experiences of former white plantation owning families while silencing the past known to the enslaved there.

Objects and Structures, and Interpretive Choices

Throughout the twentieth century, many museum collection exhibits focused thematically on the story of “progress,” a story which features the technological, geographic, and economic expansion of white America. The theme of American progress relies on economic, racial, and social hierarchies, all historically dominated by white men. Likewise, plantation sites are gendered, symbolizing the paternalistic system of

male dominance over inferiors, females, children, and the enslaved.¹ Though social historians slowly chipped away at this historiographical framework, the hierarchical ideal of progress still has a foothold at tourist plantations. Discussions of fine objects and architecture, highlight the fashionability and “ingenuity” of slaveholding plantation owners, rejecting the opportunity to discuss the achievements of enslaved designers and skilled work people.² Within plantation house interiors which attempt to recreate historic lifeways and aesthetics, the furnishings and interiors are metonymic to a particular past. As visual and experiential exhibits, the interpretation of objects and structures at tourist plantations may be the most obvious “warning flags” of Eichstedt’s and Small’s discursive strategies. Thus, over-emphasis on plantation house obscure racial narratives and the beautiful, big house and its tasteful old furnishings become a shield of “plantation chic” which block themes presenting historical racial hegemony.³

Architecture and Furnishings, Race and Class

Approximately half of the sites examined in this project focus largely on the historicism and magnificence of the furnishings displayed throughout the house; docents tell visitors which objects are important, expensive, rare, old. Volney Gay writes that the

¹Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 59.

² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 75

³ Ibid., 129.

apologist conception of the plantation house is completely reliant on the household luxury provided by enslaved persons. He goes on to say,

. . . everyday pleasures include, but are not limited to: being served, believing that one's family is superior, the thrill of investing in property that produces wealth . . . the satisfaction of owning the talents, effort, and minds of people dedicated to your betterment, being treated like a lord, and feeling admired-- even loved-- by enslaved persons.⁴

This interpretation expresses the objectification of the enslaved, as tools that supported the enslaver's wellbeing. Thus, tours of historic plantation houses that lack equal discussion of enslavement and aesthetics, distract visitors from unsavory racial narratives, masking historical machinations of violence and humility, making the past more palatable.⁵

Sites without curators, or that lack historic reference material, often misrepresent material culture during tours, stressing the novelty of decorative objects and domestic technology. Depending on the effectiveness of the interpretation, the reflection may be a simple symbol of nostalgic plantation popular culture. During a tour at San Francisco plantation, a site without curatorial staff, the docent pointed out a pier table displayed by an exterior door.⁶ Rather than explaining how pier tables reflect and add light to the room, the docent said that the mirror located beneath the table top allowed women to view their ankles in the reflection. A chaise longue, identified as a "fainting couch" during the tour, was noted for catching women who might suddenly collapse under the

⁴ Volney P. Gay, *On the Pleasures of Owning Persons: The Hidden Face of American Slavery* (Astoria, NY: International Psychoanalytic Books (IP Books), 2016), 3-5.

⁵ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 129.

⁶ Site visit, June 2019.

pressure of a corset.⁷ However, there was no discussion of who may have helped the fainting women recover from a spell, or attire themselves to begin with. This tour failed to discuss how enslaved people moved throughout the house, or what objects they might have used. The tour was rife with folkish explanations that charmed visitors without reflecting the historical reality of the plantation.

Historic interiors at tourist plantations represent the past owners, as well as “those who construct the display,” whether curator, collector, docent, or owner.⁸ When the tourist plantation owner lives at the site, objects and exhibits might interpret the current owners or occupants as much or more than the historic owners. The owner’s domestic activities affect household exhibits, as things serve in both utilitarian and interpretive capacities. Thus, the regular use of historic objects may require costly conservation more often than at uninhabited sites. An owner/resident of an occupied tourist plantation house discussed the cost of conserving a piece of furniture. “I spent about forty-five hundred bucks a pop. . . it’s the maintenance—the more crap you have, the more you have to maintain. When you have old crap, it’s a nightmare.”⁹ He/she went on to say that if the deterioration is not handled immediately, “deferred maintenance at some point becomes capital improvement,” an expense compounded by neglect.¹⁰

⁷ Site visit, May 2018; Mary Miley Theobald, *Death by Petticoat: American History Myths Debunked* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Pub., 2012).

⁸ Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* ;(Washington, DC: Smithsonian Inst. Press),389.

⁹ Interview October 4, 2016.

¹⁰ Interview October 4, 2016.

Another tourist plantation owner and resident, Kevin Kelley, resides at Houmas House's mansion. Kelly bought the property and all of its furnishings at auction in Spring 2003. Though Kelly had no museum experience, he "selected the best features from various periods to showcase a legacy of each [owning] family in the mansion," opening for tours the following November.¹¹ The house exhibits his antique and commemorative object collecting habits more than it interprets a historic domestic environment.¹² In fact, the house serves as a giant *Wunderkammer* that jumbles the aesthetic and the nostalgic, and the current and the vernacular together. During tours of this pastiche, docents stress Kelly's connoisseurship and "good" taste, rarely discussing the historic residents of the place. An upstairs bedroom features Victorian era display cases exhibiting unlabeled archaeological artifacts. Next to the cabinet, a framed photo of Bette Davis taken during the filming of "Hush Hush Sweet Charlotte" sits on top of a four-poster bed supposedly featured in the film when it was shot at Houmas House. The docent explained that the tour did not discuss slavery, and that the site has conducted no research concerning that history, suggesting that maybe one day they would learn more. Instead the house tour, the docent explained, would teach visitors about the life of a wealthy "sugar baron," which, like planter, may be considered a euphemism for slaveholder.¹³

The few representations of African American people in the entire house were paintings and prints hung above a large nineteenth-century desk in the owner's upstairs

¹¹ "Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans," Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

¹² Site visit, June 19, 2018.

¹³ Adams, "Local Color," 163.

bedroom. Some images displayed pickaninnies, other showed barefooted children eating watermelon. From the comfort of a large canopy bed, the site's owner may view the images that call back to the site's formerly enslaved as objectified commodities collected by the white owner.¹⁴ Across the hall, a space the docent referred to as the "Voodoo Room," displays African ritual objects, presented as novelty for visitors' titillation. Perhaps more than at any other Transformation project tourist plantation, Houmas House's object display evokes historical racial hegemony in a palpable way. The collection divests the humanity and power of the site's black historical actors into "inert (and commodified) racial caricatures . . . to render black presence nonthreatening to whites."¹⁵ Thus, this owner's racial biases and prejudices are literally displayed for visitor observation, trivializing the enslaved by fetishizing them.

Segregated/Secondary Spaces

Choosing to present black and white histories separately either through different tours or represented in different spaces demonstrates Eichstedt's and Small's discursive strategy "segregated knowledge."¹⁶ Interviews with owners reflect a variety of reasons for separating racial narratives. Some attribute the length of tours, explaining that tours are too short to include slavery. Others discuss the importance of depicting slavery,

¹⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁵ Ibid., 164; Ewa A. Adamkiewicz, "White Nostalgia: The Absence of Slavery and the Commodification of White Plantation Nostalgia," *As Peers*, 2016, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://www.aspeers.com/sites/default/files/pdf/adamkiewicz.pdf>, 19.

¹⁶ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 170-202.

explaining that deserves its own interpretive space and focus. Whatever the reason, separate histories emphasize the importance of the white family's wealth during "main" or "normal" tours, a reference laden with racialized meaning.¹⁷ One River Road plantation owner explained, "That's why we do exhibits, to tell other aspects of [the plantation] and to focus on the actual people in the house."¹⁸ With this assertion, the owner states a lack of belonging of the enslaved within the house's important narrative, while denying the legitimacy of their appearance in the site's history at all. Thus, the owners'/operators' mindset directly impacts the separation of racial narratives.

At most sites the racialized landscape includes African American history within outbuildings such as laundries, smokehouses, slave quarters, and basements. The largest, grandest spaces interpret the lives of the slaveholding family. In fact, the term "outbuilding" implies an otherly quality, diminished in importance and appearance within the shadow of the white family's domestic structure.¹⁹ However, any plantation structure taken alone, depicts only a portion of the historic plantation complex. Touring the big house while ignoring the vast agricultural land holdings, is akin to visiting a historic factory, but only touring the foreman's office and discussing the furnishings, without exploring the assembly lines, machinery, or production methods employed by workers.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 171-172.

¹⁸ Interview with owner, March 2015.

¹⁹ Julia Rose, "Collective Memories and the Changing Representations of American Slavery," *Journal of Museum Education* 29, no. 2-3 (2004): 27-28.

²⁰ David Butler, conversation with author, February 9, 2017.

At Shirley Plantation, outbuildings exhibit didactics listing data from documentation created by literate white slave holders, merchants, slave traders, and people working at the site in an official capacity.²¹ Similarly, San Francisco Plantation fails to represent the enslaved in the house but uses probate and annual inventories to list the names of enslaved people. These didactics appear on dusty signage in a few crudely-built structures brought to the site to represent the lives of those who toiled at the plantation. Inventories may list names, ages, job assignment, and value of the enslaved people. However, “Without names, faces, or filial or affective relationships, these individuals are denied a full human presence . . . objectified as mechanisms within a system of household management and field labor.”²² Therefore, depersonalized interpretations might unintentionally memorialize the enslaved people’s bondage, rather than giving insight into the thoughts, dreams, and personal relationships of the enslaved.²³ If the owner does not prioritize the history of the enslaved, financial resources will not be allotted toward such projects. Without dedicated research conducted by curators, historians, or consulting researchers such connections may be impossible.

²¹ Site visit, June 2018.

²² Rose, "Collective Memories and the Changing Representations of American Slavery," 27-28.

²³ Ibid., 28.

Employee as Object and Historicized Docent Costumes

Prior to 2018, Oak Alley docents were required to wear “historically accurate” costumes during tour shifts. Female employee uniforms comprised of long skirts, multiple petticoats, and support undergarments.²⁴ Berkeley Plantation, Boone Hall Plantation in Charleston, and Houmas House also require costumes, but the clothing appears vaguely old fashioned rather than accurate to a particular era.²⁵ A Boone Hall docent explained that though historicized clothing was requisite, she was not trained on what the costume represents. “We do dress in period costume in there, hoop skirts and those come from different periods of time too. Some people might have a bigger hoop. Mine's kind of more narrow, I guess more—I think it's more Reconstruction Era. . . I don't know. I think I probably should.”²⁶

Costumes may be used as a didactic tool, however at tourist plantations, historical accuracy of costumes would visually delineate racial boundaries, as enslaved black women and white slave-owning women would not have worn the same attire. While facilitating plantation house tours, white female costumed docents “. . . sound and often look like house-proud mistresses, mothers, or daughters showing off their beautiful homes to visitors, rather than paid employees.”²⁷ When an African American female docent wears historic attire, the clothing represents a different historical experience. A

²⁴ Interview with staff, March 2015.

²⁵ Site visits, June 2018.

²⁶ Interview with docent, February 26, 2016.

²⁷ Adams, “Local Color,” 168.

visitor at a Charleston plantation asked an African American docent, ““Why aren’t you in period dress?’ I’m thinking, you want me to be dressed as a slave?””²⁸ She went on to explain, “I’m not ashamed that my ancestors were enslaved, but for me it’s very important to present myself as a modern present-day Gullah woman.”²⁹ In addition, constrictive foundation garments worn beneath costumes accentuate the female figure. Depending on the cut of the garments, the female docent’s breasts might be revealed, sexualizing the work uniform. When the docent is African American, this sexualization recalls the objectification and sexual abuse of enslaved women on the plantation. When employees of tourist plantations are made to wear historicized clothing, their bodies may become as meaning laden as objects displayed in the historic house. Thus, such historicized clothing at tourist plantations may inappropriately emphasize the race and gender of interpretive staff, while potentially sexualizing the interpreter in a distorted public presentation of history.

Newly hired docents may be made to wear ill-fitting costumes, until tailored clothes are constructed. A site manager explained that “When someone starts, they usually get the hand me downs, and then we buy them a costume.”³⁰ This manager admitted that future job applications would request the applicant’s clothing sizes, suggesting that the best candidates may be those who fit into costumes currently contained in the site’s wardrobe. “We have a closet full of costume which no one can

²⁸ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

²⁹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

³⁰ Interview with manager, July 14, 2016.

wear. They are not the right size.”³¹ Costumes keep some candidates from applying for docent jobs. At a site that allow modern, casual dress, a docent for tours admitted that he would not have come to work at that site had docents been required to wear costumes.³² None of the tourist plantations in the Transformation project study use first person interpretation, therefore costumes are unnecessary adding hassle and expense to the workplace. Costumes require upkeep and are extraneous, particularly when they do not serve historical interpretation, imposing unneeded expenses on the site and its employees.

Sites which direct funding away from the research and stewardship of historic structures and objects risk corrupting their exhibits of plantation history. Incorrect assignations and descriptions by interpretive staff reflect limitations of knowledge, biases, and prejudices. Family and single owner sites have the leeway to stretch interpretations to improve the presentation of their personal identities, aggrandizing their historical importance. Furthermore, the emphasis on white wealth through the exhibition and stewardship of luxury objects blocks visitors from viewing the role of enslaved people within the household.

³¹ Interview with manager, July 14, 2016.

³² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

Auxiliary Commercial Services

*“My wedding will be perfect. My wedding will be whimsical. My wedding will be problematic. I’m not trying to force anyone into doing anything that is triggering or reminds them of anything repulsive, either through my own behavior or a racist nostalgia I’m trying to recapture.”*³³

Commercial attractions, services, and event rentals have the potential to bolster interpretive efforts by generating profits that may be reinvested in education. The more museums and heritage sites shift their offerings toward entertaining educational experiences, the more responsibility shifts away from curators toward “design, outreach, and development staff.”³⁴ Though they attract visitors who may not otherwise visit, commercial offerings can also draw focus from a site’s interpretive mission.³⁵ If “experiences happen inside of us,” and are “our internal reaction to the events that unfold around us,” tourist plantation entrepreneurs might be attracted to profits acquired through non-educational, sensory experiences such as weddings, manicured flower gardens, or

³³ Kady Ruth Ashcraft, "I Want My Plantation Wedding To Feel Simple And Lovely And Not To Focus On Slavery," *Funny Or Die*, February 25, 2016, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.funnyordie.com/2016/2/25/17749502/i-want-my-plantation-wedding-to-feel-simple-and-lovely-and-not-to-focus-on-slavery>.

³⁴ Randolph Starn, "A Historians Brief Guide to New Museum Studies," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 91.

³⁵ B. Joseph Pine, II and James H. Gilmore, "Museums and Authenticity," *Museum News*, May/June 2007, 76, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://northernlight.nl/wp-content/uploads/Pine-and-Gilmore-Museums-and-Authenticity.pdf>.

Table 16 Sites with non-historical commercial offerings.

OWNERSHIP MODEL	PROFIT MODEL	OWNERSHIP MODEL	PLANTATION NAME	GIFT SHOP	RESTAURANT	LODGING	CONCERT OR EVENT VENUE	WEDDING SITE OR STRUCTURE	OTHER ATTRACTION	TOTAL COMMERCIAL FEATURES
Public	government entity	county owned	Meadow Farm	1						1
			McLeod Plantation	1						1
			Appomattox Plantation	1						1
			Whitney Plantation	1						1
Private	for profit	family owned	Berkeley Plantation	1				1		2
		commercial entity	Boone Hall Plantation	1	1		1	1	1	5
		owned and run by separate family-owned business entities								
		single owner	Laura Plantation	1						1
		family owned	Houmas House	1	3	1	1	1	1	8
		family owned	Magnolia Plantation	1	1			1	1	4
	single/family/corporate owned with separate for non-profit component-	family owned LLC	Shirley Plantation	1				1		2
		commercial entity	San Francisco Plantation	1				1		2
		foundation owned	Oak Alley	1	2	1		1		5
		foundation owned	Middleton Place	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
	non-profit foundation owned and operated	preservation foundation owned	Bacon's Castle	1						1
	non-profit foundation owned, but run by a separate non-profit foundation	preservation foundation owned	Drayton Hall	1	1		1			3

dining and lodging.³⁶ However, these offerings endanger interpretive potency, due to their ability to present unintended links to the slaveholder's past through relaxation and indulgence. Thus, through entrepreneurial auxiliary services, beauty, leisure, and luxury supplant difficult historical narratives.

Restaurants

Eichstedt and Small determined that sites which provide commercial hospitality services, such as bed and breakfasts and restaurants, demonstrate the highest instances of “symbolic annihilation” of the enslaved from the plantation landscape.³⁷ Six of the 15 project sites tourist plantations alter the landscape with restaurants. While Magnolia Plantation maintains a refreshment stand akin to something at a sporting venue, Houmas House boasts three different dining venues, and Oak Alley offers two dining spots, as well as a cash bar serving mint juleps at the rear of the historic house. Dining services keep visitors on site and provide a spot to rest, while at the same time exchanging service for profit. However, through marketing and appropriated foodways, restaurant services may contradict or complicate historical site narratives.

Staff and owner interviews frequently invoke the term “hospitality,” to reflect the importance of making site visitors feel welcome and provided for. A Louisiana site owner/operator expressed the desire for visitors to “learn the history of the house . . . do a little bit of shopping and then drink some coffee . . . to experience a little bit of old

³⁶ Pine and Gilmore, "Museums and Authenticity."

³⁷ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 66.

Louisiana, just the ‘hospitality’ side of it.”³⁸ At tourist plantations, the term is problematic, as tour guides interchange “hospitable” with “genteel and generous,” in descriptions of historic plantation owners.³⁹ At slaveholding plantations, for the most part, guests were white. Houmas House’s Café Burnside markets to “the finest of guests,” and offers “an experience rivaling those of the great Sugar Barons of the 1800’s,” a period at the site which marks the enslavement of African American sugar workers, or their continued work as low-paid tenants following the Civil War.⁴⁰ The restaurant advertisement goes on to boast a scenario which replicates the slaveholder’s dining room, down to reproductions of the “original china made by Edouard R. Honoré for Wade Hampton in the 1830’s.”⁴¹

Another Houmas House venue, Latil’s Landing Restaurant, suggests that guests come to “Dine Like a Sugar Baron,” a role defined by white European hegemony.⁴² The advertisement goes on to explain that “for nearly two and a half centuries, the Sugar Barons of Houmas House have entertained their guests with the finest of food and beverage . . . enjoy the culinary delicacies of Louisiana that have been created for the Sugar Barons.”⁴³ The advertisement suggests that sugar barons, as mentioned before a

³⁸ Interview with owner, March 2015.

³⁹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 141.

⁴⁰ "Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans," Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

⁴¹ "Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans," Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

⁴² "Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans," Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

⁴³ "Historic Louisiana Plantation near New Orleans," Houmas House, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.houmashouse.com/>.

euphemism for slaveholder, have been present at the place for 250 years and identifies both the restaurant host and guest as slaveholders, each complicit in the reenactment. Furthermore, the evocation of the historical “Sugar Palace” attributes nothing to the work of the enslaved in the process, not the labor that made the wealth, nor the knowledge that created the foodways, thereby commoditizing and symbolically annihilating their legacy at this place. Furthermore, if dining here recreates the sumptuous dining experience of the slaveholder, would this be something a black visitor would be willing to do?

According to their web site, Middleton Place Restaurant “. . . offers traditional *Low Country* favorites made from fresh, local, seasonal, and organic ingredients . . . Lunch options include she-crab soup, shrimp and grits, collard greens, and Huguenot torte.”⁴⁴ The soup, grits, and greens are all items associated with African foodways, and specifically Gullah foodways in the Low Country. On the Middleton Place web site, these items go unattributed, while the origins of the torte are credited to the white, French religious refugees who passed the recipe through generations. Furthermore, the differentiation between Gullah and Low Country foodways are hotly contested, while other food scholars understand Lowcountry food as “a process.”⁴⁵ Thus accretions of Low Country cooking knowledge and ritual represent a “long-standing processes of colonialism and racial slavery, and of integration into global capitalist markets and an

⁴⁴ "Middleton Place National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards Gardens," National Historic Landmark House Museum, Restaurant, Stable Yards Gardens, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.middletonplace.org/>; Robert L. Hall, "Africa and the American South Culinary Connections," ed. Douglas B. Chambers and Kenneth Watson, in *The Past Is Not Dead* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 305.

⁴⁵ L. Van Sant, "Lowcountry Visions: Foodways and Race in Coastal South Carolina," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* 15, no. 4 (2015): accessed February 27, 2019, doi:10.1525/gfc.2015.15.4.18.

urban consumer society.”⁴⁶ Without the explicit recognition of the origins of such fare, tourist plantations trivialize the contributions of enslaved cooks, while ignoring the opportunity to educate while entertaining restaurant guests. Thus, by using the work, talents, and knowledge of African and African American foodways to market menus, while inviting guests to reenact slaveowners’ dining rituals, “hospitality” becomes racially coded.

Weddings

Eight of the fifteen Transformation project sites invite wedding event rentals through advertisement. Plantation owners/operators identify the earning potential of weddings, as one Charleston manager explained, “We started a wedding program, which has been very lucrative for us . . . It’s gravy money for us, and it’s wonderful.”⁴⁷ In fact, that operator’s site features multiple spaces available for weddings and the site can accommodate “. . . four to five weddings a day,” including weekdays.⁴⁸ However, the manager expressed that the site management is “always looking for new wedding venue” and plans to add a new wedding chapel in the future. To fulfill the needs and requests of wedding clients, this site hired specific staff to manage these events including a wedding

⁴⁶ Van Sant, “Lowcountry Visions;” Michael W. Twitty, “Dear Sean, We Need to Talk,” *Afroculinaria*, August 26, 2016, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://afroculinaria.com/2016/03/23/dear-sean-we-need-to-talk/>.

⁴⁷ Interview with staff, February 18, 2016.

⁴⁸ Interview with management, February 19, 2015.

coordinator, coordinator's assistant, and maintenance people.⁴⁹ This site prioritizes revenue generated from weddings over interpretation, demonstrated by allocating staffing budget to event rentals while neglecting to hire curatorial staff. Similarly, some sites limit the hours of interpretive tours and programming to accommodate wedding rentals. A River Road plantation owner explained the necessity of prioritizing weddings over tours, cutting tour times short when weddings are scheduled. "Nobody wants to get married at the dark of night. They want to get married in the sunset."⁵⁰ Though they can provide much needed income, the money comes at the sacrifice of interpretive focus, particularly as the romance associated with weddings overshadows and ignores these sites' difficult racialized histories.

Of the fifteen Transformation project sites, only Whitney Plantation does not allow weddings. McLeod Plantation, a site with a black-centric interpretation, allows weddings as a financial necessity. However, these events are not popular with the staff. A docent contested weddings at the site: "This is where the ancestors are. Some of them are buried over there . . . This is a potent site. Young, Caucasian brides want to rent the look of the big, white columns on the back of the house that were installed about 1920. It wasn't that kind of a plantation, and the powers that be are exploiting that image."⁵¹ Though didactics interpreting the site's racialized history are featured throughout the historic house, wedding participants go unaffected by the information. "There was six

⁴⁹ Interview with management, February 19, 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁵¹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

bride's maids in that room over there . . . people are downstairs reading these banners about slavery and asked to consider what their lives were like, what the lives of all the tenants, all the occupants of this house were . . . And then there are six women up here giggling and spraying hairspray and playing music and you can hear it all over the house.”⁵²

The juxtaposition of plantation history and plantation romance creates cultural dissonance surrounding weddings. The Funny or Die comedy website published an essay titled, “I Want My Plantation Wedding to Feel Simple and Lovely and Not to Focus on Slavery.”⁵³ Though intended as satire, the essay gives insight into the potential inner conflict of a plantation-wedding bride:

On my special day, I ask that you indulge my white upper middle-class nostalgia fever dream of an untroublesome America, where . . . no one questioned the problematic ease at which all these white people were living their lives. . . I want this idyllic and nostalgic wedding to be reminiscent of the joy economically influential white people felt in the 1700s and 1800s. The joy of immoral power. I can't think of a single thing wrong with holding my wedding on a lovely plot of land that housed enslaved people!⁵⁴

The exchange of romantic for unsavory is achieved by improving the landscape, emphasizing the nostalgic tropes of plantation leisure. Beyond the big house, historical

⁵² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁵³ Kady Ruth Ashcraft, "I Want My Plantation Wedding To Feel Simple And Lovely And Not To Focus On Slavery," Funny Or Die, February 25, 2016, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.funnyordie.com/2016/2/25/17749502/i-want-my-plantation-wedding-to-feel-simple-and-lovely-and-not-to-focus-on-slavery>.

⁵⁴ Kady Ruth Ashcraft, "I Want My Plantation Wedding To Feel Simple And Lovely And Not To Focus On Slavery," Funny Or Die, February 25, 2016, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.funnyordie.com/2016/2/25/17749502/i-want-my-plantation-wedding-to-feel-simple-and-lovely-and-not-to-focus-on-slavery>.

work spaces such as barns, boat docks, and warehouses are festooned with lights in use as reception spaces.⁵⁵ Through this transformation, wedding parties renegotiate the meaning of work spaces where enslaved people toiled, erasing their memory from the landscape. Wedding photos do not depict the wedding party grouped inside slave quarters, or within smokehouses. Instead, they stand in a leisure space, the historic house balcony. The wedding couple assumes the position of the plantation owner, if only for one night. Thus, through a plantation wedding, couples may link themselves to the plantation elite immortalized through extensive professional photography.

In an interview with essayist Brian Graves, McLeod Plantation's operator Shawn Halifax explained the choice to allow weddings at the site. Halifax claimed that the public expects tourist plantations to host weddings, particularly sites with big white houses that evoke *Gone with the Wind*. However, Halifax went on to explain his personal conflict with ranking income over interpretation, "I hope that we, as an organization, can look for ways to generate similar revenue but have it contribute more to fostering an environment where hard conversations can be had."⁵⁶

Gardens

The natural beauty of the plantation landscape, whether grassy fields, stands of trees, or sweeping vistas of the river, add to the picturesque quality of the tourist site.

⁵⁵ Interview with staff, February 26, 2016.

⁵⁶ Shawn Halifax, Interview with Brian Graves quoted in "'Return and Get It': Developing McLeod Plantation as a Shared Space of Historical Memory," *Southern Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2017): 90-91.

Most tourist plantation landscapes alter nature to a hyper-picturesque state, then rely upon images of the improved landscape to lure visitors. Magnolia Plantation even markets itself as “America’s Oldest Pleasure Garden.”⁵⁷ Alleés of live oaks with drooping Spanish moss flank the main drives of Oak Alley and Boone Hall Plantation, framing the plantation mansion through an arbor tunnel. The romantic atmosphere created by centenary trees evokes nostalgic visions and speaks to the sizable investment of money and effort over time. These features are regarded by site owners as assets, and in some cases, take precedence over every other aspect of the plantation. The owner of a site with such a landscape stated, “Without these trees, there is no site, no story.”⁵⁸ Thus, the romantic power of such symbolic landscaping overshadows and trivializes the lives of the enslaved people that may have planted them.

Formal gardens recall themes of classical “beauty and order” on the plantation landscape, attempted for and achieved by the plantation elite.⁵⁹ At Middleton Place in Charleston, the ruins of a portion of the historic house on a hill forces visitors to imagine the destructive violence of the Civil War. Below the ruins, a formal garden shaped like a butterfly demonstrates the skills and efforts of the enslaved people. A massive undertaking and remarkable accomplishment achieved by the enslaved at the command of the plantation owner, enslaved workers excavated the earth with buckets to create the

⁵⁷ "Magnolia Plantation and Gardens | Charleston, SC," Magnolia Plantation, accessed February 27, 2019, <http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/>.

⁵⁸ Interview with owner, March 2015.

⁵⁹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 100.

terraces which lead down to the Ashley River.⁶⁰ Furthermore, large-scale, aesthetic landscape projects appear to the public completed, and do not highlight initial installation work or the maintenance required to keep them attractive. Thus, formal plantation gardens obfuscate the historical reality of work and sacrifice of the place, while ameliorating the appearance of less-savory aspects of the site such as slave quarters, that highlight the harsh conditions of forced labor.

Magnolia Plantation in Charleston has an array of non-historical, themed gardens, as well as a petting zoo that features exotic animals. Visitors may board the site's train for a nature tour that runs along waterways that showcase the plantings. Extensive gardens installed in scenic vignettes festoon garden paths with vibrantly blooming flowers. These landscapes dwarf the historic house and draw focus from the historical interpretation of the site. Magnolia Plantation boasts the last "Romantic Garden" in the United States. According to the Magnolia Plantation website, a Romantic Garden was intended to help "men" working in factories alleviate the drudgery of the day. The site calls the Romantic Garden an "Extravagant Liar," because of its purpose "to 'lie' you into forgetting the normality of everyday life."⁶¹ However, Magnolia's Romantic Garden doubles its effort, as it allows visitors to forget the horrors of enslavement as well.

Though important to generating institution-sustaining revenue, commercial offerings that draw focus from the site's racial history undermine its educational potential emphasizing the ahistorical luxury and opulence of the plantation experience.

⁶⁰ Site visit, June 2018.

⁶¹ "Magnolia Plantation and Gardens | Charleston, SC," Magnolia Plantation, accessed February 27, 2019, <http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/>.

Furthermore, hospitality services and luxury experiences encourage white visitors to embody the slaveholder through reenactment. Such correlations undercut the gravity and importance of the historical racial hierarchy, trivializing both the misfortunes and accomplishments of the enslaved there.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the best-case scenario, the professional staff and purpose-driven board of a tourist plantation would work *together* to weave racialized history into the comprehensive, historical narrative. Site owners/operators would support narratives that feature the past and present of the African American community through educational content. This transformation would signal the site's transformation from a maudlin, nostalgic tourist attraction, to an ethically-minded heritage site exhibiting a dynamic, multi-cultural interpretive product.¹ The interpretation would include all of the races, genders, classes, and ages of people at the site based on community outreach, historical research, and strategic planning. How do tourist plantations create such a scenario? This chapter attempts to address this question using the collected essays in Kristin L. Gallas' and James DeWolf Perry's, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*.² The authors list "Six Components of a Comprehensive and Conscientious Interpretation of Slavery." This list expands upon Gallas' and Perry's work, but also offers new recommendations that may assist tourist plantations contending with Eichstedt's and Small's discursive strategies. These include:

1. "Comprehensive Content:" temporally and geographically contextualized, well-researched historical narratives
2. "Race and Identity Awareness:" staff, board, and owner/operator acknowledgement of identity and implicit biases, and how they complicate the implementation of racialized narratives

¹ Rose, "Collective Memories and the Changing Representations of American Slavery," 9.

² Gallas and DeWolf Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, xv.

3. “Institutional Investment:” the alignment of all site stakeholders, including upper management and board, to the mission of interpreting enslavement at the site
4. “Community Involvement:” outreach to community, including descendants, inviting active participation in interpretation and programming
5. “Visitor Experiences and Expectations:” exploring visitors’ identities, historical understanding, and expectations, allowing feedback to productively shape tour narratives
6. “Staff Training:” providing thematically consistent training that incorporates slavery history, contends with the emotional and psychological repercussions of this work, and is reinforced through continued staff educational programs³

Some Transformation project tourist plantation sites provide case studies for the implementation of Gallas’ and De Wolf Perry’s “Components.” Their example suggests potential pragmatic recommendations and opportunities for amending problematic operational and administrative practices. Thus, I present these guidelines within the context of owner, administrative, staff, and visitor actions and decisions, expanding Gallas’ and DeWolf Perry’s suggestions with additional recommendations, illustrated by Transformation project sites that demonstrate successful implementation of racialized narratives.

³ Ibid., xv.

Comprehensive Content

Visitors who have limited understanding of a site's history may be better served with narratives presented within a broad geographical and chronological context.

Comprehensive content at tourist plantations contextualizes the site's racial history, placing slavery within an international framework that spans the Atlantic world.⁴ Rather than an "old world" institution contained within the American South, profits from "slave labor and the international slave trade" financed "the renaissance of fine art, architecture, literature, and music in Europe."⁵ The peculiar institution fueled modern technology, art, and philosophy while at the same time instigating a lasting legacy of racial bias and racism. By expanding the public's perception of history and race, tourist plantations have the potential to be forces in social good through well-informed, balanced storytelling. Furthermore, planned comprehensive content promotes equal attention on the experiences of the enslaved and the former white residents, preempting potential symbolic annihilation. The following recommendations may help sites to ground narratives in extensive primary research, presenting the perspectives of a variety of historical actors, contextualizing site history, while eliciting personal, emotional reflection:

1. Contextualize the site's slavery history within a broad chronology that gives personal details of historic actors, emphasizing their humanity. How did slavery become a part of the site initially? What efforts, economic

⁴ Interview with a visitor, June 12, 2015.

⁵ Lest We Forget exhibit at the Old Slave Mart, Slave Route Project, UNESCO, copyright 2004, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NY Public Library, Astor, Lenox, Tilden. Curator Howard Dodson.

impacts, social currents kept enslaved people bound to the site? Following emancipation, how did the legacy of slavery impact those who survived?

2. Recreate the site's interpretive history through the exploration of academic sources and primary documents. Primary sources used should aim to include a variety of perspectives, including folklore and other alternative sources of evidence where documents reinforce white bias. How do the contradictions or complexities make an interesting story?⁶
3. Accept the interpretive power of artwork. Use it to interpret the racialized landscape, allowing artwork to invite responses, perhaps catharses, that words cannot. Provide reflective spaces that encourage personal, contemplative experiences.

Comprehensive Context at Whitney Plantation

Whitney Plantation succeeded in providing context in ways that provide a useful template for other sites. When conducting initial research, curatorial staff discovered few primary accounts describing the experiences of those enslaved at Whitney Plantation. Therefore, the site contextualizes the primary information regarding Whitney's enslaved, embedding it within a broad history of American chattel slavery.⁷ Since American schools fail to adequately teach this history, many visitors arrive with limited knowledge. However, Director of Research, Dr. Ibrahima Seck, a historian and Senegalese native, conducts rigorous academic research in an effort to counteract the deficit. Working with the site's interpretive staff, Seck created a layered, multi-perspective site history discussed throughout tours, exhibited in the orientation space, and posted on Whitney's

⁶ Gallas and DeWolf. Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, 12-16.

⁷ Interview with staff, March 2015.

detailed web site.⁸ Tour information draws from first person accounts from formerly enslaved people as well as slaveholders' documents, though the enslaved voices dominate the narrative. Thus, Whitney attains its interpretive aims reaching site visitors and curious web surfers, presenting themes and frameworks familiar to academic historians.⁹

Whitney Plantation's black-centric site interpretation rejects all nostalgic American plantation tropes. Its landscape is not romanticized nor literally represented as an agricultural enterprise. Instead, the traditional symbols of the plantation landscape fade into a backdrop upon which interpreters project the chronicle of enslavement history. Docents share the gritty details of resistance, punishment, and escape without hedonism or titillation. The decorative splendor of Whitney's "big house" is foiled by the horrors of the surrounding landscape. The narratives of enslavement heighten the juxtaposition between inside and outside, underlining the slaveholder's reliance on free labor for this luxury.

In addition to historic buildings, the landscape includes sculptures, didactic plaques, and installations that complement the interpretive experience and inspire emotional meditation. The tour begins inside a chapel that formerly housed the Antioch Baptist Church. The building was moved to Whitney from Paulina, Louisiana. Inside, guests sit in pews beside metal, lifelike sculptures of barefoot African American children created by Woodrow Nash (see fig. 4). Visitors immerse themselves in the commemorative landscape, while guides discuss the Middle Passage, slave market sales,

⁸ "Home," Slavery in Louisiana, 2015, accessed March 08, 2019, <http://whitneyplantation.com/>.

⁹ Interview with staff, March 2015.

lifeways, resistance and revolt. The Wall of Honor, a black, reflective, stone slab evocative of Kenneth Treister's Miami Holocaust Memorial, is etched with the names and stories of people enslaved at the plantation. Visitors stop and run their fingers over the names, reading the details of their captures, punishments, and deaths. Nearby, the Field of Angels features a larger-than-life bronze sculpture of a bare-breasted angel holding a baby. Slabs of shiny black granite surround the central sculpture, displaying the names of over two-hundred-thousand enslaved children who died in Louisiana before reaching the age of three.¹⁰ By interpreting the horrific experiences of the enslaved within a meditative environment, Whitney's landscape provides reflective spaces, creating a potentially cathartic experience for visitors.



Figure 4. Woodrow Nash cast sculptures of children to represent those previously enslaved at Whitney Plantation. Source: "Whitney Plantation," Flickr, March 24, 2010, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/anthonyturducken/44610>.

¹⁰ "Home," *Slavery in Louisiana*, 2015, accessed March 08, 2019, <http://whitneyplantation.com/>.

By discussing the economics of the slave trade in conjunction with the humanity of the enslaved, the narrative becomes complicated, further disrupting nostalgic and popular notions of history. Whitney's ethical focus on the social injustices of slavery and its legacy contextualizes the institution and its generational impact, proving the didactic potential of comprehensive research. Furthermore, plantation institutions who consciously restructure their racial themes to represent multiple historical perspectives can create interpretative products that reflect cooperative institutional work. Though Whitney forces visitors to confront the details of a very difficult past, sculpture gardens give guests ample opportunities to begin the reflection process. The result welcomes and embraces the black descendant community, commemorating and valorizing the enslaved through an ethical tour product.¹¹

Race and Identity Awareness

The racialized nature of plantations sites impacts interpreters and audiences, influencing the tone and content of interpretive work. Some tourist plantation staffers find the enslavement narrative difficult to swallow, as it potentially challenges personal ideas about race and history. Visitors are also challenged by racialized history, as their perspectives are likewise informed by their own racial identities. A Whitney docent explained how the site's black-centric interpretation inspired visitors to assume "they're

¹¹ Site visit, June 2018.

going to teach us about guilt, white guilt.”¹² Thus, in order to address and diffuse such anxiety, Whitney’s guides use didactic power and respectful storytelling to gain visitor trust and attention. “Once they understand that we’re just trying to tell the story, to help you gain knowledge of the history, then they see it differently,” becoming open to new ideas and viewpoints.¹³

A site manager explained his/her fears about representing racial history in this way, “If you have a traditional [white-centric] plantation tour, and somebody isn’t great, it’s fine. It’s not going to offend people. But here, if you tell the story of slavery not in quite the right way, you can really damage your reputation. People will get extremely offended.”¹⁴ This opinion epitomizes site owner’s race-related anxiety, exposing the financial risk owners associate with balanced racial representations. Gallas and De Wolf Perry write that the racialized narrative “raises troubling and controversial issues such as unconscious bias and white privilege, and challenges narratives at the core of identity, for staff and visitors alike.”¹⁵ Therefore, tourist plantations must dedicate time and effort to exploring racial identity and its impact. To this purpose, such institutions may find the following recommendations helpful:

1. Assemble a diverse board including representatives of white and black descendant families. Invite candidates of differing races, genders, ages, and professions who will represent a variety of identities, and provide various perspectives and expertise.

¹² Interview with Whitney Plantation docent, June 7, 2015.

¹³ Interview with Whitney Plantation docent, June 7, 2015.

¹⁴ Interview with site manager, March 2015.

¹⁵ Gallas and DeWolf. Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, 27.

2. Invite consultants to facilitate workshop training staff for public discussions of race and identity concerning race and identity. By examining the guilt and shame associated with racial identity, participants will expand self-understanding, potentially inspiring empathetic responses to plantation visitors.
3. After talking with stakeholders, site descendants, and the neighboring community, institute new educational programs. Provide public programming, services, and discussions that explicitly address issues of race, including the socio-economic legacy of enslavement, while meeting the needs of the site's communities.

Diverse Boards

Tourist plantations whose boards or management team are made up of the descendants of white slaveholding families must actively examine how family and racial identity affects institutional decision making. The AAM publication *Excellence and Equity* suggests that such boards “are not adequately representative of our pluralistic society, and the voice of the community is not widely heard in museum decision making.”¹⁶ To avoid institutional racism inspired by such biases, tourist plantations must assemble staffs and boards that represent multiple races, genders, and ages.¹⁷ By assembling a board that includes the descendants of both the white slaveholding family and descendants of people formerly enslaved on the site, encourages balance in institutional decision making, and discouraging potential unconscious racial biases.

¹⁶ Ellen Cochran. Hirzy, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008),14.

¹⁷ Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, "The Role of Race and Racial Identity in Interpretation," in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2016),24.

The Preservation Virginia board makeup is racially diverse, gathering members who represent various demographics and interests, including Chief Emeritus Kenneth Adams, of the Upper Mattaponi Tribe, Audrey P. Davis from the Alexandria Black History Museum, as well as Trip Pollard from the Southern Environmental Law Center.¹⁸ To directly involve representatives from the African American community in PV plans, a management team member working closely with Bacon's Castle proposed gathering of PV site coordinators with representatives from Black Lives Matter. "We can have Black people's voices talk about what Black Lives Matter means to them, and how that can be incorporated into our sites."¹⁹ Through board representations, as well as individual community advisory groups, non-profits like PV demonstrate the true desire and effort to address racialized history at their heritage sites.

Race Workshops

Sites struggling with the institutional impact of racial identity may benefit from inviting consultants to facilitate workshops. Kathryn Sikes writes that public historians and anthropologists face the same impediments to researching, understanding, and interpreting racial history, and a combined, interdisciplinary pedagogy, could enfold tenets of public history such as shared authority and critical reflection, with critical race

¹⁸ "Historic Preservation, Education Advocacy," Preservation Virginia, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://preservationvirginia.org/>.

¹⁹ Interview July 16, 2016.

theory.²⁰ Trainings which foster critical race theory education, promote the institutional understanding of race as a social construct. Society of Historical Archaeologists offers ongoing educational workshops and trainings during conferences as does NCPH, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the Slave Dwelling Project conference. The American Anthropological Association, also offers publications and interactive training related to race on their web site.²¹ Thus, when workshops and trainings consider the historical evolution of race and its use in social control, these ideas may be applied to the development of institutional history and narrative theme evolution at the site.²²

Transformation project principal Amy Potter and co-author David Anderson Hooker created training based on their book *Transforming Historical Harms: A Guidebook for Community Engagement*. The course presents a holistic framework that guides participants into “Facing History, Making Transforming Historical Harms Connections, Healing Wounds, and Taking Action,” to help people deal with guilt and shame associated with race.”²³ At tourist plantations and other southern heritage sites, the

²⁰ Sikes, Kathryn, “Parallel Conversations: Integrating Archaeology into Public History Pedagogy,” *The Public Historian* (forthcoming).

²¹ "Society for Historical Archaeology," Society for Historical Archaeology, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://sha.org/>; "RACE: Are We So Different?" RACE: Are We So Different? - Learn and Teach, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2062>; "The Founders of Black History Month (est. 1915)," ASALH, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://asalh.org/>;

²² Sikes, Kathryn, “Parallel Conversations: Integrating Archaeology into Public History Pedagogy,” *The Public Historian* (forthcoming); Terrence W. Epperson, "Critical Race Theory and the Archaeology of the African Diaspora," *Historical Archaeology* 38, no. 1 (2004).

²³ David Anderson Hooker and Amy Potter Czajkowski, *Transforming Historical Harms: A Guidebook for Community Engagement* (Harrisonburg, VA: Eastern Mennonite University, 2012), 8-9.

process can engage “those who were victimized, those who perpetrated, those who were bystanders and the descendants of each group.”²⁴ Potter and Hooker found the framework especially effective in promoting racial understanding amongst participants including those “historically linked to one another as descendants of enslaved people and enslavers from the same plantation or forced labor system.”²⁵ Such facilitated conversations allow mixed race institutional staff and boards to collaboratively explore the “institutional arrangements that determine the relationships . . . and help to predict the distribution of opportunity and the operation of personal and group power.”²⁶ Thus, the methodology links the racial biases of everyone involved with the institution to the expression of the site’s racialized narrative. Most valuable to boards at historic plantation sites, this methodology empowers site staff and board to operate independently of the choices made by their ancestors.

Linking the Racial Past to the Present

Tourist plantations have the potential to help their communities in navigating racial issues and injustice today, linking the legacy of enslavement with current events. Structural racism and institutionalized slavery bequeathed poverty, food deserts, and gentrification to America. Even so, many visitors fail to make this connection on their

²⁴ Hooker and Potter Czajkowski, *Transforming Historical Harms*: 9.

²⁵ Hooker and Potter Czajkowski, *Transforming Historical Harms* 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

own. A site manager in Charleston explained that few visitors “readily draw connections between the past that we’re interpreting and the present that we’re living in.”²⁷ By confronting tourist plantation visitors with this correlation, interpreters might provide historical links to poignant, racial tragedies like the death of Walter Scott, the unarmed African American man fatally shot during a regular traffic stop, or the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church resulting in the death of nine people at the hands of a professed white supremacist. A docent at McLeod Plantation Historic Site seized the opportunity to link institutionalized slavery to disputes surrounding the display of Confederate battle flags, resulting in a transformational moment between docent and tourist. In this case, the docent’s tour attributed the nation’s economic foundations to chattel slavery provoking the visitor’s empathetic understanding: “Now I know why they wanted that flag to come down. I just had never heard these stories before and thought about it from their perspective.”²⁸ The docent who facilitated the man’s new racial awareness said, “After that, I was just like . . . These stories really can affect people and being able to connect on a human level is really important to changing some of those prejudices that we all have.”²⁹

²⁷ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

²⁸ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

²⁹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

Race and Identity Awareness at Laura Plantation

In 1993 folklorist and puppeteer Norman Marmillion and anthropologist Sand Marmillion acquired Laura Plantation. The Marmillions initiated preservation and interpretive research on their own, creating a tour script that tried to enfold everyone living and working at the site.³⁰ However, the tour largely featured the historic house, and learn about the slaveholding family. The site even neglected to interpret slave cabins.³¹ When a fire in 2004 destroyed the plantation house, the site's owners were forced to expand their tour interpretation to the rest of the landscape in order to keep giving tours.³² The fire inspired a concerted research effort concerning those enslaved at the site. Laura Locoul Gore's historic memoirs became the foundation for the investigation, detailing the lives of the enslaved who at one time accounted for 85 percent of the plantation population.³³ Thus, the interpretation at Laura Plantation expanded to examine Creole identities. Exploring the complexities of a mixed-race society allows the narrative inclusion of all people who shared housing, work, and life together at Laura Plantation.³⁴ Up until the twentieth century, those who identified as Creole might speak French and

³⁰ Paul F. Stahls, Jr., "Historically Passionate A Creole Dynasty Where Slaves Have Names," *My New Orleans*, June 30, 2017, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.myneworleans.com/historically-passionate/>.

³¹ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 126.

³² Interview with staff, March 2014.

³³ Laura Locoul Gore, *Memories of the Old Plantation Home*, ed. Norman J. Marmillion and Sand Warren. Marmillion (Vacherie, LA: Zoë, 2007); Interview with staff, March 2014; *Putting a Face to a Name: New Slavery Exhibit at Laura Plantation Personalizes the History of Slavery*, March 2, 2017, Davis Allen, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://prcno.org/laura-exhibit/>.

³⁴ Laura Plantation, "Discover the Creole World of 4 Generations of One Louisiana Family, Both Free and Enslaved.," Laura Plantation, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.lauraplantation.com/>.

profess to be Catholic, while embracing mixed Spanish, African, and Native American heritage and racial identity.³⁵ Interpretive tours of Laura explore how a mixed-culture society complicates what visitors think about early American history. Uniquely, “Creole Louisiana was a place where class, not race, determined social status, where rural life conformed to rigid disciplines, where human bondage created wealth, where adherence to the family business and tradition was paramount, where women ran businesses and owned property.”³⁶

After site owners Sand and Norman Marmillion and historian Katy Shannon spent a decade researching primary documents, Laura opened a dedicated exhibit space in the old overseer’s cottage. *From the Big House to the Quarters: Slavery on Laura Plantation, depicted in figure 5*, was mounted in 2017, drawing from documents like bills of sale and fugitive slave advertisements.³⁷ When the exhibit opened, Shannon told a reporter, “We wanted to talk about the triumph of the human spirit, and how they maintained their dignity and their humanity . . . they were very capable, they succeeded in the midst of [slavery], and formed meaningful relationships.”³⁸ Shannon’s collaborator, site owner Sand Marmillion explained that her training in cultural anthropology informed their research methodology. “I didn’t want just a bunch of folders with documents, I wanted it to be databases. I wanted to know who were all the people

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Putting a Face to a Name: New Slavery Exhibit at Laura Plantation Personalizes the History of Slavery, March 2, 2017, Davis Allen , accessed March 1, 2019, <https://prcno.org/laura-exhibit/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

who lived and worked here and how they fit in to the community.”³⁹ Rather than flattening the experiences of the people, Marmillion was motivated to illustrate the web of interracial bonds that made up the plantation’s relationships.⁴⁰ The exhibit embraces the accomplishments of those descended from Laura’s slaves, including Antoine “Fats” Domino, Jr.⁴¹ Born to French-speaking parents, Domino exemplifies the cultural and racial mix of identities at Laura.



Figure 5. Didactics in the recently renovated exhibit space at Laura Plantation illustrate the many family ties of the place, including those purchased as slaves. Source: *Putting a Face to a Name: New Slavery Exhibit at Laura*

³⁹ Lori Lyons, "https://www.lobserveur.com/2017/08/05/the-laura-plantation-story-vacherie-landmark-telling-detailed-slave-history/," *L'Observateur*, August 5, 2017, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.lobserveur.com/2017/08/05/the-laura-plantation-story-vacherie-landmark-telling-detailed-slave-history/>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Site visit, June 2018.

Plantation Personalizes the History of Slavery, March 2, 2017, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://prcno.org/laura-exhibit/>.

Institutional Investment

According to Linnea Grim, explicitly communicating the importance of slavery within the site mission lays the groundwork for strategic planning, staff education, and funding that can fulfill that mission.⁴² Whitney Plantation and McLeod Plantation, sites with differing ownership and profit models, provide case studies that successfully demonstrate aspects of institutional investment at tourist plantations. Thus, the following recommendations consider institutional organization and functions that support the institutional investment in narrative transformation.

1. Reflect upon the institution's history: why was it founded, who were its founders, how has the story changed over time? Institutions should address their own histories in interpretive narratives, particularly when those prior actions impact visitor perceptions of racial demographics or experiences at the site.
2. Seek accreditation or participate in a third-party evaluation process through a professional organization such as AAM or AASLH. Consulting representatives of professional organizations can provide crucial guidance for positive institutional growth and change.
3. Prove the institution's commitment to educational and stewardship goals by completing the staff complement, hiring curatorial or educational staff

⁴² Linnea Grim, "So Deeply Dyed in Our Fabric That It Cannot Be Washed Out: Developing Institutional Support for the Interpretation of Slavery," ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2016), 31.

if necessary. If funding precludes adding staff, identify qualified volunteers who might work on a project-by-project basis.

4. Rethink marketing messages, abandoning “time travel” language.
5. Prove the site’s commitment to interpretive history. In recognition of the site’s history with enslaving people, discontinue wedding event rentals.

Institutional Reflection and Evaluation

Begin the process of unifying interpretive aims by reflecting on the site’s institutional history. The examination of the site’s evolution may be surprising, revealing decisions made long ago that no longer serve the site’s narrative focus. Start by investigating the site founders who transformed the place from an agricultural enterprise into a cultural heritage site. What were their motivations and mentalities? How is their work embossed on the current racial narrative? Consider how the cultural, social, racial, and economic identities of the founders played into formative planning documents that ultimately govern interpretive themes. How did surges in racial conflict, such as the Civil Rights era, impact changes in the narrative over time? How were restoration, preservation, and exhibition decisions impacted by popular culture? Including an explicit discussion of the institutional evolution within the interpretive narrative allows transparency as to how racial attitudes have changed within the organization over time. Understanding the evolution of administrator mentalities, as well as the impact of cultural nostalgia, can provide critical insight into the site’s formation.

By empathetically identifying the thoughts or biases that might have inspired these choices, staff may also learn more about their own predispositions and limitations.

Site managers might lead this discussion in an effort to empathetically address their staff's emotional and psychological responses.⁴³ Empathetic principles must also be incorporated into the site philosophy and practice as “empathy plays a positive role in ethical decision making,” a concept central to portraying racialized histories.⁴⁴ Since tourist plantations demonstrate deeply personal narratives depicting the “otherness” experienced by enslaved people and their exploitation to garner income, the institution must commit to maintain an ethical course. When dealing with a very painful history that bequeathed ongoing social conflict, empathy can influence site decision-making processes as it “fosters connectedness between organizational members and creates cooperative relationships and ethicality,” that may be passed on to visitors, stakeholders, and the community.⁴⁵

Sites who have been slow to change story, business model, or organizational make up could greatly benefit from third-party evaluation. By working with consultants such sites may tap into their potential to share their unique stories to broader audiences. AASLH tailors StEPS, the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations, toward smaller organizations, even those without paid staff, or are in the nascent stages of

⁴³ Samuel M. Natale, Anthony F. Kibertella, and Caroline J. Doran, "Empathy: A Leadership Quintessential," in *Organizing Through Empathy*, ed. Kathryn Pavlovich and Keiko Krahnke (New York: ROUTLEDGE, 2018), 94.

⁴⁴ Emmanuelle P. Kleinlogel and Joerg Dietz, "Ethical Decision Making in Organizations," in *Organizing Through Empathy*, ed. Kathryn Pavlovich and Keiko Krahnke (New York: ROUTLEDGE, 2018), 94.

⁴⁵ Emmanuelle P. Kleinlogel, Joerg Dietz, and Keiko Krahnke, "Ethical Decision Making in Organizations: The Role of Empathy," in *Organizing Through Empathy*, ed. Kathryn Pavlovich (New York: ROUTLEDGE, 2018), 115.

institutional evaluation or organization.⁴⁶ AAM facilitates evaluation programs that take stock of the operational effectiveness, ethical standing, and community service, including the Museum Assessment Program and Accreditation.⁴⁷ Drayton Hall is AAM accredited, demonstrating mastery of strategic planning, fundraising, staffing practices, and stewardship. McLeod Plantation has gone through MAP, the beginning step to accreditation. Considering the specific needs expressed by tourist plantation owners, limitations with institutional management, lack of curatorial knowledge, and issues with audience engagement, the program is well suited the small sites like a tourist plantation.⁴⁸ Through these evaluations, sites may build upon the discoveries made during institutional reflection, guided by museum professionals who can help implement effective institutional change.

Whatever the industry a tourist plantation identifies with, every level of the organization must agree to the purpose of their work. Governing documents, business plan, and strategic and interpretive plans, must be reconsidered or redefined. Clearly outlined procedures must be created, or reframed, that govern planning to implementation to accomplishment of narrative goals. Through careful strategy, planning documents

⁴⁶ "Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs)," AASLH, 2018, accessed May 08, 2018, <https://aaslh.org/programs/steps/>.

⁴⁷ See: "Accreditation," American Alliance of Museums, May 30, 2018, accessed July 08, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/accreditation/>;

"Museum Assessment Program (MAP)," American Alliance of Museums, April 13, 2018, accessed July 08, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/museum-assessment-program-map/>; "Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs)," AASLH, 2018, accessed May 08, 2018, <https://aaslh.org/programs/steps/>.

⁴⁸ "Museum Assessment Program (MAP)," American Alliance of Museums, April 13, 2018, accessed July 08, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/museum-assessment-program-map/>.

outline how goals may be reached, setting benchmarks for steps required, and illustrating potential profit through the adherence to the plan. Once the documents are distributed to staff, management and interpretive staff may discuss how the new plans might play into frontline interpretation. Thus, successful incorporation of racialized history at tourist plantations requires the attention and investment of the entire institution.

Complete Staff Complement

Through self-evaluation, tourist plantation administration may identify institutional limitations caused by voids in their personnel scheme. Whether hiring new employees or gaining assistance from volunteers, make sure the candidate's feelings about racialized history align with the institutional interpretive goals. As one successful site manager in Louisiana put it, "I don't hire people who don't want to talk about slavery."⁴⁹ A Charleston site manager recommends looking for ". . . determination and tenacity," and "the willingness to work with community and experts."⁵⁰ Seek diversity in employees and volunteers. Avoid structural prejudice and identify candidates who represent a variety of genders, ages, and races to increase a site's chances of pluralistic storytelling.

Professional impediments to narrative creation and implementation may be overcome through the fulfillment of the site's staffing complement. Employing a site

⁴⁹ Interview with site operator, March 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with site operator, February 19, 2016.

educator proves the educational mission of the place publicly, just as the presence of a curator demonstrates dedication to research, interpretive aims, and stewardship. Seek candidates with expanded skillsets, for instance a background in sales, marketing, or graphic design combined with museum training. If budget restrictions prevent hiring new staff, a common occurrence at small institutions like historic house museums, consultants or volunteers might work on a project-by-project basis. Graduate students who need internships can exchange curatorial and educational assistance for course credit through special arrangements with a university. Adherence to agreed interpretive goals requires ancillary efforts to allocate financial and human resources.⁵¹

Reframe Marketing Messaging

The site's marketing language has the potential to be the first interpretive narrative that reaches visitors. Thus, nostalgic language that suggests visitors "step into the past" may conflict with the site's interpretive goals. The promise of "time travel," while attractive to some white visitors seeking the luxurious nostalgia of the Old South, might be particularly repellent to African American and other non-white visitors. Transformation project principals David Butler, Derek H. Alderman, and E. Arnold Modlin Jr. studied tourist plantation brochures and websites, examining the type of language used.⁵² The principals found that advertisements use wording "both to reaffirm

⁵¹ Interview with site operator, February 19, 2016.

⁵² David L. Butler, "Whitewashing Plantations," *International Journal of Hospitality Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3-4 (2001); Derek H. Alderman and E. Arnold Modlin, "(In)Visibility of the Enslaved

the historical exclusion of the enslaved and to offer travelers more information about the slave experience.”⁵³ Whitney Plantation and McLeod Plantation Historic Site advertise their sites with images of African American people or housing for the enslaved and tenant farmers, which symbolize plantation life in alignment with their site narratives. Alderman and Modlin’s study found that using symbolic images of the enslaved speaks to trends in consumer demand, as these images are more likely to “resonate with growing numbers of African American travelers.”⁵⁴ Thus, marketing materials must publicize the tourist plantation’s dedication to interpreting the enslaved.

McLeod Plantation’s brochure rejects nostalgia, and its brochure text aligns with the site’s goal to broadly portray racial history.

At McLeod Plantation the story of a conflicted society unfolds. African American families like the Gathers, Dawsons, and others aspired to be free and to have their rights guaranteed and protected. The plantation-owning McLeods sought the freedom to own and manage their property to their economic advantage. These groups were forced to adjust to a world turned upside down by the war, pestilence, and a quickly changing social order.⁵⁵

The brochure language emphasizes the agency of the enslaved using active verbs that attribute accomplishment: “When William acquired this property in 1851, enslaved

Within Online Plantation Tourism Marketing: A Textual Analysis of North Carolina Websites," *Journal of Travel Tourism Marketing* 25, no. 3-4 (2008).

⁵³ Derek H. Alderman and E. Arnold Modlin, "(In)Visibility of the Enslaved Within Online Plantation Tourism Marketing: A Textual Analysis of North Carolina Websites," *Journal of Travel Tourism Marketing* 25, no. 3-4 (2008): 278.

⁵⁴ Derek H. Alderman and E. Arnold Modlin, "(In)Visibility of the Enslaved Within Online Plantation Tourism Marketing: A Textual Analysis of North Carolina Websites," *Journal of Travel Tourism Marketing* 25, no. 3-4 (2008): 278.

⁵⁵ *McLeod Plantation Historic Site* (Charleston, SC: Charleston County Park Recreation Commission).

craftspeople constructed a new home and enslaved men and women began cultivating sea island cotton.”⁵⁶ Similarly, the pamphlet narrative features self-emancipation: “Ten Freedom Seekers (Unknown) . . . took emancipation into their own hands by escaping to Union lines.”⁵⁷ Like many tourist plantation brochures, the text depicts and describes significant historic residents. McLeod’s brochure presents African American and white residents alongside one another, depicting their presence on the site as equal. By highlighting the authentic, historical experiences of former residents rather than relying on vague approximations of a romantic past, the site’s marketing language reflects unique individuals, not flattened, homogenized representations of the enslaved. This advertisement faithfully represents the site’s history, demonstrating the institution’s dedication to the interpretation of all former residents, using marketing language that clearly advertises the narrative themes the site presents.

Refuse Wedding Rentals

Site owner/operators must take a stand and stop renting the plantation property for weddings. Whitney Plantation has never allowed weddings, refusing the “dirty money” of these events. Though wedding rentals are lucrative, tourist plantation sites must prove their commitment to the formerly enslaved and the descendant community, finding new revenue sources. Should a site owner doubt that these events are harmful, or disrespectful

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to the site's history, a conversation with the site's African American descendant community might help inform their opinion. A visit to Whitney Plantation inspired an African American high school student to write:

I wonder how many people go to these very extravagant weddings and just enjoy the atmosphere of the plantation, never stopping to think about what type of horrible things happened there. I think it's crazy how they hold special events at old plantation houses because slaves who lived on these plantations were lynched, brutally beaten, and taken away from their families . . . Have you thought about the horrific scenes slaves had to endure while you're having your ball gowns made?⁵⁸

The student's visceral reaction demonstrates the potential, but unintended emotional harm plantation weddings create.

Because weddings do generate a substantial amount of operational income for many tourist plantations, this decision will require planning. New donors or income streams must be identified and implemented to make up for any deficit. However, the site's stance on these events may potentially attract positive public attention. By taking a stand, the site will clearly state its alignment of commercial and narrative aims. Once the wedding rental program concludes, advertise the fact on the tourist plantation web site. Consider sending out a press release that dually broadcasts the changes while describing the history that inspired these choices. Prospective wedding renters who visit, email, or call with inquiries, present an opportunity to promote the site's history and empathetically contextualize the inappropriateness of contemporary plantation wedding

⁵⁸ Justine Kelly, "Whitney Plantation: What Really Happened," ed. Woodlief Thomas and Jeremy Roussel, in *Talking Back to History: With the Creative Writers of Lake Area NTEC School* (New Orleans: UNO Press, 2014), 33.

events. In doing so, the institution may become a trendsetter, changing the southern wedding industry for good.

Institutional Investment and Interpretive Success at McLeod Plantation Historic Site

McLeod Plantation Historic Site transformed from an ancestral agricultural enterprise to a county-owned tourist plantation. Its interpretative success may be attributed to institutional alignment, the support and cooperation that spans from county administration to the site's interpreters. The property was considered central to the interpretation of African American history in Charleston, South Carolina, even before its purchase. Hence, when Executive Director of Charleston County Parks Tom O'Rourke acquired the estate as a Parks recreational property, O'Rourke planned to "tell the whole story" at McLeod.⁵⁹

O'Rourke recognized the academic, leadership, and interpretive skills of Shawn Halifax naming him Cultural History Interpretation Coordinator at McLeod. In an essay, Halifax described the Master Plan's interpretive goals, outlining a "unified narrative of African American history, culture, heritage, and art throughout the site."⁶⁰ The site's planning documents identify McLeod as "one of our nation's foremost locations for interpreting the African American transition to freedom in Charleston, South Carolina,

⁵⁹ Halifax, "McLeod Plantation Historic Site," 253.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 256.

and the American South,”⁶¹ a designation that frees the narrative to explore outside the scope of the antebellum time period, connecting *then* to *now*. Rather than only depicting “what life was like” for the enslaved, the Park department goes further and exhibits the experience of those who left, as well as those who remained in residence long after the Civil War. Thus, site management encourages McLeod Plantation Historic Site docents to discuss a broad history of African American residents, discussing slavery’s impact on the site, the region, and current events. A docent explained the overarching “line” that connects the “suppression of freedom” of the enslaved beyond emancipation to today.⁶² The docent described the attempt to illustrate the historical timeline and its impact on contemporary African Americans. “They’re free. Here comes the Black Codes. Here comes Jim Crow. Here comes the KKK. Here comes voter suppression, lynching. Mass incarceration, voter suppression, and that was just last week.”⁶³

In his essay, Halifax demonstrates his support and vision for this narrative. At McLeod, “the focus on the experiences of African Americans does not end with the abolishment of slavery, as if the challenges raised by generations of slavery were somehow solved with the close of the American Civil War.”⁶⁴ These successive historical influences are illustrated for site visitors by representing stories of all residents of the site back to 1850. Historical actors interpreted at McLeod are not “limited to the enslaved, freed people, and their descendants, but also the complicated relationships they

⁶¹ Ibid., 256.

⁶² Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁶³ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

⁶⁴ Halifax, “McLeod Plantation Historic Site,” 256.

formed throughout the period with the white McLeod family and other white powerbrokers that shared the same spaces.”⁶⁵

When purchased, McLeod had multiple extant work and residential structures including slave quarters, a dairy, a detached kitchen, a cotton gin house, and a “worship house.”⁶⁶ During tours, the site does not interpret the interior of any buildings. Rather, docents use phenomenology to provide an immersive, historical, African American perspective, linking the exterior spaces between work, home, and worship with stories of lived experience. As depicted in figure 6, the tour begins in outbuildings or at slave dwellings to initiate visitor empathy to an enslaved perspective, “a story where the visitor learns just as much about the enslaved as he or she does the slave master.”⁶⁷ The landscape at McLeod Plantation Historic Site represents the invisible racial boundaries that were always present at McLeod. A docent recounted, “We know that was all the way up until 1990 when Willy McLeod was living here, he doesn’t want to have any of the African-Americans who he is renting these cabins to come into the house. He does not even want to deal with them.”⁶⁸ McLeod’s complicated racial narrative uses landscape pathways and structures to explore the welcomed and refused interactions and exchanges between races. The interpretation of such in-between spaces sets the scene for powerful stories.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁶ *McLeod Plantation Historic Site* (Charleston, SC: Charleston County Park Recreation Commission).

⁶⁷ Perry Carter, David L. Butler, and Derek H. Alderman, “The House That Story Built: The Place of Slavery in Plantation Museum Narratives,” *The Professional Geographer* 66, no. 4 (2014): 555, doi:10.1080/00330124.2014.921016.

⁶⁸ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

Sites whose narratives and exhibits dwell strictly within a narrow interpretive period, also narrow their story-telling potential.⁶⁹ Tourist plantation managers and staff can support the comprehensive interpretation by representing the place before, during, and after their traditional interpretive period, as McLeod Plantation Historic Site has



Figure 6. A McLeod Plantation docent leads a tour group through a quarter that once housed enslaved people then free tenants. Source: Corey Seeman, "Visit to McLeod Plantation Historic Site (James Island, Charleston, South Carolina) - Sunday April 8th, 2018," Flickr, April 14, 2018, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cseeman/27580554298>.

managed to do successfully. As demonstrated at McLeod, the broad temporal scope of the place eases the implementation and support of presenting difficult racial narratives, broaching political topics like mass incarceration, and the impact of urban renewal. Thus,

⁶⁹ Franklin D. Vagnone, Deborah E. Ryan, and Olivia B. Cothren, *Anarchists Guide to Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2016), 175-179.

tourist plantations may prove their institutional investment through aligning interpretive and operational components to appropriately represent the legacy of slavery.

Community Involvement

In the tourist plantation business, site owners/operators can display transparency in their aims by actively seeking collaborative community relationships. For historic sites, community is not singular nor uniform, but includes groups of people bound by varying interests and criteria, some of which intersect.⁷⁰ Realigning a site's narrative focus, invites community reciprocity and allows the discovery of "new community partners" including, but not limited to: neighbors, site visitors, donors, members, descendant community, professional community, educational community.⁷¹ In the identification process, tourist plantation administrators and staff can discover communities' needs and work together creating new interpretive projects and programs.⁷² These changes not only alter the site narrative's context and effect, they create a

⁷⁰ Dina A. Bailey and Richard C. Cooper, "The Necessity of Community Involvement: Talking about Slavery in the Twenty-First Century," ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015), 62.

⁷¹ Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, ed., "Preface," in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006), xv; Dina A. Bailey and Richard C. Cooper, "The Necessity of Community Involvement: Talking about Slavery in the Twenty-First Century," ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015), 62.

⁷² Bailey and Cooper, "The Necessity of Community Involvement," 62; John Cotton Dana and W. Peniston, *The New Museum: Selected Writings* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1999), 3.

“interpretive community” who cooperatively co-produce site interpretation.⁷³ Through these collaborative efforts, plantation sites can better acquaint themselves with their audiences, with programs marketed specifically to community partners. The following recommendations may help tourist plantations identify community partners with whom to work collaboratively:

1. Identify your site’s descendant communities, African American, white and any other races historically present. Consider programming or services that celebrate their connection to the site. Offer genealogical programs or services to help descendants trace their family, potentially gathering more narrative data for the tourist plantation while helping the public.
2. Begin a membership program, and thus a member community, with special premium programs or experiences for members.
3. Go off site and get to know the neighbors. Make your site accessible to neighbors for non-interpretive use such as dog walking, picnics, or recreational programming.
4. Hold community specific celebrations and events at the site in collaboration with other non-profits, institutions, or organizations.
5. Make alliances with local schools or universities. Work collaboratively with grade schools to make the site’s history accessible through field trips, off site visits, or traveling trunks. Offer the site as a laboratory for college coursework in historic preservation, architecture, material culture, or history.

⁷³ Annette Van Den Bosch, "Museums: Constructing a Public Culture in the Global Age," ed. Sheila Watson, in *Museums and Their Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 507.

Descendant Community

When site administrators enlist descendants in decision making, the site acknowledges the significance of their lived experience, legacy, and heritage. A plantation's descendant community, both African American and white, has the potential to provide crucial institutional support.⁷⁴ A municipal site operator suggests “interacting with the community at all levels and at all stages, not just bringing them in and the beginning – or even worse, just including them at the end.”⁷⁵ While many white descendants are proudly aware of their ancestral connection to the plantation, some African Americans may not know their genealogical history. Tourist plantations can play a key role in genealogical research, since many have records relating to the enslaved. At Oak Alley Plantation, the education and curatorial staff gathered extant records concerning the enslaved posting them to their website as a database. The database, “brings to light attributes of personhood including names, origins and relationships, and presents them simultaneously with the marks of slavery that dehumanized—such as appraised value.”⁷⁶

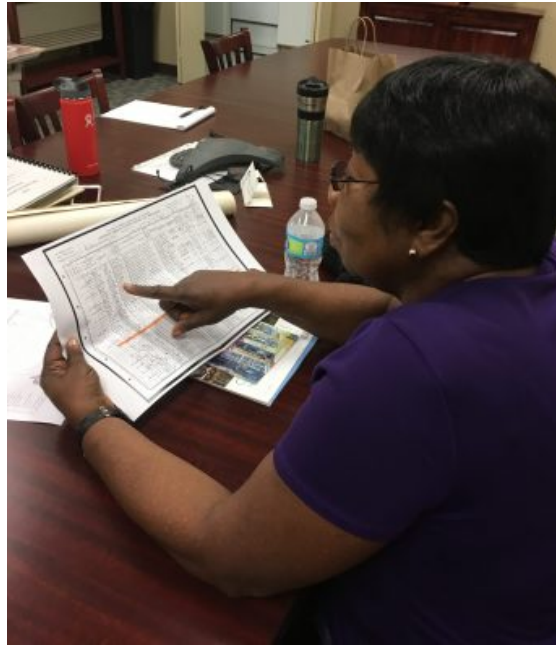
Similarly, Drayton Hall's Assistant Curator of Architectural Resources, Cameron Moon published an online article explaining her collaborative research with a descendant of the site. Ms. Dorothy Gilliard's grandmother Malsey Doyle had lived and worked at

⁷⁴ John F. Baker, *The Washingtons of Wessyngton Plantation: Stories of My Family's Journey to Freedom* (New York: Atria Books, 2010).

⁷⁵ Interview with staffer, February 19, 2016.

⁷⁶ "The Foundation," Oak Alley Foundation, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.oakalleyplantation.org/about/foundation>.

Drayton Hall around the turn of the twentieth century. Using documentation concerning former tenants and residents of the plantation, Gilliard and Moon were able to uncover Doyle's work mining phosphate and gardening at the site (see fig. 7).



*Figure 7. At Drayton Hall, Dorothy Gilliard examines historic records to trace her ancestor Malsey Hall.
Source: "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed January 31, 2019, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.*

Moon writes that Drayton Hall welcomes curious descendants who want to research their families. In fact, Moon attributes the survival of Drayton Hall's historic house to formerly enslaved who remained on the property as tenants. "The main house still stands in the condition that it does because of that community and the profits from the mining industry. Just as enslaved people built the walls of Drayton Hall in the eighteenth century, their descendants' presence on the property through the twentieth

century ensured the house's survival."⁷⁷ Drayton Hall has an African American burial ground that still allows interments of descendants. Their Visitor Services Coordinator Amanda Felder explains, "We have historically honored the interment of the descendants of enslaved African Americans with a connection to Drayton Hall. The most recent burial was in January of 2016."⁷⁸

In 2014, the Tennessee State Museum exhibited another project which exemplifies the successful collaboration between institution and the descendant community. Though the exhibit *Wessyngton Plantation*, was a single interpretive installation, and not a full-scale operating tourist plantation, the narrative successes of the project demonstrate a mastery of community curatorial collaboration. The exhibit's creators represented white descendants of slaveholders and ancestors those enslaved at the plantation, such as John Baker, Jr. whose book *The Washingtons of Wessyngton Plantation: Stories of My Family's Journey to Freedom* was the basis for the exhibit's interpretation.⁷⁹ Baker's genealogical research illustrated the extensive family network that began with Wessyngton, giving voice and agency to his ancestors. Rob DeHart, one of the exhibit's curators, writes that the exhibit was not intended "to make anyone feel guilty or sad," and portrayed the enslaved as "active players in their own lives."⁸⁰ The exhibit produced increase in visitation with "68,000 visitors [attending] in seven months,

⁷⁷ "Drayton Hall Home," Drayton Hall, accessed January 31, 2019, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

⁷⁸ "Re: Question about the African American Cemetery," e-mail to Amanda Felder, December 4, 2017.

⁷⁹ John F. Baker, *The Washingtons of Wessyngton Plantation: Stories of My Family's Journey to Freedom* (New York: Atria Books, 2010); John Baker, "The Search for My African-American Ancestry," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 3 (1997): 7-17.

⁸⁰ Rob DeHart, "Slaves and Slaveholders of Wessyngton," *History News*, Winter 2016, 12.

a 10 percent increase over typical attendance,” demonstrating the interpretive excellence possible when an educational institution works collaboratively with the descendant community.⁸¹

Marketing language can also dually promote the site while presenting narratives concerning the formerly enslaved and their descendants. McLeod Plantation’s marketing literature advertises the site as the ancestral home place of African American and white former residents. In their fold-out brochure, McLeod Plantation Historic Site identifies the “People of McLeod Plantation,” with photographs and narratives of significant white and African American former residents. The brochure includes the first owner, William Wallace McLeod (1820-1865) and explains how the talents of McLeod’s enslaved workers resulted in the skillful creation of the historic plantation house. The brochure also briefly recounts the story of “Ten Freedom Seekers” named “Syphx, Beck, Tony, Ben Molly, Abram, York, Rosie, a fourteen-month-old baby, and William Dawson” who self-emancipated in 1862.⁸² The last entry is “Those Not Yet Forgotten” with a photo of a young African American girl playing in the yard. The brochure invites collaborative research, “You can help! People who worked, soldiered, lived and died here have stories to tell that can help enrich everyone’s understanding of McLeod Plantation. If you are connected to this place or know someone who was, you can preserve the voice of someone not yet forgotten by letting a staff member know.”⁸³ Such projects and data

⁸¹ DeHart, “Slaves and Slaveholders of Wessyngton.”

⁸² Charleston County Park Recreation Commission, *McLeod Plantation Historic Site* (Charleston, SC: Charleston County Park Recreation Commission).

⁸³ Charleston County Park Recreation Commission, *McLeod Plantation Historic Site* (Charleston, SC: Charleston County Park Recreation Commission).

collections may provide valuable information to help descendants know their ancestors, the descendant community, and themselves in a new way.

Once a tourist plantation becomes acquainted with the descendant community, their family ties potentially span a network of descendant collaborators. Tourist site administrators can show the interest in the descendant community by holding programs and homecoming celebrations aimed to commemorate their ancestors. Some tourist plantations do this by inviting both African American and white descendants whose families are associated with the site. Homecoming events welcome the community, and provide an opportunity to collect stories, oral histories, and share historical photographs. Through each of these collaborative efforts, tourist plantation administrators can help the descendant community identify their role in the stewardship of their culture and history at the site.⁸⁴

Institutional Community

Only six of the fifteen Transformation project tourist plantations offer a site-specific membership, not associated with a parent organization such as a historical society or preservation group. Membership applications offer valuable demographic data concerning their loyal visitors, creating a relationship that invites feedback through member surveys and other inquiries. Membership programs gather like-minded individuals dedicated to the support and enjoyment of the site. Membership fees garner

⁸⁴ Bailey and Cooper, "The Necessity of Community Involvement," 65.

steady if modest income, as well as built-in audiences for fee-based events. Most importantly, members are site advocates with a far reach who advertise the site's goals and interpretive work without charge.⁸⁵

Neighboring Community

Frank Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan recommend that historic site administrators get to know their neighbors and their neighborhoods, instructing them to “Walk around the Block (and Often)” studying neighbors and surroundings.⁸⁶ However, the acreage that typically surrounds tourist plantations, makes identifying neighbors in this manner challenging. Expansive grounds do not typically attract visitors walking dogs, or taking afternoon strolls as urban sidewalks might. Therefore, tourist plantation owner/operators and staff must actively work to acknowledge, know, and serve their neighbors. They are vital to a site's ongoing sustainability. Thus, efforts to attract neighbors must be prioritized over marketing to visitors from other regions.⁸⁷

While geographic isolation prevents walk-in traffic, it presents opportunities to capture the attention of fitness enthusiasts. Many Transformation project plantations have river front landings or docks, though many of them do not have boat rentals. Rather than investing in a rental scheme, sites can team up with rental companies already conducting

⁸⁵ Falk and Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age*, 152; "Colleen Dilenschneider I Data For Cultural Executives," Colleen Dilenschneider, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.colleendilen.com/>.

⁸⁶ Vagnone, et al. *Anarchists Guide to Historic House Museums*, 54.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 58, 55.

business along the river. By collaborating with these companies, advertising water, snacks, and available services, tourist plantations may attract new neighbors. Historically significant spots along the river may be identified on a special map available to boaters, pointing out places where enslaved people worked or self-emancipated. Visitors might break for a picnic, take a tour, or walk the grounds. Similarly, the distance between many rural tourist plantations creates an opportunity to serve long distance cyclists. A river, running, or cycling tour program might be created in partnership with other sites, where visitors can run, paddle, or ride to experience multiple sites.

Two Transformation project sites McLeod Plantation Historic Site and Meadow Farm Plantation, both publicly owned, take active part in their neighboring communities. Interviews with McLeod Plantation Historic Site staff reflect high use of the site by Charlestonians. “We get more locals here than most historic sites I've worked in. Usually, local people don't go to local places but here we do have quite a few.”⁸⁸ Similarly, Meadow Farm’s location, nestled within sprawling Crump Park recreation area attracts people visiting the park to exercise, use playground equipment, or attend sporting events.⁸⁹ Meadow Farm presents “drive in” movies at their site setting up inflatable movie screens for community viewing.⁹⁰ Sites may work to position themselves as a “third place,” allowing use of the acreage as contemplative and recreational park space.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Interview with docent, February 19, 2016.

⁸⁹ Interview with Meadow Farm visitor, October 29, 2016.

⁹⁰ "Brookland District Historic Sites - Meadow Farm Museum," Henrico County (Virginia) Historical Society - Henrico County's Fairfield District, <http://www.henricohistoricalsociety.org/brookland.meadowfarm.html>.

⁹¹ Falk and Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age*, 67.

Though such programming may be non-historical, it serves community needs thereby addressing site mission and goals. Most of the Transformation project sites are located in coastal communities who have experienced damage from hurricanes. Magnolia Plantation and Gardens hosts stocking events for a local food bank that provides food during disasters such as catastrophic storms.⁹² The site also donated visitor passes awarded to donors during an off-site blood drive. Tourist plantations that offer event rentals may donate use of their sites to local non-profit organizations, or host fundraising events jointly, sharing resources while raising money. Partnering with other organizations in this way serves the needs of neighbors, reaches new audiences, and proves the site's dedication to community service.

Envision the site's purpose beyond storytelling to include community-building. Specify a dog-friendly space, welcome picnics, anything that gathers and serves the broader community. Change the institutional mindset governing plantation land from exclusive to inclusive. By prioritizing neighborly participation over entry fee onto the site's acreage, both traffic and community buy-in will increase.

Become a Place of Community Events and Celebrations

John Falk and Beverly Shepherd write that museums "build community identity and bring residents together to celebrate what is special about their own experience."⁹³

⁹² "Magnolia Plantation and Gardens | Charleston, SC," Magnolia Plantation, accessed February 27, 2019, <http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/>.

⁹³ Falk and Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age*, 149.

Beyond exhibits, tourist plantations may help residents celebrate their shared experiences through festivals and other celebratory programming that makes use of the outdoor expanse of the site's landscape. Tourist plantation outdoor spaces create perfect environments for concerts, food festivals, and many other types of programs.

The vast, open acreage of rural tourist plantations allows excellent views of the night sky. Stagville Plantation in Durham, North Carolina partners with Morehead Planetarium to host astronomy programs. The site also gathers the neighboring community through celebratory music and food programming. Their Jubilee Music Festival, which presents African American blues and Americana artists, was "designed to raise awareness for Stagville while highlighting an important part of black American history."⁹⁴ In 2014, Stagville hosted a food event outside of extant slave quarters in an area called Horton's Grove, facilitated by African American foodways interpreters.⁹⁵ Dontavius Williams, Clarissa Lynch, Jerome Bias, and Michael Twitty employed historic foodways creating a multi-course dinner for participants. The dinner, created under Twitty's direction, was described as "a postmodern mix of activity: . . . iron trivets resting in fire and ash . . . cell phones . . . a tour by a UNC archaeology professor explaining the history of the grounds, and the way the enslaved lived . . . sweet potato biscuits . . . roasting pork and frying chicken in the air . . ."⁹⁶ Not only does Twitty's

⁹⁴ Derek Quizon, "Former Slave Plantation Plays Host to Music Festival," *The News and Observer*, July 15, 2013, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/community/durham-news/dn-community/article10276334.html>.

⁹⁵ Randall Keenan, "Michael Twitty: The Antebellum Chef," *Garden Gun*, December/January 2014, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://gardenandgun.com/feature/michael-twitty-the-antebellum-chef/>.

⁹⁶ Randall Keenan, "Michael Twitty: The Antebellum Chef," *Garden Gun*, December/January 2014, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://gardenandgun.com/feature/michael-twitty-the-antebellum-chef/>.

work invoke the spirit of the enslaved, it brings people together over food, presenting authentic cultural and historical experiences while drawing the community together.

Educational Community

By positioning themselves as benevolent, educational, community institutions, tourist plantations may leverage relationships with schools, libraries, and granting institutions to expand interpretive narratives, volunteer pools, and reach a wider audience. Tourist plantations can work directly with local districts to make their educational programming more accessible. Schools or districts located within two hours of the site, provide a large pool of candidates for educational programs. While some districts no longer provide funding for field trips, corporate or private sponsors may provide funding to pay for busses and other expenses. Site educators can work directly with school district curriculum writers or individual teachers to tailor tour curriculum and programs directly to the required SOLs, and “define benchmarks for success” in collaborative programming.⁹⁷ In lieu of field trips, provide traveling trunks that bring the site’s interpretive history to the school or have the site educator present a programs to classes at the school. Encourage students to visit the site with their families by distributing visitor’s passes during field trips or school visits.

⁹⁷ John H. Falk and Beverly Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006)237.

Through a partnership with Whitney Plantation, Lake Area New Tech Early College High School produced a collection of creative student essays entitled, *Talking Back to History*.⁹⁸ After touring the site with owner John Cummings, students saw the enslaved in a new light, writing poetry and essays wherein students identified personal connections with the historical actors. In an essay about enslaved children student Brianna Bryant wrote, "I felt as though these children face so many day-to-day struggles that when they finally had time to just be children, they wanted to cherish every moment. I wanted to think of them in happy times because seeing the real stuff would bring me to tears."⁹⁹ Other students drew a correlation between the current incarceration of their relatives and the slaves previous held at Whitney. Through this tour and writing process the program created new interpretations about the place, inspiring students' personal and emotional investment at the site, bringing attention to social justice issues.

By reaching out to various professors at university departments, such as urban planning, architecture, studio art, history, literature, marketing, archaeology, and business, tourist plantations may forge alliances with nearby universities creating mutually beneficial relationships. The plantation house and landscape may become a valuable collaborative learning space. While I was the Director of the French Legation Museum in Austin, the University of Texas Urban Planning graduate students led

⁹⁸ Woodlief Thomas and Jeremy Roussel, ed. *Talking Back to History: With the Creative Writers of Lake Area NTEC School* (New Orleans: UNO Press, 2014).

⁹⁹ Brianna Bryant, "Weeping Willows," ed. Woodlief Thomas and Jeremy Roussel, in *Talking Back to History: With the Creative Writers of Lake Area NTEC School* (New Orleans: UNO Press, 2014), 49-50.

neighbors in a Jane Jacobs walk around the neighborhood.¹⁰⁰ The students based their tour on their own academic research, which explained the evolution of the area around the Museum from a plantation, to a freedman's town, to a respite from red lining during mid-twentieth-century urban renewal initiatives. UT's historic preservation department became valuable volunteers for programs on site, after students agreed to trade the use of the site for an event in return for their work. Allow use of the site as a "lab" for preservation, material culture, or public history classes. The preservation department also conducted classes in the historic house, exploring the attic and basement during a materials course. These collaborations inspire valuable research, led by intellectually curious and academically competent students. Furthermore, a cooperative alliance with students may instigate elaborate, multi-part research projects, with succeeding student cohorts working at the site over multiple years. The time, talent, and intellect dedicated to such projects result in lasting personal investment in the site.

Professional Community

During interviews multiple tourist plantation owner/operators expressed feeling professional isolation, that might be resolved through membership to professional organizations like AAM, NCPH, or AASLH. These organizations allow owners and staff

¹⁰⁰ "Jane Jacobs Walk Talk- Hidden East Austin: Austin, Texas," Jane Jacobs Walk Talk- Hidden East Austin: Austin, Texas, 2013, <http://www.janejacobswalk.org/jane-jacobs-walk-2013-events/jane-jacobs-walk-talk-hidden-east-austin-austin-texas>; Jennifer Minner, "Tours of Critical Geography and Public Deliberation: Applied Social Sciences as Guide," ed. Jeremy C. Wells and Barry L. Steifel, in *Human-Centered Built Environment Heritage Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

access to an experienced peer group. Similarly, memberships to a rotary club, chamber of commerce, and tourist board not only provide contact with business owners throughout the area, they represent many varying professions, companies, and identities. By fostering relationships with professional allies, administrators can attract broader audiences, interpretive scope, and profit margins. Thus, identifying potential allies creates a powerful network of professional support for tourist plantations.

Tourist plantation administrators can partner with other sites to market cooperatively and forge valuable friendships with neighboring tourist plantation site staff. The Plantation Parade in Louisiana, made up of four Transformation project sites including Laura Plantation, Oak Alley Plantation, Houmas House, and San Francisco, perfectly illustrates the potential of such partnerships.¹⁰¹ As a marketing cooperative, the sites advertise together on the Plantation Parade web site, and link to each other on their individual web sites. One of the Parade site managers described the desirability of partnering with high-traffic sites like Oak Alley. The smaller site partnered in the Parade “ . . . to make us bigger because there’s nobody bigger than Oak Alley . . . they are the most popular girl at the dance, Oak Alley.”¹⁰² Combination tickets for these sites are sold directly from the Plantation Parade website as well as on the individual site pages. Through this affiliation, third party coach companies market bus and boat tour tickets of the Parade sites as well. By becoming more closely acquainted, regional tourist plantation owner/operators can recognize common history and discover how they might

¹⁰¹ Plantation Parade, "Take a Trip Through Time: Tours, Shopping, Dining, Accommodations," Plantation Parade on the Great River Road, 2017, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://plantationparade.com/>.

¹⁰² Interview with owner, March 2015.

differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Though competition for tourist dollars is fierce, encouraging intellectual comradery also encourages the uncovering of new information, strengthening the network of knowledge between the sites.

Thus, by identifying their various communities, tourist plantations stretch their interpretive reach. Furthermore, they strengthen their regional role by proving their dedication to community service. Most importantly, community involvement helps tourist plantations identify narrative themes yet unaddressed, through the collaborative creation of new interpretive projects.¹⁰³ These changes amend interpretive effectiveness, and build an audience based upon personal investment.

Visitor Experiences and Expectations

Gallas and DeWolf Perry write of the sites that interpret slavery, “We do not ‘do’ this ourselves—our visitors are equal partners in interpretation.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, visitors play as vital a role in planning and interpretation as do the site staff and management. Visitor identity, expectation, and feedback should all contribute to administration and operational practices at tourist plantations. Transformation project visitor survey data

¹⁰³ Bailey and Cooper, "The Necessity of Community Involvement," 62; John Cotton Dana and W. Peniston, *The New Museum: Selected Writings* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1999), 3.

¹⁰⁴ Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, ed., "Preface," in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006), xv.

indicate a visitor desire to learn about enslavement. Therefore, site owners must not assume that visitors arrive with the desire to experience nostalgic tropes. Visitor feedback from tours and collected through email and social media posts should all be considered in the creation and implementation of narrative themes. If used in a supportive, didactic capacity, feedback might contribute to staff learning and professional growth. The following recommendations speak to addressing visitor desires:

1. Find out what your visitors want to experience during visits. Do not assume they want or need to be protected from difficult narratives.
2. Talk with tour participants about nostalgic tropes, contextualizing their impact on America's popular history.
3. Expect that some visitors have limited understanding of history and may react rudely or emotionally to tour narratives. Prepare docents to empathetically address the concerns of these guests.

Create Challenging but Endearing Experiences Through Complex Narratives

In brave rejection of ameliorating narratives, site owner/operators must recognize *discomfort* as an authentic experience valued by tourist plantation visitors. The complex, ambiguous, and difficult aspects of slavery history at plantation sites present intellectual and emotional challenges, which may endear the visitor to the place. Brian Chesky, the Airbnb cofounder and CEO who built an international business based on visitor experience, speaks to the ability of such challenges to create memories. "If you do not

leave your comfort zone, you do not remember the trip.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, overcoming a challenge experience is significant and transformative.¹⁰⁶ Relinquishing preconceived notions, nostalgic tropes, and yielding to the emotional and intellectual rigors of well-documented but difficult plantation history may reframe a visitor’s overall racial mentality. Thus, by offering challenging interpretative narratives, tourist plantation operators might gain visitor investment through a transformational experience.

Consumer demand “can be a major strategic tool in the marketing of consumption experiences; tourism experiences in particular.”¹⁰⁷ One operator said, “I have to forecast what people are going to want for the future,” because interpretive changes and new hospitality projects take time to plan and implement.¹⁰⁸ Visitor survey data collected by the Transformation project team, reflected that most visitors wanted to hear more information about slavery and less about architecture and furnishings.¹⁰⁹ Visitor surveys taken before and after tours revealed visitors valued narratives about enslavement when shared by guides during tours.¹¹⁰ A manager noted that his/her site markets to a “much more to an older crowd” since “those are people who can take vacations and afford it.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ "Reid Hoffman of LinkedIn, Brian Chesky of Airbnb, and How to Scale to 100M Users (#326)," interview, *The Tim Ferriss Show* (audio blog), July 11, 2018, accessed August 3, 2018, <http://tim.blog>.

¹⁰⁶ "Reid Hoffman of LinkedIn, Brian Chesky of Airbnb, and How to Scale to 100M Users (#326)," interview, *The Tim Ferriss Show* (audio blog), July 11, 2018, accessed August 3, 2018, <http://tim.blog>.

¹⁰⁷ Athinodoros Chronis, "Tourists as Story-Builders: Narrative Construction at a Heritage Museum," *Journal of Travel Tourism Marketing* 29, no. 5 (2012): 445.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with operator, March 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Unpublished report, NSF Plantation Data- Louisiana March 2015.

¹¹⁰ Butler, et al., 5.

¹¹¹ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

These visitors when surveyed expressed satisfaction with aesthetics-oriented house tours. However, younger audiences expressed desire to hear more information about the enslaved, with one visitor admitting, “I don’t want to know any more about the gardens, architecture, and furniture . . . I’ve had enough of that.”¹¹² A visitor to McLeod Plantation Historic Site said their visit was inspired by a desire to “get a more holistic view of what it was to be an African American on the plantation . . . they ran this place . . . they had to be people who were very talented craftsmen, knew about farming in a highly sophisticated way.”¹¹³

Address Nostalgic Tropes and Popular History with Tour Guests

Tourist plantations can expand their interpretive narrative by addressing and contextualizing popular notions of plantation nostalgia. Tourist plantations have become a southern culture trope, and some visitors arrive at plantations longing to absorb the Hollywood experience of moonlight and magnolias. Laura Plantation’s public relations manager Joseph Dunn explained that many of the “great houses were opened in the ’60s and ’70s.”¹¹⁴ He explained how the plantation house became iconic to a generation of

¹¹² Interview with visitor, February 20, 2016.

¹¹³ Interview with McLeod Plantation visitor, March 9, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Dwayne Fatherre, “Laura Plantation Embraces Creole Past, Seeks to Defy Antebellum Stereotypes [sic.],” *Houma Today*, September 18, 2015, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.houmatoday.com/news/20150918/laura-plantation-embraces-creole-past-seeks-to-defy-antebellum-sterotypes>.

poor white visitors attempting to reconnect with a “lost way of life.”¹¹⁵ Dunn explained that in the mid-twentieth century, the majority of plantation visitors had experienced “the austerity of the Depression, who had lived through the war . . . They wanted to see how rich people lived, and there was this nostalgia for the ‘Old South’ of their parents and their grandparents.”¹¹⁶ The accretions from early and mid-twentieth century culture mark tourist plantations and visitor psyche alike with indelible ideals of the South. By contextualizing these ideas within tour information, visitors may fall out of the hypnotic spell cast by Hollywood films. Calling out this process of narrative creation, provides a gateway for addressing visitor expectations while adding dimension to plantation interpretation.

Prepare Docents for Challenging Guest Responses

Visitors silently reflect their racial attitudes with their bodies, shifting their postures in response to tour information, averting their eyes, or gazing intently at the docent. During interviews, docents admitted that they try to “read” their audiences and tailor tours toward the perceived expectation. One site manager explained that after “about seven or eight months they [docents] have created this conversation . . . telling

¹¹⁵ Dwayne FATHERRE, “Laura Plantation Embraces Creole Past, Seeks to Defy Antebellum Stereotypes [sic.],” *Houma Today*, September 18, 2015, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.houmatoday.com/news/20150918/laura-plantation-embraces-creole-past-seeks-to-defy-antebellum-stereotypes>.

¹¹⁶ FATHERRE, “Laura Plantation Embraces Creole Past, Seeks to Defy Antebellum Stereotypes [sic.]”.

people what they want to hear.”¹¹⁷ Other tour participants vocalize opinions for the benefit of the tour group. In some cases, the visitor response is positive. “I got so much positive feedback from the African-Americans. They really encouraged me to stay on track because very few people will address it [slavery] today.”¹¹⁸ This comment aligns with data collected at the African American Burial Ground in New York, that identified African Americans as more likely to associate places of slave history to feelings of “pride an inspiration” after visits to these places.¹¹⁹

Because tourist plantations may force visitors to confront difficult racial narratives, some sites try to prepare docents for racist, rude, or unusual guest interactions. A visitor to McLeod Plantation Historic Site felt her family’s honor was threatened by the site’s interpretation. She responded by interrupting the tour, exclaiming that her family had been good to their “help.”¹²⁰ The docent responded as trained, that the site bases their narratives “off of research, off of oral histories,” simultaneously acknowledging the visitor’s challenge, but bolstering the historical interpretation through the discussion of source material.¹²¹ While emotions and opinions are disputable, the docent argued that narrative clarity presented with factual evidence should be sufficient. “People can’t really argue with the fact that we’re just presenting what we know for this site and for the area

¹¹⁷ Interview with operator, March 2015.

¹¹⁸ Interview with docent, February 27, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Conny Graft, “Visitors Are Ready, Are We?” ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006) 74-75.

¹²⁰ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹²¹ Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

at the time.”¹²² Since each moment of a tour is precious, skillfully deflecting such dialogue prevents the possibility of an uninformed guest hijacking the narrative into a discussion of racist beliefs.¹²³

Observing visitors and providing opportunities for feedback help identify who visitors *are*, but also what they want and need. Changing audiences seeking experiences at historic sites, have changing expectations untethered from nostalgia. Therefore, regular gathering of visitor feedback will assist tourist plantations navigate a changing professional landscape as their audiences change.

Staff Training

Thorough and ongoing staff training at tourist plantations is vital to interpretive work. The nature of this training requires a comfortable, “safe” environment where staff may confront the complexity of racially and historically balanced narratives. Through this training, they may help “visitors scaffold their knowledge and fashion new historical narratives out of cognitive dissonance.”¹²⁴ Such training requires dedicated time, thought, and effort, and will not be successful without the support and leadership of the site’s

¹²² Interview with docent, February 28, 2016.

¹²³ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

¹²⁴ Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, ed., “Preface,” in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006), xv.

management. These recommendations may assist in providing proper support for site staff and administrators:

1. Site managers should adopt a democratic management style, working in a collaborative capacity with staff when creating interpretive narratives. Take management training if necessary.
2. Invite consultants to facilitate interpretive training.
3. Acknowledge the emotional and psychological impact of racialized history, preparing interpretive staff with specialized training.
4. Institute empathetic management and interpretive practice.
5. Acknowledge the importance of docents' interpretive work. Show appreciation through appropriate pay and other benefits. Stop requiring historicized clothing that differentiates races and sexualizes the staff.
6. Regularly evaluate interpretive staff and provide ongoing training and team-building events.

The Democratic Management Style

Site managers must understand how their relationship with interpretive staff impacts interpretive narrative creation. According to Eileen Newman Rubin, managers who employ the democratic management style, believe in engaging the staff in decision making, "and aspire to achieve team consensus. . . and try to take everyone's opinions and concerns into consideration."¹²⁵ Autocratic managers press staff to perform according to their personal desires, and laissez-faire managers fail to provide leadership through

¹²⁵ Eileen Newman Rubin, "Assessing Your Leadership Style to Achieve Organizational Objectives," *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 32, no. 6 (2013): 58-59.

involvement and example. By placing “importance on communication mutual trust, and interpersonal respect,” democratic leaders of tourist plantations incorporate administrative strategies that support interpretive staff through collaboration and cooperation. They do this by supporting interpretive staff, listening, inviting the insights interpretive staff gain through contact with the public.

Through collaborative decision making, democratic leaders get “employee buy-in,” while reserving their right to final decisions.¹²⁶ This “participative, people-oriented, relations-oriented style” results in pride, as employees attain a central role in forming institutional practices.¹²⁷ Site managers may benefit from attending management courses such as the AASLH History Leadership Institute, or even webinars hosted by the Democracy at Work Institute.¹²⁸ By including staff in operational and interpretive decision making, administrators create a collaborative partnership that encourages employees to take initiative, ownership, and responsibility.

Hire Consultants to Facilitate Staff Training

The International Sites of Conscience offers a training course called Facilitating Dialogue, which “invites people with varied experiences and differing perspectives to

¹²⁶ Eileen Newman Rubin, "Assessing Your Leadership Style to Achieve Organizational Objectives," *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 32, no. 6 (2013): 56.

¹²⁷ Eileen Newman Rubin, "Assessing Your Leadership Style to Achieve Organizational Objectives," *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 32, no. 6 (2013): 56.

¹²⁸ "History Leadership Institute," AASLH, 2018, accessed March 16, 2019, <https://aaslh.org/programs/history-leadership/>; "School For Democratic Management," School For Democratic Management, accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.democraticmanagement.org/>.

engage in an open-ended conversation toward the express goal of personal and collective learning.”¹²⁹ At Preservation Virginia, grant funding paid for representatives from Sites of Conscience to conduct “dialogue training” with its sites’ interpretive and management staff, instructing docents about public conceptions of race, making interpretive staff better able to respond to visitor questions.¹³⁰ For instance, docents were taught to invite reflection from visitors who inquired whether or not the slaveholder was “good” to his slaves.¹³¹ The manager explained that rather than confirming or denying good treatment, the ISC trainer taught docents to ask open ended questions such as, “Why is that important to you?”¹³² The manager explained that visitors typically respond with statements like, “I would like to see if how he treated his slaves reflects the views that I have.”¹³³ The docent might then inquire how the visitor defined “good” treatment, leading to a discussion of the total state of enslavement. Because of the complex and sensitive nature of interpretive training, inviting outside advisors or consultants to facilitate training provides a neutrality and teaching experience that site staff cannot alone.

¹²⁹ "Facilitated Dialogue," Sites of Conscience, accessed January 1, 2019, <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dialogue-Overview.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Interview July 16, 2016.; "Home," Sites of Conscience, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/home/>.

¹³¹ Interview with manager, July 16, 2016.

¹³² Interview with manager, July 16, 2016.

¹³³ Interview with manager, July 16, 2016.

Acknowledge the Emotional and Psychological Impact of Interpreting Racialized History

Shawn Halifax, a manager at McLeod Plantation offers interpretive staff training.

He writes of his workshop, the Ethical Interpretation of Slavery and its Legacy:

Explores pedagogical and psychological impediments for visitors learning difficult history; stresses the importance for interpreters to explore their own identities and their own thoughts and beliefs related to racism, slavery, and the legacy of slavery; provides methods for creating corrective narratives to the traditional narrative visitors expect to hear at historic plantations; instructs on how to recognize when corrective narratives are emotionally and cognitively disruptive to learners, including interpreters themselves as they learn new information while preparing their interpretations; and teaches how they can respond to the dissonance in a way that is respectful to the guest, but offers emotional protection for themselves.¹³⁴

Because the psychological trauma and emotional weight of the racial history at plantation sites exerts pressure on staff and management, owner/operators can support the psychological and emotional health of docent staff through ongoing discussions and training.¹³⁵ Inextricably linked with actions, experience and emotions determine a staff members' ability to empathize with visitors.¹³⁶ Thus, tourist plantation staff training must provide a "safe space" for confidential, respectful, and personal explorations of identity

¹³⁴ Shawn Halifax, "McLeod Plantation Historic Site," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (2018).

¹³⁵ Linnea Grim and James DeWolf Perry, "'So Deeply Dyed in Our Fabric That It Cannot Be Washed Out' Developing Institutional Support for the Interpretation of Slavery," ed. Kristin L. Gallas, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, Interpreting History Series (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2015), 35.

¹³⁶ Veronika Kisfalvi, "Working Through the Past," in *Organizing Through Empathy*, ed. Katherine Pavlovich and Keiko Krahne (London: ROUTLEDGE, 2018), 80.

and racial history.¹³⁷ The training must challenge staff into potential discomfort as they tackle their own misconceptions and biases in preparation with dealing the public's.¹³⁸

The site staff, narratives, historical actors, and visitors all must be considered empathetically, since submersing oneself in this subject matter can be emotionally taxing.¹³⁹ Encouraging staff to regularly talk and share experiences, promotes the alleviation of intellectual and emotional distress. A site operator in Charleston explained, "We're not professional counselors, but we can listen and talk to one another and realize that we're all going through it."¹⁴⁰ A site manager also acknowledged that the docent's racial identity may affect their interpretive experience differently.¹⁴¹ "We have African-American interpreters, as well as other interpreters of other races. It takes an emotional toll on all of them, but it doesn't take an equal toll on all of them."¹⁴² Acknowledging different experiences provides more sensitive support for interpreters, demonstrating administrative commitment both to staff and the interpretive goal.

¹³⁷ Patricia Brooks, "Developing Competent and Confident Interpreters," ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015), 86.

¹³⁸ Mark Katrikh, "Creating Safe(r) Spaces for Visitors and Staff in Museum Programs," *Journal of Museum Education* 43, no. 1 (January 26, 2018): 13.

¹³⁹ Kathryn Pavlovich, *Organizing Through Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Arnold Modlin, Jr., Derek H. Alderman, and Glenn W. Gentry, "Tour Guides as Creators of Empathy: The Role of Affective Inequality in Marginalizing the Enslaved at Plantation House Museums," *Tourist Studies* 11 no. 1 (2011), 3-19; Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 13.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with operator, February 19, 2016.

¹⁴¹ Interview with operator, February 19, 2016.

¹⁴² Interview with operator, February 19, 2016.

Empathetic interpretive practice at sites like tourist plantations require docents to relinquish their role as the authority or expert and become a conversational facilitator.¹⁴³ In maintaining mindfulness of plantation history's sensitive nature, docents may welcome visitor curiosity with gratitude, thanking visitors for posing questions before responding. Such responsiveness diffuses emotional tensions, and invites visitors to feel comfortable, allowing for "productive conversation to follow."¹⁴⁴ Thus, with a direct, intentional approach to difficult narratives through training, the site ensures that all staff are prepared to "'engage' with the challenge of interpreting this history."¹⁴⁵

Show Appreciation for Interpretive/Docent Staff

Docents and interpretive staff need elevation in the institutional personnel scheme. By increasing docent hiring standards, tourist plantation management will increase the site's interpretive capabilities. Rather than thinking of docents as low-value employees that do the "grunt" work, docents should be considered for their value as educators and visitor liaisons. As the most fundamental interface between the institution and the public, docent wages are a crucial investment. Prove the institution's commitment to docents by providing a living wage, allowing tips, opportunities for work in other capacities, or other benefits or incentives. Stop requiring docents to wear historical

¹⁴³ Patricia Brooks, "Developing Competent and Confident Interpreters," ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015), 86.

¹⁴⁴ Katrikh, "Creating Safe(r) Spaces for Visitors and Staff in Museum Programs," 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

costumes. Reinvest wardrobe funds into staff wages or bonuses. Identify a sponsor, grant, or donor who will fund a year-long docent fellowship at a higher than normal pay rate. Require the fellow to complete a research, curatorial, or educational project, resulting in new experience and credentials for the employee and research for the institution. Alternatively, establish a program with a local university that allows students to work as docents for college credit.

Providing Regular Evaluation and Ongoing Training

Owner/operators must support interpretive staff through regular evaluation, and ongoing training and educational opportunities. Regular staff meetings and informal social events encourage team-building and unify docents and managers in pursuit of interpretive goals. Furthermore, such meetings provide a classroom atmosphere to experiment and practice.¹⁴⁶ The volunteer docents at Middleton Place receive required training sessions throughout the year.¹⁴⁷ Middleton Place has created an advisory group that creates continuing training courses, educational workshops, an annual volunteer appreciation banquet, a regular newsletter, and trips to other historic sites as far away as the Caribbean.¹⁴⁸ By presenting a variety of training topics, docents become more skilled,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with docent, February 21, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with docent, February 20, 2016.

and encouraging teambuilding activities help unify staff toward the same interpretive aims.

Similarly, the ongoing evaluation process ensures that docents continue to confidently manage tour interpretation to the same standard (or better than) they could following initial training. A Charleston site evaluator must observe the tour and visitor response regularly, to “ . . . experience it themselves, to go through it with the guides, and for the guides to gain enough trust in that person to open up to them and talk about what they’re feeling. There’s no substitute. You can’t fake that. It just takes time.”¹⁴⁹ The manager explained that the critical attention evaluations provide helps to build trust with interpretive staff over time.

At historic sites like tourist plantations, staff training is everything. It helps all members of the institution align their racial understanding and expectations to the site’s interpretive mission. Training helps prepare staff for the emotional and psychological challenges presented by traumatic racial history. Tourist plantation management must lead their staff, demonstrating the importance of continued curiosity and education, supporting their staff’s ongoing efforts to learn.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with operator, February 19, 2016.

Concluding Thoughts

The Transformation project identified many ways that tourist plantations fail to achieve institutional integration of racialized history. Many sites inadequately represent racialized history, whether through exaggerated efforts to drive profits through non-essential commercial services, or through failure to attract paying visitors who might finance research and implementation of new information. The project also uncovered areas for potential research. For instance, no intensive study has been conducted on guilt and shame and its impact on museum and historic site staffs. An exploration of these ideas would prove extremely insightful, particularly in further investigation of descendants working at sites and serving on boards.

Through my examination of the Transformation project sites and collected data, I was left with many questions. What is the public historian's responsibility to deal with tourist plantations that continue to profit from nostalgic nonsense? What about those sites that purposely profit on the celebration of racial hegemony, continuing to fetishize the commodity of the Lost Cause landscape?¹⁵⁰ Do we have a duty to elicit change or advocate? If so, how is this effectively accomplished? Sites like Whitney Plantation which dually attract vast visitorship while completely incorporating racialized site narratives require future financial study, reflecting revenue over time. A demonstrated

¹⁵⁰ Carter, et al. "Defetishizing the Plantation," 128.

increase in revenue, if directly linked to this interpretation, may be the only motivation for some income-driven for-profit sites to integrate this history.

Even with the best intentions, abundant funding, and a well-informed staff, tourist plantations face an uncertain future. Waning visitorship at some places generates weak income. Many sites studied demonstrate institutional trends that serve nostalgic, ahistorical interpretation. At these sites, management aims diverge from research and exhibition, while docent staff goes under supervised and inadequately prepared for work. However, sites like McLeod Plantation and Whitney Plantation reveal that the transparent presentation of the difficult plantation past, by well-informed diverse interpretive staff, generates excitement and attracts highly engaged and interested paying visitors. These sites have the potential to act as a home base for America's long-postponed catharsis, encouraging a recovery from slavery's ongoing aftermath. It is my hope that studies like this one might empower site leaders and staff with strategies to approach racial history from a different perspective. No matter what their role, tourist plantation staff and owners alike, must strive to serve the community, embrace the challenges of their historical reality, while drawing direct correlations to its lasting legacy. In doing so, these sites might help facilitate the country's healing process.

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APPENDIX A

Plantation Docent Interview Instrument-

1. Background- About Person

- a. Tell me about yourself. (Your background? Your family? Where you are from? Your parent's occupations? Your schooling?)

2. Background- As Docent

- a. How did you come to work here?
- b. How long have you been a docent at Laura plantation?
- c. Can you describe the hiring process?
- d. Have you worked at any other plantations or museums? (Where? How long? What did you do there? Why did you leave?)

3. Training

- a. What was the training process like? (How long until you gave your first tour?) Have you completed any research about the plantation outside of the training you received?

4. The Tour

- a. How many days do you work per week? (Hours per day?) On the average day, how many tours do you give? How large is the average tour group?
- b. What are the key themes of your tour?
- c. Are there any topics on the tour that you wish you could devote more time to?
- d. How was your tour's narrative or script created? Do you use one provided for you or were you asked to develop your own based on material provided by management?
- e. Has anything happened on past tours, positive or negative, that has influenced how you do your tour now?
- f. Does your audience affect your tour? Elaborate.

5. Job Satisfaction and Evaluation

- a. What is your favorite part of the job? (Least favorite part?)
- b. How are you evaluated by management? By visitors?

6. Visitors

- a. How would you describe the typical plantation visitor?
- b. Do you remember the worst tour group you've had? (What was bad about them?)(Best tour group? What was good about them?)
- c. What are some common questions that you get asked on the tour?

- d. Do you get any indication of tourist expectation from your tour?

7. Heritage Tourism and Slavery

- a. Do you consider tourist plantations to be museums? Why/ why not?
- b. How comfortable are you with talking about slavery on your tour?
- c. How comfortable are the tourists with hearing about slavery on the tour?
- d. Do you get any questions about slavery from tourists? (What types of questions? How do you respond? Who generally asks questions about slavery?)

"Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes"

Data Usage Agreement

Acquisition of Data

To request the use of data collected under the "Transformation of Racialized American Southern Heritage Landscapes" project (NSF Grant #1359780) conducted by Drs. Derek Alderman, Candace Bright, David Butler, Perry Carter, Stephen Hanna, Arnold Modlin, and Amy Potter, (herein "research team"), the requesting researcher (herein "researcher") must agree to the guidelines presented within this document and must complete the Data Request section below.

Distribution of Data

If the request is approved, the researcher will not share the acquired data without seeking further permission from the approving member of the research team. Analyses of the data may be shared at academic conferences, in class presentations, in manuscripts, and in reports as described by the researcher in the Dissemination Plans section. Continued communication regarding changes to dissemination plans with the approving individual will be appreciated.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The research team has redacted identifiers of research participants from the shared data to comply with IRB and to protect the identity of these individuals. However, if in the analysis of data, the identity of a participant can be inferred, the researcher agrees to do their due diligence to ensure that (1) the research team is alerted to this and (2) no data are analyzed and disseminated that allow for any audience to infer identity.

Authorship

To be eligible for authorship, a researcher must have contributed to the drafting of the manuscript and at least one of the following: (1) research concept and design, (2) acquisition of data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data. Acquisition of funds, the collection of data, or general supervision of the research group, by themselves, do not justify ownership. If the researcher seeks to publish from the data, they agree to notify the research team as stipulated in the Dissemination Plans section. Invitations to co-author such publications will be welcomed.

Grant Acknowledgment

All work stemming from the shared data must include the following funding statement: "Research funded by NSF Grant #1359780." Acknowledgement should also include research team members who not included as authors.

Data Request

Name: Noël Harris

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Purpose of Data Request: Dissertation research

Question(s) Guiding Research Purpose: What characteristics can be identified in the categorization of these sites?

What are the trends in administrative systems at tourist plantation sites, and what is the motivation of each system?

In what ways does administrative ignorance of museum practice and public history best standards lead to the neglect of site-appropriate storytelling?

How does staff management of material resources shape the site narrative?

What is the docent staff's impact, versus their perceived and real value at these sites?

What sites or individuals use entrepreneurial methods to benefit the community through historical programming? And what are their methods?

Dissemination Plans (i.e. names of conferences, journals, etc): None planned currently. Will notify principal investigators should this change.

Approved: x Not Approved (see next page for explanation)

Approved with Considerations (see next page for explanation)

Name: Stephen Hanna

Organization: UMW

Signature 

Date November 11, 2017