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Confronting Slavery in Historic Charleston  
Changing Tourism Narratives in the Twenty-First Century

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Institute for Liberal Arts

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M.A. University of Mississippi, 2006

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An abstract of  
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## Abstract

### Confronting Slavery in Historic Charleston: Changing Tourism Narratives in the Twenty-First Century

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**ABSTRACT:** *Confronting Slavery in Historic Charleston: Changing Tourism Narratives in the Twenty-First Century* examines representations of the history of slavery and its race and class legacies within Charleston, South Carolina's historic tourism landscape. Through fieldwork conducted on selected plantation sites and developing public history projects from 2007-12, Battle argues that despite recent groundbreaking developments, Charleston's public history producers cannot develop representations that effectively address the Lowcountry region's history of slavery just by adding African American history tours. Since the late nineteenth century, historic tourism in Charleston has emphasized an exclusive fantasy of the colonial and antebellum past for tourism audiences by narrowly focusing on white elite lifestyles, architecture, and material culture. This interpretive pattern continues in the present, even with recently added tours. To effectively address the significance of slavery and its race and class legacies in Charleston, public history producers and interpreters must comprehensively transform traditional representation strategies to include emerging narratives of African American experiences during and after slavery, and to confront the role of white elites in maintaining and benefitting from this institution during the colonial and antebellum periods. Scholarly research, diverse oral histories, and input from grassroots voices are critical to this inclusive change. Within current economic constraints, Battle suggests innovative solutions for transformation in Charleston's public history narratives, such as multi-institutional collaboration and digital interpretation strategies.

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### SECTION TWO

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When I first started doing tours, they would not mention anything about black history, nothing. It wasn't until between five and eight years ago that they really began to incorporate a lot of black history, and the plantations had their tours themselves. Because they were beginning to realize that people come here — they know that slavery happened here! They know we lived here! But you come for the tour and people said, “What happened to the blacks?” And they realized that if they are to continue, they have to incorporate black history as well as white history.

— Alphonso Brown, tour guide and director of Gullah Tours,  
Charleston, South Carolina, 2008

## Preface

### *Changing How We Tell the Story*

In May 2012, I interviewed Queen Quet, activist and leader of the Gullah Geechee Nation, at the annual Gullah Festival in Beaufort, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> We discussed her work as an advocate for preserving African American Gullah Geechee history and culture, and current problems with developing inclusive public history in the South Carolina Lowcountry. The greatest limitation, we determined, was the longstanding dependence on narratives of white elite nostalgia found throughout the region. “You really would have to completely remove the whole structure and rebuild,” Queen Quet explained. “They’re not going to do that, you see what I mean? You’re talking about an institutionalized framework of how we tell the story.”

Queen Quet’s comment captures two issues I grappled with throughout my research process. The first is that changing historic narratives in Charleston, South Carolina, to centrally address the Lowcountry region’s significant African American history, from slavery and Emancipation, to civil rights struggles that continue into the present, requires more revolutionary transformation than the recent tourism additions I describe in this dissertation. Emerging representations of African American history during and after slavery, through tours and exhibitions on historic sites, with independent

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Quet, interview with author, 25 May 2012, Beaufort, South Carolina. Queen Quet, also known as Marquette Goodwine, is the elected head-of-state for the Gullah-Geechee Nation. As the “Gullah-Geechee Nation” website explains, “The Gullah/Geechee people have been considered “a nation within a nation” from the time of chattel enslavement in the United States until they officially became an internationally recognized nation on July 2, 2000.” “Gullah Geechee Nation,” accessed 4 March 2013, <http://gullahgeecheenation.com>. In her online biography, Queen Quet further explains that she is a “chieftess” and “art-ivist: who conducts community advocacy through her organization, The Gullah Geechee Sea Island Coalition. “Queen Quet: Chieftess of the Gullah Geechee Nation,” accessed 4 March 2013, <http://www.queenquet.com>.

guides, or even through an entire museum dedicated to African American history, all serve as a beginning to interpreting the complex multicultural history of the Lowcountry to public audiences. But despite these promising developments, site producers and interpreters cannot effectively introduce inclusive narratives within a broader public history context that emphasizes nostalgia over critical understanding of the city and region's colonial and antebellum past. The romantic fantasy that white elites constructed about southern plantation history shortly after the Civil War served to shape public memory for their own political, economic, and labor interests in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the twenty-first century, this fantasy still forms the overarching marketing "brand" for the city's multi-billion dollar tourism landscape. When Charleston earned accolades from *Condé Nast Traveller's* Reader's Choice Awards for top tourism destination in the United States in 2011, and in the world in 2012, their editor praised the city by stating, "Charleston is really on top of its game and has returned to its pre Civil War prominence."<sup>2</sup> When it is convenient for tourism marketing, the central role of African American slavery and racial inequalities in this historic "prominence" remains glaringly absent.

The fundamental change necessary to challenge this exclusive fantasy goes well beyond tourism representations. As Queen Quet suggests, public history narratives that marginalize race and class struggles reflect the surface of an institutionalized framework for "how we tell the story." For over a century, the rhetoric of colonial and antebellum white elite nostalgia influenced economic, political, and social policies and identities

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<sup>2</sup> "Charleston Named Top City by Conde Nast Traveler," *Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau*, accessed 4 March 2013, [http://www.charlestoncvb.com/visitors/events\\_news/charleston-news/charleston\\_named\\_top\\_city\\_by\\_conde\\_nast\\_traveler-1223](http://www.charlestoncvb.com/visitors/events_news/charleston-news/charleston_named_top_city_by_conde_nast_traveler-1223).

throughout the Lowcountry. Charleston's narrowly focused historic tourism narratives are a symptom of the systemic racism entrenched throughout the region's power structures.

In this context, where does inclusive change effectively begin?

The second major issue Queen Quet's words highlight is that changing Lowcountry history to become more inclusive is a shared responsibility. *We* tell the story. Public history narratives do not develop through a singular top-down delivery process from producers to consumers. Audiences extract their own meanings and disseminate their own versions of history, based on varying perceptions, needs, and identities. We tell the story of the past in many ways, and for better or worse, what we do with that story shapes the present and future. As Roy Rozenzweig and David Thelan explain, "By recovering things from the past or by looking at experience differently, we can see how to think and act differently in the future."<sup>3</sup>

I recognize this collective responsibility for the present influences of history not only as a scholar, but also as a white South Carolinian with ancestral ties to the region's history of slavery. I am a descendant and share a family name with individuals who were not only prominent colonial and antebellum slaveholders, they also had family ties to influential political leaders who promoted and defended the institution throughout the nation.<sup>4</sup> To many, I seem like the last person who would argue for better public understanding of the region's slaveholding past, because it is also my own family's past. When I told Queen Quet that I was from South Carolina she seemed surprised. But when

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 205.

<sup>4</sup> Marty D. Matthews, *Forgotten Founder: The Life and Times of Charles Pinckney* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

I told her I was descended from Pinckneys, that Pinckney is my middle name, she was shocked, and exclaimed, “Seriously?!”

In the twenty-first century, a few white descendants of slaveholding families have published works to critically address, rather than avoid, their ancestors’ role in slavery, and to learn more about the people their ancestors enslaved. In South Carolina, Edward Ball’s *Slaves in the Family* (1998) stands as the most well-known example of this form of family history confrontation. In 2008, Felicia Furman also produced a powerful documentary entitled “Shared History” about her family’s connection not only to slavery in South Carolina, but also to the production of white elite nostalgia for the antebellum past in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Her film outlines how her ancestors, William Gilmore Simms and Elizabeth Simms Oliphant, wrote influential histories of South Carolina that romanticized slavery and shaped public memory of antebellum and colonial southern history throughout the United States. According to my parents — born in the 1950s — these were the grade school history textbooks for many South Carolinians of their generation.

This dissertation serves as the beginning of my own confrontation with the history of slavery in South Carolina, but unlike Ball and Furman, I do not discuss my Pinckney ancestors in great detail. Instead, I focus on what first shaped my frustrations with U.S. southern history, and what continues to influence perceptions of this region’s past both locally and for audiences from around the world — conflicting public history representations of African American slavery and plantations. A generation removed from

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York City, New York: Ballantine Books, 1998). “*Shared History*,” directed by Felicia Furman (PBS, 2008) DVD.

Furman and Ball, I grew up in the 1980s, in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina, with desegregated schools, Dr. Martin Luther King Day, and Black History Month in February. We were the generation that popular rhetoric finally encouraged to embrace “diversity” in a “multicultural” world. But the historic narratives we received about this world did not align with this evolving vision. Instead, popular representations of U.S. southern history seemed contradictory, or existed in isolation. On primetime television, we watched depictions of the struggles of slavery in *Roots* (1977) or the *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974), but we also watched *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and 1980s updates of this earlier plantation nostalgia in television series such as *North & South* (1985-86) and *Beulah Land* (1980). In one popular version of southern history, slavery was brutal suffering; in another, slavery was a benign backdrop to white elite experiences on luxurious plantations.

And then there were school field trips. The Pee Dee region seemed to have few historic tourism sites compared to the Lowcountry, so when it was time to go on a history field trip, Conway schoolteachers piled us into a bus to ride ninety miles south to Charleston. Once there, we dutifully toured forts, museums, pirate prisons, and my favorite sites — plantations. Unlike television and movies, representations were not contradictory on plantation sites in the 1980s and 90s. Guides exclusively, and unquestioningly, focused on white elite material culture, with little to no discussion of slavery. And I loved it. I thought the women in hoop skirts, pointing at chandeliers and staircases, telling *us* where *we* would eat at long dining room tables on old china plates, or where *we* would dance in wide open ballrooms — were wonderful. I absorbed the

romanticized images, and imagined myself being a part of them. No guides on these field trips, or teachers at school, encouraged my classmates or me to see the connections between the painful experiences of slavery and the seeming luxury of antebellum plantation life on these sites.

In this way, popular images of Lowcountry history in the 1980s and early 90s consisted of confusing messages about plantations, slavery, and the past and present meanings of race and class. Being a descendant of Pinckneys did not provide clearer insight. For most of my childhood, the Pinckney name seemed more like an heirloom to distantly revere than a connection to South Carolina's complex colonial and antebellum race and class histories. It was not until 2000, when I was in college at the University of South Carolina and took Dr. Daniel Littlefield's "Plantation Societies" course, that the gravity of these gaps and misconceptions in my understanding of this history started to become apparent. I felt embarrassed, then angry that I had not known better. Why were the many versions of South Carolina history I grew up with so contradictory, disjointed, or just false?

In 2000, the same year I took Littlefield's class, the state legislature voted to remove the Confederate flag from the top of the South Carolina State House dome in Columbia. In 1962, an all-white state legislature voted to place the flag in this prominent location amidst Civil War Centennial events and ongoing civil rights protests. By the 1990s, a block of white legislatures repeatedly refused to remove the flag from the dome, until the NAACP imposed a national economic boycott that cost the state's tourism industry billions of dollars annually. The flag removal ceremony took place on July 1st,



the summer after my sophomore year at the University of South Carolina. I walked the few blocks from campus to the state house grounds to watch with a crowd of thousands as two Citadel cadets drew the Confederate flag down from the dome. Moments later, they raised the battle version of the flag again, on top of a Confederate soldier memorial centrally located on State House grounds near Main Street. A loud, eerily dissonant roar emerged from the crowd as thousands of different onlookers simultaneously cheered and protested while the flag changed locations. Listening to the crowd, I knew I was not the only person confused and frustrated about the present day meanings of South Carolina's past.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout my fieldwork, I included my middle name on the consent forms that I asked all interview participants to sign. If it seemed relevant to the discussion, I would mention that I was related to Pinckneys (from the Bluffton area, not Charleston, but still Pinckneys). Like Queen Quet's reaction, this occasionally led to insightful discussions, particularly if the person I was interviewing also had South Carolina ancestry. Some individuals told me their ancestors may have been enslaved by my ancestors, and some individuals, black and white, told me that we were most likely related. I also received words of advice. At one public history conference, an African American woman researching her ancestors' connections to slavery in South Carolina told me simply, and not unkindly, "welcome to your journey." A scholar friend from West Africa and I also had a clarifying discussion about why we study contemporary representations of the history of slavery. He explained that he was descended from an African slave trading

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<sup>6</sup> Michael K. Prince, *Rally 'round the Flag, Boys!: South Carolina and the Confederate Flag* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

family, and I told him about my white slaveholding ancestors. I concluded that I research public history because it is in the present, in my lifetime, and I can do something about it. “Exactly,” he agreed.

In the future, this journey may become a more personal exploration of my family’s connections to slavery. But for now I will start with unraveling some of the contradicting historical representations that strongly influenced me as I was growing up in South Carolina, and that still influence millions of visitors and local citizens each year in the major tourism destination of Charleston. The political, social, and economic influence of exclusive nostalgia tied to racism in South Carolina goes well beyond tourism narratives, but my hope is that transforming public history can contribute to changing how we tell the story of slavery and its legacies in South Carolina. Ideally, making the state’s complex history of race and class struggles accessible to the public could serve as a critical resource for challenging old assumptions and identifying new opportunities to dismantle ongoing inequalities in the present.

## Introduction

### *Tourist Expectations in the Twenty-First Century*

In a 2011 interview, Jane Aldrich described one of her most striking memories from working on a plantation tourist site in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>7</sup> Like many public history professionals I interviewed, Aldrich has worn multiple hats at different Lowcountry area institutions. This includes working as an archivist at the South Carolina Historical Society, an education outreach coordinator at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, and in the early 2000s, as a historic guide at Drayton Hall, a former plantation turned historic tourism site along the Ashley River. As Aldrich recalled, in 2000 a group of African Americans from a church in Lexington, Kentucky arrived on a bus for their tour reservation at Drayton. She was scheduled to lead a tour for one half of the large group, while another guide took the other half. For unclear reasons, Drayton Hall management booked the group for a children's program, even though their ages ranged from six to eighty years old. Aldrich adapted her tour narrative to fit this range, but she still kept interactive questions from the children's program that were not apart of the standard tour, including an observation exercise with

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Aldrich, interview with author, 18 November 2011, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

the large, colonial plantation house on the site.<sup>8</sup> “One of the things we always did,” Aldrich explained, “is we went around to the back of the house, and had them stand with their backs to the house, and then asked them all to turn around and give one word that the house brought to mind.” Typically, the responses Aldrich heard during this exercise included “beautiful,” “huge” or “impressive.” The responses this African American tour group offered were strikingly different. Their words were “horrific,” “fear,” “ugly,” and “pain.” When Aldrich asked why they had these reactions to the house, an individual from the group told her that “their ancestors were the ones that had built that — whoever those people had been, they had been enslaved and had been forced to do that.”

In contrast to many white historic interpreters I met in my research, Aldrich is well-versed in African American history and the history of slavery in the region, and readily engaged this shift in visitor responses. “I acknowledged their reaction to the house as being valid,” she recalled, “and asked them if they were able to see any beauty in the house at all . . . that what [their ancestors] had created was something that had stood the test of time, something that stood as maybe a testament to their strength and their skill of surviving.” The group’s responses to her suggestions were “kind of a mixed bag,” she reflected. But when Aldrich continued with the house tour, and specifically described the

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast to most of the colonial and antebellum plantation homes along the Ashley River in Charleston, Drayton Hall’s main house was not burned during the Civil War. According to the “History” section of their website, there are different stories about why the colonial, Georgian-Palladian style house (built over 265 years ago) survived the war. “For years, three stories circulated without any hard evidence. In the first story, an enslaved person prevented Drayton Hall’s destruction by claiming that Drayton Hall was owned by ‘a Union man’ — perhaps a reference to a Drayton cousin, Percival Drayton, who served as a commodore in the Union Navy (though if that is the case, he was unable to save his family’s ancestral home, Magnolia). The second credits General William Tecumseh Sherman and the love he had for one of the Drayton women. The third credits Dr. John Drayton who may have had yellow flags posted at the entrances to the property indicating that it was being used as a smallpox hospital.” The History section then further explains that third story is the most likely explanation for why the house was not burned, but the other two became part of local lore. “The Civil War: How Drayton Hall survived,” *Drayton Hall*, accessed 17 December 2012, [http://www.draytonhall.org/research/history/civil\\_war.html](http://www.draytonhall.org/research/history/civil_war.html).

experiences of African Americans during and after slavery in every room of the centuries-old house, she felt that tensions eased for the group. During our interview, Aldrich asserted that she offered this inclusive interpretation approach on all of her house tours at Drayton Hall, but she was especially deliberate with this group. “Though some people tell me you can’t do this,” she noted, “there wasn’t a room that didn’t have some reference to Africans and African Americans on that property . . . you can’t do one without talking about the other; it’s too intertwined.”<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the white female guide who led the other half of this African American tour group around the house struggled that day. Her interpretation focused almost exclusively on architectural details of the Georgian-Palladian plantation house, and descriptions of the white elite Drayton family who occupied the house for centuries. After the tour was over, Aldrich remembered this guide claiming that her tour participants “had been nasty all the way through the tour, they had tried to argue with her about things she told them.” When Aldrich asked her to give an example, the guide stated that in the basement of the house (a space where enslaved people and later post-Emancipation domestic servants would have particularly spent time working, though they were active throughout the house), she “told the story about how difficult the life of the mistress of the house was . . . how it was her job to knit the socks for all of the workers on the plantation.” Her group became “offended by the idea that she felt sorry for the plantation mistress who was not eating bonbons.” The guide argued to Aldrich that visitors should not come with such “expectations” for a plantation tour, and asserted that “when

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Aldrich, interview, 2011.

somebody comes here they just need to come and accept what we do.” Aldrich countered that “everybody who comes through that gate has an expectation, and it’s up to us to rise to their expectation.”<sup>10</sup>

Visitor criticism and debate with guides about exclusive plantation history interpretations is not unique to Drayton Hall. On nearly all of the Charleston area plantation tourist sites where I conducted observational and interview fieldwork between 2007 and 2012, interpreters and site producers offered stories of visitors directly or indirectly challenging historic representations that marginalized or romanticized slavery and African American history on the site. In some cases, guides felt offended by such complaints and dismissed them, but others engaged these visitor concerns as signs for change. As Shelia Harrell-Roye, another historic interpreter at Drayton Hall (and one of the few African American historic interpreters I encountered on a Charleston plantation site) explained in a 2009 interview, she “totally understood” when a visitor came to her with complaints about representations of slavery on the site. “When interpreters don’t understand it,” she noted, “they think he wants to be negative, harsh, rude or crude — no, he’s telling you actual valuable information. Something that you might need to take and embrace to find a better way to involve those people to come out.”<sup>11</sup>

At Boone Hall Plantation, tour manager Abby Sensenbaugh noted in a 2007 interview that fewer school and tour groups requested the site’s “Life in the South” play, which featured white actors in historic costume performing scenes of a fictional love affair set in the “Old South.” “I think people really don’t want to teach the Old South,”

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Aldrich, interview, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Shelia Harrell-Roye, interview with author, 26 June 2009, Charleston, South Carolina.

Sensenbaugh reflected about the play's waning popularity, "you know how everything was so glamorized in the 50s and 60s? Now it's just stay away from that as much as possible."<sup>12</sup> Sensenbaugh encouraged site management to remove the play, and by 2009 I observed that it was no longer listed with the site's offerings.

At Middleton Place, another former plantation turned tourist attraction in the Charleston area, the vice president of museums, Tracey Todd, noted that in the 1970s a large tour group cancelled their reservation at the site's fine dining restaurant after they realized Middleton's history involved slavery. The group's leader simply called and stated, "We just found out that Middleton Place had slaves." The staff person on the phone responded, "Right, of course, that's part of the history of this site." The group leader then bluntly told him, "Well, we can't come. There's no way."<sup>13</sup> Decades later, the president of the Middleton Place Foundation, Charles Duell, wrote about the incident in *Beyond the Fields: Slavery at Middleton Place*, a booklet published in 2008 to accompany "Eliza's House," an exhibition and tour about African American history during and after slavery that opened at Middleton in the 1990s. Duell claimed in the booklet that "slavery was still not talked about" at Middleton in the late twentieth century because "neither the interpretive staff nor the public was ready for the discussion." But he conceded that this lack of discussion created problems — "at the same time, the site itself

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<sup>12</sup> Abbey Sensenbaugh, interview with author, 9 August 2007, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

<sup>13</sup> Tracey Todd, interview with author, 20 October 2011, Summerville, South Carolina. Because the catering order was already in place for this large group, Todd noted that they were able to move their event to an off-site building, but unbeknownst to the group, this structure was from the 1800s and probably also built and inhabited by enslaved people.

was sometimes criticized or avoided.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, some members of the public were ready to address slavery. The exhibition and tour at Eliza’s House served as one of Middleton’s early attempts at correcting this absence.

Visitor concerns about representations of slavery and its race and class legacies on Charleston plantation sites did not disappear with the introduction of “African American history tours” or “slavery tours” in the 1990s and early 2000s. Drayton Hall already featured an African American history tour, entitled “Connections,” at the time of Aldrich’s tour experience with the African American church group in 2000. Similarly, Boone Hall offered an African American history-based “Gullah Show” as another option alongside the “Life in the South” play on their schedule of tour options, before site producers phased out the play. Many of these recently added African American history tours struggle, then and now, because producers relegate them to a separate area of the plantation site, while the traditional interpretive focus on white elite lifestyles, material culture, and architecture remains unchanged in the plantation house and gardens. The numbers of visitors and site staff willing to contest the traditional standards of “what we do” are growing, and their criticism indicates that site producers and guides must engage inclusive historic interpretation more comprehensively. In the twenty-first century, Charleston’s plantation tourist sites are only at the beginning of grappling with a long history of marginalizing African American history during and after slavery in their interpretations.

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Duell, “Foreword,” in *Beyond the Fields: Slavery at Middleton Place*, Barbara Doyle, Mary Edna Sullivan, and Tracey Todd (Summerville, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation 2008), 7.



*Confronting Slavery in Historic Charleston* presents selected studies of historic sites, tours, and developing projects within Charleston's historic tourism landscape that reflect this burgeoning public history change. These studies come from fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2012 — a time when recently established representations of African American history during and after slavery are just revealing their transformative potential. Throughout my fieldwork I observed tours and exhibitions at different historic sites, attended board meetings for developing public history projects, and interviewed individuals in the Charleston area who either work on historic sites or mobile tours, or in connection to the Lowcountry's expanding tourism landscape. My goal was to identify how inclusive representations of African American history during and after slavery developed in different institutional contexts; what major obstacles site producers, interpreters, and audiences continue to confront in the twenty-first century; and what further interpretation possibilities these changes and challenges might reveal. The examples I selected to assess from the multi-institutional context of Historic Charleston include a longstanding, privately-owned and for-profit plantation tourist site; various independent African American history-focused driving tours and performances; a developing African American history museum led by the city government; and a heritage corridor supervised by the National Park Service to highlight African American Gullah Geechee culture and history.

Based on this research, I argue that change is beginning in Charleston, but Lowcountry sites and tours cannot develop more inclusive historic interpretation simply by adding new tours alongside pre-existing tourism offerings. As scholar Tony Bennett

suggests, and as recent visitor criticisms reveal, a “quantitative” approach to implementing change, where the number of African American history tours just increases, inevitably falls short within any site-based, regional, or national public history narrative. To engage the prominent role of slavery and post-Emancipation labor regimes in the Lowcountry, and to effectively represent the significance of African American history and culture, historic site producers must “discursively reshape” the entire rhetorical framework and interpretation strategies of Charleston’s historic tourism narratives.<sup>15</sup> As public history spaces and tours emerge in Charleston to include underrepresented multicultural histories, traditional white elite history narratives must also transform. To accomplish this, public history producers have to significantly reconsider their traditional tour development priorities — on their own sites, and in collaboration with other sites and tours throughout the region. Inclusive change requires both changing or broadening *who* or *what* is the focus of historic interpretation, and transforming *how* history producers construct tour narratives. Rather than prioritizing elite material culture and architecture isolated to a specific location, site producers must invest in staff and resources to develop new, cohesively interconnected tours that centrally feature inclusive social history interpretation based on scholarly research, a diverse range of oral histories, and input from grassroots voices and representation concerns.

Charleston has been at the national vanguard of architectural historic preservation efforts since the early twentieth century, but historic interpretation remains

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Politics, Theory* (London, UK and New York, New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.

underdeveloped throughout the city and surrounding Lowcountry region.<sup>16</sup> This imbalance stems from a long history of tourism site producers and guides who prioritize elite aesthetic preservation interests *over* effective historic interpretation.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Lowcountry plantation sites, aesthetic interests even came before accurate historic preservation at times. The current plantation house at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in Charleston serves as an example of how a historic site director changed a historic structure to fit his perceptions of visitor interests in an imagined “Old South” atmosphere. The structure originally functioned as an antebellum hunting lodge before the family moved it to Magnolia to become their residence. During the Civil War, newly free African Americans or Union soldiers (depending on the source) burned the family’s original antebellum home to the ground.<sup>18</sup> In the 1970s, the site’s director, Drayton Hastie, decided to open this hunting lodge residence to the public, so that Magnolia could have a house tour like other plantation sites. But he decided that a transported hunting lodge did not look like the Hollywood image of a plantation house — it did not have

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<sup>16</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 2000. The preservation emphasis of local organizations such as the Preservation Society of Charleston demonstrates this focus on preservation over interpretation. Since 1920, the stated mission of the Preservation Society has been to “cultivate and encourage interest in the preservation of buildings, sites and structures of historical or aesthetic significance.” No equivalent “interpretation society” exists, and while the College of Charleston and Clemson University host a joint graduate program in historic preservation, instruction in historic interpretation or social history courses are not part of the program. “Preservation Society of Charleston, South Carolina: What We Do,” accessed 6 April 2012, [http://www.preservationsociety.org/who\\_what.asp](http://www.preservationsociety.org/who_what.asp). “Historic Preservation,” *Clemson Graduate School*, accessed online, 19 November 2012, <http://www.grad.clemson.edu/programs/Historic-Preservation/>.

<sup>18</sup> Preston Cooley, interview with author, 26 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina. In Chapter One I will discuss discrepancies in the site’s representations over who actually burned the house at Magnolia, Union soldiers or enslaved African Americans.

iconic white columns.<sup>19</sup> So, as his grandson Winslow Hastie explains, in 1995 Drayton Hastie hired a construction crew and added them. “He thought that’s what tourists wanted to see, they wanted to see columns when they came to a plantation. So when you get into the whole mythology thing, he bought into that and he pushed it — he wanted to package a plantation the way he thought people wanted to see it. And that’s still there today.”<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for emphasizing historic appearances in Charleston, rather than historic interpretation, are not difficult to identify. Behind the city’s elegant architecture, copious antiques, and dramatic military battles, Charleston’s broader social, economic, political, and labor histories all point to the central role of antebellum and colonial slavery in the region. From the wealth, oppression, and violence this institution produced for Africans and their African American descendants before Emancipation, to the struggles that followed for African Americans through Jim Crow segregation, civil rights protests, and ongoing racial inequalities — slavery shaped Charleston’s past and present. Instead of confronting these historic realities, the city’s white elite tourism producers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries focused on preservation, and developed historic representation strategies that specifically served to obscure and romanticize slavery and its legacies.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the twentieth century these narrow and misleading

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<sup>19</sup> Leigh Scott, interview with author, 17 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina. Cooley, interview, 26 January 2011. White columns at the front of plantation houses were standard on the sets of popular Hollywood films about the antebellum South, such as Tara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), which was immensely popular throughout the twentieth century and was re-released to theaters in 1998. As house manager Leigh Scott explained in 2011 this film continues to shape many visitors’ expectations of visiting a plantation site. “They expect Tara,” she said, “I mean they honestly come here and they think—oh these columns! The veranda! You know they picture Tara, it’s Hollywood’s version of plantation.” Scott, interview, 17 March 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Winslow Hastie, interview with author, 28 July 2009, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Yuhl, *The Golden Haze of Memory*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 187. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 3-4.

representations largely went unchallenged. Historic interpretation functioned primarily as a homegrown construction, informally passed down through generations of predominantly white tour guides, while tourism producers invested in preserving or creating the historic appearances of specific sites or downtown neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> Historic preservation efforts became more meticulous and professionalized by the twenty-first century, but public history producers did not apply the same level of scrutiny to interpretation.<sup>23</sup> For Charleston's public history landscape to reflect the region's rich diversity, as well as nationally and internationally significant history of race and class struggles, site producers must re-prioritize their institutional resources to support effectively inclusive interpretation. This requires comprehensive investment in hiring, training, and adequately paying skilled staff to generate professional interpretation strategies based on research and local outreach.

A focus on longstanding tourism site studies and developing African American history projects in Charleston offers insights into public history transformation within a range of institutional contexts that share a geographic tourism area and historic context. In contrast to destinations such as Colonial Williamsburg, a single organization does not manage "Historic Charleston." Instead the city's public history producers consist of various tour guides working independently or in tour companies, as well as historic tourism producers and interpreter staff working in a range of site-based funding structures (from government-funded National Park Service, National Trust, State Park, and County

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<sup>22</sup> As I describe in Chapter One, in the late nineteenth century, formerly enslaved African Americans also served as tour guides at Magnolia Plantation, but by the mid-twentieth century, house and garden guides were mainly white females.

<sup>23</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 2000.

Park sites, to city-managed, non-profit, or privately-owned for-profit sites). In addition, these historic attractions and tours function within the context of living urban and suburban spaces, rather than in a separate theme park. The impact of these different funding and management contexts on site interpretation can be significant. For example, the first time I went to Boone Hall in 2007, I asked one of the staff members why this plantation site features such a wide range of recreational attractions in addition to history and nature tours (such as rock concerts, corn mazes, and a Halloween zombie carnival), while the plantation across the street, the Charles Pinckney National Historic site, hosts few added attractions. The staff member responded that the difference was money—Boone Hall is privately owned and for-profit, and must sell tickets to stay open, while the Charles Pinckney site is a National Park site, supported through the federal government. He then pointed to a suburban housing development across the road and noted that if Boone Hall did not add more ticketed attractions, that is how the site would end up.

Despite these institutional differences, Charleston tourists often move between sites and tours. In various interviews, site producers and interpreters noted that different historic sites compete for this traffic by highlighting the unique features of their sites, such as Magnolia's gardens or Drayton Hall's colonial house. But even as they highlight specific site "niches" to attract visitors, site producers who seek to implement inclusive change could also benefit from multi-institutional collaboration to help cohesively develop and link representations of African American history throughout the area. As Michael Allen, a park ranger for Charleston's National Park Service sites (including the Charles Pinckney site, as well as Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie) explains, even if one site

becomes more inclusive, complaints about neighboring tourist sites still impact how the public perceives the area's historic representations in general.<sup>24</sup> Focusing on a historic tourism area collectively undergoing transformation reveals shared challenges and opportunities across sites and tours, while site studies offer in-depth scrutiny into factors that influence interpretive transformation within a specific institutional context.

### ***Changing Charleston: Historic Context***

Even if most sites and tours present it as marginal in the city's public history narratives, the central role of colonial and antebellum slavery in the history of Charleston and the Lowcountry, as well as African American history and culture during and after slavery, is evident in current scholarship. During New World expansion and colonization starting in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Europeans enslaved American Indians and recruited European indentured laborers, but from the earliest explorations into the Americas, they also brought enslaved, indentured, and free Africans. By the eighteenth century, the largest coerced labor force in the Americas consisted of Africans who arrived through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and their enslaved African American descendants.<sup>25</sup> In North America, Charleston was the dominant point of disembarkation for this trade.<sup>26</sup> Though North America played a relatively minor role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade in contrast to the Caribbean and Brazil (only around three percent of the trans-

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Allen, interview with author, 9 January 2009, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

<sup>25</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1998). David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York City, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> James McMillin, *The Final Victims: The Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783-1810* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

Atlantic slave trade went to North American ports), the African American descendants of these enslaved Africans increased exponentially.<sup>27</sup> By 1860, over four million African Americans lived as enslaved chattel property in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Up to fifty percent of their African ancestors came to this country through Charleston, through a harbor that also became the location of the first military conflict in a Civil War that ended in Emancipation for all enslaved people in the United States.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Lowcountry region surrounding Charleston featured an extensive network of rice plantations that generated one of the nation's wealthiest economies in the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Though traders forced many enslaved Africans further west through the domestic slave trade after they arrived in Charleston, a significant number sold as chattel property to Lowcountry slaveholders, particularly to work on these nearby plantations.<sup>31</sup> This led to a black population majority in the Carolina colony and later the state of South Carolina, that lasted from the early eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.<sup>32</sup> Both during and after

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<sup>27</sup> "Estimates," *Voyages Database: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 30 November 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>.

<sup>28</sup> Ira Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America," *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Voyages*, accessed 30 November 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>.  
McMillin, *The Final Victims*, 2004. Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 356-358.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 140-153.

<sup>31</sup> William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York City, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996). Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006). Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York City, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974). Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 64-81, 485-87.



slavery, large African American populations in urban contexts such as Charleston, and in surrounding rural areas, carved out unique social structures and cultural identities that still resonate.<sup>33</sup> Rural Lowcountry African Americans particularly formed the distinctive Gullah (also known as Geechee) culture, based on practices and dialects retained by enslaved Africans, and preserved through large enslaved populations on Lowcountry plantations, who later populated free black communities in the coastal areas. This culture demonstrates West African cultural retentions that persist in the present, particularly through language, spirituality, agriculture, basketry, pottery, foodways, and music.<sup>34</sup> Over the past three centuries major African American political activists and community leaders emerged from both the rural and urban areas of this distinctive region, including Denmark Vesey, Robert Smalls, Septima Clark, and Esau Jenkins. These individuals proved influential in local and national struggles for social and political equality, from slavery to the post-Emancipation era and into the twentieth-century civil rights movement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984). William S. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* (Athens, Georgia and London, UK: The University of Georgia Press, 1999). Margaret Creel, *"A Peculiar People:" Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs* (New York City, New York: New York University Press, 1989). Dale Rosengarten, Theodore Rosengarten and Enid Schildkrout, editors, *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* (New York City, New York: Museum for African Art, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Edward A. Miller, Jr., *Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Katherine Mellon Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006). Winfred B. Moore and Orville Vernon Burton, editors, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

Despite Charleston's significant African American history during and after slavery, for over a century, historic sites, tour guides, and museums in this area have overwhelmingly emphasized antebellum and colonial white elite lifestyles through architecture and material culture.<sup>36</sup> These exclusive interpretation strategies served to marginalize or romanticize African American slavery and its race and class legacies. As scholar Stephanie Yuhl explains, Charleston's narrowly framed nostalgia formed shortly after the Civil War, when white elites sought tourism revenue by translating "their personal and small group memories into easily consumable forms that fixed a public idea of Charleston — genteel, ordered, historic, romantic — in the American imagination."<sup>37</sup> On a local level, their popularized understanding of the past helped launch the area's lucrative historic tourism industry. More broadly, their efforts fed a growing memorial movement throughout the U.S. South promoted by white elites in the generations after the Civil War. This movement not only reclaimed and romanticized public memory of antebellum and colonial southern history throughout the nation, it also enabled sectional reunion for white northern and southern business interests, and helped reassert racial hierarchies and white supremacy after the end of Reconstruction, particularly through the implementation of Jim Crow segregation laws.<sup>38</sup> By the 1940s, Grace Elizabeth Hale

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<sup>36</sup> Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 187. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 3-4. Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington DC and London, UK: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 171.

<sup>37</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 187-88.

<sup>38</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 2005. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 2005). Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993). David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001).

argues, the developing white southern middle class also benefited from the mythic authority of “Old South” race relations. Segregation satisfied white southern sectionalism while enabling a “New South” middle class to pursue a northern model of industrial development and urban professionalism.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, southern African Americans struggled with the boundaries and inequalities of segregation, and pursued new work opportunities and greater social mobility by moving to northern urban centers through the Great Migration.<sup>40</sup>

In South Carolina, the tenacious grip of antebellum nostalgia tied to racist ideology helped white supremacy prevail in statewide politics as well as tourism throughout the twentieth century, even through the 1960s civil rights movement.<sup>41</sup> For example, Strom Thurmond’s Dixiecrat revolution and eventual GOP shift directly relied on Barry Goldwater’s “Southern Strategy” to attract white southern voters to the Republican Party through anti-civil rights rhetoric. Despite this ongoing “race-baiting” political strategy, popular media continuously claimed that South Carolina and its leaders were too “genteel” for the racial violence and televised spectacles that occurred in

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<sup>39</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 53.

<sup>40</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 485-87.

<sup>41</sup> Significantly, after the reassertion of southern white elite authority in the state at the end of Reconstruction, poor whites in the Upstate of South Carolina did assert their own political interests by producing political leaders who challenged the dominance of Lowcountry white elites. Their populist rhetoric criticized elite indulgences and promised progressive change, but ultimately the perceived need to maintain white alliance against the black majority prevented these leaders from effectively subverting conservative elite interests. Instead Upstate figures such as “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman (governor and then U.S. senator from 1890-1918) and Cole Blease (governor from 1911-1915, U.S. senator from 1925-1931) maintained their white working class popularity through “race baiting,” while generally accommodating conservative elites. Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 430-482. V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation: A New Edition* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 130-155.

Mississippi and Alabama in the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> The work of major civil rights activists in the state, including Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins, and Judge Waties Waring in the Charleston area, and prominent Lowcountry civil rights events such as the Orangeburg Massacre in 1968 and the Charleston Hospital Worker's Strike in 1969, did little to dismantle this widely-embraced perception of racial benevolence in South Carolina.<sup>43</sup> The lack of national media attention on the 1960s civil rights events in the state meant that popular perceptions of elite racial moderation, supported by public history representations of a "genteel" antebellum and colonial past, remained intact in South Carolina throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>42</sup> Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York City, New York: New American Library, 1976). Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, New Jersey and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2006). Winfred B. Moore and Orville Vernon Burton, editors, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006). Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York City, New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Moore and Burton, editors, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 2008. Jack Nelson and Jack Bass, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999). Fink, Leon and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Katherine Mellon Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Tinsley Yarborough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001). Notably, Wim Roefs argues that the image of South Carolina as more moderate than other "Deep South" states during the height of the 1960s civil rights movement can be attributed to the strength of South Carolina's NAACP prior to the 1960s. Roefs asserts that South Carolina's NAACP effectively pressured the state's white leadership to be more moderate by the 1960s based on a history of court cases decided in favor of the demands of this significant black political force in the 1940s and 1950s—over the democratic white primary, equalizing teacher's pay, and equalizing and desegregating schools. Black leadership in the state forced South Carolina's white leaders to learn how to negotiate. But despite the significance of these influential court cases, Governor James F. Byrnes (in office from 1951-1955) also made sure that the Supreme Court addressed Kansas's *Brown vs. the Board of Education* before South Carolina's desegregation case, *Briggs vs. Elliott*, despite the fact that the latter was filed earlier. Byrnes sought to keep the media spotlight away from South Carolina, and civil rights leaders preferred Kansas because they believed the U.S. South was too volatile for arguing the first school desegregation case. Wim Roefs, "The Impact of 1940s Civil Rights Activism on the State's 1960s Civil Rights Scene: A Hypothesis and Historiographical Discussion," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 2008. Orville Vernon Burton, Beatrice Burton, and Simon Appleford, "Seeds in Unlikely Soil: The Briggs vs. Elliott School Segregation Case," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 2008.

In the 1970s, a series of racially moderate politicians did win various elections in South Carolina based on an alliance between black voters and moderate whites. These leaders attempted to address state-wide problems of poverty, disease, and inadequate public education, which disproportionately effected African Americans and poor whites.<sup>44</sup> The rise of Ronald Reagan Republicanism in the 1980s upset this multiracial collaboration by offering a new “Southern Strategy” of more subtle, “coded” racism to appeal to the segmented and privatized emergence of “Silent Majority” whites in suburban areas throughout the U.S. South. Reagan’s presidency reinvigorated Republicans in South Carolina, and a new era of divisive conservative dominance over the state ensued.<sup>45</sup> According to Willie M. Legette, the increased spatial class separation in suburban areas in the late twentieth century also influenced black politicians in the state. Even as a significant black caucus developed in South Carolina in the 1970s and 80s, voting patterns were sometimes marked by black legislators’ interest in preserving middle class status, rather than broader interests in addressing economic inequalities.<sup>46</sup> In the twenty-first century conservative political dominance continues to block cross-racial and cross-class alliances for improving chronic issues of poverty, crime, inadequate

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<sup>44</sup> Bass and De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 1976. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Bass and De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 1976. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 2006. Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, editors, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York City, New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Willie M. Legette, “The South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus, 1970 to 1988,” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 6, (July 2000), 839-858.

public education, and racial inequalities in the state.<sup>47</sup> Though poverty rates are comparatively high for all of the state's population demographics, poverty and related issues still disproportionately impact African Americans in South Carolina.<sup>48</sup>

Unquestioned "Old South" nostalgia, combined with recycled political rhetorics of "bootstraps" self-preservation, coded racism, and classism, helps obscure the severity and shared responsibility of these problems, thwarting the collective development of possible solutions.<sup>49</sup>

The booming tourism industry of "Historic Charleston" that began in the late nineteenth century both perpetuated and financially benefitted from white elite fantasies of the colonial and antebellum past. These fantasies continued to prevail in the twentieth century. Though service sector businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and resorts generally produce greater revenue than historic sites, they still borrow themes of "Old

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<sup>47</sup> *Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools*, directed by Bud Ferillo (Ferillo & Associates, 2010) DVD. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 2006. "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates: State and County Maps 2011," *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed 28 March 2013, <http://www.census.gov/did/www/saige/data/statecounty/maps/2011.html>. In all measurement categories for poverty used in this nationwide study (total population, by county, age, or median income), South Carolina featured some of the highest poverty percentages in the nation.

<sup>48</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2007 and 2012, 28.7% of African Americans in South Carolina live in poverty (352,670 individuals out of a statewide African American population of 1,227,851), in contrast to 11.8% of the white population in South Carolina living in poverty (353,139 individuals out of a total statewide white population of 2,995,034). "Poverty Rates for Selected Race and Hispanic Groups by State and Place," *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed 28 March 2013, [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/publications/Appendix\\_Tables1-24.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/publications/Appendix_Tables1-24.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2001). In *The Presence of the Past*, Roy Rozenzweig and David Thelan provide insight into the present-day political impacts of nostalgia. They explain that African Americans often view history as progress from worse to better, while many white Americans view the past as better, through nostalgia, and the present as worse. These contrasting perceptions of the trajectory of a region or nation's history can directly link to an individual's political worldview and sense of faith in, or alienation from, the "nation-state" in the present. Thelan and Rozenzweig suggest that historians should engage these individual and group-based past-present connections to better understand how history informs current political beliefs and identities. Roy Rozenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 159-60, 195-207.

South” nostalgia for their menus, souvenirs, and decor.<sup>50</sup> As Yuhl explains, local white elites shaped the “content, form, and meaning” of “Historic Charleston,” and their efforts enabled this tourism destination to become a thriving commodity in various business contexts within the “modern marketplace.”<sup>51</sup> By the twenty-first century, “Historic Charleston” is a multi-billion dollar tourism destination, where a selective version of history still serves as the central attraction “brand.”<sup>52</sup> According to a Charleston Convention & Visitors Bureau study in 2007, over four million visitors come to the Charleston area annually, pouring over three billion dollars into the local economy each year. This study also revealed that the top reasons visitors gave for coming to Charleston were not golf or beach resorts, but history and food.<sup>53</sup> This visitor traffic will only increase in the coming decades, particularly considering that in 2011, *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine’s Readers’ Choice Awards deemed Charleston the top tourism destination in the United States, and in 2012 they awarded this city the accolade of

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<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Goings, “Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose Travel the USA: The Marketing of Memory Through Tourist Souvenirs,” in *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism*, Graham M.S. Dann and A.V. Seaton, editors (New York, New York: The Haworth Press, 2001), 134-135. Anthony J. Stanonis, *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South* (Athens, Georgia and London, UK: The University of Georgia Press, 2008). Margaret A. Shannon and Stephen W. Taylor, “Astride the Plantation Gates: Tourism, Racial Politics, and the Development of Hilton Head,” in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, edited by Richard A. Starnes (Tuscaloosa, Alabama and London, UK: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 182-83.

<sup>51</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 187-88.

<sup>52</sup> John Willson, interview with the author, 18 June 2009, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>53</sup> “Estimation of Tourism Economic Impacts in the Charleston Area, 2007.” Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, College of Charleston’s Office of Tourism Analysis, accessed October 2009, <http://www.charlestonevb.com/media/tourismimpact.html>.

number one tourism destination in the world.<sup>54</sup> Surging visitor interest means that Charleston's historic sites have the potential to influence public history education for millions of local, national, and international visitors each year. But transforming Charleston's traditional public history emphasis on white elite nostalgia to include narratives of African American experiences during and after slavery confronts numerous obstacles within a highly contested public history terrain. Questions about how to implement inclusive change require ongoing investigation about what representation strategies are most effective, how sites will practically implement these strategies, and whether or not longstanding public history producers are willing to transform a traditional representation framework that has proven to be highly lucrative and influential in a range of social, political, and economic contexts.

### *Slavery and Plantations in U.S. Public History*

The various challenges and opportunities that Charleston's public history representations face today point to a broader "coming to terms with slavery" and its race and class legacies throughout U.S. public history.<sup>55</sup> "Simply put, American history cannot be understood without slavery," historian Ira Berlin succinctly explains. "Slavery shaped America's economy, politics, culture, and fundamental principles." But despite the central historic significance of this institution and the influence of enslaved people and

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<sup>54</sup> "Top 10 Cities in the United States: A perennial top-ten placer, Charleston grabs the number one spot for the first time," *Conde Nast Traveler*, accessed 10 May 2012, <http://www.cntraveler.com/readers-choice/2011/united-states/top-10-cities-usa#slide=1>. Warren Lance Wise, "Conde Nast declares Charleston op Tourist City in the World," *Post & Courier*, posted 17 October 2012, <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20121017/PC05/121019368/conde-nast-declares-charleston-top-tourist-city-in-the-world> (accessed 1 June 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America," *Slavery and Public History*, 1-17.



their descendants in the United States, Berlin notes that “most Americans do not know what slavery was.”<sup>56</sup> The historic dominance of colonial and antebellum white elite nostalgia in public history throughout the nation, in textbooks, film and television, and political rhetoric as well as historic sites, contributes significantly to this problem.<sup>57</sup> Ignorance about U.S. slavery not only impacts public understanding of the nation’s complex and culturally diverse colonial and antebellum history, it also mystifies current race and class struggles that grew from this history. As exemplified by South Carolina, racial stereotypes and prejudices that developed to justify and romanticize slavery continued to shape narratives about citizenship rights, social and economic hierarchies, and ongoing systemic inequalities throughout the nation.<sup>58</sup> Public history producers who learn to identify and articulate, rather than obscure, the “past-present alignments” of U.S. slavery and the national development of social inequalities could greatly assist in educating Americans about current race and class tensions.<sup>59</sup>

The impetus for changing U.S. public history to effectively include the history of slavery began in the mid to late twentieth century, and came from a wide range of sources

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<sup>56</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” *Slavery and Public History*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York, New York and London, UK: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010). James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (Touchstone, 2007). Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 2001. Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 1993. Yuhl, *The Golden Haze of Memory*, 2005. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 2005. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Joseph R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2001). James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005). Painter, *The History of White People*, 2010. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 152.

— including the influence of the civil rights movement to embrace multiculturalism, new critical scholarship, and popular culture. Scholar and museum curator Fath Davis Ruffins argues that the “virtual silence” around slavery in U.S. public history most significantly began to break around 1980, after watershed events, such as the release of the immensely popular *Roots* miniseries in 1977, revealed that representing slavery’s hardships to the American public was not an “insurmountable problem.”<sup>60</sup> Scholars have further identified a number of reasons for why these representations would increase throughout the United States—from groundbreaking films and museum exhibitions that generate public empathy towards this history, to generational change and distance from legal segregation, to the growing economic presence, needs and heritage interests of African Americans as consumers.<sup>61</sup> These recently emerging representations of slavery also meant that the experiences and cultures of enslaved Africans and their African American descendants in the United States began to receive more effective and empowering interpretive attention. In the twenty-first century, historic sites that focus exclusively on white elite experiences and material culture increasingly confront demands for inclusive change based on these new consumer perspectives, and many public history producers throughout the United States are scrambling to adapt.

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<sup>60</sup> Fath Davis Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2006), 394-398.

<sup>61</sup> Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” *Museum Frictions*, 2006. Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History*, 2002, Dann and Seaton, *Slavery, Contested Heritage, and Thanotourism*, 2001. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York City, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

Though Charleston features a range of historic site attractions such as military forts and downtown mansions, I primarily focus on transforming plantation sites and developing African American history and culture projects connected to plantation sites in my research. Though U.S. plantations historically functioned as profit-seeking agricultural systems that centrally relied on black enslaved labor to generate a lucrative regional economy, tourism producers marketed these sites as spaces of elite leisure for most of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup> Scholars such as Jessica Adams and Ian Gregory Strachen argue that this pattern continues for contemporary tourists, who invest in a glorified plantation image for the purposes of escape and recreation. This image specifically involves a “paradise” fantasy of not working, and yet being surrounded by luxury.<sup>63</sup> These elite fantasy strategies help explain why a strong correlation between historic plantation sites, leisure resorts and upscale developments persists in the twenty-first century, and why addressing the realities of enslaved life that produced this white wealth seems undesirable or incompatible for many producers and consumers.<sup>64</sup>

Despite this representation emphasis on escape, recreation, and leisure, many visitors simultaneously engage plantations as spaces for public history education. As Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen explain, based on numerous surveys, Americans rank

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<sup>62</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 2005. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 2005, Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 1993. Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, North Carolina and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Jessica Adams, “Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 42 (Spring 1999), 163-187. Ian Gregory Strachen, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville, Virginia and London, UK: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3, 36.

<sup>64</sup> June Manning Thomas, “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks: Notes on Issues of Employment,” *Phylon*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (1<sup>st</sup> Qtr., 1980), 7. Strachen, *Paradise and Plantation*, 2002. Shannon and Taylor, “Astride the Plantation Gates,” *Southern Journeys*, 2003.

museums and historic sites as the places they trust most for learning about history.<sup>65</sup> In addition, as David Butler argues, even when plantation site producers focus on leisure or recreation, their historic interpretation employs the authoritative tone of a “museum,” so that “every plantation, as a museum, may act as a site for the construction of a fictitious history.”<sup>66</sup> Hundreds of thousands of visitors go on plantation tours in the Charleston area each year. The Ashley River Road plantation sites in Charleston receive a significant proportion of these tourists: Drayton Hall averages 70-80,000 visitors per year; Middleton Place averages 100,000; and Magnolia Plantation & Gardens, the central site study of this section, receives over 150,000 visitors a year.<sup>67</sup> These striking numbers represent a comparatively small percentage of the four million tourists who visit Charleston annually. Most visitors stay downtown, and the majority of employment and spending in the Lowcountry’s tourism industry occurs in hotels and food service rather than historic sites. Yet, as John Willson, director of administration at the Charleston Convention & Visitors Bureau explained, the overarching “brand” of “Historic Charleston” continues to rely on historic icons like plantation sites.<sup>68</sup> How site producers and interpreters represent history on these sites is highly influential, and demands critical assessment.

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<sup>65</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 31-32.

<sup>66</sup> David Butler, “Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South,” Graham M. S. Dann and A.V. Seaton, editors, *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2001), 171.

<sup>67</sup> Tracey Todd, interview with author, 20 October 2011, Summerville, South Carolina. Email to author from Herb Frazier who manages public relations at Magnolia, 7 February 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Willson, interview, 18 June 2009. The Charleston Convention & Visitors Bureau organizes strategies planning for the local travel industry in Charleston. For more information see “What We Do,” *Charleston: Where History Lives*, accessed 20 October 2011, [http://www.charlestoncvb.com/travel/about/what\\_we\\_do.html](http://www.charlestoncvb.com/travel/about/what_we_do.html).

The influence of Charleston's plantation sites as resources for interpreting African American history could also increase in coming years. As I describe in chapter three, developing public history projects, such as the International African American Museum (IAAM) and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC), are currently seeking to make African American history and culture more visible in the Lowcountry. But with the economic downturn starting in 2008, both projects lost billions of dollars in federal support. As IAAM director Dr. John Fleming explained in 2011, with this reduced budget, IAAM must investigate more cost-effective historic representation strategies by collaborating with existing tourist sites, rather than just developing a self-contained museum.<sup>69</sup> Existing plantation tourist sites could be essential to this collaboration strategy, but IAAM staff would have to examine the current representations on these sites, and their potential for being more inclusive, before determining how they could work together. "If we are going to guide the general public to those particular sites," Fleming noted, "then the expectation is that they present a pretty accurate history of the site and do away with some of these fairy tales that they like to tell."<sup>70</sup>

In addition, in both downtown and suburban areas, new generations and demographics of site visitors, interpreters, and producers with different educational and popular culture contexts for understanding slavery are engaging the city's historic representations. Influenced by messages of multicultural equality from the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, these visitors demonstrate a willingness to engage

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<sup>69</sup> John Fleming, interview with the author, 7 February 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>70</sup> Fleming, interview, 2011.

in more critical understandings of the American past.<sup>71</sup> Jerome de Groot and Allison Landsberg also describe increasing interactive and empathetic audience relationships to historic representations and narratives, particularly ones that address traumatic histories, based on changes in technology and mass media access in recent decades.<sup>72</sup> Rather than passively receiving information during a tour, visitors often arrive with questions and expectations based on internet searches or popular films, which can be both productive and challenging for guides to grapple with. More transparent and comprehensive inclusion of African American history and culture, as well as the history of white elites' connections to slavery, are vital for plantation tourist sites to remain relevant to new audiences.

### ***Transforming and Emerging Public History***

As Richard Handler and Eric Gable explain, public history sites do not just consist of static exhibitions, tour scripts, artifacts, and buildings; they also function as “social arenas” or “contested terrains” where site producers, interpreters and visitors constantly engage in a process of historic representation creation, exchange, and at times conflict and adaptation.<sup>73</sup> This makes public history an interdisciplinary research field, which is why I emphasize observational and interview fieldwork, as well as archival research and

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<sup>71</sup> Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” *Museum Frictions*, 2006. Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). Michael Elliott, *Custerology: The Enduring Legacy of the Indian Wars and George Armstrong Custer* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London, UK and New York City, New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997), 9.

secondary reading, to form my research methodologies and sources. Based on this fieldwork, I selected specific in-depth site studies or tour examples that demonstrate the major challenges and opportunities of interpretive change in the Charleston area. I engage interviews with staff members, site management, independent guides, and planning board members on different plantation sites or public history projects because their discussions offer insights into institutional contexts, “on the ground” work experiences, and change over time that can be difficult to access exclusively through observational or archival research. To contextualize their interviews and priorities, I also include my own analysis of sites, tours, and developing projects, as well as visitor comments gathered through observation and user-generated online review sites such as TripAdvisor.

The first section of this dissertation, “Transforming History at Magnolia Plantation,” focuses on Magnolia Plantation & Gardens as an example of a privately owned, for-profit plantation site, amongst Charleston’s many historic plantations, that has been open to the public since 1870. Chapter One, “A Trance of Enjoyment,” examines the long history of tourism at this site, and reveals how site producers developed, adapted, and maintained representation narratives of white elite nostalgia at the site from the nineteenth century to the present. Despite this long-term emphasis, in 2009, Magnolia site producers introduced a scholarship-based tour about African American history and slavery for the first time. Chapter Two, “The Cabin Project,” assesses what happens when an effectively inclusive tour about African American history and slavery develops within Magnolia’s traditionally nostalgic representation framework. In addition to considering the strengths and challenges of developing the tour, I consider what future interpretive

changes the tour could encourage, and what obstacles currently limit its transformative potential.

The second section, “Emerging African American History in Charleston,” and third chapter, “As It Really Was,” focus on the work of African American public historians in the Lowcountry who developed representations of African American history and U.S. slavery through entrepreneurial, independent tours and performances, as well as within the contexts of traditional historic sites, starting in the 1980s and 90s. Today the efforts of these early African American historic interpreters are influential in developing new institutional projects such as the International African American Museum (IAAM) and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC). In contrast to longstanding historic sites like Magnolia Plantation that must *transform* their traditional representations to become more inclusive, the initial challenges for these developing projects are identifying strategies and resources that enable African American historic narratives to effectively *emerge* as public history representations. Their interpretive strategies already center on inclusion and discussions of historic race and class struggles, but predominantly African American planning board members still struggle to acquire the resources, skills, and time for their projects to become effective conduits for local voices and grassroots outreach in conjunction with scholarly research. Their development strategies for accessing and documenting local black history also must confront the concerns of populations accustomed to African American marginalization in public history. Finally, in the current context of economic constraint, emerging projects must pursue interpretation strategies and resources that are cost-effective as well as accessible,



such as digital interpretation strategies, oral history interviews, and multi-institutional collaboration. As all of these longstanding sites and developing projects grapple with the legacies of exclusive white elite fantasies in Charleston's public history landscape, their public history interests and needs increasingly overlap. For this reason, I discuss and compare both transforming and emerging patterns of interpretive change in this work.

### ***Current Project Scope and Future Research***

From the early stages of my research, Stephanie Yuhl's *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* provided the critical historic context for launching my project focus on Charleston's public history landscape in the twenty-first century. It would be tempting to present this project as a contemporary follow-up to her research on historic tourism in Charleston in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where are representations of slavery and African American culture in Charleston's historic tourism industry today? But once I embarked on fieldwork in 2007, I realized that the influential figures, institutional contexts, and challenges and implications of change in "Historic Charleston" have grown exponentially. To be feasible, the scope of my project had to narrow, and the result is that many critical figures, sites, and issues in Charleston and the Lowcountry's expansive historic tourism industry go untouched here. One notable absence is a direct assessment of the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Despite many Sesquicentennial events taking place in Charleston starting in 2011, including commemorations of the first Civil War conflict at Fort Sumter in 1861 and reenactments of the African American 54th Regiment Massachusetts who

charged Fort Wagner near Charleston in 1863, I only include brief discussions of this subject.<sup>74</sup> In part, I avoid the Sesquicentennial because other scholars, such as Blain Roberts and Ethan Kyle, are already researching these events in Charleston. Their work will appear in upcoming publications and replicating their critical research seemed unnecessary. I also found that the research background and assessment strategies needed for researching military sites, in contrast to plantation sites and developing museum projects, seemed distinct enough to separate. Traditional representations of history on fort sites often involve specific times, settings, and details of military events, rather than the broader daily life continuum of interpreting colonial and antebellum plantation history across centuries. Still, the contexts of social and political histories surrounding military battles are becoming a more central part of Civil War interpretation in Charleston, particularly for asserting the significance of slavery in the causes of the war.<sup>75</sup> The resources for inclusive change in these different historic site contexts will increasingly interconnect, and their shared goals and challenges should be addressed in future scholarship on Charleston's public history landscape.

I also do not detail the social and environmental impacts of tourism development in and around Charleston, which can create significant infrastructure, economic, and displacement challenges for local populations. In the Lowcountry, these development

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph McGill, a program officer for the Southern Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, belongs to this 54th Regiment Massachusetts reenactment group who appear regularly at public events in Charleston. For more information about their recent activities see: Joseph McGill, "Joseph McGill and Company A, 54th Massachusetts Reenactment Regiment March in Inaugural Parade," *Lowcountry Africana*, 30 January 2013, <http://www.lowcountryafricana.com/2013/01/30/joseph-mcgill-and-company-i-54th-massachusetts-reenactment-regiment-march-in-inaugural-parade/> (accessed 2 June 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Michael Allen and Carlin Timmons, interview with the author, 9 January 2009, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

issues disproportionately impact African Americans. For example, the 2010 census revealed that downtown Charleston, the most highly trafficked tourism area in the region, now features a white demographic majority. This is a major shift — in 1980 downtown Charleston’s population was two thirds African American. Today, it is two thirds white. As David Slade explains in a 2011 *Charleston Post & Courier* article, “gentrification and rising downtown rents, along with a broader national trend of urban black families moving to the suburbs, are believed to have played key roles in the population changes.” This urban transformation and population displacement is directly tied to tourism increasing the number of hotels and restaurants downtown, raising the cost of living and limiting housing options. The long term political impact of these demographic changes will be significant. “The results of the downtown racial realignment have broad implications for urban planning and political power,” Slade notes, “and point to the changing face of the suburbs as well as the urban core of the city. The Census results will be used to redraw political boundaries, including Charleston City Council districts.”<sup>76</sup>

Urban development tied to tourism and historic preservation efforts has a long and controversial history in Charleston. One of the Historic Charleston Foundation’s first neighborhood-based development projects was rehabilitating the downtown Ansonborough neighborhood in the 1950s. It was seen as a success for the “preservation community, middle-class home owners, real estate brokers, downtown merchants, and the tax collector.” But for the predominantly African American residents who were forced to

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<sup>76</sup> David Slade, “Racial Shift: Charleston’s peninsula makeup reverses in 30 years, with blacks leaving for suburbs, area becomes two thirds white,” *TPost & Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, posted 29 March 2011, <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20110329/PC06/303299919> (accessed 18 December 2012).

move from the rehabilitated area, it was a “case study in displacement.”<sup>77</sup> In the 1970s and 80s, the Foundation recognized past injustices of displacement in Ansonborough, and attempted to rehabilitate other neighborhoods with mediating benefits such as easements, privileging residents’ home ownership over new buyers, and attempting to use historic architecture to address inner city housing needs.<sup>78</sup> But the Foundation’s history of gentrification and displacement in the 1950s and 60s caused many residents in low-income areas to distrust ongoing historic preservation efforts. Future research into inclusive public history projects must address the challenges of maintaining racial and economic diversity within the urban and suburban development pressures of a tourism area like Charleston and the surrounding Lowcountry. Public history sites and projects must also increase effective engagement of grassroots voices from Charleston’s historic African American communities, not only to engage current cultural identities and historic meanings, but also to determine the detrimental economic and infrastructure impact of historic tourism development in these areas.

Finally, in addition to U.S. public history, recent scholarly and tourism interests in the history of Atlantic World slavery have influenced various international historic sites to reconsider their inclusive interpretation strategies. In my future research, I hope to develop comparative site studies of international Atlantic World tourism destinations where producers and interpreters are beginning to address interconnected histories of slavery, plantation agriculture, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. I am particularly interested in international destinations that are historically tied to Charleston, such as

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<sup>77</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 106-123.

sites in Barbados and Sierra Leone. As scholar Peter Wood describes, the Carolina colony was founded in the seventeenth century as a “colony of a colony” of Barbados.<sup>79</sup>

Barbadian settlers to the Charles Towne (later Charleston) area were highly influential in the development of the colony because of their familiarity with the labor and land cultivation system that made sugarcane so lucrative in the West Indies, and would later make rice a major cash crop in the Carolina Lowcountry — slavery and plantations.<sup>80</sup>

Today both Charleston and Barbados host significant tourism industries that feature historic themes. The overlap and influential exchange of their colonial histories has garnered attention from tourism producers, but historic sites in both areas grapple with addressing the significance of slavery and the slave trade in their shared histories.

Comparing representations of these interconnected histories provides insights into the influences of contemporary national, social, political, demographic, and economic contexts in shaping challenges and opportunities for inclusive public history narratives.

In Sierra Leone, a former slave fortress site on Bunce Island is currently being restored as a tourist destination through private donations. During the eighteenth century, traders on Bunce Island sent a significant number of ships of enslaved Africans to Charleston, and this connection has been a public history springboard for exploring West African roots in the African American Gullah Geechee culture of coastal South Carolina

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<sup>79</sup> Wood, *Black Majority*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 1998. Wood, *Black Majority*, 1974. Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and Georgia.<sup>81</sup> According to Bunce Island historian Joseph Opala, Sierra Leone officials hope tourism will bring economic opportunity and improved infrastructure to the area. They are particularly interested in drawing African American tourists, similar to other West African slave fortress destinations in Ghana and Senegal.<sup>82</sup> Balancing local and global interests in cultural identity, tourism revenue, and the history of slavery can lead to complex conflicts as well as collaboration.<sup>83</sup> Bunce Island's focus on the history of the slave trade in an emerging tourism industry provides a contrast to the longer histories of tourism in Charleston and Barbados, where many sites must transform from focusing exclusively on white elite historic experiences and material culture. Critical and collaborative dialogue about present needs and expectations surrounding tourism industries in these areas, as well as the interconnected histories of slavery between these international sites, can help implement more effective and sustainable inclusive historic tourism representations.

International public history connections could also enable Charleston's public history producers to more effectively interpret the complexity and scope of Charleston's multicultural history. By traditionally privileging white elite narratives, Lowcountry public history producers not only marginalized the significance of African Americans and

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<sup>81</sup> Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York City, New York: Ferrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998). *The Language You Cry In*, directed and produced by Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano (1998) DVD. *Family Across the Sea*, directed by Tim Carrier (South Carolina ETV, 1991) DVD.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Opala, phone interview with the author, 8 August 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Paulla A. Ebron, "Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (November 1999), 910-932. Christine Mullen Kreamer, "Shared Heritage, Contested Terrain: Cultural Negotiation and Ghana's Cape Coast Castle Museum Exhibition 'Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade,'" in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2006), 435-468.

slavery, they also missed opportunities to engage the rich diversity of international history in this region as an Atlantic World society. Through a more inclusive lens, Charleston and the surrounding Lowcountry can be understood as an area where European, African, West Indian, and American Indian populations encountered one another in colonial contexts of oppression, resistance, and conflict, as well as creative adaptation, influence, and exchange.<sup>84</sup> These populations ultimately generated a new multicultural American society that still demonstrates this web of influences.

International site studies relevant to this history could point to opportunities for multi-institutional public history collaboration across the Atlantic World.

### ***Conclusion: What is Public History?***

When I interviewed Queen Quet, leader of the Gullah Geechee Nation and local activist, about her work in public history in 2011, she immediately questioned why I used the term “public history.” “Isn’t history available for all the public?” she asked, “seems strange that you’ve got to call it ‘public history’ . . . what do academics mean by public history?”<sup>85</sup> Her question points to a tension between public and academic historians that ran throughout my dissertation research. Why is public history considered separate from academic history? Scholar Robert Weible suggests that this perceived separation stems from distinct economic markets for history production. As he explains, while academics

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<sup>84</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998). Judith Carney, *Black Rice*, 2001. Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 1998. Steven J. Oatis, *A Colonial Complex: South Carolina’s Frontiers in the Era of the Yamasee War 1680-1730* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London, England: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Wood, *Black Majority*, 1974. S. Max Edelson, “Beyond ‘Black Rice’: Reconstructing Material and Cultural Contexts for Early Plantation Agriculture,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No.1 (February 2010), 128.

<sup>85</sup> Queen Quet, interview with the author, 25 May 2012, Beaufort, South Carolina.

“toil mainly among themselves” as they work in institutions that only “accept a narrow definition of history-related work as a factor in tenure and promotion decisions,” public historians “cede too much authority to the public” because the business model many museums and historic sites rely on is based on “meeting audience expectations.”<sup>86</sup> This contrast in priorities leads to a problematic disconnect that limits the public impact of academic works and is detrimental to the development of inclusive, scholarship-based interpretation on historic sites.

Based on my research in Charleston, public history sites and tours often suffer from lack of scholarly consultation, but both scholars and public history producers are at fault for this. Scholars too often limit their professional outreach to fellow scholars and academic institutions, and site producers and interpreters are accustomed to developing historic interpretation “in-house,” with little scholarly review. As I will describe, one of the fortunate results of recent pressures to effectively address African American history during and after slavery in Charleston is that site producers find that they must engage outside scholarly resources to build new narratives, and academics can help. For scholars, this public history need points to a growing field of study as well as more diverse scholarship applications. As Rebecca Conard states, the field of public history combines the standard frameworks of academic history (such as time period, themes, and geographic region) with the unruly “fourth dimension” of “practice.” Through public history “practice,” Conard explains, scholars must learn to engage the wide-ranging needs of audiences and their various uses of memory and personal heritage to

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Weible, “Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, Volume 46, No. 3 (March 2008), 24-25.



communicate historic narratives in the present.<sup>87</sup> Scholarly expertise becomes a negotiating term in the ongoing construction of “past-present alignments” in public history narratives, rather than a top-down governing force.<sup>88</sup> This can be humbling, and frustrating, for academic scholars, but the most effective public history projects engage in collaborative “shared inquiry” between public history producers, interpreters, diverse audiences, and scholars; and often prioritize contemporary interests in education and ethics as well as historic accuracy.<sup>89</sup>

In Charleston, attending to the history of slavery and its race and class legacies, instead of an exclusive focus on white elite nostalgia, can lead to a range of unexpected reactions from interpreters, producers, and visitor audiences. But as Jerome deGroot explains, the “unruly” aspects of public history, and the various uses of the past in American life, provide ample opportunities for scholarly investigation.<sup>90</sup> Though many scholars may prefer to avoid the seeming chaos of public history, I embrace this challenge because of the wide-reaching influences of effective historic interpretation. As Weible concludes, “In an ideal world, historians could help sanction and limit social and political power by ensuring that the understanding of the past on which the public shapes its future is factual, accurate, comprehensible, meaningful, useful, and resistant to cynical manipulators who sell snake oil as historical truth.”<sup>91</sup> In this “ideal” scenario, all historians

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<sup>87</sup> Rebecca Conard, “Public History as Reflective Practice: An Introduction,” *The Public Historian*, Volume 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 9-13.

<sup>88</sup> Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 152.

<sup>89</sup> Katherine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian*, Volume 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 15-38.

<sup>90</sup> Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History*, 250.

<sup>91</sup> Weible, “Defining Public History,” 25.

must consider themselves “educators who neither deny their expertise nor keep it to themselves,” because “whether they work in classrooms, museums, or historic sites...in the end, they take responsibility for making the final edits on a community’s (or a nation’s) historical narrative.”<sup>92</sup> Though public history is an unruly field in the midst of volatile changes, the rewards for investigating and collaboratively enhancing its practice are tremendous.

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<sup>92</sup> Weible, “Defining Public History,” 25.

**SECTION ONE**

**Transforming History at Magnolia Plantation**

## Chapter One

### “A Trance of Enjoyment”

#### Developing Historic Tourism at Charleston’s Magnolia Plantation from 1870 to the Present

##### *Introduction: Layers of Attractions*

For researching changing historic tourism representations of slavery in Charleston, South Carolina, Magnolia Plantation & Gardens stands out as an ideal plantation tourist site study. Magnolia has been continuously owned by Drayton family descendants since the late-seventeenth century. It opened to the public as a private, for-profit tourist site in 1870, and in 2009 it became the most recent plantation site in the area to open a scholarship-based tour on African American history during slavery and after Emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Before the development of the “From Slavery to Freedom” tour, also known as the “Cabin Project,” representations of African American history and slavery at this tourist site were scattered, marginalized, and romanticized. Like other area plantation sites, the majority of Magnolia’s interpretation strategies emphasized white elite nostalgia for the antebellum and colonial past, particularly in the house and garden tours. The Cabin Project introduced a guided tour of five cabins restored to represent different time

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<sup>1</sup> To clarify the Drayton family connection between Magnolia Plantation and Drayton Hall: Thomas Drayton was an immigrant from Barbados (and before that England) who acquired Magnolia in 1676. Sixty years later his youngest son, John Drayton, inherited Drayton Hall, just one mile down the road. Both men were significant slaveholders and made their fortunes from rice agriculture worked through enslaved labor. Over his lifetime, Thomas Drayton, who died in 1724, owned three thousand acres of land and over one hundred enslaved people of African and American Indian descent. One generation later, though the exact will is missing, by his death in 1779, John Drayton acquired over seven hundred enslaved people and as many as ten plantations. John Drayton’s descendants continued to own and occupy Drayton Hall until 1974, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation purchased the main house and roughly one hundred surrounding acres to preserve and open Drayton Hall to the public as a historic site. In contrast, Reverend John Drayton first opened Magnolia to the public in 1870, over one hundred years earlier, to garner tourism revenue after facing significant financial losses from the U.S. Civil War. Winslow Hastie, interview with the author, 28 July 2009, Charleston, South Carolina. *Lowcountry Africana*, accessed 29 August 2011, <http://lowcountryafricana.net/default.asp>. *Drayton Hall*, accessed 29 August 2011, <http://www.draytonhall.org/>.

periods of African American occupation, from 1850 to 1969. The project developers, Craig Hadley and later D.J. Tucker and Preston Cooley, constructed the tour narrative based on scholarly research to provide broad historic context to the cabins, which included addressing topics from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the twentieth century civil rights movement. As Cooley stated in a 2011 interview, the recent and groundbreaking arrival of this tour in the for-profit context of Magnolia made this site the perfect “laboratory” to study representation transformation in Charleston. “It wasn’t two or three years ago where we were just the laughing stock, the Six Flags of tourism in Charleston,” he explained, “and we [went] from being the laughing stock, to being given awards . . . all over the course of a couple of years.”<sup>2</sup>

*New York Times* reporter Jim Rutenberg also found the From Slavery to Freedom tour to be a pivotal departure for Magnolia. In a 2009 article, published just months after the Cabin Project opened, he wrote that while in general Magnolia still served as a “romanticized theme-park homage to the way things were for Charleston’s gloriously wealthy families before the Civil War,” the separate African American history tour made a significant impact on his experience at this site, even in comparison to Drayton Hall, the National Trust owned plantation site next door:

When I was directed to yet another tram, I had visions of a cabin tour modeled after the old Orient Express ride in Atlantic City, a mini-roller coaster that took its ticket holders on a delightfully lame spin through a haunted house stuffed with “frightening” mannequins.

But I had stumbled upon something entirely unexpected: a collection of slave cabins built in the 1850s and restored to reflect African-American life on the plantation at different periods between 1850 and 1969. Their ramshackle construction and original brick chimneys were no less powerful a reminder of the brutal condition of the slaves than the hidden staircase at Drayton was.

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<sup>2</sup> Preston Cooley, interview with the author, 26 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

Preston Cooley and D. J. Tucker, historians who lead the tours offered vivid, sugar-free descriptions of slave life.<sup>3</sup>

How did the From Slavery to Freedom tour develop at Magnolia? In a 2008 article entitled “Selling Slavery” in Charleston’s *Post and Courier*, reporter Kyle Stock suggests that the most straightforward answer to this question in the for-profit context of Magnolia is that site producers believed the tour could make money. As he notes, Magnolia spent \$600,000 on the Cabin Project with hopes of luring “an additional 15,000 to 20,000 visitors a year.” With ticket prices at \$15 for general admission plus \$8 for the From Slavery to Freedom tour, this projection would lead to a revenue increase of up to \$460,000 a year. Stock suggests that like sites around Charleston, Magnolia developed the Cabin Project to tap into the \$45 billion African American business and leisure travel market in the United States. He concludes that African American history tours on plantation sites are only appearing in the twenty-first century because “Charleston

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Rutenburg, “Dueling Visions of the Old South,” *New York Times*, 9 September 2009, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/travel/13culture.html?scp=1&sq=plantations%2C+Charleston&st=nyt> (accessed 2 February 2010). The hidden staircase Rutenburg refers to is a feature of the house tour at Drayton Hall, a neighboring Ashley River Road plantation tourist site I describe briefly in the dissertation introduction. Enslaved people, and later servants after Emancipation, used the dark, narrow staircase in Drayton Hall to access different rooms in the house. Today, guides present this cramped, hidden staircase as a striking contrast to the large, ornate staircase used by the elite Drayton family. This staircase also serves as a visual cue for discussing the experiences of enslaved people in the home. In my numerous observations of Drayton Hall’s tours, some guides do effectively emphasize the role of this staircase, while others treat it as a minor interpretive point, preferring to focus on the Georgian-Palladian architecture of the house. A few I observed avoid discussing the hidden staircase altogether. I noted a similar pattern on other plantation site house tours, where one or more visual cues in the main plantation house provide a brief opportunity to discuss the history of slavery. For example at Magnolia, there is a portrait of an enslaved woman in the home, and at Middleton Place, guides note a pillowcase that an enslaved woman gave to her child when she was sold away from the plantation. Even with these interpretive opportunities, guides vary widely in how much they engage these cues to make discussions of enslaved and post-Emancipation race and class experiences a significant part of their tour.

business people are realizing that slavery — at least the examination and discussion of it — can be lucrative once again.”<sup>4</sup>

But making money from historic representations hardly introduces a new enterprise in Charleston’s centuries-old tourism industry. The problem is that until very recently, tourism producers specifically avoided or romanticized African American history, particularly on plantation sites. Could the Cabin Project serve as an example of a new, productive relationship between the tourism consumer market of popular appeal and the ethics of inclusive, multicultural public history? Based on my research fieldwork at Magnolia from 2007 to 2011, the major obstacle for achieving this ideal is that site producers have not comprehensively implemented these groundbreaking inclusive interpretation changes throughout the site. Instead, they present the new African American history tour alongside older and *ongoing* representations of white elite nostalgia, as well as recreational entertainment, in the house and gardens. As Stock revealed, in 2008 Magnolia sought *additional* visitors and revenue with the new representation strategies of this project, not comprehensive change. This makes the Cabin Project an example of what Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small describe as “segregated knowledge” on a plantation site, because its interpretations of African American experiences during and after slavery are relegated to the separate space of the cabins, while other tours and attractions remain relatively unchanged.<sup>5</sup> Rather than old representations giving way to new, Magnolia appears to have “something for everybody.”

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<sup>4</sup> Kyle Stock, “Dueling Visions of the Old South,” *The Post and Courier*, 27 July 2008, <http://archives.postandcourier.com/archive/arch08/0708/arc07276602589.shtml> (accessed online 2 February 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington DC and London, UK: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 170-202.

A tourist seeking “moonlight and magnolias” and a tourist seeking empathetic, scholarship-based interpretations of African American history can both come to the site and find options to fit their interests. Rather than launching a broader transformation of romantic, elite plantation narratives, the Cabin Project may function as just another ticketed item on the tour schedule, the latest layer in Magnolia’s long history of adding profitable tourist attractions.

Even if additional revenue is the ultimate goal of Magnolia’s site producers, current indicators suggest that the From Slavery to Freedom tour does not rest easy for visitors or staff alongside older interpretations in this “something for everybody” scenario. While the Cabin Project received positive reviews after it opened in 2009 from outside visitor and media sources, visitors regularly framed this praise as given *despite* other representations at Magnolia. For example, the online user-generated travel site *TripAdvisor* revealed numerous positive reviews of the Cabin Project from visitors, and further corroborates Rutenburg’s description of this tour being a welcome change from Magnolia’s other “theme park” representations. Based on an Internet search in April 2011, out of 108 overall reviews of Magnolia published after March 2009 (when the Cabin Project opened), 37% of the comments specifically praised and recommended the From Slavery to Freedom tour, while other separately ticketed tours, such as the house tour or nature tram tour, were rarely individually mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Many of these visitor

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<sup>6</sup> Numbers based on tally of *TripAdvisor* comments, accessed 28 April 2011, [http://www.TripAdvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g54171-d104636-Reviews-Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_Gardens-Charleston\\_South\\_Carolina.html](http://www.TripAdvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d104636-Reviews-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html). I started the tally with comments that dated past March 2009, when the From Slavery to Freedom tour first opened to the public. 40 out of 108 reviews, from April 2009 to April 2011, specifically mentioned and praised the “From Slavery to Freedom” tour. *TripAdvisor* is a user-generated website, and these reviews were of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in general, so the number of comments specifically about the Cabin Project are remarkable considering that users were not *asked* to comment on this tour. Instead, they produced these reviews based on their own volition.



comments described the tour as “life changing,” a “highlight” or a “must-see.” But again, in a comment from May 2010 entitled “From Slavery to Freedom tour was most worthwhile thing we did,” the visitor saw the Cabin Project as an exception. “The “From slavery to freedom” tour at Magnolia Plantation was powerfully moving” the commenter noted, “I would not have awarded this attraction as even ‘very good’ otherwise.”<sup>7</sup>

Through a site study of Magnolia, I argue that when plantation tourist site producers introduce new historic representations of African American history, they cannot simply add them as a separate tour alongside preexisting tours. Instead, as scholar Tony Bennett explains, inclusive historic interpretation demands that traditional representation frameworks be “discursively reshaped” and “subjected to the organizing influence of new rhetorics.”<sup>8</sup> His argument for comprehensive rather than “quantitative” approaches to transformation applies to a wide range of national, regional, and site specific public history contexts, but seems especially relevant to southern plantation tourist sites. According to Bennett, the historic narratives of tours, sites, regions, and nations do not just present the “raw materials” of historic information; instead, they operate within “the mould through which such events might be cast into representations that would be consistent with the largely Eurocentric lexicons of nationalism and history which governed public perceptions of such matters.”<sup>9</sup> As present day values and identities

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<sup>7</sup> “From Slavery to Freedom tour was most worthwhile thing we did,” review from *TripAdvisor*, by jbisho1 of Bloomington, Indiana, posted 26 May 2010, [http://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r65346393-Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_Gardens-Charleston\\_South\\_Carolina.html](http://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r65346393-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html) (accessed April 28, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Politics, Theory* (London, UK and New York, New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 137, 145.

expand beyond Eurocentric lexicons, the framework and language of a historic narrative's "past-present alignments" must also change.<sup>10</sup> In Charleston, white elite nostalgia overwhelmingly shaped the traditional "lexicon" of historic tourism for over a century to support race and class hierarchies based on white supremacy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The growing popular influence of multiculturalism and inclusion ethics, along with more diverse tourism audiences and public history producers, challenges these exclusive hierarchies. To be more inclusive, plantation site producers in Charleston must develop entirely new interpretive lexicons and strategies for presenting historic narratives.

To transform a site's white elite representation strategies, site producers, interpreters, and visitors must first recognize how these traditional plantation narratives developed. For this reason, the first chapter examines Magnolia's tourism history from the late nineteenth century to the early 2000s. The next chapter then assesses the development of the Cabin Project starting in 2002, and considers how this tour engages preexisting historic representations in the house and gardens since its opening in 2009, and how it could further influence site transformation. An in-depth site study of Magnolia provides an opportunity to examine the consumer market and education dynamics of inclusive public history change within a specific space and site history, while also connecting Magnolia's transformation issues and obstacles to developing representations of slavery throughout Charleston's tourism industry — which then ties to broader inclusive shifts in national and international public history contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 152.

This site study and assessments of nearby plantations are based on interviews and tour observations I conducted on site and in the Charleston area from 2007 to 2012, along with local institutional archival research. Although I engage visitor perspectives through tour observation and informal conversations, as well as visitor-generated review sites such as *TripAdvisor*, interviews with site producers and interpreters serve as the central resource in this study. Their perceptions of visitor and institutional interests are ultimately what determine how a site's representations change. Interpretative transformations on these plantation sites are recent and their effects far from conclusive, but this brief window of fieldwork time allows for insights into the immediate impacts and possible developments of new African American history tours.

Throughout my research, the site staff I interviewed consistently seemed aware of the current need to transform plantation representations. Even when an interview subject seemed resistant to my questions about change, no one seemed surprised. The uncertainty and varying responses from different interpreters and site producers revolved around what to do next, where and how — which set up a productive context for a critical dialogue about how to develop a more inclusive framework for representing Charleston's diverse history and culture.

### ***Early Historic Interpretation through Scattered Signs***

When I first visited Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in October 2007, the only guided tour I found on African American history was a once-a-day “Slave Talk,” held at one o'clock in the afternoon, according to a laminated paper sign nailed to a post near a building marked “Ante Bellum Cabin” (see figure 12, page 168). I arrived at two o'clock,

missing the tour, but I was able to go on the house tour, which emphasized antique décor and furniture. The only aspect of the house tour that could be seen as an exception to this white elite material culture focus was the “History Room.” Guides encouraged visitors to walk through this side room on their own, to look at walls covered with an eclectic array of images, such as Audubon paintings of birds, sketches of Charleston events from nineteenth century editions of *Harper’s*, 1950s and 60s magazine advertisements featuring white female models in Magnolia’s gardens, and photographs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of white Drayton family members and formerly enslaved African American men and women who lived at Magnolia (see figures 1, 4, and 11 on pages 162-167). These materials at least suggested a more complex social history at the site, but other than a few brief captions, interpretative guidance remained minimal in this room. By 2011, the house director moved the “History Room” to the basement rather than the side room upstairs, and assigned one or two guides to be on hand to answer visitor questions, but the confusing layout and minimal interpretation of the images and materials in the room remained the same.

In contrast to the once-a-day “Slave Talk,” Magnolia’s guided house tours and nature tram tours occurred nearly every hour, all day, and the petting zoo and gardens were also open for self-guided tours from “8am til Dusk.” So after my first house tour, I stopped by the petting zoo to look at rabbits, geese, and pigs, and then went to the gardens. This tour came with a map leading visitors down a trail marked by numbered signs throughout the site’s extensive gardens, winding past camellias, statues, and hedges, with the Ashley River and remnants of rice fields in the distance. In addition to numbers,

I also spotted small, faded metal signs throughout the grounds providing brief descriptions about subjects at Magnolia — the favorite resting spots of Drayton family members, the history of a rare redwood tree, the location where paddle wheel steamers dropped off tourists starting in the 1870s, before they could access the site through automobiles and paved highways. A few of these small, descriptive signs addressed African American history, but they reflected many of the site’s early problems with representing slavery. These African American history signs repeatedly focused on the benevolence of Reverend Drayton as a slaveholder, rather than the experiences and struggles of enslaved African Americans. For example, the “Antebellum Schoolhouse” sign, located outside of a building that housed the administrative offices, offered the following historic description (see figure 8, page 166):

This structure, partitioned and now used as an office, was built in the 1840s by the Reverend John Drayton, Magnolia’s owner of that day, to be used as a classroom for the many children of plantation slaves. This was in defiance of then existing South Carolina law...under the guise of religious instruction, he held daily classes here teaching the “3 Rs” to the children whom he referred to as “my black roses.”

Years later, in May 2011, I found another of these small signs by the “Plantation Cemetery,” located behind the locked gate of the Audubon Swamp Garden (visitors receive a code to get through the gate after they purchase a separate ticket along with the general admission). I seemed to find another sign each time I returned to Magnolia over the years, hidden in shrubbery by a building, or at far corners of the gardens. The first paragraphs of this sign by the cemetery read (see figure 9, page 166):

Here and in the woods beyond lie the graves, now largely unmarked, of those who lived and worked at Magnolia over the past three centuries.

One of the stones marks the resting place of Adam Bennett, head slave prior to the Civil War, and plantation supervisor after the war until his death in 1910. He and Reverend John Grimké Drayton worked side by side for over half a century in expanding

the garden to its present state of perfection. It was also Adam Bennett who, in 1865, though strung up to a tree in the garden by Union troops and threatened with death, refused to disclose the hiding place of the Drayton family valuables.

In a 2011 interview, former director Taylor Drayton Nelson explained that his grandfather, Drayton Hastie, put these signs up in the 1970s, in an early attempt to infuse social and natural history into the landscape. Nelson stated that his grandfather wanted to “diversify the place,” so visitors would come for more than “just to look at the pretty flowers.”<sup>11</sup> The themes of slaveholder benevolence and slave loyalty in these signs generally come from the white Drayton family’s oral traditions. “We didn’t have interpretive manuals,” Drayton family descendant Winslow Hastie explained in 2009, “we didn’t have written up stuff, it’s just things that have been kind of cobbled together over years, and a lot of it are sort of oral histories that have been duct-taped together.”<sup>12</sup>

Amid the booming nature tram tours, overflowing antique collections in the house, and miniature horses and peacocks in the petting zoo, small interpretive signs in the gardens and grounds may seem like a minor consideration compared to the more apparent attractions I first encountered at Magnolia in 2007. However, like the eclectic collection in the History Room, the scattered presence of these signs reveals a larger organizational problem in the site’s historic interpretation that continues today, even with the addition of the Cabin Project. Rather than a cohesive site narrative, site directors traditionally presented Magnolia’s history in bits and pieces, such as scattered signs in the gardens and small, disjointed image captions in the “History Room.” These isolated stories also appear in the house tour narratives and the site’s more recent orientation

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor Drayton Nelson, interview with the author, 24 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>12</sup> Winslow Hastie, interview, 2009.

video (simply titled “Magnolia Plantation & Gardens,” produced in the early 2000s). This scattered approach is not an innocuous, minor consideration. It prevents a more critical understanding of the site’s history because it disconnects these isolated stories from broader historic contexts. Without more direct interpretative guidance, plantation history on sites such as Magnolia easily falls into popular tropes that developed over the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to affirm white elite nostalgia, plantation patriarchs, and southern racial hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> As scholars Stephen Small and Jennifer Eichstedt argue, stories about “benevolent masters” and “loyal slaves” are prevalent in southern public history. They reflect a rhetorical pattern found throughout plantation tourist sites to “valorize whiteness” and “trivialize” or ameliorate the experience of enslavement.<sup>14</sup> The details of such stories may not be entirely false, but “in the absence of substantive discussions of some of the harsh realities of life experienced by the enslaved, [these stories] are likely to have an invalidating and demeaning effect.”<sup>15</sup>

Eichstedt and Small particularly found a pattern of “loyal slave” narratives from just after the Civil War on various plantation sites, similar to the story of Adam Bennett hiding Drayton family valuables from Union troops. They noted that these narratives rarely include descriptions of the “economic and political restraints faced by those legally freed at the end of the Civil War.” These restraints would have strongly influenced how

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<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Jessica Adams, “Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 42 (Spring 1999) 163-187. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2005). Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 148, 161.

<sup>15</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 148.

formerly enslaved people made decisions to protect their own interests or their biological families, Eichstedt and Small argue, rather than just “loyalty” to white masters and mistresses.<sup>16</sup> More diverse oral histories from sources outside of the white Drayton family, such as the descendants of Magnolia’s enslaved inhabitants, also suggest that there are various versions of these stories of African American experiences during and after slavery at Magnolia, as Winslow Hastie commented:

...[our Cabin Project consultant] talked to different people and everybody had a slightly different interpretation. Which of course is very typical. So we kind of started to not necessarily debunk a lot of these myths, but question and maybe present them as such, not saying this is written in stone, this is history, but more—“it’s been said that.”<sup>17</sup>

Sources, context, complicating factors, and alternative perspectives do not appear in these scattered stories on signs and captions around Magnolia — this is what a “bits and pieces” approach to history specifically obscures. Visitors can passively absorb or ignore small signs as part of the scenery, presenting social history with the seemingly innate authority of a placard identifying a species of plant or tree. When tour guides at Magnolia rephrase their own presentation of these stories as “it’s been said that,” they still avoid the broader problem of context in their interpretation, not only of the complex historic circumstances that would have influenced the choices and experiences of enslaved or newly free individuals, but also of the historical role of “loyal slave”

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<sup>16</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 151.

<sup>17</sup> Winslow Hastie, interview, 2009. Preston Cooley also noted in 2011 that the interviews of descendants of African American enslaved and later free workers at Magnolia conducted by Cabin Project developers are in storage at Magnolia and still not organized for archival purposes. I did not use them in this dissertation project, though they could be an excellent resource for future researchers. D.J. Tucker and Cooley also explained this collection could be an oral history project to build on in the future, because many descendants of enslaved African Americans who lived at worked Magnolia still live in the Lowcountry region.



narratives in producing white elite plantation ideology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One of the most glaring problems with Magnolia's historic representations is that cohesive (much less inclusive) historic interpretation is not a central priority. Instead, Magnolia's overarching representation strategy is to emphasize the pastoral landscape, particularly the gardens. This approach has been in place since the site first opened to the public in 1870.<sup>18</sup> After the Civil War, Reverend John Drayton sold most of the plantation land that his family acquired in the seventeenth century to phosphate miners, but he kept five hundred acres along the Ashley River, which included the location of the family residence and the gardens. According to Nelson, Charles Sprague Sargent, the first director of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, encouraged his great-great grandfather to open Magnolia because its formal and romantic-style gardens were a "unique horticultural marvel." Sargent knew that his friend struggled with financial difficulties after the Civil War, and thought he could use the gardens to garner revenue from the burgeoning tourism industry, especially the post-war influx of northern visitors. As Nelson noted, the main stream of visitors to the site in the nineteenth century were, "Yankees interested in coming down and seeing what the South was like after the war."<sup>19</sup>

Historian Nina Silber's research on early tourism in the U.S. South suggests that Sargent's advice and Nelson's assessment of Magnolia's early plantation tourists were

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<sup>18</sup> "Magnolia History," *Magnolia Plantation & Gardens*, accessed 16 October 2011, [http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/magnolia\\_history.html](http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/magnolia_history.html). According to the "Magnolia History" page on the Magnolia Plantation & Gardens website, after the Civil War, Reverend John Grimké Drayton had to "save the plantation from ruin" to protect the "welfare of the family, the house, and the *gardens* themselves" [italics added].

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

accurate. After the Civil War, elite nostalgia on plantation sites appealed to white tourists across regions, despite recent sectional violence. While former Confederates, writes Silber, “learned to accept their loss by turning the old South into a land of idyllic plantation settings, heroic men, and elegant women,” which they commemorated through “pilgrimage” tours to plantation sites, white northerners also toured southern plantations to form antebellum historic fantasies that reinforced notions of northern civilization and racial supremacy. The South offered an “antimodern refuge” for white elite northerners, Silber asserts, where the “class tensions of their own industrializing and stratified society could evaporate.”<sup>20</sup> This early plantation nostalgia transformed the meaning of plantation slavery for white southerners and northerners, from an exploitative labor system and racial hierarchy that divided the nation into “a happy and mutually beneficial arrangement which offered enjoyment and contentment to all of its participants.”<sup>21</sup> By the late nineteenth century, this increasingly popular and widespread understanding of slavery as a benevolent institution helped solidify sectional reunion after the war, justified the federal government’s indifference to vigilante white violence against free African Americans in the U.S. South, and enabled the end of Reconstruction and the introduction of Jim Crow segregation laws. Plantation tourism sites like Magnolia that emphasized a glorious antebellum past helped white southerners take control of post-war memorial culture throughout the nation for their own contemporary political and economic

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<sup>20</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 4, 68.

<sup>21</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 4. Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2010). Greeson argues that white northern literature promoted nostalgic southern plantation fantasies after the Civil War to construct a new national identity where the U.S. South symbolically functioned as a central, exotic “other.”

interests, at a great cost to the recently obtained rights and opportunities of African Americans.<sup>22</sup>

As the first private garden in the southeast to open to the public as a tourism site (according to Drayton family descendants), Magnolia became a leader in an early network of plantation tourist sites in the Charleston area.<sup>23</sup> In 1875, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published an article written by Constance Fenimore Wilson about traveling in Charleston, describing how tourists would take a steamboat to see plantations on the Ashley River. Wilson notes that Magnolia's gardens were a "bewitching" escape for tourists (see figure 1, page 162). "They wander through the glowing aisles of azaleas" she claims, "and forget the lapse of time, recalled from their trance of enjoyment only by the whistle of the boat, which carries them back to the city."<sup>24</sup> This early representation emphasis on landscape beauty, leisure and escape, established for white visitors during the volatile post-Civil War era, continued to dominate the site's promotional materials and attractions throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

The site's more recent orientation video, "Magnolia Plantations & Gardens," reveals the ongoing influence of this early focus on garden escape and leisure. According

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<sup>22</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002). Silber, *The Romance of Reunion* 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Magnolia Gardens was the first among these plantations to formally open the public as a tourist site with tickets and promotional materials, though other sites informally accepted visitors. Cooley, interview, 2011. As Stephanie Yuhl and Fitzhugh Brundage describe, this informal approach to historic tourism was a pattern throughout the U.S. South. Historic sites and commemoration efforts in this region had no governmental oversight in contrast to commemoration efforts in Europe, which were state-run. In areas like Charleston, historic representations were locally constructed by white elites. This meant that local white elite experiences and perceptions of plantation slavery would largely shape historic narrative conveyed to the broader public, particularly tourists, throughout the twentieth century. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 187. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 3-7.

<sup>24</sup> "Up the Ashley and Cooper," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, No. CCVII, Vol. LII (December 1875), 7. Drayton family archives, College of Charleston Special Collections, Charleston, South Carolina.

to Winslow Hastie, a Drayton cousin in Los Angeles, Dylan Nelson, produced the twenty-three minute orientation video in the early 2000s. It plays on a repeated loop in a small theater near the parking lot and ticket booth, so that visitors often view it just after they arrive. Along with displaying site attractions, the video features descriptions of individuals who occupied and worked at the site over time, enslaved and free, white and black, in different chronological sections from “The Colonial Era” to “Magnolia Today.” The video uses what scholar Gary Edgerton describes as a “collage of techniques” within each section — mixing background music and narration with interviews of Drayton family members and Magnolia staff, close-ups of archival documents and images, and more recent images of the plantation landscape. The organizational structure of this technique in the video offers numerous valuable interpretive points and historic information, which I will draw from later in this chapter. But the general problem with this “chorus of voices” approach, first popularized by Ken Burns’ documentaries in 1980s and 90s such as *The Civil War* (1990), is that these diverse perspectives operate within a misleading framework. Edgerton describes this representation problem as the “broader framework of agreement,” which depicts definitive and affirming closure for all historic events and issues, despite presenting complex perspectives, contexts, and unresolved tensions.

In Burns’ work, Edgerton identifies the progress of the United States as the underlying, and misleading, framework of agreement. “He presents an image of the United States pulling together despite its chronic differences,” Edgerton argues, “rather

than a society coming apart at the seams.”<sup>25</sup> In Magnolia’s orientation video, the beauty of the landscape, first emphasized in the 1870s, still defines the site’s framework of agreement for tourists in the twenty-first century. While the video presents information about the site’s plantation history, including the history of slavery, the overarching video structure intertwines these more complex discussions with images, background music, and narration that ultimately encourages leisure, to “enjoy Magnolia.” As the introductory sequence narration states:

Take a ride on our nature train or nature boat for a view of the wildlife that thrives here. Take our house tour and learn more about the fascinating history of the Drayton family. *Visit our street of antebellum slave cabins, and explore the development of African American life on the plantation.* Experience the unique Audubon Swamp Garden, or stroll the magnificent historic gardens. Enjoy Magnolia, a landscape of otherworldly beauty and peace. [emphasis added]<sup>26</sup>

The fact that the video features multicultural historic information about Magnolia, rather than just white elite material culture or nostalgic lifestyle descriptions, is a significant step towards inclusive interpretation on the site. But a brief analysis of specific history-focused sections in the video demonstrates the obscuring influence of the site’s framework of agreement on complex historic events and experiences at Magnolia. For example, the “Slavery” section opens with a brief description of the “task system” of plantation labor used on rice plantations, and states that some forty-five slaves lived on the plantation before the Civil War (without mentioning the much larger slaveholdings on

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<sup>25</sup> Gary R. Edgerton, “Chalk, Talk, and Videotape: Utilizing Ken Burns's Television Histories in the Classroom,” *Magazine of History*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Film and History (Summer, 2002), 21.

<sup>26</sup> *Magnolia Plantation & Gardens*, directed by Dylan, Nelson, and Haskell (Magnolia Plantation Corporation. ca. early 2000s) DVD.

other plantations owned by the same Drayton family).<sup>27</sup> This section's narration then quickly shifts from African American experiences of slavery to a longer description of Reverend Drayton's role as a conflicted and ultimately benevolent slaveholder. The belief that Drayton taught slaves to read serves as the video's evidence for this character description, which echoes the family's oral traditions conveyed in the 1970s interpretive signs. The video also asserts that family relation to infamous abolitionist aunts, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, would have shaped Reverend Drayton's perspectives, though the nature of their personal interactions remains vague in the video. The section then concludes with biographical information about the Grimké sisters, without providing broader context on how they had to leave Charleston to pursue their anti-slavery work, reflecting another version of a "bits and pieces" approach to Magnolia's historic interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

In the "Civil War" section of the video, a contradiction emerges about what happened to the antebellum house at Magnolia. The narration states that, "victorious Union soldiers left a trail of annihilation in their wake," followed by Nelson asserting that

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<sup>27</sup> As various historians explain, rather than work being supervised from sun up to sundown as found with gang labor, enslaved labor organization on rice plantations (as well as on other Lowcountry plantations, such as Sea Island cotton) involved a "task system." In this system, enslaved individuals completed an assigned "task" each day (except generally Sundays). Once they completed this task, enslaved individuals could pursue other activities such as tend to their own subsistence crops, hunt or fish. Various scholars argue that the task system offered more independence for enslaved people on Lowcountry plantations, but William DusiBerre also asserts that rice agriculture was still grueling, with higher rates of mortality for enslaved people due to disease and labor conditions compared to cotton and tobacco plantation agriculture. William DusiBerre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996). David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006). Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> For more information on the life and works of Angelina and Sarah Grimke see: Mary Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimke Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2001). Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

“the troops burned every plantation house on the Ashley River, with the exception of Drayton Hall.” But moments later a voice-over actor reads a letter written to Reverend Drayton by his mother in October 1865 that conveys a different narrative:

No white person has gone back, nor do I hear of any who intend on doing so. It is believed your house is burned by your own Negroes, as well as some others.

This quote from Reverend Drayton’s mother points to the oppressive and volatile experience of slavery at Magnolia, enough to lead enslaved people to burn the plantation house in defiance. But rather than address the implications of these differing accounts, the narration simply shifts again, stating that: “The bonds of slavery had been broken, but personal bonds remained.” The video then concludes with another narrative of slave loyalty, by noting that after the war ended, former slave Adam Bennett walked to Reverend Drayton’s home in Flat Rock, North Carolina to tell him the gardens at Magnolia were unharmed:

Upon reaching Flat Rock, Adam told the Reverend that though the house had been burned, the gardens survived. Together Adam Bennett and Reverend Drayton returned to Magnolia, to start again.

The story of Adam Bennett walking to Flat Rock also appears in a caption beneath an image of Adam Bennett and his family in the History Room at the end of the house tour. Like the sign in the cemetery, the caption obscures the complexities and conflicts of plantation slavery by claiming that, “The landscape of Magnolia unified the races in a way that politics could not.” The caption hints that all former slaves at Magnolia did not experience this “unity,” but it frames their resistance as disloyalty: “Some workers deserted, but most remained, true to the place they called home.” Rather than exploring

various African American experiences, including resistance to enslavement, the use of the gardens as a “framework of agreement” in these interpretive signs, captions, and in the more contemporary orientation video, again obscures the complexity of African American experiences during and after slavery at Magnolia.

Though the orientation video encourages visitors to “explore” history at Magnolia, its concluding points still echo, rather than challenge, the nostalgic ideological narrative first developed at Magnolia after the Civil War to promote sectional reconciliation and white supremacy. The message that visitors should ultimately focus on the beauty of the garden landscape remains intact in the twenty-first century. As I will describe, site directors adapted this overarching narrative from white leisure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to “family-friendly” recreation in the late twentieth century to match changing visitor interests. But despite increasing layers of recreational attractions as well as scattered signs, captions, and video excerpts in the early twenty-first century, site producers overwhelmingly framed Magnolia as an aesthetic landscape of “otherworldly beauty and peace,” rather than of complex social history experiences and events surrounding slavery.

### ***Magnolia’s Gardens before Tourism***

Romanticized understandings of plantation landscapes in American popular culture did not originate with tourism. Though this section focuses primarily on twentieth and early twenty-first century historic representations on plantations, representations of white elite fantasies on these sites grew from ideological patterns developed centuries earlier. As historian Jeffrey Robert Young argues, pro-slavery cultural representations



were not just nostalgic, post-Civil War constructions; they were also central to supporting the plantation economy and its reliance on enslaved labor while the institution existed.

“Slavery in the New World was affected by cultural as well as fiscal imperatives,” Young explains. “Religion, nationalism, imperialism, and racism offered principles that helped to structure the institution of slavery, to manage, and, by the eighteenth century, to defend it from mounting criticism.”<sup>29</sup>

In this context, rather than “otherworldly,” Magnolia’s early gardens are symbolic expressions of this longstanding cultural history, specifically the English colonial power structure that first established African American slavery in the Carolina colony.

Magnolia’s orientation video provides some revealing background on this symbolic role.

In “The Colonial Era” section, the narrator explains that “Flowerdale” was the first garden at Magnolia, built (presumably by enslaved labor) shortly after Thomas Drayton acquired the plantation in 1679. Drayton arrived in the Carolina colony in 1671, most likely from the English colony of Barbados, but he and his family originally emigrated from England.<sup>30</sup> When he came to Carolina, Drayton would have brought an English understanding of colonial power with him, as well as West Indian experience with

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Robert Young, editor, “Introduction,” *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>30</sup> In “Barbadian Settlers in Early Carolina: Historiographical Notes,” Kinloch Bull explains that describing many early Carolina settlers as “Barbadian” can be a misreading of archival evidence. Many early Carolina settlers passed through Barbados on their way to Carolina, rather than settling on this island colony before settling Carolina. Thomas Drayton may be an example of this confusion, but most likely he still stopped in Barbados en route and witnessed their well-established systems of African slavery and plantation agriculture. Kinloch Bull, “Barbadian Settlers in Early Carolina: Historiographical Notes,” in *South Carolina and Barbados Connections: Selections from South Carolina Historical Magazine*, edited by Stephen Hoffius (Charleston, South Carolina: Home House Press, 2011), 79-80.

African slavery and plantation agriculture in Barbados.<sup>31</sup> As historian Patricia Seed explains, from an English perspective, controlling the “wilderness” through a garden did not just offer leisure and beauty; it demonstrated power and domination. Plantations were a form of garden from this viewpoint, as Seed notes, “English colonists referred to their own activities in occupying the New World as planting a garden.”<sup>32</sup> They specifically understood this “ritual of possession” as a noble contrast to Spanish colonization that involved extracting wealth through mining rather than “improving [land] through cultivation.”<sup>33</sup> In the context of the Carolina Colony, displacing American Indians and exploiting enslaved labor (overwhelmingly African but also American Indian during the colonial era) were essential to “planting this garden” for a lucrative plantation economy.<sup>34</sup> Though dominant American popular culture may have rejected English control to embrace the development of U.S. nationalism during the American Revolution, Jennifer Rae Greeson notes that the concept of plantations as gardens continued to play a powerful rhetorical role. American writers may have pushed away from the “planter” as a

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<sup>31</sup> Many early settlers to the Carolina colony settled or at least spent time in the English colony of Barbados before their arrival. In Barbados, they learned about establishing a plantation economy through enslaved African labor. This made Carolina distinctive from other English colonies in North America, because plantations and African slavery were a priority from the founding of Carolina, rather than settlers focusing first on indentured servitude or mixed labor forces with a range of export strategies. Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 36-38. Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974).

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>33</sup> Greeson, *Our South*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> As Steven Oatis describes, in the colonial period, early settlers of Carolina were heavily involved in an American Indian slave trade in contrast to other colonies. Carolina settlers also traded goods with certain American Indian groups while having animosity with others, particularly groups allied with Spanish or French rivals. These various relationships between settlers and local American Indian groups created a complex web of entanglements and tensions that erupted and nearly destroyed the colony during South Carolina's Yamasee War (1715-1717). Steven J. Oatis, *A Colonial Complex: South Carolina's Frontiers in the Era of the Yamasee War 1680-1730* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London, UK: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

“venerable icon of English New World civilization,” but they still maintained reverence for “subduing” the soil, so they reframed the icon of the prosperous colonial planter to become the virtuous “American farmer.” Thomas Jefferson exemplified this shift when he wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), “Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God.” But as Greeson points out, in the context of Jefferson’s Virginia, despite his veneration of subsistence farming, the wealth of Jefferson and the new nation continued to rely on plantations worked through slavery, so that “the ubiquitous American farmer of early U.S. nationalism was produced by *writing over* the American planter.”<sup>35</sup> Whether glorifying plantations as gardens or farms, rhetorically diminishing the significance of enslaved labor in the American economy was already apart of early colonial and later national popular culture and ideology.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the formal Flowerdale garden, the video narration explains that in the 1830s, Reverend Drayton expanded the gardens in a “romantic” design (again, presumably through enslaved labor) to become “a combination of both a seventeenth century formal garden, as well as a nineteenth century English naturalistic garden.” The goal of this romantic garden was to create a “natural” garden, or what Magnolia’s director of gardens, Tom Johnson, describes as “man’s attempt at recreating Eden.”<sup>37</sup> In the video,

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<sup>35</sup> Greeson, *Our South*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> In *Landscapes of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art*, editors Angela D. Mack and Stephen G. Hoffus present an exhibition and collection of essays that discusses the impact of plantation imagery in American art, and addresses the changing ways that artists depict enslaved individuals in plantation or farm landscapes over time, or in some examples, erase slavery from plantations altogether. Angela D. Mack and Stephen G. Hoffus, editors, *Landscapes of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Behre, “Magnolia a historic treasure,” *The Post and Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina. June 20, 2011, <http://www.postandcourier.com/news/2011/jun/20/magnolia-a-historic-treasure/> (accessed June 20, 2011).

Nelson further describes this transition: “Whereas it made sense when the Draytons first arrived at Magnolia to do everything they could to subdue nature, John Grimké Drayton sought to work in harmony with nature.” In the context of a plantation, replicating “Eden,” or creating “harmony with nature” in nineteenth century garden design may demonstrate a new metaphorical role for gardens in contrast to “subduing nature,” but this shift still symbolically diminishes the presence and significance of slavery in a plantation space. As Ian Gregory Strachen argues, a garden “paradise” on a plantation evokes an Edenic fantasy of being free from labor, of *not working*, and yet being surrounded by abundance.<sup>38</sup> The role of slavery in producing the abundance of plantation economies fades into the “natural” and “harmonious” landscape through this “paradise” representation strategy.

Drayton also had a more personal goal in mind for his romantic garden expansion. The video states that Drayton built the gardens as an “earthly paradise” at Magnolia for his wife Julia, because she felt “homesick for her native Philadelphia” and “had a great deal of trepidation about the South.” According to Magnolia house guide Iris Silk, Julia’s “trepidation” refers to her anxieties about marrying a slaveholder. As Silk explains, Julia was “afraid of the black slaves.” This led Julia to avoid Magnolia most of her life; she spent the majority of her time either in downtown Charleston, their summer home in Flat

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<sup>38</sup> As Ian Gregory Strachen describes, in tourism representations “paradise” and “plantation” function as “two dissimilar entities” that “rebuff and reinforce each other on the level of metaphor.” Strachen’s research focuses on tourism in the Caribbean, but parallels to his argument be found on plantation sites and tourism themes in the U.S. South. As he explains, “The strength of ‘paradise’ as metaphor and mythological construct lies in its ability to transform itself... ‘Paradise’ turns to ‘Plantation’ and vice versa... Its objective is to subdue nature, to harness nature, and to order nature into neat rows, to make nature work and produce while the European stands by with little to do but consume.” Through exploiting the plantation work of the enslaved, the slaveholder could construct an “earthly paradise” that symbolically erased or naturalized their labor. Ian Gregory Strachen, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville, Virginia and London, UK: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3, 36.

Rock, North Carolina, or visiting relatives in Philadelphia. Silk found this point uncomfortable to explain when she mentioned Julia during her tours, so like the video, she did not discuss that slavery was the source of Julia's anxieties. "I learned not to go there," Silk explained, "so I don't, because I don't want to offend anybody, you know."<sup>39</sup>

The video narration of Drayton's role in the expansion of the gardens also parallels Greeson's description of the popular iconic shift from English planter to American farmer.<sup>40</sup> Reverend Drayton's older brother Thomas inherited the plantation in 1825, but John became the owner after his brother died in a hunting accident. According to the video, Drayton wanted to pursue a minister's life, with no interest in "property or prestige," and the "unexpected pressures" of suddenly managing a plantation caused him to contract tuberculosis. Nelson then describes how Reverend Drayton's doctors suggested that he work with the soil to improve his health. "So John walked out of the house at Magnolia and went in the garden to where Adam Bennett and some other slaves were working," the video narration states, "and he came hand-to-hand and shoulder-to-shoulder with them, working just as they were to dig into the ground."

This description serves as the first introduction in the video of the significance of enslaved African Americans, particularly Adam Bennett, in cultivating the gardens at Magnolia, but it also reframes Reverend Drayton from a plantation owner and slaveholder into a virtuous farmer. The film narration then expands on how Reverend Drayton and Adam Bennett formed a close relationship working "shoulder-to-shoulder," so that Drayton learned to garden "with Adam's guidance." This description concludes

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<sup>39</sup> Iris Silk, interview, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Greeson, *Our South*, 19.

that the romantic garden is the fruit of Reverend Drayton's labor — “he made it his life's work to create a beautiful garden that would be to the glory of God.” Eichstedt and Small argue that this virtuous farmer role, like the loyal slave and benevolent slaveholder role, can be found on numerous southern plantation sites. “The idea that the hard work and effort of individual (white Americans) is what made them successful is foundational to American mythology,” they explain. On plantation tourist sites, despite the prominent role of slavery, Eichstedt and Small find that “the story of individualism is left largely intact.” This video narration suggests that it is still largely intact at Magnolia as well.<sup>41</sup>

Pointing out this misleading pattern of rugged individualism at Magnolia does not mean Reverend Drayton did not take part in extensive garden work. The problem with this representation strategy is that by highlighting his work in the gardens, the orientation video diminishes and neglects the central economic and social significance of enslaved plantation labor in the surrounding rice fields at Magnolia and on other Drayton family plantations. A separate section of the video briefly mentions rice field labor, but in contrast to the garden work prescribed by Drayton's doctor, the video depicts this labor as far from healthy. “They had to wade out into the murky swamp and successfully navigate the alligator infested waters, the malarial mosquitoes were whizzing about,” the narrator explains, “it took a great deal of labor.” Rather than investigate these contrasts in labor experiences, or more significantly expand on the history of rice agriculture and the experiences of slavery in this context, the narration abruptly shifts from this description to the next section of the video.

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<sup>41</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 165.

### *Early Tourism Representations of African Americans at Magnolia*

Newly free African Americans continued to provide much of the labor at Magnolia once the plantation became a tourist site in 1870. Though many former slaves left after Emancipation, some families, such as the Bennetts, chose to stay and work as gardeners and tour guides. As Nelson explained in a 2011 interview, “There would be a black person that would take visitors around the garden, and show them particular spots that were pretty . . . because it was easy to get lost, [they] lead them around the place.”<sup>42</sup> African Americans also appeared in Magnolia’s early promotional materials and souvenirs for tourists. As Winslow Hastie described, some postcards from the late nineteenth century feature hand-tinted photographs of African Americans working at Magnolia both during and after slavery. “It’s like ‘take your postcard of Aunt Mamie,’” Hastie observed about the souvenir postcards, “you know the commodification of slavery in a way.” The “Aunt Mamie” image he refers to still appears on the site’s orientation video, on Magnolia’s current website, and in the History Room in the house basement.<sup>43</sup> It features an older African American woman holding a broom, dressed in a kerchief, and standing beside a large, blooming azalea bush (see figure 10, page 167). The History Room caption describes her as a “garden worker” and dates the image to 1860, but this date information is absent from the website and in the video narration (though on the website she is named as “Aunt Phoebe”).

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<sup>42</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> “Magnolia History,” *Magnolia Plantation & Gardens*, accessed 11 July 2011, [http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/magnolia\\_history.html](http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/magnolia_history.html).

Hastie's observation about the marketing of slavery imagery through postcards reflects a broader pattern in early plantation tourism. Kenneth Goings argues that souvenir collectables featuring stereotypical representations of African Americans were popular among white tourists in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century because it presented a "therapeutic sense of comfort and racial superiority." Popular depictions of African Americans happily at work particularly supported the "stereotypical old south/new south myth of the loyal *happy* servant just waiting to carry out the master's-now consumer's/tourist's bidding."<sup>44</sup> When site producers represented African American labor on plantations to the public through souvenirs, they consistently romanticized the historic contexts and lived experiences of slavery and post-Emancipation labor regimes.

Despite colorful tinting on her clothes and the nearby azalea blooms, the expression of the African American woman in this Magnolia postcard appears more solemn than "happy." Regardless, the purpose of this image and hand-tinting is to depict a "picturesque" context rather than an individual experience. As Nina Silber explains, while early Lowcountry tourists considered African Americans to be "objects of the tourist adventure," travel literature generally presented African Americans and their labor as best appreciated from a distance, as an innate part of the pastoral plantation landscape.<sup>45</sup> "By the late nineteenth century," argues Silber, "both Europeans and Americans used the picturesque formula to render possibly threatening features of society

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Goings, "Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose Travel the USA: The Marketing of Memory Through Tourist Souvenirs," in *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism*, Graham M.S. Dann and A.V. Seaton, editors (New York, New York: The Haworth Press, 2001), 134-135.

<sup>45</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 78.



— such as poverty and the underclass — safe and amusing.”<sup>46</sup> In the Lowcountry, the artwork of Charleston painter Alice Ravenel Huger Smith (1876-1958) helped popularize the “picturesque” framing of plantation landscapes and African American labor throughout the United States. Smith often painted African Americans as “amorphous, faceless types,” writes Stephanie Yuhl, “figures that tend to melt into the agricultural landscape,” while white figures in her paintings emerge as “much better defined and undeniably individual.”<sup>47</sup>

I found another souvenir collectable image of Magnolia in the College of Charleston’s Special Collections that further demonstrates this pattern of framing laboring black bodies as an innate, amorphous part of the landscape. This stereograph image is part of a “Drayton Hall Series” from the 1890s, and it depicts five African Americans sweeping Magnolia Plantation’s live oak-lined entrance road (see figure 2, page 162). Photographer F. A. Nowell framed the shot from such a distance that faces are scarcely visible and emotions are indiscernible. The information on the back of the stereograph card does not mention the individuals working on the front; instead it provides a brief description of the plantation owners and conveys nostalgia for a pastoral “South.” Like the orientation video, it also concludes with praise for the beauty of Magnolia’s landscape:

The Grounds, Lakes, Lawns and Avenue of Oaks, serve to make this one of the loveliest abodes in the South, and the forests of Camellias and Chinese Azaleas, blooming beneath huge Magnolias and Live Oaks, attract many visitors.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> Stereograph image of Magnolia Plantation, “Drayton Hall Series,” F.A. Nowell, photographer, ca. 1890s, Drayton family archives, College of Charleston Special Collections, Charleston, South Carolina.

The orientation video narration asserts that working as a “gardener” after Emancipation was a “better job” for free African Americans than being a sharecropper. But lack of social history in the site’s garden tour interpretation means that the work and skills of early African American gardeners remains largely overlooked by Magnolia visitors.<sup>49</sup> Twenty-first century site producers generally represent the gardens as an aesthetic, leisurely experience, rather than a product of human design and labor. The skills and effort African American gardeners provided were remarkable, and essential to Magnolia’s reputation. The 1903 Baedeker’s Guide described Magnolia’s gardens as one of the top destinations in the United States (along with Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon), because it was one of the first gardens to use azaleas in its landscaping, and for its historic camellia collection.<sup>50</sup> With recent scholarly investigations into the influence of African and African American skills on early U.S. industries and crafts, such as cattle wrangling, rice cultivation, ironwork, and foodways, what did enslaved and later free African American gardeners contribute to the design and science of American horticulture?

In 2011 I interviewed Magnolia’s garden supervisor, Isaac Leach, an African American man who acquired his expertise through multiple generations of African American gardeners passing down their skills at Magnolia. Adam Bennett (the enslaved man prominently featured in Magnolia’s antebellum history representations) trained his sons, John and Ezekial, to supervise Magnolia’s gardens after Emancipation. Leach’s

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<sup>49</sup> Hastie, interview, 2009. As Hastie pointed out, “there hasn’t been a lot of studies of African American contributions to horticulture.”

<sup>50</sup> Hastie, interview, 2009. This Baedeker’s Guide ranking for Magnolia is also noted on various Magnolia brochures.

grandfather moved to Magnolia from a neighboring Lowcountry plantation, and Bennett's sons in turn trained him, and he then passed his garden expertise to his son, Johnny, and finally his grandson, Isaac. "My grandfather worked here for about 60 to 65 years, and now my father, he's been here for 65 years, loved every bit of it," Isaac Leach explained in 2011, "but I'll be here for 70 years, so I'll have it over on them . . . I just love [Magnolia] and wouldn't be anywhere else but here."<sup>51</sup>

Leach expressed great dedication to his job, but in contrast to site representations that emphasize the leisure of the gardens, he depicted Magnolia's gardens as places of work. "After I got out of school I came in to work with my father in the nursery part, propagation, loadings trucks — load ten to fifteen thousand plants on a truck every other day," he explained, "working with my father was always harder, because I'm his son — you gonna work." By 2011, Johnny Leach was eighty-eight years old and semi-retired, but he continued to work part-time at Magnolia. "He gets up at 3:30 in the morning. He's a worker for his age," Leach described his father. "He never liked to work with anyone, he prefers to work by himself. . . . so he cuts down trees, gets someone to take it out of the way."<sup>52</sup>

Changing representations of Magnolia's gardens from subduing the wilderness, to recreating paradise, to the work of virtuous independent white labor, obscured both the enslaved African American labor in the rice fields and African American work and contributions in the gardens during and after slavery. Today, site representations could more effectively and directly encourage visitors to understand the gardens as a space of

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<sup>51</sup> Isaac Leach, interview with the author, 15 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>52</sup> Leach, interview, 2011.

African American labor history, and American social history, as well as aesthetic beauty and design. African Americans were not background features in this landscape, despite how they were framed in early postcard images. Isaac Leach's interactions with visitors also suggest that neglecting this labor history can create tensions for tourism audiences. "I've met a lot of people from up North," he said, "and they say, well how can you — how do you feel as an African American, how do you feel working at a plantation?"<sup>53</sup>

As I will describe in the second chapter, the Leaches not only worked in Magnolia's gardens for three generations, they also lived on the plantation grounds, in one of the cabins now featured on the From Slavery to Freedom tour. Descriptions of their experiences working and living at Magnolia during the twentieth century civil rights movement are a striking feature of the Cabin Project. But in the self-guided garden tour, representations of the Leaches' work experiences, or of the contributions and labor provided by the Bennetts and other African American gardeners at Magnolia since the gardens were established in the seventeenth century, continue to be minimal. Expanding representations of African American work in the gardens, as well as the social meaning of gardens over time, could serve as a powerful way to challenge the traditionally exclusive representation strategies of aesthetic beauty and escape. Such transformation could open up possibilities for the entire site to more cohesively incorporate inclusive social history interpretation within the gardens as well as the cabins and house.

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<sup>53</sup> Leach, interview, 2011.

### *Family Directors and Representation Layers*

When Reverend Drayton first opened Magnolia's gardens to the public in 1870, he became the first in a line of Drayton family directors to manage the plantation as a private, for-profit tourist site. This single-director management and for-profit funding structure would distinctly shape how Magnolia's tours and attractions developed and changed over the next century. Directors at Magnolia did not have to answer to broader government or institutional standards found at a national or state parks, or non-profit foundation-based historic sites in the Charleston area by the late twentieth century. As one local tour guide described Magnolia's management, "It was their place and they can run it how they want."<sup>54</sup>

When a site relies on ticket sales to remain open, popular appeal and the changing trends of visitor interests become priorities. While different directors at Magnolia could shape the site's representations, they based these choices on their perceptions of visitor interests. When a new family director developed a new representation strategy, he did not cancel out earlier representations or reorganize the site. Instead, he layered it onto pre-existing representations. New attractions became another item on the tour menu at Magnolia. In 2011, former Magnolia director Taylor Drayton Nelson described the cumulative effect of over one hundred and forty years of different directors adding attraction layers at Magnolia as "homespun." Cabin Project assistant director Preston Cooley further asserted that Magnolia's disjointed appearance gave the site a reputation for being the "Six Flags" of plantation tourism in Charleston.<sup>55</sup> Recounting the history of

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<sup>54</sup> Alada Shinault-Small, interview with the author, 20 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>55</sup> Cooley, interview, 2011.

Magnolia's family directors helps clarify how and why each of these "homespun" attraction layers developed at Magnolia. This tourism history context also reveals future strategies for cohesively engaging these layers in the site's interpretation.

After Reverend Drayton's death in 1890, management of Magnolia passed to his daughter Julia Drayton Hastie and her children. By the early twentieth century, Reverend Drayton's grandson Norwood Hastie was the director, but descriptions from interviews about his management generally detail lavish parties and celebrities at Magnolia in the "roaring twenties" more than changing the site attractions. Like his grandfather and mother, Norwood Hastie maintained Magnolia as a leisurely garden destination, though Nelson noted that he did significantly expand media publicity for the site.<sup>56</sup> More dramatic changes came to Magnolia in 1975, when Norwood's entrepreneurial brother Drayton took over management. In our interview, Winslow Hastie described his grandfather Drayton Hastie as the "P.T. Barnum" of Magnolia, because he sought to increase tourism revenue by making the site more recreational and "family-friendly." He opened the site year round (rather than seasonally from January to May), and added a petting zoo, a nature tram and boat ride, a house tour with a gift shop, and a café. As described earlier, he also added small interpretive signs throughout the site, featuring historic narratives based on popular culture and family lore rather than scholarly research.

When Drayton Hastie passed away in 2002, his grandson Taylor Drayton Nelson became the site director. A recent college graduate from Brown University with a degree in economics, Nelson admitted that he did not have a great interest in managing his

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<sup>56</sup> Cooley, interview, 2011.

family's plantation tourist site in Charleston. As he explained in a 2011 interview, he ultimately took the position because his grandfather needed another family member to manage the site, and Nelson needed a job. "It was just fortuitous timing," he stated. As a more hands-off director than his grandfather, Nelson also proved to be more open to engaging outside professionals and scholarly research for the site's interpretation. This new input led him to become more interested in addressing African American history and slavery on the site. Soon after he took over management, he began to collaborate with outside professionals and organizations to renovate and interpret the cabins formerly occupied by African Americans during and after slavery. In 2007, when this project was still under development, other family descendants asked to be involved. Nelson ceded his director position to a family board structure, made up of two of Drayton Hastie's children and five of his grandchildren (including Nelson). This family board continues to manage the site today.

Nelson's cousin Winslow Hastie serves as a significant voice in this new board management structure. He worked at an architecture firm in San Francisco, California, that specialized in historic preservation before moving back to Charleston in 2005, where he became the Director of Preservation and Museums for the Historic Charleston Foundation.<sup>57</sup> With Winslow's professional background, historic preservation increasingly influences the family board's goals to reframe the site's representation priorities. "Since my grandfather's death, we've really tried to focus on improving visitor

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<sup>57</sup> As their website describes, "Established in 1947, Historic Charleston Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve and protect the historical, architectural and material culture that make up Charleston's rich and irreplaceable heritage. The Foundation seeks to achieve this through active advocacy, participation in community planning, educational and volunteer programs, the preservation of properties, research; and technical and financial assistance programs." *Historic Charleston Foundation*, accessed online 11 July 2011, <http://www.historiccharleston.org/>

experience and focusing more on being a real, authentic historic site, as much as we can,” he noted. “The African American cabins [were] sort of our first significant foray into that realm.” Winslow Hastie’s professional experience in preservation can be a great asset to Magnolia’s future, but the board will have to prioritize and invest in researched, inclusive social history interpretation as well as preservation to effectively transform the site.

The following subsections briefly address how different directors influenced and adapted Magnolia’s representation strategies in the twentieth century. Through these descriptions, I also present an interpretive possibility for making this dynamic tourism history more visible to visitors in the site’s traditional tour spaces. Guided focus tours, more apparent signs, or an exhibition that includes information about changing plantation representations in the house and gardens, could more effectively and cohesively engage the site’s homespun layers in inclusive interpretation strategies. Addressing the dynamic history of late nineteenth and twentieth century plantation nostalgia at Magnolia could also help articulate to visitors how the site’s representations developed over time within specific race, class, political, and popular culture contexts. Highlighting, rather than obscuring, these historic problems with the site’s traditional representation strategies could then prompt visitors to consider the social and labor histories of plantation spaces long overlooked in tourism contexts, such as the cabins and fields.

#### *Norwood Hastie: 1920s-1970s*

One of Norwood Hastie’s major contributions as a director at Magnolia was increasing and updating the site’s promotional materials. By the mid-twentieth century, magazine advertisements featuring white female models, smiling brightly among



Magnolia's azaleas, replaced the earlier postcard images of "picturesque" African American figures in the plantation landscape. As Nelson described, his great-uncle sought to expand Magnolia's publicity in the twentieth century as Charleston became a major tourist destination. House manager Leigh Scott points out that tourism "really started" at Magnolia in the 1920s, because tourists could travel more conveniently and quickly by automobile, rather than traveling down the Ashley River by steamboat, like sightseers in the 1875 *Harper's* article.<sup>58</sup> The realities of antebellum plantation history seem even more distant in these colorful garden images, particularly as the models promote consumer products such as Chesterfield cigarettes as much as the specific tourism destination of Magnolia (see figures 3 and 4, page 163).

Norwood Hastie featured the gardens in his outreach and tied the plantation's landscape to an idyllic fantasy of the South. "He was kind of tireless in getting publicity for the garden," Nelson explained. "He put advertisements in the newspaper, telling people when the peak bloom was. It really became a kind of event in the South."<sup>59</sup> Isaac Leach, who started working for Norwood Hastie as a teenager, explained that while he may have changed the publicity, Norwood did not change the gardens. "He was more or less into maintaining the camellias," Leach observed, "the azaleas and all the older stuff, and just keeping those up."<sup>60</sup> Preston Cooley described how Norwood and his wife Sarah also hosted major parties in the 1920s and 30s: "you had all kinds of people coming to these parties . . . I mean these were big deal parties." The "20<sup>th</sup> Century" section of the

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<sup>58</sup> Leigh Scott, interview with the author, 17 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>59</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Leach, interview, 2011.

orientation video features images of famous figures who stayed at Magnolia at this time, including George Gershwin as he was writing *Porgy and Bess*, Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and a young Orson Welles, while the video narrator proclaims “the Charleston Renaissance brought the social world of the Jazz Age to Magnolia.” Though the video narration fails to mention them, Cooley also noted the influential role of African American musicians who played at these parties in Charleston’s 1920s and 30s Jazz history, such as the Jenkins Orphanage Band.<sup>61</sup>

The Charleston Renaissance artistic movement that took place in this area during Norwood Hastie’s tenure reveals how a new generation of elite Charleston society members could reframe the antebellum past for their interests. As David Blight points out, “like all great mythologies, the Lost Cause changed with succeeding generations and shifting political circumstances.”<sup>62</sup> In the 1890s, Lost Cause memorials of the 1870s went from the defense of a “righteous rebellion” to sectional reunion on “southern terms,” through a romanticized Jim Crow racial hierarchy in a southern landscape.<sup>63</sup> By the 1920s and 30s, at the height of the Charleston Renaissance, belief in this narrative of southern memory was “almost subconscious.” As Yuhl explains, in contrast to the

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<sup>61</sup> The Jenkins Orphanage Band formed at an orphanage for African American children in Charleston that Reverend Daniel Jenkins opened in 1891. Jenkins wanted to purchase farmland to teach the children to be self-sufficient, but when he struggled to obtain financial donations, he requested gifts of instruments instead and found those easier to obtain. He then started the Jenkins Orphanage Band, based on “pickaninny” brass bands that were popular in minstrel shows of the 1800s. The band gradually started touring cities up and down the eastern coast, building their reputation and popularity. In 1905, the Jenkins Orphanage Band played in President Roosevelt’s presidential parade. By the 1920s they became great promoters of jazz and ragtime music, and eventually were credited with starting the “Charleston” dance trend, based on “geechie” dance steps. Julie Hubbert, *Symposia: Jenkins Orphanage*, University of South Carolina, accessed 22 October 2011, <http://www.sc.edu/orphanfilm/orphanage/symposia/scholarship/hubbert/jenkins-orphanage.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 258, 264.

<sup>63</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 258.

Southern Literary Renaissance and Harlem Renaissance also stirring at this time, the Charleston Renaissance did not struggle with questions of identity, and did not consider the past to be a “negative burden.” Instead, local white elites demonstrated “a largely uncritical approach to a received tradition of place.” They “internalized” memories passed down from their elders and “located their privilege to speak for Charleston” through these bloodlines, particularly to outsiders in the burgeoning tourism industry.<sup>64</sup> The young “movers and shakers” of this generation had not experienced antebellum plantation life, the Civil War, or Reconstruction, so they interpreted pre-Civil War history to “suit their psychological needs for continuity and control in a changing world.”<sup>65</sup> History in this context functioned as a religious faith, an obscuring mystique, used to form vague claims of “authenticity” that legitimized the power of this narrative.<sup>66</sup>

Norwood Hastie’s advertising strategies reflect this unquestioning reverence and nostalgia for the past. Brochures and advertisements for Magnolia up until the 1970s continually look to the past for their promotional material to assert the site’s present identity as a tourist attraction, though this selective exercise still did not involve historic interpretation. Instead, the aesthetic beauty of the gardens served as a “mystique” representation strategy to evoke the antebellum past. A Magnolia brochure from the 1950s demonstrates this continued theme of nostalgia and escape in the gardens. Entitled “World’s Most Beautiful Garden,” the brochure displays images of blooming azaleas, accompanied by quotes referring to Reverend Drayton’s gardening work in the 1830s, as

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<sup>64</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 11.

<sup>65</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 9.

well as the 1903 Baedeker's Guide ranking, and a description of finding peace in the gardens from "world unrest." The brochure also claims that mothers should bring their children to Magnolia, because "unruly youngsters walk reverently and star-eyed through the heavenly beauty."

By the 1970s, the appeal of this promotional emphasis on Magnolia as a garden paradise seemed to wane. In various interviews, staff at Magnolia explained that Drayton family descendants considered selling Magnolia at this time, particularly when their cousins next door decided to sell Drayton Hall to the National Trust in 1974. Norwood Hastie sought the tax benefits of historic designation on the National Register, which it formally received in 1969, to offset the costs of managing the site as a tourist attraction.<sup>67</sup> But rather than sell Magnolia, Norwood's entrepreneurial brother Drayton bought Norwood's share and took over management of the site in 1975.<sup>68</sup> Like his brother, Drayton expressed an assumed reverence for the past and did not challenge the central promotional focus on the gardens, but he also saw lucrative potential in the five-hundred-acre site for *additional* attractions, and decided to maintain family ownership. "He added different facets to the place," Nelson explained, "to really try to make it a more viable tourism attraction that was able to support itself, because the garden had been losing money." The "essential elements" of antebellum Charleston history as a nostalgic theme from the 1920s and 30s remained in place at Magnolia, but with Drayton Hastie's

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<sup>67</sup> Cooley, interview, 2011. Tucker, interview, 2011. For more information on National Register designation see *National Register of Historic Places*, accessed 11 July 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/index.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Edward C. Fennell, "Magnolia Gardens Sold," newspaper article clipping (unknown source) in Drayton Hastie's scrapbook, 3 December 1975, 1B, Magnolia Plantation & Garden archives, Charleston, South Carolina.

leadership this frame of “leisure and escape” shifted to include multi-use, recreational activities.<sup>69</sup> By the late 1970s and 80s, brochures for Magnolia displayed many more attractions than azaleas, with hopes of appealing to a new generation of visitors.

***Drayton Hastie: 1970s to Early 2000s***

In 2011, house manager Leigh Scott allowed me to explore a side room of the main house at Magnolia that contains the site archives. Without formal organization, the room functions as a storage space for extra pieces of furniture and antiques, as well as boxes of older promotional materials and scrapbooks that Drayton Hastie kept from 1975 to 2002.<sup>70</sup> One scrapbook contains a memo that outlines the numerous changes Drayton made to the site, and documents the motivation for his dramatic shift in representation strategies. “In response to the objectives of the South Carolina P.R.T. [Parks Recreation and Tourism] and the Charleston Chamber that South Carolina tourist attractions attempt to offer facilities to lengthen the stay of visitors in this area,” the memo begins, “Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in 1976 took the following steps.”<sup>71</sup> The document then describes over twenty-five additions or changes Drayton Hastie made to the site in his first year as director. These included opening the site year round, adding a petting zoo, a ranch for miniature horses, nature walks, a wildlife preserve, canoe rides and bicycle trails, a gift shop, a restaurant, and scheduling regular weekend events such as “bands, country music, art shows, water shows, square dances, etc.” He also introduced a number

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<sup>69</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Other early promotional materials for Charleston area plantations, including Magnolia, are also archived at the Charleston County Public Library and the College of Charleston Special Collections, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>71</sup> Memo found in Drayton Hastie’s scrapbooks in Magnolia’s Archives in April 2011. Documented not dated, but presumably it was written shortly after changes implemented in 1976.

of new plants to the gardens, so that it would be in bloom over a longer period of time.

The memo only mentions history in the last section, entitled “Improved Incidental Facilities.” After doubling the size of the restrooms, installing underground electrical wires, and widening roads, he also lists:

- (d) placing signs throughout the area which describe items of plantation interest
- (e) clearing a prehistoric Indian Mound for viewing
- (f) clearing of brush and opening for inspection the old slave graveyard
- (g) extending parking areas

According to his memo, Drayton sought to “lengthen the stay of visitors” by diversifying the offerings, so the site was more “family friendly.” In our interview, Nelson stated that his grandfather initially put up the small “plantation interest” signs because he believed men needed something to do while women looked at the flowers.<sup>72</sup> Children, however, concerned him the most. Contrary to instilling awe, as Norwood Hastie’s brochure claimed, a *Post & Courier* newspaper article in 1975 quoted Drayton stating that “there isn’t enough for children to do in Charleston.” He argued that families prefer to go on longer beach vacations in Florida rather than take historic tours in Charleston.<sup>73</sup> For Drayton, the petting zoo and miniature horse ranch were high priorities because they tackled the problem of entertaining children and attracting families. He also applied this family-friendly strategy to the site’s promotional materials, by changing earlier brochure headlines such as “Most Beautiful Gardens in the World” to “Year round Enjoyment For the Whole Family,” and adding pictures of children playing with animals and families on boat rides alongside images of azaleas and camellias. The gardens

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<sup>72</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> “Magnolia Gardens Sold,” *Post & Courier*; Charleston, South Carolina, 1B, 1975.

remained a focal point, but under Drayton, Magnolia's publicity increasingly advertised the site as a "multi-use" tourist plantation.

### *Just a Home, Not a Museum*

With the enduring popularity of *Gone with the Wind*'s Tara, as well as the success of numerous house tours in Charleston (including the Georgian-Palladian style colonial house next door at Drayton Hall), Hastie would have been well aware of the appeal of southern "big house" mansions on plantation sites.<sup>74</sup> So in 1976, a popular year for historic tourism due to the nation's bicentennial, he decided to move his family out of the main house and open it for guided tours. A flyer entitled "Magnolia Plantation House Unique" reveals Hastie's awareness of the house tour's unorthodox features in the context of "Historic Charleston," particularly its pre-Civil War use as a hunting lodge, and its mid-twentieth century modern upgrades. But that did not discourage him. To assert the house's historic credentials, the flyer emphasizes the ancestral lineage of the Drayton family at Magnolia, and the fate of the original colonial and antebellum houses on the site. In the last paragraph, he notes that a hunting lodge that has functioned as the family residence since 1870 could also introduce a distinctive interpretive opportunity. "[The house] provides a glimpse of plantation living since the Civil War encompassing the difficult days of the Reconstruction period," the flyer reads, "and the economic stagnation

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<sup>74</sup> During the time period of my research (2007-2012), a number of house guides still noted that tourists come to southern plantation sites expecting to see a house that looks like Tara from the film version of *Gone With The Wind* (1949). Notably in the book, Tara is a less elaborate structure, and does not feature iconic white columns. Regardless, over half a century after its release, the film version of this book continues to serve as a visual reference point for southern plantation sites, including Magnolia. Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War & The Plantation Legend* (New York, New York: Abbeville Press, 1995). Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagine South* (Durham, North Carolina and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2003).

that engulfed the Southern economy until after the First World War.”<sup>75</sup> Interpreting the Reconstruction era through the house would have been a unique choice in contrast to the prevalent antebellum or colonial focus of other historic sites in Charleston. But the last line of the flyer offers a succinct explanation of the direction Hastie ultimately took with Magnolia’s house interpretation — “It is still just a home, not a museum.” Hastie sought to fulfill consumer expectations rather than provide professional “museum” interpretation, so with this disclaimer he opened the tour based around his own perceptions of plantation house aesthetics.

To give the house a more aged feel, Drayton began to collect antiques that appeared to date from antebellum or colonial periods to fill the various rooms, while his wife, Fernanda, constructed a tour narrative for house guides.<sup>76</sup> The volunteer base that she drew from to interpret the house generally consisted of white women, middle to upper-class retirees or housewives, who were either local or recent transplants to the area.<sup>77</sup> Fernanda Hastie and her new staff of female guides in the 1970s followed a

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<sup>75</sup> Eve Lewis, “Magnolia Plantation House Unique,” Presentation Programs, 1977, Magnolia Plantation & Garden archives, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>76</sup> An article from Charleston’s *News & Courier*, “Plantation House Charms with Casual Country Air,” described the opening of the house in 1976. It features pictures of miniature models of machines used in local industries such as cotton ginning and phosphate mining, which were kept in one section of the house. These mechanical representations suggest further attempts by Hastie to appeal to plantation history as a “masculine” subject, but later Hastie removed them to make room for more antique furniture and decor. Nancy Jacobs, “Plantation House Charms With Casual Country Air,” *News and Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, 3 October 1976, 1E, Charleston County Public Library archives, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>77</sup> Jacobs, “Plantation House Charms,” 1976. African American history guide Alada Shinault-Small (I discuss her experiences in more detail in chapter three) volunteered on various plantation sites in the 1990s, and described how this generally white, female volunteer culture found in the house tours of Charleston historic sites was not just made up of locals, but also absorbed transplants as new industries came to the area in the 1980s and 90s. According to Shinault-Small, many guides were “wives of CEOs who were forced to do community service...one woman’s husband worked at West Banco. Another worked with something like Enterprise...Some of them were military—among the high officers it was that mandate for them to do something in the community.” Shinault-Small, interview, 2011.



pattern established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of local white elite women shaping narratives in public history spaces throughout the U.S. South and across the United States. As Fitzhugh Brundage writes, through post-Civil War memorial culture, white elite southern women “donned the mantle of ‘guardians of the past’ to a degree without precedent in the region’s history.” They drew from local sources to do this, in contrast to Europe, where the government traditionally directed public history representations.<sup>78</sup> By the early 2000s, the Cabin Project would rely on outside researchers to develop its historic narrative, but in the 1970s, Fernanda Hastie claimed authority for constructing Magnolia’s house tour narrative.

Cornelia Taylor moved to Charleston from Oklahoma in 1998, and was the last house tour guide working at Magnolia during my research timeframe who was trained by Fernanda Hastie. Her interview in 2011 reveals how Fernanda Hastie’s tour followed the patterns of object focus found throughout Charleston’s house tours. As Taylor explained, when she first started “we went through the room and talked about a lot of the furniture.” When I asked, “Did you mention slavery?” she responded, “there wasn’t much to tell.” Another house guide, Iris Silk of Columbia, South Carolina, started working at Magnolia in 2006, when a new house director led the interpretation instruction. Silk explained that Fernanda Hastie’s 1970s narrative still shaped her guide training experience, despite starting work at Magnolia in the early 2000s.<sup>79</sup> By that time, instead of working from a script, Silk explained that “you just followed other tour guides around and learned it,” or

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<sup>78</sup> Brundage, *Southern Past*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Cornelia Taylor, interview with the author, 20 April 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

as house manager Leigh Scott explained, “it was just very word of mouth.”<sup>80</sup> Without a script or training manual, changing a house tour narrative is difficult. Still, Silk noted that when she started working at Magnolia, a new generation of guides “kept questioning things . . . and maybe even wouldn’t say a lot of the things that were wrong.” In contrast, long-term guides still reiterated the narrative they absorbed in the 1970s. “A lot of the women were older than me,” said Silk, “and they had grown up in the South and they had heard these things all their lives . . . some did change, some did not.” As a more recent addition to the house guide staff, Silk found that the most problematic remnants from these early tours involved depictions of the history of slavery, particularly older guides claiming that “slaves were happy here.”<sup>81</sup> She notes guides often had personal as well as ideological reasons for their claims about this history:

I think that a lot of white folks, particularly if they are descended from plantation owners, or people that owned slaves, they don’t want to acknowledge that their family may have mistreated a person. So it’s a lot easier to believe that—“oh no, our family, they were always good to their slaves.” Like that mattered. But you know in today’s sensibilities . . . people just didn’t want to believe that.<sup>82</sup>

More recent house guide arrivals, like Silk, seem to demonstrate greater interest in moving away from the longstanding house interpretation at Magnolia, particularly, as I will describe, after many of the older guides left following changes in site management

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<sup>80</sup> Silk, interview, 2011. Scott, interview, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Silk’s more critical perspective on how the traditional tour narrative at Magnolia addresses slavery represents a shift away from many house guides who still focus on white elite history in their tours. Though I did not explicitly ask Silk how she developed her perspective, Tracey Todd (Vice President of museums at Middleton Place) noted in a 2011 interview that the timing of when a guide is trained is more influential in their understanding of plantation history and slavery than their age or regional origin. In this case, Silk appears to be at retirement age, but she started work at Magnolia in 2006, which meant she was not as immersed in traditionally exclusive approaches to the house tour as more long term guides. Tracey Todd, interview with the author, 20 October 2011, Summerville, South Carolina.

<sup>82</sup> Silk, interview, 2011.

positions in 2010. Ideally, with effective resources and support, these more adaptable guides could prove capable of embracing inclusive interpretive change.

In 2009, Winslow Hastie also noted that his work with the Historic Charleston Foundation, on sites such as the Aiken Rhett house (where the house tour features intact and interpreted slave quarters), gave him experience with “the proper methods of interpretation, having an interpretive plan” which he hopes to bring to Magnolia. As he explains, “we’ve never even had [an interpretive plan] in the house.”<sup>83</sup> After the From Slavery to Freedom tour opened, Hastie became concerned that the content of the house tour contradicted the new tour. He asked Preston Cooley, assistant director of the Cabin Project, to write a new information guide for the house in 2010. Cooley included more social history about the Drayton family, rather than just descriptions of furniture, but he avoided writing a script because he did not want the tours to sound like recited information. Instead, his information guide offers a thematic outline, and explicitly encourages guides to acknowledge African American history and slavery. Responding to this encouragement still appears to be optional.

The house guides I interviewed indicated that they consider the cabins, rather than the house, as the appropriate space for addressing slavery. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, including slavery in an African American focus tour is a significant step, but this institution and racial hierarchy defined the experiences and racial hierarchies of all plantation inhabitants, black *and* white. Though house guides at Magnolia have begun to acknowledge this history with some management encouragement, they continue to avoid

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<sup>83</sup> Winslow Hastie, interview, 2011.

making slavery and its post-Emancipation legacies of racial and economic inequalities a *central* interpretive point within the house for explaining the historic wealth and class status of the Draytons.

This segregated approach to the discussion of slavery is a serious problem on a site where visitors self-select their tours. The result, as Eichstedt and Small found on plantation sites throughout the U.S. South, is that, “it is easy to escape any real contemplation of or education about slavery.” In contrast, visitors find it “impossible to escape being informed about the magnificent architecture, the well-respected owner of the plantation or period pieces of furniture or china.”<sup>84</sup> The more established, traditional house tour may seem like the most efficient historic tour choice for visitors with limited time or budgets. “I had a group come in [to the house],” explained Magnolia house manager Leigh Scott, “the only thing they wanted to know about were the slaves . . . . And honestly my guides aren’t trained to have this record of information. ” She ultimately told the group “y’all are on the wrong tour,” and encouraged them to go on the Cabin Project tour. “I felt bad for them because they had this limited time and they were taking the house tour . . . they had no interest in the furniture.”<sup>85</sup>

This continued belief that the house narrative should primarily address furniture, or the white Drayton family, is troubling considering that enslaved and later free African Americans lived and worked in the house when it was an antebellum hunting lodge, and when it became a post-Civil War plantation home. Unfortunately the kitchen and

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<sup>84</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 171. Eichstedt and Small conducted research and identified representation patterns on 122 different plantation tourist sites in Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee (3).

<sup>85</sup> Scott, interview, 2011.

servant's quarters spaces within the house, which would be the most likely areas to emphasize this history (though slavery could be interpreted throughout the home), are not part of the tour. Drayton Hastie built the gift shop in these areas in the 1970s. Cooley also recently moved the eclectic History Room to the kitchen and quarters space beside the gift shop, but when I asked various staff members about relocating the gift shop, they responded that it brings in too much revenue. In addition, with the 2008 economic downturn, funds were not available to construct a separate gift shop building.

Nonetheless, the History Room could make more effective use of this interpretive space.

A new exhibition in this room could represent the history of white elite and African American experiences and interrelationships at Magnolia within the house, as well as address tourism and plantation mythology influences on the house. Many of the archival documents and images in the room, such as magazine advertisements and *Harper's* magazine illustrations, already speak to this history — they just need cohesive curatorial attention. This exhibition could also introduce information about slavery and post-Emancipation race and labor experiences for time-constrained visitors and set up a provocative juxtaposition to the traditional narrative of the house tour. In the long term, the house tour narrative itself must become more comprehensively inclusive of diverse social history experiences, and Magnolia directors should find a new space for the gift shop, so that the quarters and kitchen area can serve as interpretive spaces for addressing the central significance of Africans Americans *within* the house, as well as in the gardens,

cabins, and fields.<sup>86</sup> Until recently, there were no signs to convey the significance of the gift shop space, which reflects a pattern Eichstedt and Small identify as “symbolic annihilation” of African American history on plantation sites.<sup>87</sup> Site producers could begin to change this imbalance by immediately reorganizing the History Room, until site resources can support embarking on more comprehensive representation changes throughout the house.

Though the house tour is one of Drayton Hastie’s more recent tour additions in the 1970s, the site interpretation in this space seems strikingly resistant to change. In 2010, a number of older female house guides at Magnolia quit in response to shifts in house management, such as Preston Cooley’s rewriting the information guide. I interviewed Cornelia Taylor and Iris Silk in 2011 because they were the only two guides who remained from this earlier staff. “Anytime you have a transition, you know when things change, you’re going to have some fall out from that” Silk explained, “I wouldn’t relate it to the history, I think it was a difference in new management.”<sup>88</sup> In 2011 Leigh Scott also left Magnolia for another position, and Preston Cooley moved from working on the Cabin Project to becoming the house manager. Staff turnover and transitions occur regularly on tourism sites, but with this significant and ongoing staff change, perhaps the house tour at Magnolia could move towards more inclusive and complex interpretive content, if

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<sup>86</sup> Notably, site producers at nearby historic mansions such as the Aiken Rhett Mansion in downtown Charleston or the Owens-Thomas House in Savannah, Georgia have developed and implemented effective restoration and interpretation of the work and dwelling spaces of enslaved African American *within* historic homes. These sites could serve as influential examples for interpreting similar spaces in plantation houses such as Magnolia’s.

<sup>87</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 127-128.

<sup>88</sup> Silk, interview, 2011.

producers and staff can challenge their assumptions that the house is “just about the family” or furniture. While the From Slavery to Freedom tour offers a groundbreaking representation of African American history at Magnolia, as I will describe in the next chapter, the burden of being the site’s panacea for more inclusive interpretation is overwhelming for one tour. Site directors must focus on transforming the entire site.

### *Conclusion*

By 2011, members of the family board, particularly Winslow Hastie, sought to remove some of Drayton Hastie’s twentieth century additions. Hastie viewed his grandfather’s added representation layers as historically inauthentic, the source of the site’s “theme park” reputation.<sup>89</sup> But these additions demonstrate how Magnolia transitioned in the twentieth century, from a romanticized site of garden nostalgia to a “multi-use” recreational destination. Researched historic interpretation has only recently become a representation priority at this site. Erasing these additions as inaccurate misses the influential role they played in Magnolia’s tourism history and the site’s nostalgic narrative development. The marketing dynamics behind these strategies and additions similarly shaped historic tourism sites and tours throughout Charleston. Hastie’s additions, as well as earlier site representations based on the “earthly paradise” of the gardens, are examples of broader patterns in how tourism strategies obscured the history of race, class, and slavery in Lowcountry plantation destinations. Interpreting, rather than removing, these layers of representation history could reveal a striking educational

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<sup>89</sup> In a 2010 interview, Winslow Hastie discussed trying to remove many additions made by his grandfather in the twentieth century, including the porch and hollow white columns around the house. Hastie, interview, 2010.

resource by making the site's dynamic tourism history visible. This interpretive opportunity would be strikingly relevant to the oldest "man made" tourism destination in the southeast, and could help challenge many of the historic assumptions and fantasies visitors bring to plantation spaces. This approach could also make different leisure and recreation additions at Magnolia a cohesive part of the site's historic interpretations, rather than functioning as disjointed attractions. Otherwise, the From Slavery to Freedom tour will continue to be an exceptional, rather than cohesive part of the tour experience for visitors on the site, and the inclusive historic education it introduces will continue to be undermined by the site's longstanding representation framework of white elite nostalgia, aesthetic beauty, and recreation.



## Chapter Two

### The Cabin Project

#### Introducing an African American History Tour to Magnolia Plantation

##### *Introduction: A New Addition*

In June 2009 I went on the From Slavery to Freedom tour at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens in Charleston for the first time. I pulled into the driveway behind a line of cars, inching towards the ticket booth, just as I had on my first visit to the site in 2007. This time, looking over the worn wooden sign by the booth listing tours and prices, I noticed a new board on the bottom, announcing the addition of this African American history tour. The board had been nailed to the sign just below Magnolia's standard offerings — Basic Admission: Gardens and Grounds, House Tour, Nature Tram, Nature Boat, and Audubon Swamp Garden (see figure 14, page 169). Visitors pay fifteen dollars to enter the grounds; the additional tours cost another seven dollars each.<sup>90</sup> Former Magnolia director Drayton Hastie introduced most of these tours in the 1970s, except for the gardens, which had been open to the public since the plantation became a tourist destination in 1870. This new From Slavery to Freedom tour, also known as the Cabin Project, offered a guided interpretation of five cabins formerly inhabited by enslaved and later free African Americans who lived at Magnolia. Site producers opened it for the first time in March 2009.

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<sup>90</sup> These were the prices in 2009. By 2010 Magnolia raised the additional tour prices to eight dollars per tour.

The amended sign demonstrated what was groundbreaking and problematic about the From Slavery to Freedom tour at Magnolia — it was a new addition to an old tour menu. Despite this tacked-on appearance, as I conducted observations and interviews at Magnolia from 2007 to 2011, I found that this tour was not just an addition, but also a striking shift away from the site’s traditional representation strategies. For over 140 years, different descendants of the Drayton family managed Magnolia as a privately owned, for-profit site that featured attractions based on white elite nostalgia, gardens escape and leisure, and family recreation. This longstanding interpretive framework did not represent a benign longing for the past. Instead, such nostalgic narratives on plantation sites served as a rhetorical strategy after the Civil War to marginalize the significance of slavery, promote reconciliation between white southerners and northerners to benefit inter-regional business and political interests, and to enable white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation in the twentieth century.<sup>91</sup> In the Charleston area, this narrative strategy also served as the popular “branding” theme of the burgeoning tourism industry. Historic guides in downtown mansions, forts, and plantations such as Magnolia focused almost exclusively on white elite experiences and material culture in their tours, and either romanticized or entirely excluded discussions of African American life during and after slavery.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>92</sup> Fitzhugh Brundage, *Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London UK: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 15. Stephanie Yuhl, *The Golden Haze of Memory*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

The tumultuous era of twentieth century civil rights activism introduced significant changes in race, class, and gender hierarchies and identities in the United States, but a nostalgic representation framework remained dominant in Charleston's historic tourism industry.<sup>93</sup> At Magnolia, it was not until the early twenty-first century that changes within the plantation's management structure, and in broader public history trends towards multicultural inclusion, converged to instigate the cabin restoration process and development of an African American history tour. One of the greatest challenges this new addition continues to face is that site producers present it as a separate and optional tour, rather than a central narrative throughout the site. At the time I was conducting research, the white elite historic representations in the house and gardens remained unchanged. Once the Cabin Project tour opened, if visitors had questions about African American history or slavery on a house tour, rather than address those subjects, house guides suggested visitors go on the new tour.<sup>94</sup> The problem with this approach is that a historic site cannot effectively address the history of slavery and post-Emancipation racial hierarchies through one tour addition. An isolated African American history tour cannot counterbalance an overarching plantation representation framework of white elite

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<sup>93</sup> As plantation tourism researchers Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small ask, "How is it that, decades after the first civil rights legislation was passed and Black racial justice activism rocked the United States, most of the sites we explored still engage in symbolic annihilation and trivialization? That is an important question not only for the plantation museum industry, but also for the other facets of social life, education, and regimes of representation that are deeply socialized." David Butler and Jessica Adams also find that white elite nostalgia thrives on late twentieth and early twenty-first century plantation sites throughout the U.S. South for the purpose of generating experiences of leisure and escape, rather than complex history education, particularly regarding the central role of slavery. Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 21. Jessica Adams, "Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture," *Cultural Critique*, No. 42 (Spring 1999), 63-187. David Butler, "Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South," Graham M. S. Dann and A.V. Seaton, editors, *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism* (New York, New York City: Haworth Press, 2001), 169.

<sup>94</sup> Iris Silk, interview with the author, 20 April 2011, Charleston, South Carolina. Leigh Scott, interview with the author, 17 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

nostalgia, or its more recent ties to recreation or leisure. To effectively engage African American history, plantation sites must “discursively reshape” the interpretative strategies, source materials, and rhetoric of representations throughout the entire site.<sup>95</sup>

Why should a private, for-profit plantation site such as Magnolia make these significant changes, particularly when their traditional strategies have kept them financially solvent for well over a century? Rather than old representations giving way to new, why not just have “something for everybody”? With an additional tour, visitors seeking white elite “moonlight and magnolias” escape, and visitors seeking scholarship-based discussions of African American history, can both come to Magnolia and find what they are looking for. They may even go on the house and garden tours *and* the Cabin Project tour, and still not confront the connection between the wealth and luxury of the slaveholders and the experiences and struggles of the enslaved. Tara McPherson identifies this dual understanding of southern plantation history, employed by predominantly white audiences, as “lenticular logic.” Through this representation strategy “histories or images that are actually co-present get presented (structurally, ideologically) so that only one of the images can be seen at a time,” she explains. “Such an arrangement represses connection, allowing whiteness to float free from blackness, denying the logical historical imbrications of racial markers and racial meaning in the South.”<sup>96</sup> Lenticular logic on a plantation site would enable house and garden tours to continue to emphasize leisurely escape or white elite material culture, rather than developing inclusive

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<sup>95</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Politics, Theory* (London, UK and New York, New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.

<sup>96</sup> Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, North Carolina and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.

discussions of plantation slavery or post-Emancipation labor regimes, even with the addition of an African American history tour. In 2001, tourism and marketing scholars Bronwyn Jewell and John C. Crotts conducted a survey of the “underlying motives and needs” of visitors on neighboring plantation site Drayton Hall and found that their survey participants were already enacting this logic. According to this study, “stop repeating the mistakes of the past” was less important than having “a satisfying leisure experience, where pleasure and learning are complementary.”<sup>97</sup> Their findings suggest that an “additional,” compartmentalized approach to inclusive historic interpretation should be agreeable for most Charleston area tourists.

Despite the convenience and seeming acceptance of “something for everybody” tours, once Magnolia opened the Cabin Project in 2009, the interpretive strategies, source materials, and information presented on this tour did lead some visitors to question historic interpretations throughout the site. As I described earlier, TripAdvisor comments about Magnolia Plantation since the Cabin Project opened in 2009 suggest that visitors noticed and critiqued the disjointed narratives of different historic tours on the site.<sup>98</sup> The tour may have effectively challenged the plantation representation expectations of traditional site visitors, but these responses could also be attributed to the new types of plantation visitors the tour attracted. Several historic interpreters on Charleston plantation

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<sup>97</sup> Bronwyn Jewell and John C. Crotts, “Adding Psychological Value to Heritage Tourism Experiences Revisited,” *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Volume 26, No. 3 (Routledge, May-June 2009), 244.

<sup>98</sup> As I noted in the first chapter introduction, TripAdvisor comments suggested many visitors also saw the From Slavery to Freedom tour as an improvement over other site tours and attractions. “Magnolia Plantation & Gardens,” *TripAdvisor*, accessed 28 April 2011, [http://www.TripAdvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g54171-d104636-Reviews-Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_Gardens-Charleston\\_South\\_Carolina.html](http://www.TripAdvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d104636-Reviews-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html)

sites, including at Magnolia, noted that they observed an increase in African American visitors starting in the early 2000s. Many also noted a general increase in visitors of various backgrounds and ethnicities who asked questions about the history of slavery and African American experiences, due to prior exposure to information about this history before visiting the site.<sup>99</sup> With the addition of an African American history tour, the standard plantation site visitor began to change.

The contrast in interpretive strategies between the house and garden tours and the Cabin Project tour went beyond subject matter. Representing African American history not only changes *who* or *what* the tour is about, but also *how* project developers construct interpretation. In her research on representations of slavery at Colonial Williamsburg, Lisa Woolfork argues that this comprehensive change occurs because the subject of African American history requires significantly different interpretive strategies. White elite plantation history representations traditionally rely on descriptions of luxury objects and elaborate buildings to assert connections to the past. The broader historic contexts of these objects are often secondary in tour narratives to lengthy descriptions of the financial worth and design of antiques and architecture. In contrast, the material culture and historic resources available for African American history interpretation on plantation sites require more complex explanations. Guides must emphasize “conjecture,” and the

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<sup>99</sup> For example, Michael Allen, who has been working with the Charleston area National Park Service since the 1980s, noted in a 2009 interview that by the twenty-first century visitors seemed to *arrive* for tours with more prior knowledge about slavery. He suggested this may be due to increased Internet access to history information. Sharon Murray also noted in a 2007 interview that when she first started working for Boone Hall Plantation in the 1990s, she would make a point to speak to any African American visitors she saw on the site because they were such a rare occurrence. By the early 2000s, she saw African American visitors daily, though white visitors still made up the overwhelming majority of Boone Hall tourists. I describe both of these historic interpreters further in chapter three. Michael Allen, interview with the author, 9 January 2009, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Sharon Murray, interview with the author, 15 August 2007, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

“inability to know” as they describe this history, rather than assuming that “object equals truth.” Woolfork asserts that in a museum or historic site, this shift encourages more effective and accurate historic interpretation in general, because it “eschews the museum’s ‘hegemony of objects’ and highlights what the museum aims to keep hidden: that the museum and its objects are not mimetic facts or truth but rather are created and assembled.”<sup>100</sup> In this way, the interpretation strategies of the From Slavery to Freedom tour at Magnolia cannot rest easy next to the object focus of earlier tours. The material culture available for interpreting African American history at many plantations, such as artifacts found in archaeological digs and cabin structures in the case of Magnolia, requires historic context to understand their significance. Rather than fetishizing the object, the social relationship between the object and the individual who used it often becomes the focus of African American history interpretation.<sup>101</sup> As interpreters and visitors increasingly engage such representation strategies and research for one tour, what is missing, or underdeveloped, on other tours and representations at the same site is more apparent.

When I first interviewed Cabin Project director D.J. Tucker in 2009, he was optimistic about the potential for the new tour to influence other historic representations at Magnolia. “We exist right now in a bubble,” Tucker explained, “but you’ve got members of the family. . . who are looking at other aspects of the site’s interpretation, shaking their heads and going ‘Oh my God, we’ve got to do something about [house and

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<sup>100</sup> Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 176.

<sup>101</sup> Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, 179.

garden representations]. This is so unbelievable.’ So they may do something completely different.”<sup>102</sup> Such comments suggest that Magnolia Plantation stands at a developmental crossroads in the twenty-first century. Site producers and interpreters can either attempt to contain the dissonance between these recent African American history additions and traditional white elite history representations in separate spaces and tours, constructing what Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small describe as “segregation of knowledge,” or they can push towards more comprehensive change, so that all historic representations throughout the site become inclusive, researched, and cohesively represented.<sup>103</sup>

Currently, Magnolia staff members confront numerous obstacles for implementing such transformation. One of the most immediate is financial support. Generating more effectively and inclusively researched historic interpretation requires skilled staff and research time, which means offering salaries that not only reflect these skills and labor, but also demonstrate institutional support for new interpretive strategies and sources. This challenge came to a head at Magnolia in August 2011, when Tucker suddenly resigned from his position. He never directly spoke with me about why he decided to leave, but based on our earlier interviews I believe his reasons may have been connected to frustrations with not feeling supported by the site management, financially or structurally, to effectively develop and manage the Cabin Project tour.<sup>104</sup> A few months before he left, I asked Tucker if site managers wanted him to develop a formal manual for the tour that

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<sup>102</sup> D.J. Tucker, interview with the author, 24 June 2009, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>103</sup> Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 10.

<sup>104</sup> In August 2011, Tucker sent an email to inform me that he left his position abruptly at Magnolia, but we never met to discuss his reasons for quitting. I respect his choice to keep his reasons for leaving private, and the explanations I offer are based on my own speculation.



future guides could follow. “I don’t even think they care or if they are even aware,” he responded, “I think that speaks volumes . . . The fact that they don’t even seem aware of the fact that they should have some sort of a program.”<sup>105</sup>

Tucker was also unwilling to produce a manual because site management had demonstrated that they would not pay him to take on additional research responsibilities for developing tour interpretation:

. . . someone would have been paid thousands at the Smithsonian, or thousands at the National Underground Railroad Museum, or thousands at some other place just to concoct all that stuff. But we got hired as hourly employees to come in and deliver a program. And we weren’t given a program, so we just went ahead and did what we did because we had to tell people something down there.<sup>106</sup>

This dilemma is not unique to Magnolia. By 2009 nearly all plantation tourist sites in the Charleston area featured an added African American history tour that contrasts with earlier, and generally ongoing, representation strategies in house and garden tours based on white elite plantation nostalgia. The staff tasked with developing these new tours are burdened with great expectations — of generating museum-quality interpretation that will compensate for decades (more than a century at Magnolia) of neglecting African American history and slavery, without causing controversy for existing historic representations, and often without significant increase in funding or staff support for the additional research and guide training. This pattern of low pay for historic guides stems from a long history of volunteer staff delivering interpretation in sites throughout the United States as well as Charleston. Volunteers often came from a local

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<sup>105</sup> Tucker, interview, 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Tucker, interview, 2011.

pool of affluent white retirees or housewives who traditionally did not demand significant, if any, salaries. For plantation sites that seek more effective African American history representations based on scholarly research, transitioning into a professional pay grade that matches the skills and time required to produce this interpretation is imperative. But such financial investment can be a major problem, particularly in times of economic constraint. On nearly every Charleston area plantation site, when I asked about the greatest challenges to improving African American history tours, or historic interpretation in general, the first answer was always “money.” Project directors noted that guides were not paid enough to research or be trained for the history they are interpreting, or to stay in the position long enough to develop their interpretation skills. While some sites pay guides a wage (and some sites, such as Drayton Hall, require a bachelor’s degree), I regularly heard this comparison in some form — “guides working here could make more money flipping burgers at a fast food restaurant.” In addition, constructing permanent exhibitions or restoring existing structures to interpret African American history is expensive. As George McDaniel, the director of Drayton Hall noted, in comparison to obtaining donations for restoring downtown mansions or large plantation houses, securing funding either privately or through government granting agencies for restoring or preserving structures such as cabins to interpret African American history “is by no means impossible, but it takes more work.”<sup>107</sup>

Despite these financial challenges, as well as other developmental and interpretive obstacles I will describe in this chapter, a number of project managers and guides on

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<sup>107</sup> George McDaniel, interview with the author, 10 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

Charleston area plantation sites are developing African American history tours that introduce historic narratives based on scholarly research through innovative representation strategies in previously overlooked structures and spaces. With different funding and management structures, as well as tourism histories, these plantation sites construct tours and engage representation challenges in distinctive ways, which I will reference in this chapter. But the central focus of my discussion will be an examination of Magnolia's Cabin Project tour between 2009 and 2011— to consider how it developed on this family-owned, for-profit plantation site despite significant challenges, and to describe what interpretation opportunities it introduces, as well as what limitations it faces.

### *Early Development of Magnolia's Cabin Project*

In a 2011 interview, I asked Taylor Drayton Nelson about his role in launching the From Slavery to Freedom tour in the early 2000s. After his grandfather passed away in 2002, Nelson became the director of Magnolia and brought a new generational vision to the site, but he responded that his grandfather, former site director Drayton Hastie, would have “probably renovated those cabins eventually.”<sup>108</sup> Perhaps. Drayton and his brother Norwood Hastie's application to obtain National Historic Register status for the site in 1969 reveals that the brothers were aware of the historic significance of the handful of cabins on the property occupied by African Americans since the 1850s.<sup>109</sup> After a lengthy description of the landscape and gardens in the application, they added,

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<sup>108</sup> Taylor Drayton Nelson, interview with the author, 4 April 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>109</sup> Archaeological teams in the early 2000s identified the 1850s date for the original cabin construction. Enslaved people, both of African and American Indian descent, would have occupied the plantation site from the late seventeenth century to Emancipation, in different housing structures that deteriorated over time.

“nomination includes seven wooden slave cabins.”<sup>110</sup> The brothers ultimately treated African American history on the site as an afterthought — the gardens were the primary focus of the application, and neither chose to act on historically interpreting the seven cabins. The cabins were “preserved” because they continued to be occupied throughout the twentieth century by African American families. Similar cabins often deteriorated on other plantation sites in the Lowcountry (or if the plantation became a tourist site, cabins became restrooms or gift shops).<sup>111</sup> But at Magnolia, the Bennetts and later the Leaches worked as gardeners after the plantation became a tourist site, and they continued to live in and maintain these cabins as their homes throughout the twentieth century.<sup>112</sup> They did not treat the cabins as historic artifacts for tours. While some cabins remained relatively unchanged, the Leaches made modern upgrades, for example by combining two of the cabins, and adding wallpaper, a tin roof, and linoleum floors in the 1960s and 70s. As Nelson noted, some of the cabins continued to be inhabited until the 1990s, “so the idea that they were suddenly history was a little bit of a stretch.”<sup>113</sup>

Drayton Hastie, who directed the site from 1975 to 2002, was a businessman attuned to pursuing additional attractions that could bring in revenue. By the 1990s, he

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<sup>110</sup> Magnolia application for National Historic Register nomination, date marked 1969, Charleston County Public Library archives, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>111</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 125-130. As Eichstedt and Small describe, such use of spaces where enslaved or freed people lived on plantation tourist sites is an example of “symbolic annihilation” or “erasure.” An example of this can currently be seen at Drayton Hall, where the gift shop is located in a former freedman’s cabin, though they have plans to move the gift shop to an interpretive center once it is built in a few years, so they can present African American history interpretation in the cabin. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Magnolia’s gift shop is located in the basement of the main house, where the kitchen and “servant’s quarters” were located.

<sup>112</sup> Isaac Leach, interview with the author, 15 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>113</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

would have noticed that neighboring Ashley River Road plantation sites Drayton Hall and Middleton Place were developing African American history focus tours, most likely in response to broader changes in U.S. public history, popular culture, and political rhetoric to be more inclusive and “multicultural.”<sup>114</sup> Neighboring plantation site Middleton Place responded to this increasing popular interest in African American history in the mid-1990s by opening an exhibition on African American spirituality in a former chapel used by enslaved people, and by restoring “Eliza’s House,” a post-Emancipation freed person’s cabin, for a self-guided tour. Soon after Eliza’s House opened, Hastie furnished a “Slave Cabin” at Magnolia, in a former outbuilding near the site’s parking lot. He later renamed the building “Ante-Bellum Cabin” over concerns that the term “slave” was offensive, though I later found the laminated sign for a once-a-day “Slave Talk” by this building when I first visited in 2007.<sup>115</sup> An interest in addressing African American history and slavery does not necessarily translate to effective interpretation. The problem with the “Ante-Bellum Cabin” was that Hastie furnished it based on his perceptions of what a “slave cabin” would look like (see figure 13, page 168). As local tour guide Alada

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<sup>114</sup> Fath Davis Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szewaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham, North Carolina and London, UK: Duke University Press 2006). Multiculturalism emerged as a concept in the late 1960s as a way to reframe political policies to be more race and ethnicity-conscious, after it became clear to many activists and political leaders that ending legal segregation with the civil rights movement did not end racial inequalities. As the authors of “Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion” explain, the goal of “multiculturalism” is to celebrate different cultural and ethnic identities as “equally valid.” This countered the earlier homogenizing “melting pot” concept for ethnic diversity in the United States, which ultimately assumed “Euro-American norms” as the only American cultural identity. Multiculturalism also pushed against the influence of liberal individualism in American political culture, by asserting that individuals hold “membership in a ‘societal culture’ with its own language and history” that is also necessary for “the individual’s dignity and self-realization.” Jack Citrin, David O. Sears, Christopher Muste, and Cara Wong, “Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2001), 247.

<sup>115</sup> Leach, interview, 2011.

Shinault-Small (an independent African American history interpreter I will discuss further in the chapter three) explained, his interpretation was “off base”:

The historical accuracy of the items, the amount of items in the space itself—this gave you the picture that well, if the enslaved person lived in a dwelling like this with all of these things, what are they moaning about?<sup>116</sup>

Magnolia’s private, family-owned, for-profit status means that director interests shape changes at this site. Hastie’s approach throughout his leadership was to manage historic representations based on his own marketing strategies and perceptions of popular culture, rather than outside research and collaboration. Because of this tendency, in contrast to federal government, state government, or non-profit sites, privately owned sites like Magnolia are often the last to change their representations. “[Private sites] could do whatever they want,” noted Shinault-Small, “so a lot of times it’s money driven, a lot of times the decisions aren’t quite the best on the interpretive side.” She explains that this tendency has begun to change, and more plantation sites are attempting to get “in the loop of diversity and inclusiveness in telling the whole story” because “that’s more of a money stream.” But until recently, before national and local shifts in public history trends, she asserted that privately owned sites in particular “just didn’t seem to give a flip.”

At Magnolia, the dominant influence of the director also means that when the leadership changes, the site can also change rapidly, without the need for institutional approval. This seemed to be the case when Drayton Hastie passed away in 2002 and his grandson Taylor Drayton Nelson took over. In contrast to his grandfather, Nelson came to Magnolia after college as a reluctant site director. As he described, “It was a default mode

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<sup>116</sup> Alada Shinault Small, interview with the author, 20 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

for me.”<sup>117</sup> Rather than managing new representation developments himself, he was open to outside collaboration, but he was also interested in pursuing more effective representations of African American history on the site.<sup>118</sup> In the late 1990s, the director of education at Drayton Hall, Craig Hadley, helped implement an African American history program at that site called “Connections,” and he spoke with Nelson about the possibility of improving on the “Slave Talk” and restoring the cabins at Magnolia for similar interpretation in the early 2000s.<sup>119</sup> In 2005 Drayton Hall ended Hadley’s position, so he again approached Nelson about developing the Cabin Project, and they started making plans.

Nelson noted that another major influence in shaping the Cabin Project was a luncheon held at Magnolia in September 2006 for both white Drayton descendants and descendants of enslaved African Americans from various Drayton plantations. As Nelson explained, the goal was “to get the discussion started between the groups,” so that the developing Cabin Project “wasn’t just white people interpreting black people’s history.”<sup>120</sup> Notably Bill Drayton, a white minister from England, instigated the event. As

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<sup>117</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

<sup>118</sup> As D.J. Tucker described Nelson, “He kind of grew up around here, and grew up around some of the families that lived in the cabins. There was already a relationship there. And he was open to continuing to communicate with some of these descendants of families that were either enslaved or you know, worked out here in that post-Emancipation period.” Tucker, interview, 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Site producers at Drayton Hall developed the “Connections” program after Richmond Bowens passed away in 1998. Bowens provided a more informal version of African American history interpretation by describing his memories of growing up and working at Drayton Hall as an African American, starting in 1993-94. Bowens even claimed that he was descended from enslaved Africans who came to the Carolina Colony with the Drayton family from Barbados. When Bowens passed away, site producers decided they needed to develop an official tour that focused on African American history, and Craig Hadley proposed developing a tour based on scholarly research that introduced a broader historic context as well as oral history. George McDaniel, interview, 2011.

<sup>120</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

a 2006 *Post and Courier* article explained, Drayton became interested in researching his Drayton ancestry, and addressed the group of forty black and white individuals at the luncheon as “one big family,” stating, “God has called us together.”<sup>121</sup> Magnolia garden supervisor Isaac Leach, whose family is prominently featured in the Cabin Project, also remarked on the significance of that luncheon:

...[Bill Drayton] made a public apology to the African Americans that he was sorry that his family had slavery during those times. And he brought the media with him from England because they wanted to get their perspective on what was going on here. And it was an open apology for something that happened many, many years ago. That was the start of the [Cabin] Project.<sup>122</sup>

The *Post & Courier* article noted that the involvement of this English cousin came just a few months before the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire. In England, various institutions observed this 2007 bicentennial with extensive commemorative events, including museum exhibitions, public debates, and a high budget film, *Amazing Grace* (2007). Awareness of these events in England may have encouraged Bill Drayton’s interest in addressing his ancestral connections to slavery in South Carolina, an interest he brought to Magnolia. But in contrast to England, there were relatively few events commemorating the bicentennial of the end trans-Atlantic slave trade in the United States in 2008. As historian Eric Foner noted in a *New York Times* article, “Forgotten Step Toward Freedom,” this “divergence” in commemoration may have been due to a sense that Britain’s abolition of the trade was a “major step” toward the abolition of slavery in the empire. In contrast, slavery in the

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<sup>121</sup> Tenisha Waldo, “Plantation’s Past not just black and white,” *The Post & Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, 4 September 2009, 1B. The article did not specify the denomination or church where Bill Drayton practiced his ministry.

<sup>122</sup> Isaac Leach, interview, 15 March 2011.



United States not only survived, but also “embarked on an era of unprecedented expansion” through the U.S. domestic slave trade. In terms of public memory, Foner describes trans-Atlantic slave trade abolition as a chapter “of which all Britons can be proud,” so that it becomes a “usable past” for awareness of the nation’s “multiracial character.” In the United States, Americans have “had to look elsewhere for memories that ameliorate our racial discontents.”<sup>123</sup>

An exception to this indifference in the United States was an academic conference entitled “Ending the International Slave Trade: A Bicentenary Inquiry,” hosted by the College of Charleston’s Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World program (CLAW) in Charleston in March 2008. The conference featured speakers who discussed how and why the trans-Atlantic trade ended in the United States, and compared the numerous bicentennial commemoration events in England to the lack of interest the United States. The last day of this conference featured a tour of Magnolia’s developing Cabin Project led by Hadley, and a commemorative ceremony between the white Drayton family and descendants of enslaved Africans from Drayton plantations that was open to the public and attracted media attention.<sup>124</sup>

The conference also included a presentation of the *Lowcountry Africana* website, which Magnolia sponsored starting in 2006. The website initially served as a way to

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<sup>123</sup> Eric Foner, “Forgotten Step Toward Freedom,” *New York Times*, 30 December 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/30/opinion/30foner.html?pagewanted=1&sq=abolition%20of%20slave%20trade&st=cse&scp=6> (accessed 8 July 2011).

<sup>124</sup> I was able to attend these events, and noticed a large number of news cameras and reporters at the commemorative ceremony, revealing the symbolic role of this ceremony in public history as well as personally between the families. The final gesture of the ceremony was for a descendant of the white Drayton family and a descendant of an enslaved African who had been owned by the Draytons to release a wreath together into the Ashley River.

facilitate access to archives of plantation records for African American genealogical research, particularly African Americans who worked at Drayton family plantations before and after Emancipation. By 2011, as the website home page notes, *Lowcountry Africana* expanded to “document the family and cultural heritage of African Americans in the historic rice-growing areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida . . . home to the rich Gullah/Geechee culture.” The site’s manager, Toni Carrier, volunteers her time to maintain this significant digital project, but Magnolia financially supports the site, and provides resources for obtaining documents and other digitally archived materials.<sup>125</sup>

Magnolia’s involvement in these projects and events started in 2002 with Nelson’s interest in African American history, as well as his more hands-off, collaborative approach to leadership. His management style also opened the way for new strategies to interpret African American history. When Hadley started working at Magnolia, he encouraged restoring the cabins through a professional process in contrast to Hastie’s informal approach to the “Ante-Bellum Cabin.” Hadley also encouraged the use of scholarly historic sources for guided interpretation of the cabins rather than using site-based family memories or popular culture. This professional, scholarly approach required more funding and development time than earlier informal historic representation strategies. Hadley had to hire contractors to conduct building surveys to prove that the cabins were a preservation project worthy of historic district designation through the

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<sup>125</sup> *Lowcountry Africana*, accessed 1 September 2012, <http://www.lowcountryafricana.com/>.

National Park Service, so that Magnolia would be eligible for a tax credit.<sup>126</sup> This was followed by archaeological surveys, which required over a year of excavating, processing and cataloging reports. The actual renovation of the cabins did not begin until 2008, which was also when new problems arose that almost unraveled the Cabin Project.

D.J. Tucker started working at Magnolia doing building surveys of the cabins in 2006. His interviews are my main source for describing this development process, particularly because by 2009, Tucker replaced Craig Hadley as the Cabin Project director. One point Tucker emphasizes in these interviews is that despite reporter Kyle Stock's criticism of Magnolia in his 2008 *Post and Courier* article that the site was seeking to profit from "selling slavery" through the new tour, a number of people actually went to great financial lengths to complete the Cabin Project.<sup>127</sup> In particular, in the midst of twelve months of renovations starting in 2008, the economy crashed, and the company contracted to do the renovation work ended up losing money. As Tucker describes, the renovation company still decided to finish the project, because they believed it had a "higher purpose" to educate the public about African American history.<sup>128</sup>

Also in 2007, Taylor Drayton Nelson decided to cede his director position to a new Drayton family board of directors. He pursued "other interests" he explained, and a number of family members wanted input in managing the site.<sup>129</sup> This new board

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<sup>126</sup> For further information on local historic district designation in the United States: National Park Service Department of the Interior, "What is a local historic district?" *People Protecting Community Resources*, accessed 23 February 2012, <http://www.nps.gov/tps/education/workingonthepast/definehd.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> Kyle Stock, "Selling Slavery, Area business people finding money in long shrouded history," *The Post and Courier*, 27 July 2008, <http://archives.postandcourier.com/archive/arch08/0708/arc07276602589.shtml> (accessed 2 February 2010).

<sup>128</sup> Tucker, interview, 2009.

<sup>129</sup> Nelson, interview, 2011.

demonstrated support for the Cabin Project, but by 2009, particularly with the economic downturn, they also became concerned with the pace of Hadley's work and his salary based on what he had produced. The Magnolia board ultimately decided to terminate his employment shortly before the From Slavery to Freedom tour opened. The Cabin Project staff who remained at that time, D.J. Tucker and Preston Cooley, had to finish what Hadley did not complete.

Hadley influenced the development of African American history tours at both Drayton Hall and Magnolia by facilitating the use of scholarship and professional processes, but he fell short of following through with implementing these projects. Tucker became the director of the Cabin Project after Hadley left, and focused on completing the interpretation plan. Meanwhile Cooley, as the assistant project director, took responsibility for completing extensive tax credit paperwork, and later they both worked on grant applications for further exhibition development support.<sup>130</sup> Though Hadley did leave them with some visual materials and a broad historic manual, according to Tucker and Cooley, the interpretive outline he provided was brief, and ultimately not very different from the African American history program already presented at Drayton Hall, where Hadley worked before. "Preston and I were challenged," Tucker explained in 2009, "because we were like, we can't just go ahead with the program we were delivered, it's essentially a knock-off of the program next door."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> In their interviews Tucker and Cooley described saving Magnolia roughly \$50,000 in tax credits and obtaining further grant money for exhibition development, which they would be in charge of designing. In 2011, they were still paid roughly the hourly wage of a guide, though later they received some pay increases. Tucker, interview, 2011. Preston Cooley, interview with the author, 26 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>131</sup> Tucker, interview, 2009.

Many historic tourism sites have high turnover in their staff, so shifting leadership in a project's development is not necessarily surprising. What was problematic here, as Cooley and Tucker explained, is that they had to take on extra grant writing and interpretation development responsibilities, but they were not compensated for these increased responsibilities in their salaries.<sup>132</sup> The economic crisis led to limited funds for staff salaries and constrained the ability to negotiate changes to these salaries. The legacy of volunteer or minimum wage guides representing history at plantation sites such as Magnolia also established a general pattern of low pay in the job field. Like the construction firm restoring the cabins, Cooley and Tucker shouldered the extra responsibility because they supported the public education goals of the Cabin Project. For these individuals, the From Slavery to Freedom tour was not a lucrative endeavor.

To summarize, in a process that was shaped by circumstantial timing and economic fluctuations as much as deliberate planning, a convergence of external influences, internal changes, and personal sacrifices in the early 2000s led to the Cabin Project developing at Magnolia. This haphazard development may also reflect the growing pains of introducing new professional restoration and interpretation strategies to a site with a longstanding tradition of directors informally adding representation layers based on consumer interests. Despite these struggles, by March 2009, *New York Times* reporter Jim Rutenberg described Magnolia's newly opened Cabin Project as a "powerful" reminder of the "brutal condition of the slaves," and Cooley and Tucker's

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<sup>132</sup> Tucker claimed that while Hadley was given a flat salary, he regularly added on further contracting costs. When Hadley left, Tucker and Cooley were told they were in charge of the project, but with the economic downturn, they would not receive pay increases that matched Hadley's salary. Tucker, interview, 2011.

interpretation as “vivid, sugar-free, descriptions of slave life.”<sup>133</sup> In addition, as Tucker stated in 2009, the tour seemed to be a financial success after it opened:

We were given a mandate: you need to do this much business. And we’re meeting it, and I think we’re going to exceed it. Which tells me something — not just that this is something that could be profitable, but that people are fascinated with this history, so much so that they are willing to pay to learn about it.<sup>134</sup>

Tucker’s comment points to crucial questions about the overall purpose and impact of the From Slavery to Freedom tour. Could tours like the Cabin Project on private plantation sites like Magnolia demonstrate a mutually productive relationship between the financial priorities of commercial tourism and inclusive public history goals? As Stock asserted in his *Post & Courier* article, plantation tourism site owners profiting from slavery and African American history, this time through tour ticket sales, could appear exploitative.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, Magnolia’s site interpretation has the potential to offer influential inclusive public education for 150,000 annual visitors. Are Magnolia’s site producers willing, or able, to support more comprehensive changes not just to an additional tour, but to an entire site representation framework based on white elite fantasy? If not, then is Stock correct in suggesting that the Cabin Project is an additional financial endeavor to attract more tourists, rather than a starting point for more fundamental transformation? These questions about Magnolia’s ultimate interests in the From Slavery to Freedom tour remained unanswered as I conducted research between 2009 and 2011, but they present an ethical challenge that could serve as a guideline in the

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<sup>133</sup> Jim Rutenberg, “Dueling Visions of the Old South,” *New York Times*, 9 September 2009, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/travel/13culture.html?scp=1&sq=plantations%2C+Charleston&st=nyt> (Accessed online 2 February 2010).

<sup>134</sup> Tucker, interview, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Stock, “Selling Slavery,” 2010.

context of a for-profit site. The only way site producers can begin to confront accusations of “selling slavery” is through consistent dedication to the public education role of inclusive history representations across the entire plantation site, rather than passively benefitting from the financial appeal of one tour addition.

### *The Tour Experience*

The interpretation strategies that emerged from the Cabin Project’s development process indicate the transformative potential of this tour for the rest of the site. My first tour in June 2009 not only provides an outline of the tour’s structure, but also explains how I recognized another groundbreaking aspect of the tour, beyond scholarly content, that should also not be overlooked — the significance of emotions and personal connections in public history representations.

After I purchased tickets at Magnolia’s entrance booth, the attendant directed me to the parking lot, where I waited by a bench with roughly fifteen other tour participants for a driving tram. Tucker and Cooley later informed me that Cabin Project guides lead the tour as often as six times a day during busy times of year such as spring and summer. This regular, multiple tour schedule is a striking contrast to the once-a-day “Slave Talk” I saw advertised in 2007. During the five-minute ride to the cabins, Tucker, an interpreter as well as project director, introduced the subject of the tour through a microphone and speakers. When we reached the site, he led us to an outdoor shelter located beside five cabins restored to represent their history of occupation by enslaved and later free African Americans from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries. Project developers

restored each cabin to represent a different year: 1850, 1870, 1900, 1926, and 1969. Before visitors could walk through the cabins, we gathered around picnic tables and Tucker outlined the broader context of African American history in the South Carolina Lowcountry, which he later explained could span (depending on the the guide) from the beginning of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the experiences of the Leach family who lived and worked at Magnolia during the civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century — all in a twenty-five minute lecture. He used laminated print-outs of archival documents and small artifacts to illustrate different historic points, particularly a Ziploc bag of rice grains in their husks. Once he finished, Tucker gave us a detailed handout about the cabins to reference as we walked through the buildings. At this point tour participants could ask him questions. After fifteen to twenty minutes on our own in the cabins, or talking to Tucker, we could then either continue looking at the cabins and walk back on our own, or get back on the tram where Tucker gave a wrap-up lecture before dropping visitors off for the house tour, or back at the parking lot. The overall tour took about forty-five minutes to an hour.

This tour presentation structure, which all Cabin Project guides that I observed between 2009 and 2011 used with some variation, introduces a number of significant changes from Magnolia's earlier representation strategies. The tour narrative starts with broad historic context rather than isolated stories or objects and structures. Tucker bases his narrative on outside scholarly works as the dominant historic sources rather than



Drayton family lore or popular culture.<sup>136</sup> The tour structure also allows time for questions and dialogue between the guide and visitors, rather than treating history as a static presentation for tour participants to passively absorb. In contrast, guides shuffle visitors in and out of rooms on a tight schedule in Magnolia's house tour, and the garden tour is self-guided. But during the Cabin Project tour, questions and comments with the guide are encouraged, to the extent that on that first tour I had to wait in line after the lecture behind a number of other visitors to introduce myself to Tucker.

As I waited I mulled over different points in the presentation, and swatted at mosquitoes in the summer heat. Tucker told me later that he already knew I was an academic before I introduced myself. As he described, "you struck me that you knew what you were doing." I think what tipped him off was my expression: I did not look surprised. The historic content he presented was based on a body of academic work I engaged regularly as a graduate student. Instead of encountering new information, I was busy considering what points he did or did not use to present Magnolia's African American history. Fresh from the classroom, I assumed I would assess historic tours like a scholarly essay in my dissertation fieldwork. Tightening the argument, squeezing in left out historic points, updating the scholarship — these were the strategies that I believed would "fix" current tour representation problems, particularly when much of the tour is based on academic research as well as oral histories. As I listened to other tour

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<sup>136</sup> As I quoted Winslow Hastie in the first chapter, "we didn't have written up stuff, it's just things that have been kind of cobbled together over years, and a lot of it is sort of oral histories that have been duck taped together." Winslow Hastie, interview with the author, 28 July 2009, Charleston, South Carolina. Later in the chapter I describe some of the specific scholarly arguments Cabin Project guides emphasize in the tour, which are primarily drawn from works such as Peter Wood's *Black Majority* (1974), Judith Carney's *Black Rice* (2001), Daniel Littlefield's *Rice and Slaves* (1991), and Charles Joyner's *Down by the Riverside* (1984).

participants speaking to Tucker ahead of me in line, I began to realize the contrasts between their priorities and my own. This became particularly clear when I overheard a middle-aged African American man in front of me thanking Tucker. He was an elementary school teacher from Seattle, Washington, and told Tucker that he was amazed by what he heard during the tour presentation, claiming that he had “never thought about my history that way before.” He looked at the ground as he spoke and shook his head. His voice was shaking.

This emotional response, and sense of personal connection to the tour as “*my* history,” was not an isolated reaction. As Cabin Project assistant director and interpreter Preston Cooley later explained, he regularly encountered strong visitor responses to the tour that varied greatly depending on the visitor, and as he characterized, by race:

It does run the gambit. I’ve had ... African Americans come to me in tears thanking me for finally telling the truth about their ancestors ... I’ve had angry white people come to me and basically tell me that I’m full of you know what. That those Africans were heathens, that they were not smart, and that all this stuff we’re peddling is nothing but clap trap. I’ve had African Americans who were not angry at *me*, but they were angry, because they remember their grandparents living in those conditions that we represent out there... I’ve also had angry white people who were mad because we didn’t talk about all the beatings, and they felt like we were whitewashing it.<sup>137</sup>

While these responses can be challenging for Cabin Project guides to navigate, emotions and personal connections to history are a regular part of their work, and are central to presentation strategies. Tucker is a passionate storyteller, so that his tour becomes an active, engaging performance. He also instructs Cabin Project guides, who are predominantly white, to present their tour narratives within a reverent overarching frame of “acknowledgment” or “giving credit” to the “contributions” of enslaved and free

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<sup>137</sup> Preston Cooley, interview, 26 January 2011.

Africans and African Americans, rather than listing historic facts.<sup>138</sup> As a recently trained guide concluded on a Cabin Project tour I recorded in May 2011:

If it wasn't for the knowledge and the skill and all of the hard work from these African slaves and these African American families that have lived on this plantation for as long as this plantation has been in existence, we wouldn't have everything that's developed from that here today.<sup>139</sup>

Numerous comments posted on TripAdvisor after 2009 indicate that this frame of reverence and Tucker's enthusiastic presentation style create a powerful experience for visitors, particularly his "passion" and "personal touch." As one site user stated:

The unexpected pleasure was the excitement of the new Cabin Project; a history of African Americans in this area from slavery to freedom. The tour guide DJ Tucker was a well informed historian and clearly enthusiastic about the information in the tour. His enthusiasm was contagious and made the slave cabin tour the highlight of our day.<sup>140</sup>

In a 2009 interview, Tucker explained that his presentation approach of combining academic research and engaging public performance strategies reflects his background. He has a master's degree in history with an emphasis on African American studies from the College of Charleston, and he has worked as a guide on various historic sites. His interest in African American history came from growing up in Ontario, Canada, near Harriet Tubman's home at the terminus in the Underground Railroad — which he learned about while working as a costumed interpreter representing nineteenth century Ontario. Tucker also described a youthful obsession with the Civil War, which led him to join an

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<sup>138</sup> Recording of From Slavery to Freedom tour guided by D.J. Tucker, May 2011. Magnolia Plantation, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>139</sup> Recording of From Slavery to Freedom tour guided by Jason Crowley, May 2011. Magnolia Plantation, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>140</sup> ["The new Cabin Project is inspiring! Start your tour with the cabins, highly recommend a visit"](http://www.TripAdvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r51027007-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html#CHECK_RATES_CONT) *TripAdvisor*. review by Stray 2 of North Carolina, December 10, 2009, [http://www.TripAdvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r51027007-Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_Gardens-Charleston\\_South\\_Carolina.html#CHECK\\_RATES\\_CONT](http://www.TripAdvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r51027007-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html#CHECK_RATES_CONT) (Accessed January 21, 2011).

Ontario based reenactment group and eventually move to Charleston for graduate school to learn more about U.S. southern history.

This exposure to academic and public history work makes Tucker a distinctive, but increasingly more prevalent form of historic interpreter in Charleston. Throughout my interviews I found that at least some recently hired staff in leadership positions on historic sites have advanced degrees from historic preservation or academic humanities programs. This is a distinct shift from the early to late twentieth century, when project managers and guides generally learned about the historic content of the tours they gave by observing guides who worked on the site before them (and as noted, this interpretation was based mainly on family lore).<sup>141</sup> Personal hobbies such as historic reenactment or genealogical research, as well as high school and occasionally college history classes also shaped many guides' historic backgrounds, but having one or two staff members with an advanced degree on historic plantation sites in the Charleston area is a recent phenomenon. This point is not meant to imply that an advanced degree necessarily equates better interpretation, or that an individual without an advanced degree cannot offer effective historic interpretation. Instead, this recent pattern in hiring reflects a growing awareness of the need for a professional process in Charleston's public history, and for broader historic contexts and research in constructing site representations. Staff

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<sup>141</sup> Hastie, interview, 2009.

members who have been exposed to scholarly resources and methodologies can particularly help introduce professional research strategies to public history contexts.<sup>142</sup>

Despite this growing professionalization in public history, Tucker's background in African American studies is exceptionally rare amongst historic interpreters on Charleston plantation sites. Staff members at Magnolia and Drayton Hall with advanced degrees in historic preservation, for example, described learning more about architecture than social history in their studies, and generally did not have prior experience with African American history research or interpretation until they started working at a plantation site. Academic programs that train scholars who may go on to work in historic site interpretation could more directly include public history and inclusive social history interpretation strategies in their curriculum. Coursework on interpreting slavery would be particularly relevant to Charleston area historic preservation and academic history departments, where students are surrounded by local sites where enslaved African Americans lived and worked.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Peter Novick observes that academic historians have also struggled with bias in their work, despite claims of "objectivity," particularly regarding African American history. Correcting these biases within the academy, based on scholarly evidence, also makes up the goals of many new academic history works, which makes correcting bias, or clarifying opinion and conjecture vs. facts, a shared ideal of both academic and public history. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>143</sup> Joe Mestor, interview with the author, 10 March 2011, Charleston, South Carolina. Scott, interview, 2011. Both Scott and Mestor (who works at Drayton Hall) described receiving master's degrees from a historic preservation program in Charleston that is co-hosted by Clemson University and the College of Charleston. Many Charleston area historic sites hire new graduates from this program, often in leadership positions that involve interpretation as much, if not more than historic preservation. Despite this hiring pattern, according to Historic Preservation graduates I spoke to, and based on the program's website, the coursework and research for the degree focuses on preservation strategies rather than interpretation or social history. "Historic Preservation," *Clemson Graduate School*, accessed 19 November 2012, <http://www.grad.clemson.edu/programs/Historic-Preservation/>.

What I found striking about the Cabin Project tour however was that despite the inclusion of scholarly research, emotional engagement was also central to the tour presentation. In an academic classroom context, emotions and personal connections are often treated like an unspoken taboo. They can be a hindrance to objective inquiry, and lead to “revision” when applied to history, by making the figures and events of the past a malleable resource for validating personal beliefs and desires in the present.<sup>144</sup> But for the Cabin Project, setting up an emotional encounter for visitors with African American history is standard. Many guides, including Tucker and Cooley, described using the hybrid of “edutainment” in their interpretation strategies, though they noted that this term often makes academics uncomfortable.<sup>145</sup> As Lisa Woolfork observes in her research on Colonial Williamsburg, their strategies reflect a pattern in public history practice. Rather than being ignorant of academic priorities when they engage scholarly resources, public historians are often just more willing to “suspend dependence on [academic] discourse and affix belief instead to spiritual, emotional, personal, community, and the broadest racial group concerns.”<sup>146</sup> They engage emotions because shifting this “dependence” makes the tour more interesting to the public. As Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan reveal through extensive surveys, Americans are overwhelmingly interested in learning about history, but they seek out venues where they can bring their personal experiences

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<sup>144</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 113. David Lowenthal. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Novick, *The ‘Objectivity Question,’* 1988.

<sup>145</sup> Tucker, interview, 2011. Jeff Neale, interview with the author, 5 February 2012, Summerville, South Carolina.

<sup>146</sup> Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 133.

and emotions into dialogue with “the past,” particularly at museums or historic sites.<sup>147</sup> In contrast, these surveys indicate that Americans generally describe classrooms as “boring,” because they associate scholarly contexts with lectures that just “list facts.”<sup>148</sup> Making the presentation both informative and *not* “boring” is crucial to making visitors receptive and willing to purchase tickets in a historic tourism context. Emotions and personal engagement are an immediate, accessible way to accomplish this.

When applied to African American history on a plantation site, emotional interpretation strategies help channel the strong responses visitors may have to discussions of slavery and post-Emancipation labor regimes. As Cooley noted earlier, these responses range in intensity from anger and sadness, to reverence and gratitude, to nervous humor or sarcasm. In addition, many Americans particularly experience confusion and anxiety when they encounter discussions about the history of slavery because of the institution’s ongoing race and class legacies. As Ira Berlin explains in his essay “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” in American society “there is a recognition, often backhanded and indirect, sometimes subliminal or even subconscious, that the United States’ largest, most pervasive problem is founded on the institution of slavery . . . thus, in the twenty-first century — as in the American Revolution of the 1770s, the Civil War of the 1860s, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s — the history of slavery mixes with the politics of slavery in ways that leave

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<sup>147</sup> As Rosenzweig and Thelen described about their choice to use the phrase “the past” rather than “history” in developing their survey, “*The past* was the term that best invited people to talk about family, race, and nation . . .” Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 6, 31-32.

<sup>148</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, 31.

everyone, black and white, uncomfortable and often mystified as to why.”<sup>149</sup> In the interactive context of a tour, this confusion can trigger complex feelings of shame, resentment, and hurt for visitors in response to interpreter narratives and site representations. Despite increasing access to public history information about slavery, visitors of all racial backgrounds often struggle to grasp the complex experiences and contemporary meanings of this institution and its legacies. Reciting academic research falls short of engaging this range of emotional responses.

At the same time, academic anxieties around personal, emotional connections to “the past” in public history are not unjustified, particularly regarding slavery and race. As David Lowenthal explains, while personal connection methods of representing history are engaging, people have also used them throughout history to construct the power of “heritage” in the present. Lowenthal defines “heritage” as a form of faith rather than fact; as a use of history that binds individuals to “a family, a community, a race, a nation.”<sup>150</sup> The problem with this type of connection is that it often creates a sense of ownership over history, and leads to elevating certain heritage narratives and disregarding others, which can serve to justify inequalities and power hierarchies in the present. The history of how white history producers, both public and academic, marginalized African American history and elevated Euro American history in the United States is one of the most striking examples of how such “heritage” production can be socially and politically

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<sup>149</sup> Ira Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>150</sup> Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 2.



destructive.<sup>151</sup> Such influences certainly shaped Magnolia's early representation strategies, and continues to influence problematic interpretations on the site today.

How will recent representations of African American history in Charleston that use personal engagement strategies interact with this long established pattern of white elite heritage production in U.S. public history, particularly on plantation sites? Can they introduce more inclusive ways for visitors of various backgrounds to personally connect with the past? Adding tours that emphasize African American heritage as “equally valid” could be seen as a “multicultural” solution to correcting the longstanding overemphasis on white elite heritage on Charleston plantation sites — fix bias by honoring multiple heritages.<sup>152</sup> But this add-on approach to history obscures connections between these heritages. Treating slavery as a separate African American history subject avoids the role of Europeans and European Americans in implementing slavery and post-Emancipation labor regimes, which deeply intertwined their historic experiences and fortunes with Africans and African Americans in a racist hierarchy. How can all history tours on the site represent multiracial connections to the history of plantation slavery?

The personal engagement interpretative strategy of “time travel” introduces challenges and potential solutions for exclusive heritage production problems. As Woolfork explains, “time travel” representation strategies have long been problematic on plantation sites, because they served to invite predominantly white participants, either as visitors, guides, or reenactors, to reconstruct and experience a selective “fantasy and

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<sup>151</sup> Novick, *The 'Objectivity Question,'* 1988.

<sup>152</sup> Citrin, Sears, Muste, Wong, “Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion,” 247.

nostalgic longing” for the past. Through being surrounded by old buildings, gardens, and antiques, as well as other guides who may assert their authority through appearing “historic” in period clothing, visitors imagine that they can “go back in time” on plantations as sites “living history.” This immersion gives visitors a false sense that they can personally “revisit people and scenes, to rekindle the range of feelings that had accompanied the experience,” or as Woolfork quotes one reenactor, to “remember our history the way we want to do it . . . instead of the way some of the history books have portrayed it.”<sup>153</sup> Recreating historic race and class hierarchies and struggles are optional and generally neglected in these traditional time travel fantasies. When Magnolia exclusively focused on white elite fantasy in its history representations, predominantly white guides and visitors inevitably adopted a white elite social role. For example, until the 1990s, female house guides at Magnolia wore hooped skirts and often invited tour participants into the dining room with descriptions such as “this is where you would dine with the Draytons.” In their research, Eichstedt and Small described such “universalizing” comments as common in guide presentations on plantation sites. As they observe, “it did not take much reflection to realize that such statements actually referred to a small and narrowly defined group—elite whites or white men.”<sup>154</sup> Consciously or subconsciously, this false perception of the antebellum and colonial plantation past allowed predominantly white guides and visitors to believe they were returning to “a day when whiteness meant something.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, 162. Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, 18.

<sup>154</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 137.

<sup>155</sup> Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, 163.

With the introduction of African American history tours that interpret the history of slavery on plantation sites, continuing these traditional “time travel” strategies becomes problematic. As Woolfork observes at Colonial Williamsburg, when sites address historic racial hierarchies, this can also translate to making present racial identities more visible, for guides and visitors. She notes that this shift in awareness can be a struggle for African American guides in contrast to white guides on “living history” sites, for example at Colonial Williamsburg:

White interpreters portraying the elite of colonial society usually find themselves performing a social role (royal governor or rich widow) which is more affluent than that which they experience as twenty-first century museum employees. For black interpreters, however, a crucial shift from the context of freedom to that of assumed bondage is implicit in the chore of performing history in the first person.<sup>156</sup>

In Charleston I only encountered a few interpreters who performed in “first person,” so that the “time travel” I observed was more subtle in contrast to Colonial Williamsburg. By the twenty-first century, the majority of white historic guides on plantation sites wore modern clothes, though they still regularly suggested white elite “time travel” to visitors in their tour narratives. For example, on a 2011 tour I observed at Middleton Place (another Charleston plantation site), the guide gestured toward the lawn and driveway and asked tour participants to imagine watching their party guests arrive in carriages while someone brings them a glass of madeira. They were not asked to consider being the “someone” bringing the madeira. The problems with these time travel strategies become more clear once African American history interpretation is apart of the site.

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<sup>156</sup> Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, 163.

In the next chapter I discuss the experiences of influential African American historic interpreters in the Charleston area who specialize in African American history. Some work or have worked as interpreters on plantation sites, and a few present in historic costume. Their interviews echo some of Woolfork's concerns. But what is striking about Magnolia and most of the plantation sites I observed is that the overwhelming majority of guides and visitors are white, even on the African American focus tours.<sup>157</sup> Different site directors provide various explanations for the lack of diversity in their staff, including low pay and the ongoing social stigma of African Americans working on a plantation. As white males interpreting African American history, Tucker and Cooley both described experiencing anxiety in their interpretation work. Tucker explained:

A couple of weeks ago I had a lady come in on a Saturday afternoon, and after the program she came up and thanked me and told me she admired the courage I had in delivering that program. And afterwards I thought, "Oh my God, I never thought of it that way before." But it explained the apprehension I feel every time I go out and do this program. Because I do, I dread it, I'm nervous, I feel it. And I'm always looking for feedback and affirmation.

Cooley described concerns about his accent as well as his appearance —“my biggest worry is first impression. Are they going to immediately write me off because I am a white southerner?” Cooley started working on the Cabin Project in 2008. He is from upstate South Carolina, and ran a tour company in downtown Charleston with his wife Bonnie that they had to close with the economic downturn. One of the shifts for him

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<sup>157</sup> This does not mean whiteness equals a monolithic tour experience— in addition to race, Charleston area plantation tour guides described visitors ranging widely in age, regional or national background, and presumably in education backgrounds, as well as political and social beliefs. Many also noted that visitor demographics are changing to be more ethnically diverse, and they are particularly seeing more African Americans coming to plantation sites, though white visitors are still the overwhelming majority.

about transitioning from a general Charleston history tour to an African American history tour was dealing with anxiety about being a white male southerner with a thick accent. “I will try to make jokes about my southernness,” Cooley explained:

I guess I do that because I do worry sometimes that I will be perceived, especially when I open my mouth, as Mr. Southerner here . . . African American church groups, older ladies and older gentlemen that remember not being able to use certain water fountains, not being able to go to certain places, what do I represent to them?

These anxieties reflect how the struggles of recent and current racial inequalities are part of what makes interpreting slavery a challenge in U.S. public history. “There is a general, if inchoate, understanding,” suggests Berlin, “that any attempt to address the question of race in the present must also address slavery in the past.”<sup>158</sup> For white interpreters there is also sense that to address slavery one must address race in the present, particularly when traditional white elite “time travel” strategies have long been a direct or subtle part of site representation.<sup>159</sup>

Within this context of past and present racial tensions, Tucker and Cooley avoid traditional historic character “time travel” strategies in their tour narratives. While they present as passionate storytellers, Cabin Project guides do not reenact history through costume or interpretive suggestions. Instead, they wear a uniform of khaki pants and polo shirts, and suggest the roles of scholarly researchers. As Tucker introduced a tour in 2011:

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<sup>158</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” 3.

<sup>159</sup> On many plantation sites a number of African Americans work in grounds maintenance, or cafe and food facilities. At Magnolia, Marlene Grey, who is a Jamaican of African descent, has worked in accounting at the site since the 1990s. But as noted, on all of these plantation sites, the interpretation staff are still overwhelmingly white.

*Our* job out here was to come out here and do archival research, archaeological surveys and preservation work . . . And it was through the research that *we* did, that *we* were able to determine that these really are former slave cabins. [italics added]<sup>160</sup>

Rather than exclusive time travel or reenactment, Cabin Project guides encourage visitors to participate in a research adventure, of discovering the history of these cabins through the guidance of professional research. This approach emphasizes a scholarly role for interpreters, as well as a student role for visitors, so that they can feel “comfortable” about their participation in the tour, as one visitor commented on TripAdvisor:

[Tucker’s] tour is not about shame or blame, it simply brings to light many facts most of us are not taught in school. Thanks to Magnolia Plantation for providing this tour.<sup>161</sup>

Even when visitors and interpreters experience discomfort about the history of slavery with this researcher presentation strategy, as Tony Bennett explains, intense responses are part of the process of troubling the “past-present alignments” of traditional site narratives.<sup>162</sup> Strong emotions from visitors may be a sign that the From Slavery to Freedom tour is introducing historic interpretation that effectively challenges long term bias on plantations sites.

Rather than abandoning time travel interpretive strategies however, Alison Landsberg argues that new, more inclusive forms of experiential “time travel” can be productive for helping visitors connect to complex historic experiences. The goal of this strategy is to encourage empathetic understanding of historic experiences (defined by scholarship and research) that occurred in spaces such as the cabins at Magnolia, rather

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<sup>160</sup> Recording of tour, Tucker, 2011.

<sup>161</sup> *TripAdvisor*, “Don’t Miss Slavery to Freedom Tour,” review by rasjayee, March 21, 2010, [http://www.TripAdvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r59145569-Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_Gardens-Charleston\\_South\\_Carolina.html](http://www.TripAdvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g54171-d104636-r59145569-Magnolia_Plantation_Gardens-Charleston_South_Carolina.html) (accessed January 23, 2012).

<sup>162</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of a Museum*, 152.

than admiring luxury objects or seeking elite personal fantasies of the past. Landsberg asserts that what is educational about this strategy, particularly for historic experiences involving suffering or struggle, is that “empathy” requires an understanding of difference and connecting across differences. As she explains, “the connection one feels when one empathizes with another is more than a feeling of emotional connection; it is a feeling of cognitive, intellectual connection, an intellectual coming-to-terms with another person’s circumstances.”<sup>163</sup> What is critical in this form of interpretation is that *difference*, between historic race and class experiences, as well as between past and present circumstances, is acknowledged rather than obscured. Experiencing the past is no longer about becoming immersed in a generalized nostalgic fantasy of yourself or your ancestors, but about personally understanding and connecting to distinct historic experiences defined by scholarly research. Landsberg argues that acknowledging and connecting to history as a distinct experience and context can lead to more inclusive, accurate and ethical understanding of the past and present, for a diverse range of visitors.

The professional restoration process applied to Magnolia’s cabins in the early 2000s helps enable an empathetic “time travel” connection to the site’s African American history across different time periods. Project developers restored each cabin to a different time period in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they implemented this process with considerable research and restraint compared to Hastie’s earlier “Ante-Bellum Cabin.” When I first visited in 2009, there were relatively few furnishings or exhibition materials, a striking contrast to other cabin interpretations in the area, such as the cabins

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<sup>163</sup> Alison Landsberg. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 149.

found at Boone Hall Plantation in nearby Mount Pleasant. Site producers filled Boone Hall's cabins with exhibition panels, video screens, and mannequins with push button recorded narration, as well as extensive props and furnishings. In comparison, Magnolia's Cabin Project has far fewer interpretive additions. I later learned that the restoration differences between these sites had to do with changes in funding for the project as much as interpretive strategies.<sup>164</sup> The sparse approach allows quiet space visually, aurally and physically for visitors to connect to the material structures, and through them, to contemplate the lives of their former occupants — what Landsberg describes as “sensuous” or “experiential” knowledge production.<sup>165</sup>

The lecture and self-guided tour structure of the Cabin Project is also unique compared to other African American history tours I observed. Most involved guide interpretation throughout or functioned like a seated classroom lecture. On the From Slavery to Freedom tour, the lecture provided scholarly guidance and broad historic contexts for visitors, but afterwards tour participants went through the cabins on their own. With minimal guide or text panel interpretation in the interior spaces of the cabins, visitors can independently build on the historic information they heard during the lecture to develop empathetic connections to the historic narrative of the tour through interacting with the cabin spaces. My own experience of going through the cabin was where I felt the

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<sup>164</sup> Hadley initially wanted more material items in the cabins, but when he left, site producers decided to limit further additions, particularly with new economic concerns in 2008. Tucker, interview, 2011. Cooley, interview, 2011.

<sup>165</sup> Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 129-32. As Landsberg explains, museum spaces such as the U.S. Holocaust Museum employ experiential representations by constructing exhibitions where the clear boundaries of exhibition cases and text panels are removed. In this context, “there is no longer a clear distinction between your space and the exhibit, your body and the history of the objects around you . . . Their seductive tangibility draws you into a lived relationship with them” (132).



most *unlike* a researcher. Rather than observing for my fieldwork, I was having a multi-sensory connection like the other tour participants. Minor actions such as ducking into small doorways and walking on cabin floorboards, or visual details such as peeling layers of wallpaper in the 1969 cabin or light shining through cracks between boards in the 1850 cabin were apparent, and provocative, without the distraction of exhibitions, cluttered objects, or guide interpretation. While verbal and text interpretation is vital to conveying the historic context of a site, these strategies can powerfully combine with experiential learning in structures and landscapes. This interactive, empathetic opportunity for historic education is also a crucial element of what these sites can offer in contrast to an academic classroom. “Time travel” continues to be an impossible fantasy in this context, but encouraging inclusive rather than exclusive connections can serve as an effective and engaging interpretive strategy.

Despite careful interpretive framing, along with anger or reverence, Cabin Project guides also described crass humor or snide comments from visitors, or just glazed-over boredom. Cabin Project guides often confronted and managed such responses along with stronger emotions. This complex tangle of visitor responses revealed to me why academic historians often prefer to claim boundaries of objective inquiry in their work. But as Jerome De Groot argues, the “sheer multiplying variance” of emotions and lack of boundaries is also what is valuable about the various ways the public engages history outside of the classroom.<sup>166</sup> For this reason, after my first tour, I always made sure to stand near the line of visitors with questions. Listening to visitor and interpreter dialogue

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<sup>166</sup> Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London, UK and New York, New York: Routledge, 2009), 250.

after the tour lecture, or walking through the cabins, reminded me to look beyond academic critiques in my research, to consider the discursive value of personal experiences and emotional connections with historic interpretation as well as scholarly content.

### *Scholarly Content in the Tour*

In a scholarship-based tour like the Cabin Project, researching and organizing the most recent academic research for public interpretation can be a major challenge. Guides deliver multiple tours on a daily basis, and their narrative structure must be concise and easily accessible.<sup>167</sup> In contrast, academic history is a dynamic process made up of ongoing, nebulous, and heated arguments between scholars. As Robert Weible observes, while attracting and engaging visitors drives the market goals of historic tourism, the publishing market of academic history scholarship revolves around presenting new research, or reexamining and critiquing existing arguments and evidence.<sup>168</sup> Though more sites are hiring staff with advanced degrees, the dynamic pace of academic debate can be difficult to tie down and translate to the format of a historic tour, particularly if it complicates existing historic narratives. Changes and updates to the tour narrative and site representations require deliberate and ongoing outside research, as well as processing and insertion into an already time-constrained tour structure, by guides and project directors preoccupied with daily interpretation duties. This is particularly an issue with

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<sup>167</sup> Cabin Project guides frequently noted in interviews that they do not recite a script, but they do repeat a standard, thematic tour narrative structure on a regular cycle. Cooley, interview, 2011. Tucker, interview, 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Weible, "Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?" *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, Volume 46, No. 3 (March 2008), 24-25.

African American history, which went from being overlooked or marginalized by most academic historians and history departments before the mid-twentieth century, to becoming one of the most dynamic areas of historical study, both within the United States and internationally.<sup>169</sup>

These tensions contextualize scholarly conflicts I observed within the Cabin Project tour's interpretive narrative, particularly guide descriptions of the "black rice" thesis. The academic debate over West African technological influence in colonial rice agriculture development in the South Carolina Lowcountry exemplifies how different priorities can influence debate and interpretation. To provide a brief summary, in his 1974 publication *Black Majority*, Peter Wood suggested that West Africans from rice growing areas could have influenced Lowcountry rice agriculture. Daniel Littlefield's *Rice and Slaves* (1991) and Judith Carney's *Black Rice* (2001) more specifically asserted that West African agricultural expertise (rather than European) brought over by enslaved men and particularly women from rice growing regions launched the lucrative industry of rice plantation agriculture in Georgia and South Carolina. Littlefield examines advertisements for slave auctions and runaways to suggest that Lowcountry slaveholders sought enslaved West Africans from rice growing regions for their rice-growing expertise. Carney argues that rice agriculture has a longstanding history in certain parts of West Africa in contrast to the lack of rice agriculture in Europe, so it would only be logical that expertise brought

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<sup>169</sup> Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century," *Slavery and Public History*, 2006. Ruffins, "Revisiting the Old Plantation," *Museum Frictions*, 2006.

over by enslaved Africans launched rice agriculture in South Carolina, particularly with similarities in techniques across regions.<sup>170</sup>

This black rice thesis emerged around the same time a number of Charleston plantation sites, including Magnolia, were developing African American focus tours. “Black rice” became a compelling part of the tour interpretation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries because it offered an empowering claim of West African influence over European agricultural practices. This point served to counter what Ira Berlin observes as one of the more traditional, Eurocentric understandings of slavery — that this institution had a benign, civilizing influence over “heathen” Africans.<sup>171</sup> In their interviews Tucker and Cooley both described encountering this “heathen” view of Africans, particularly from older white visitors. Asserting that West Africans “contributed” the technology of rice agriculture, rather than just labor, became a concise way to assert that West Africans were “smart” rather than “heathens,” and were sought after by white slaveholders because of their knowledge. As Tucker summarized the role of “black rice” in his tour narrative:

Everything we’ve told you today about their knowledge and their contributions and about how all this stuff was overlooked—why is it important now? Because all the racism and the prejudice that we were fed, for however many umpteen generations through the nineteenth and twentieth century, right through Jim Crow segregation, through the Civil Rights era and right to the present, is founded and predicated on a base that is essentially that of a myth and lie.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974).

<sup>171</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” *Slavery and Public History*, 5.

<sup>172</sup> Tucker, interview, 2011.

The black rice thesis also countered another problematic understanding of slavery that Berlin described, where slavery is an institution of “suffocating oppression, so airtight that it allowed its victims little opportunity to function as human beings.” The perceived result was that “slavery robbed Africans and their descendants of their culture . . . reducing them to infantilized ciphers.”<sup>173</sup> Enslaved West Africans bringing rice agricultural practices to the New World serves as evidence that Africans did not lose their culture or knowledge despite the hardships of slavery, and that their expertise was a vital part of the developing North American economy. In public history contexts, this thesis offers an uplifting, empowering narrative of Africans in slavery, rather than just focusing on oppression and struggle.

Then, in 2007, historians David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson published an article in the *American Historical Review* entitled “Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas,” that challenged the black rice thesis as an overstatement. The authors argue that the shifting interests of the larger Atlantic market had a greater impact on what parts of West Africa, rice-growing or not, enslaved people in the Lowcountry came from, regardless of planter interest in agricultural skills. They also assert that the actual slave trade to the Lowcountry does not demonstrate the numerical presence of West Africans from rice growing regions (particularly numbers of women trained in agriculture as Carney asserts) to be so critically influential at the time rice-growing technology developed, though they do note that a significant number of enslaved people from rice-

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<sup>173</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” *Slavery and Public History*, 5.

growing regions came later in the trade. Ultimately these scholars assert that the numbers do not fully support the thesis. Knowledge about developing rice agriculture could have come from multiple sources as Europeans experimented with various agricultural techniques from Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas, as well as Africa and Europe, in their ongoing search for lucrative plantation cash crops during New World colonization. All scholars involved in the debate acknowledge that enslaved Africans did bring influential skills to rice agriculture as it developed in the Lowcountry, particularly in toe-heel planting techniques and in the use of “fanner” baskets and mortar and pestle to process rice. The point of contention is not overall influence, but whether or not trans-Atlantic slave trade numbers and points of origin support the thesis that enslaved West Africans provided the initial, and economically crucial design of Lowcountry rice agriculture, particularly the complex tidal irrigation systems found on Carolina and Georgia plantations.<sup>174</sup>

This article generated enough debate among scholars that in February 2010 the *American Historical Review* published a special volume of articles assessing the competing rice agriculture arguments. S. Max Edelson’s essay “Beyond ‘Black Rice’: Reconstructing Material and Cultural Contexts for Early Plantation Agriculture” is particularly useful for describing the public “pedagogy” at stake with the rice debates, as well as the scholarship:

Like the tale of Squanto teaching Pilgrims to plant maize, the image of black slaves instructing their white masters in the intricacies of sowing seeds, culling weeds, and

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<sup>174</sup> David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, “Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas” *American Historical Review*, Volume 112, No. 5 (December 2007), 1329-1358.

irrigating fields is a multicultural origin story designed to make a pedagogical point. Establishing the Lowcountry rice economy was an achievement for which blacks appear to deserve credit that white colonists as well as white scholars have long denied.<sup>175</sup>

Edelson then offers critiques of both scholarly arguments, stating that while the authors of the intervention article “make a convincing case that few skilled rice farmers figured among the enslaved population of the early Carolina Lowcountry” the problem with their critique is that “it still leaves un-answered the question of how rice became the region’s staple commodity.”<sup>176</sup> Edelson goes on to assert that he believes the answer to this question lies in further research into the context of the plantation itself rather than focusing exclusively on Atlantic market statistics or West African-based skill contributions. To better understand knowledge transfer in colonial agriculture and economies, scholars could seek “to reconstruct the specific conditions under which African slaves and European colonists first practiced agriculture in New World environments . . . these adaptations reveal a world of unintended consequences and surprising collaborations that shaped the emergence of American plantation societies.”<sup>177</sup> Still he acknowledges that the momentum to conduct this research and ask these questions of rice agriculture can be attributed to the black rice thesis debates. Rice agriculture had previously been overshadowed by a scholarly focus on sugar, cotton, or tobacco plantations, and these scholarly conflicts helped emphasize a need for scholars to consider multiple “slaveries” to understand the role and individual experiences of this

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<sup>175</sup> Max S. Edleson, “Beyond ‘Black Rice’: Reconstructing Material and Cultural Contexts for Early Plantation Agriculture,” *American Historical Review* (Volume 115, No. 1, February 2010), 128.

<sup>176</sup> Edelson, “Beyond ‘Black Rice,’” 125.

<sup>177</sup> Edelson, “Beyond ‘Black Rice,’” 126.

institution in American history.<sup>178</sup> Rather than a problem, Edelson sees these debates over rice agriculture and West African influence in the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry as a valuable resource for generating new questions and scholarship.

By 2011 I observed little evidence of this debate in Tucker and Cooley's presentation of the black rice thesis in the Cabin Project tour, or in the presentations of the new Cabin Project guides. When I asked Cooley and Tucker about their thoughts on challenges to the black rice thesis, they generally dismissed them. They were not unique in this perspective; many public historians I spoke to described being upset by academic concerns regarding the black rice thesis, and were suspicious of the motives of the white male scholars who would write an intervention article questioning West African agency and technological contributions. As one public historian asked, "why would they want to do that?" Even Edelson observed in his essay that the strict quantitative intervention into Carney's "looser," more "associative" style of reasoning made the scholars involved seem unsympathetic and "churlish" in their "unwillingness to admit that Africans might have deposited this significant stratum in colonial British America's economic foundation."<sup>179</sup>

My major concern about this resistance to black rice thesis critiques in the context public history interpretation was not with the accuracy of the argument, but with the dismissal of the scholarly process that the debate demonstrated. Continuously questioning arguments and reexamining evidence is central to effective historic research, and to how

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<sup>178</sup> Edelson, "Beyond 'Black Rice,'" 127.

<sup>179</sup> Edelson, "Beyond 'Black Rice,'" 129.



scholars construct, reexamine, and adapt historical and geographical understanding. Why should this process be hidden in public history contexts, and replaced with “open and shut” historic narrative presentations?<sup>180</sup> Can historic interpreters effectively include academic debate and conflicting arguments in their tour presentations? If public historians resist questioning or including the various factors that may influence a historical experience as complex as enslavement, how will this limit the effectiveness of their interpretation strategies?<sup>181</sup>

In 2010 I interviewed David Eltis about his perspectives as an academic historian, particularly regarding the intervention article that he co-authored, and the role of the “black rice thesis” in public history. He responded by discussing the sociology of knowledge itself, and described a general divide among academic historians between a belief in facts, and a belief that all knowledge is socially constructed. As a historian who focuses on the quantitative data of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in his research (particularly through the Voyages Database project he led at Emory University), Eltis believes that while many aspects of history and culture depend on an individual’s perspective, the role of empirical, quantifiable evidence outside of human constructs should not be overlooked.<sup>182</sup> As he explains, “there are some things which exist whether

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<sup>180</sup> Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>181</sup> As described in the introduction, this tension in priorities also relates to a traditional sense in the history community that public history and academic history are separate realms. This problematic divide must be bridged to effectively develop inclusive public history interpretation. Robert Weible, “Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, Volume 46, No. 3 (March 2008), 24-25.

<sup>182</sup> For more information on the Voyages database, see: *Voyages Database*, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.slavevoyages.org>.

or not people recognize them as a reality.”<sup>183</sup> Facts about history exist regardless of how people feel about them or understand them, which can be difficult to grapple with in the context of public history, which as Eltis observes, “really hinges on that issue of differing perceptions of reality and one being as good as another.” Historical facts do not necessarily connect to present day interests, which may make them difficult to interpret, but that does not mean they become malleable points.<sup>184</sup>

In 2011, I also interviewed Dr. Daniel Littlefield, who is the author of one of the seminal books in developing the black rice thesis, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (1991). Littlefield also noted a relationship, and tension, between fact and conjecture in the black rice thesis, but he asserts that Atlantic slave trade numbers do not displace the importance of conjecture, and the argument for critical West African influence:

The case for [the rice thesis] is circumstantial. I can say this fact, this fact, this fact leads to the suggestion that Africans brought this knowledge and taught Englishmen how to do it. The only way you could really prove that is if you had a document. An Englishman saying “I learned how to grow rice from my slave today.” And we don’t have any document of that type. So lacking that, it’s a circumstantial case of this happened, this happened, and this happened—and then they grew rice.<sup>185</sup>

Littlefield believes the black rice thesis, like all scholarship, should be rightfully contested, but not dismissed, because of the ways it could inform future research developments. This is part of the academic process, which he also observed would make discussions around the black rice thesis difficult for public historians:

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<sup>183</sup> David Eltis, interview with the author, 16 November 2010, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>184</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, 31.

<sup>185</sup> Daniel Littlefield, interview with the author, 13 May 2011, Columbia, South Carolina.

The thing about the interaction between public history and professional historians is that professional historians like to argue about things. And when you are presenting a story to the public, to make it understandable, you have to sort of pare it down. And this could mean, on the one hand if you want to discredit it, you can dismiss an African contribution entirely. Or if you want to emphasize it, you can take it to extremes. But that's because there's still, in the historical profession, people who are still working out the precise lines of the contribution.<sup>186</sup>

When I asked Eltis about the role of public history in the debate, he generally did not believe it should influence the objective goals of his academic research. He did, however, question the pedagogical implications of describing enslaved West Africans offering “contributions” of rice technology by tutoring their white enslavers:

The rice thesis is really saying that the Africans collaborated in their own exploitation. Which I think is a very odd position to take . . . I think African agency is very, very important, but I wouldn't carry it to the point where Africans are actually helping to create a plantation economy which is based on this horrible system.<sup>187</sup>

Enslaved people may have gained some immediate personal advantages from supporting a stable plantation economy (for example the improved wealth of slaveholders could potentially translate to better food rations, or could prevent the financial need to sell family or friends, or lead to a variety of other ameliorations in this exploitative system), but Eltis's questioning of the rhetorical use of “contributions” did seem relevant in my observations of the From Slavery to Freedom tour. Cabin Project guides regularly used the concept of contributions in their interpretation, for example in the guide's tour conclusion quoted earlier: “if it wasn't for the knowledge and the skill and all of the hard work from these African slaves and these African American families . . . we wouldn't have everything that's developed from that here today.”<sup>188</sup> While “contributions” asserts a

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<sup>186</sup> Littlefield, interview, 2011.

<sup>187</sup> Eltis, interview, 2011.

<sup>188</sup> Recording of tour, Crowley, 2011.

powerful role for Africans in a founding narrative of the plantation economy, and the early national economy, this theme simultaneously obscures some defining features of slavery. Specifically, that these “contributions” were not freely given. Slaveholders, often with support from non-slaveholding whites, used violent coercion or the underlying potential of violence to obtain labor and skills from enslaved Africans and African Americans to produce this wealth, and to make these individuals units of wealth as chattel property. These points are central to understanding slavery, in all its various forms.

Such interpretive tensions within the Cabin Project narrative connect to a larger dilemma with public representations of the history of U.S. slavery in the present. As Ira Berlin explains:

What makes slavery so difficult for Americans, both black and white, to come to terms with is that slavery encompasses two conflicting ideas—both with equal validity and with equal truths, but with radically different implications. One says slavery is our great nightmare; the other says slavery left a valuable legacy. One says death, the other life.<sup>189</sup>

When I asked Tucker and Cooley about this dilemma in how Americans understand slavery, they responded that they chose to emphasize “life” in their interpretations. Their narrative powerfully focuses on West African retentions such as rice agriculture, and the survival of cultural traditions through music, spirituality, foodways, and family life, but only minimally addresses the significance of chattel property status or violence in slavery.<sup>190</sup> I found this to be a pattern on neighboring plantations, such as Middleton Place and Drayton Hall. Middleton’s African American history tour guide Ron

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<sup>189</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” *Slavery and Public History*, 7.

<sup>190</sup> This may be why as Cooley noted earlier, some tour participants felt like they were “whitewashing” the tour, because while Cabin Project guides did regularly discuss the suffering of the trans-Atlantic Middle Passage, they rarely mentioned violence against enslaved African Americans once they were working on Lowcountry plantations.

Vido stated that he found it frustrating that visitors regularly wanted to know why he did not talk about “whips and chains” of slavery in his tour.<sup>191</sup> When I asked a number of guides why they did not discuss violence, they responded that visitors already knew about that aspect of slavery so why should they focus on it? A few even claimed that they had no archival evidence of violence against enslaved people on that plantation, though they were aware it most likely happened. I found this avoidance and claims of prior visitor knowledge to be problematic considering that guides also frequently stated that their audiences generally knew very little about African American history during and after slavery before they began their tours. Why did they consider violence to be covered ground? Effectively addressing the systemic violence of slavery is crucial for comprehending how this system functioned. “No understanding of slavery can avoid these themes,” Berlin asserts, “violence, power, and the usurpation of labor for the purpose of aggrandizing a small minority.”<sup>192</sup>

In addition, chattel property status within North American slavery constantly threatened and destabilized the social connections and survival resources of enslaved people, not only through the trans-Atlantic trade but also in the ongoing domestic trade. Between 1790 and 1808, Americans transported over one million enslaved African Americans from Upper South states, like Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia where slavery was on the decline, to Lower South states like Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama to follow the growth of cotton agriculture. Over two thirds of this number arrived through sale in the U.S. domestic slave trade. After the trans-Atlantic slave trade

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<sup>191</sup> Ron Vido, interview with the author, 5 February 2012, Summerville, South Carolina.

<sup>192</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” *Slavery and Public History*, 6.

closed in the United States in 1808, this surging demand for enslaved labor on cotton plantations could only be met through the domestic slave trade, and Charleston's markets played an active role.<sup>193</sup> As Stephanie Yuhl argues, neglecting public history representations of the U.S. domestic slave trade helps generate a benign, paternalistic view of the overall institution:

When the story of slavery begins in the usual historic sites — the plantation, small farm or city mansion setting — it is too easily domesticated into a discourse about relationships, community, homes, households and intact families “white and black.” In such settings, bondage is too readily assimilated; the enslaved too easily become “servants” separated from active enslavers, and the institution of slavery construed simply as an inheritance that is paternalistic and organic in nature.<sup>194</sup>

Numerous scholars have asserted that chattel property status, as well as inheritability of this status for future offspring, are critical to understanding how slavery functioned as an exploitative system of commerce rather than paternalism. No matter what survival resources, cultural retentions, or family and kinship connections an enslaved person established, constant vulnerability to sale made the experience of slavery

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<sup>193</sup> Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade In American Life* (Oxford, UK and New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-5. Stephanie Yuhl, “Re-mapping the Tourist/Trade: Confronting Slavery’s Commercial Core at Charleston’s Old Slave Mart Museum,” *The Journal of Southern History*, upcoming article publication (Summer 2013).

<sup>194</sup> Yuhl, “Re-mapping the Tourist/Trade: Confronting Slavery’s Commercial Core at Charleston’s Old Slave Mart Museum,” Summer 2013.

devastating.<sup>195</sup> By underemphasizing these points, guides obscure why and how enslaved people consistently resisted this institution.<sup>196</sup> Though the From Slavery to Freedom tour offers a wide range of valuable scholarly information, a narrative focused on “contributions” can obscure narratives of oppression and resistance that are crucial to understanding the experiences of enslavement.

Identifying the importance of scholarly debates and neglected historic contexts in the Cabin Project tour content indicates ongoing interpretive challenges for addressing African American history and slavery on plantation sites for current audiences. For example, I question the absence of discussions of violence and sale in slavery based on

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<sup>195</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006). The Cabin Project tour does introduce visitors to the trans-Atlantic trade, but I observed that guides did not emphasize the threat of sale as chattel property that continued to impact enslaved people on Lowcountry plantations through the domestic slave trade. This tendency to avoid the domestic slave trade reflects a problem in academic scholarship as well as public history. Only recently have scholars begun to produce works on the slave trade within the United States that lasted until the U.S. Civil War, particularly from plantation regions along the U.S. East Coast to the cotton plantations of Mississippi and Alabama. As Yuhl explains, “this scholarly state of things has also risked inadvertently reinforcing the slave-owners’ interpretation of the peculiar institution,” because it obscures how they continued to engage in the trade and financially benefit from the chattel property status of enslaved African Americans. Yuhl, “Re-mapping the Tourist/Trade,” 2. Other works on the role of chattel property status and sale in the U.S. domestic slave trade include: Deyle, *Carry Me Home*, 2005. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999). Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008). Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). James McMillin, *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783-1810* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 2004).

<sup>196</sup> Scholars argue that enslaved Africans and African Americans in the United States did not passively accept their status. Instead, across centuries of slavery they consistently resisted violence, sale, and the brutality of chattel slavery in a range a ways, from open rebellions, to running away, to subtle subversive acts such as feigning illness or slowing work processes, to political advocacy in the abolitionist movement. Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1991). David P. Geggus, editor, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002). Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison House, 1999). Mark M. Smith, *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (University of South Carolina Press, 2005). James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2007). Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, The African* (Simon & Brown, 2013 (originally published 1789)).

concerns that neglecting these subjects ameliorates the role of white slaveholders (and therefore supports, rather than challenges, a plantation framework of white elite nostalgia). But I also found that the motivation for minimizing these points did not stem entirely from white interpreters and visitors. As Ruffins observes in “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” outcries against African American history representations that focus on violence, sale, and victimization also come from African Americans.<sup>197</sup> She describes the reasons for these protests stemming from African American ambivalence about representing such a painful past, to a sense that a “white” public history institution is not capable of effectively addressing the “brutal realities of slavery.”<sup>198</sup> Charleston plantation sites where producers still treat African American history tours as optional additions are highly vulnerable to this criticism, particularly when historic tours in the main house and gardens continue to emphasize white elite nostalgia.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> A striking example of African American resistance to public history representations of slavery occurred with the controversy over the reenactment of a slave auction in Colonial Williamsburg in 1999, which the local NAACP protested. For more information, see: Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” *Museum Frictions*, 2006. Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, 2009. Richard and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>198</sup> Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” *Museum Frictions*, 407-408.

<sup>199</sup> The question of present day political and economic implications for addressing this history also influences concerns about representing slavery in U.S. public history. As Ruffins notes, the increasing presence of slavery in public history has been accompanied by “increasing insistence on political acknowledgement of and economic compensation for the injuries of slavery,” which some activists argue could translate to support for institutions such as historically black colleges or African American history museums rather than individual payments. The other implied goal of representing the history of slavery through an “interracial framework” has been “racial reconciliation,” though Ruffins notes that the political base for this approach is predominantly not African American. None of the guides I spoke to explicitly invoked any of these political implications, so it is still unclear what site producers and interpreters hope to accomplish with African American history additions within these present day political and economic contexts. Reconciliation may have potentially been implied through the interpretive frame of reverence for African American contributions, but the topics of historic tours throughout the site are generally too separate from the white elite tours to be considered “interracial.” Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation,” *Museum Frictions*, 416-26.



### *Emphasizing Questions*

Scholarly content can help correct biases in historic tours, but its interpretive potential is cut short when guides seek to produce a single “open and shut” narrative. Effective public history representations should strive to address debate and competing viewpoints. Interpreters’ most immediate reasons for not including competing arguments involve lack of time in the tour structure for complication, academic jargon, and critical discussions of historic interpretations. But for the purpose of time and clarity I argue that there is an alternative — interpreters could emphasize open-ended interpretive questions based on scholarship. What if Cabin Project guides asked visitors to consider Berlin’s “life” or “death” approaches to understanding the experiences of slavery, rather than choosing for them? This questioning could further engage the experiential space of the cabins by asking visitors to consider how the occupants of these spaces would have dealt with different circumstances at different points in history. This strategy may seem simplistic, but encouraging questions could generate more critical thinking about diverse historic contexts. As Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper argue in their research on historic representations in Hollywood films, the most effective films about historic subjects seek to “challenge its viewers to *think* about how events being portrayed can be interpreted.”<sup>200</sup> As Richard Handler and Eric Gable explain, if critical interrogation becomes a goal, the benefit of a historic site is that it already functions as an interactive “social arena.”<sup>201</sup> Magnolia’s structures and landscapes offer numerous opportunities for

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<sup>200</sup> Trevor B. McCrisken and Andrew T. Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>201</sup> Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 9.

introducing questions and challenging visitor assumptions about antebellum and colonial history in the South Carolina Lowcountry, as well as late nineteenth and twentieth century tourism history. Jarring visitor expectations rather than catering to them on a for-profit plantation site may sound problematic, but as a 2011 *Washington Post* article about new representations of slavery at Colonial Williamsburg revealed, making visitors *think* about this complex history may be a new trend on history sites. After describing a provocative presentation at Colonial Williamsburg on the different meanings of freedom to slaveholding and enslaved colonial figures, reporter Rachel Manteuffel positively noted, “That’s right, I’m in Colonial Williamsburg, and it’s making me think Revolutionary.”<sup>202</sup>

The Cabin Project could build on its existing combination tour structure by further emphasizing inclusive experiential education and questions in the cabins, and by pursuing exhibition spaces in an appropriate structure on the site to offer foundational information about the history of slavery. This could relieve guides from having to “list facts” to provide a scholarly foundation in the lecture portion of the tour. As I will describe in chapter three, developing a major museum on Lowcountry African American history in Charleston could also alleviate pressure on guides to accommodate a general lack of U.S. public understanding about African American history.<sup>203</sup> The Cabin Project already introduces many groundbreaking interpretation strategies as well as researched historic information to Magnolia, but in the future project managers must continue to consider

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<sup>202</sup> Rachel Manteuffel, “Colonial in: The Complicated History of Colonial Williamsburg,” *The Washington Post*, 9 June 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/colonial-in-the-complicated-history-of-colonial-williamsburg/2011/05/20/AGRtfqNH\\_story.html?fb\\_ref=NetworkNews&fb\\_source=home\\_multiline](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/colonial-in-the-complicated-history-of-colonial-williamsburg/2011/05/20/AGRtfqNH_story.html?fb_ref=NetworkNews&fb_source=home_multiline) (accessed 9 June 2011).

<sup>203</sup> Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” 3.

opportunities for enhancing the tour and its potential to challenge and transform historic representations throughout the entire site, including the house and gardens.



(Figure 1) Print of garden path at Magnolia Plantation from “Up the Ashley and Cooper,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, December 1875, courtesy of the College of Charleston Special Collections.



(Figure 2) Front of stereograph image of African Americans working at Magnolia Plantation, F.A. Nowell, photographer and publisher, ca. 1890s, courtesy of Drayton Hall, a historic site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



(Top, figure 3, and bottom, figure 4) Advertisements emphasizing garden beauty, leisure, and escape in Magnolia's Gardens, ca. 1950-60s (when Norwood Hastie was site director), courtesy of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens archives.



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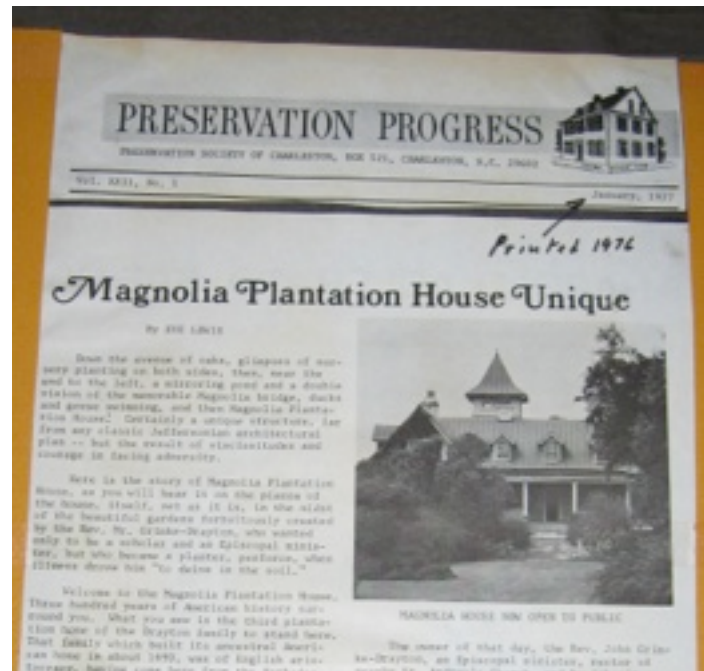
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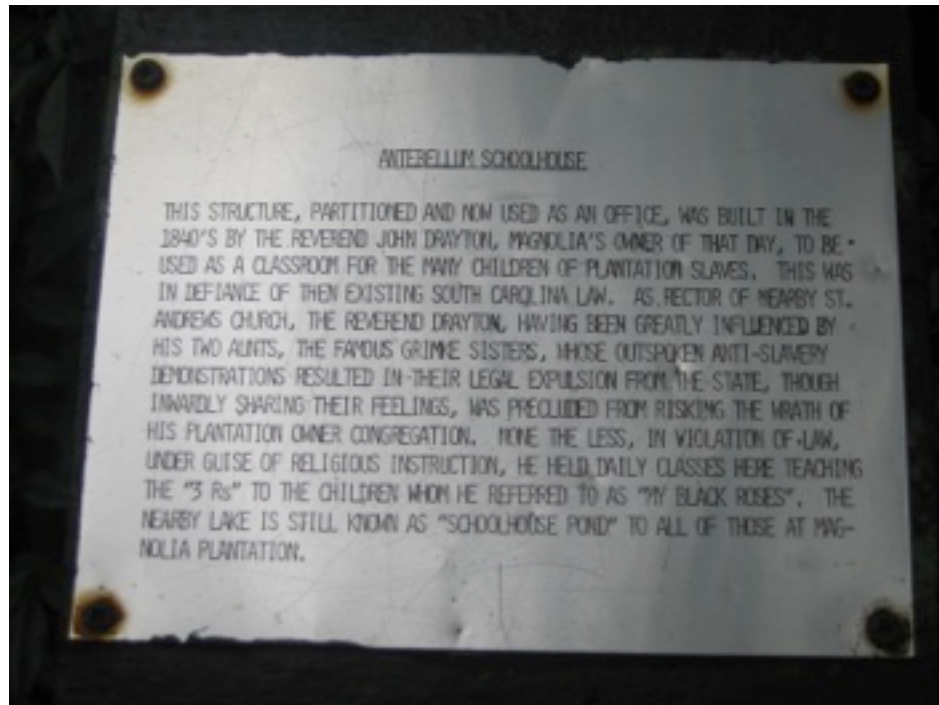
(Figure 5) Clipping of newspaper advertisement, ca. 1975, courtesy of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens archives. Lists recreational and entertainment attractions for “everyone in the family” added by Drayton Hastie after he became site director in 1975.



(Figure 6) Flyer announcing opening of Magnolia house tour in 1976, courtesy of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens archives. Image in flyer shows appearance of house at Magnolia before Drayton Hastie added columns in 1995.



(Figure 7) Main house at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, 2008. The current house was a hunting lodge that the family moved from Summerville, South Carolina to be the family residence after the antebellum home burned during the Civil War. In 1995, site director Drayton Hastie added a wrap around porch and columns.



(Top, figure 8) "Antebellum Schoolhouse" interpretive sign at Magnolia Plantation, located beside current administrative offices, 2007. (Bottom, figure 9) Signs for "Plantation Graveyard" (African American cemetery) at Magnolia Plantation, 2011. Drayton Hastie placed these interpretive signs throughout the site in the 1970s. When addressing slavery, the descriptions on these scattered signs emphasize the benevolence of Reverend Drayton as a slaveholder, or the "loyalty" of specific enslaved people at Magnolia.







(Figure 10) Hand-tinted postcard photograph of “Aunt Phoebe,” Magnolia-on-the-Ashley, Charleston, South Carolina, ca. 1901, Detroit Photographic Company, courtesy of Magnolia Plantation & Garden archives. In Magnolia’s “History Room” (2011) this image appears in different colors in a small frame with the caption “garden worker” (figure 11, below, top left image). On the current Magnolia website, the above image appears in the “Magnolia History” section with the caption “Aunt Phoebe” and no date or further details.





(Figure 12) “Slave Talk” sign, locate beside “Ante Bellum Cabin” (below) at Magnolia Plantation, 2007. This sign and tour were removed by 2009.



(Figure 13) Interior of “Ante Bellum Cabin,” at Magnolia Plantation, 2007. In the 1990s, Drayton Hastie furnished an outbuilding by the parking lot to look like his perception of the interior of an antebellum slave cabin.



(Top, figure 14) Entrance sign to Magnolia Plantation & Garden, 2009. The “From Slavery to Freedom Tour” opened to the public this same year, and site producers nailed a new board to the bottom of old sign. (Bottom, figure 15) Cabins in “From Slavery to Freedom” tour, after restoration, 2009.



(Top left, figure 16) Former Cabin Project director, D.J. Tucker, presenting cabin restoration plan and historic lecture to tour group, 2009. (Middle, figure 17) tour participants explore cabins independently after listening to tour presentation, 2009. (Bottom, figure 18), interior of cabin in "From Slavery to Freedom" tour, 2011.



(Top left, figure 18) Display in stable yards at Middleton Place to demonstrate how enslaved African Americans at this plantation processed rice, 2011. (Top right, figure 19) Souvenirs for purchase in Magnolia Plantation & Gardens gift shop, 2011. The gift shop reflects the white elite material culture focus on the house tour (pictures not allowed in the house). On most Charleston area plantation house tours, interpretation emphasizes the age and financial worth of antiques and furniture owned by white elites, while material culture for interpreting slavery and African American history, like the display in the image on the left, requires more comprehensive social and labor history context.



(Figure 20) Sharon Murray performs in "Gullah Show" at Boone Hall Plantation, 2007. She first started working as a cultural performer on this site in the early 1990s.



(Top, figure 21) National Park Ranger Michael Allen announces the commission members for planning and implementing the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) at the Avery Research Center in Charleston, South Carolina, 2008. Allen also serves as the Community Outreach Organizer for the GGCHC. (Bottom, figure 22) Conceptual design for the International African American Museum, which will be located in Arrival Square (formerly Gadsden's Wharf) in downtown Charleston, courtesy of the International African American Museum, design by Ralph Appelbaum Associates, 2013.



## **SECTION TWO**

### **Emerging African American History in Charleston**

## Chapter Three

### *“As It Really Was”*

#### **African Americans Interpreting Historic Charleston**

##### *Introduction: I Am Somebody*

In the opening scenes of *I Am Somebody* (1970), a documentary about the 1969 hospital workers’ strike in Charleston, an unseen female narrator speaks: “Ever since I was a little girl, I could remember that tourists would come to Charleston.” As she narrates, the film shows footage of sightseeing tourists on a ferry to Fort Sumter, followed by a carriage ride alongside the mansions lining Battery Park. At the end of this sequence she concludes: “But those who came in the spring of 1969 saw Charleston as it really was — if you’re poor and black.”<sup>1</sup> The documentary later features footage of African American hospital workers and students demonstrating in front of these Battery Park mansions, protesting against racial discrimination and demanding fair wages and union representation.

In 1969, the hospital workers’ strike stood out as one of the most significant civil rights events in Charleston, and South Carolina, to garner national media attention during

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<sup>1</sup> *I Am Somebody*, directed by Madeline Anderson (American Foundation of Non-Violence, 1970).



the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> The choice of these demonstrators to protest in one of Charleston's most elite and highly trafficked historic tourism spaces, and the film director Madeline Anderson's choice to emphasize the significance of marching in that space, reveals that African Americans in Charleston have long been aware of their exclusion from historical as well as contemporary power structures and tourism narratives. During this civil rights event, protestors used media attention as an opportunity to push back against this exclusion. As one student marcher at the Battery explains in the film, "its a historical section of Charleston, the only people around here is white . . . . I really wanted them to see that we were not going to just stay in the ghettos and have demonstrations, that we can go into their own community and raise as much hell as we want to."<sup>3</sup>

White elites, slaveholders, and slave traders built or occupied many of the historic mansions along Charleston's Battery. The park also faces a harbor that includes Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began, and Sullivan's Island, where enslaved Africans were

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<sup>2</sup> Though South Carolina received comparatively little national media attention during the 1960s civil rights movement in contrast to southern states such as Mississippi and Alabama, this does not mean major civil rights struggles did not occur in this state. While political rhetoric and even scholars frequently claimed that South Carolina and its leaders were too "genteel" for the racial violence and televised spectacles that occurred in other parts of the U.S. South, (along with other explanations such as moderate white political leadership, the influence of international business interests, and even a history of more accommodating black leadership), as the film *I Am Somebody* indicates, and as various scholars have addressed, what "really" occurred in South Carolina race relations during the mid-twentieth century civil rights era was more violent and volatile. Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Leon Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power: The Story of 1199B and Labor's Search for a Southern Strategy," *Southern Changes*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1983, 9-20), accessed 17 March 2013, [http://beck.library.emory.edu/southernchanges/article.php?id=sc05-2\\_006&keyword=Leon%20Fink](http://beck.library.emory.edu/southernchanges/article.php?id=sc05-2_006&keyword=Leon%20Fink). Winfred B. Moore and Orville Vernon Burton, editors, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006). Jack Bass and Scott Poole, *The Palmetto State: The Making of Modern South Carolina* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Tinsley Yarborough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001). Katherine Mellon Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *I Am Somebody*, Anderson, 1970.

held in quarantine when they first arrived to North America through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Today a number of monuments on the Battery commemorate the Confederacy, but no marker yet memorializes the history of slavery that the Confederacy fought to preserve, or the thousands of enslaved Africans who disembarked from the Middle Passage in Charleston Harbor between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> By marching through this space in 1969, black protestors physically asserted the significance of African Americans in Charleston's present and past, and made a poignant, highly visible public intervention into the city's long history of race and class injustice.

The 1969 demonstration also reveals how marginalizing African American history generates much more than inaccurate tourism representations. In his 1958 *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Melville Herskovits asserts that the myth of African "savagery" and inferiority to European "civilization" serves as a central strategy for supporting white racism in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Since Herskovits, various scholars have identified how demeaning or negligent representations of Africans and African Americans have permeated U.S. public history and popular culture, from stereotypes featured in popular film and print, to exclusive historic narratives in school textbooks as well as tourism narratives, to "pseudo-science" arguments providing dubious genetic evidence to support white supremacy. In addition to denigrating African and African American history and culture, such representations warped public understanding of the history of slavery in the

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<sup>4</sup> *Voyages Database: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 30 November 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>. James McMillin, *The Final Victims: The Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783-1810* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Beacon Press, 1990 (original publication 1941)).

United States. Rather than presenting U.S. slavery as an international, racism-based, coerced labor system for economic gain managed through violence and oppression, popular representations based on white elite nostalgia transformed slavery into an innate racial hierarchy, a positive work of instilling Christianity, or just a minor part of history relegated to the U.S. southeast that should be forgotten.<sup>6</sup> These skewed historic narratives enabled the entrenchment of political and economic race and class hierarchies in the United States that lasted long after Emancipation and Jim Crow segregation, by crystallizing into systemic inequalities that continue into the present.<sup>7</sup> Any attempts to understand U.S. race relations today requires recognizing and challenging the myths and biases against African and African American history that Herskovits identified, and enabling a better public understanding of slavery as the basis of these long term racial injustices in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of Historic Charleston, African American exclusion from public history had a range of economic consequences — including limiting African American access to tourism dollars after this industry became a major source of income starting

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<sup>6</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Stephanie Yuhl, *The Golden Haze of Memory* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005). W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York, New York and London, UK: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010). Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Painter, *The History of White People*, 2010. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Ira Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

shortly after the Civil War. As Nina Silber explains, even when black southerners functioned as an “attraction” for visitors with the growth of tourism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African Americans could only obtain marginal work based on their seemingly minor role in the southern historic narrative. For example, black Charlestonians could access work as hucksters selling vegetables, seafood, or sweetgrass coil baskets to visitors and locals in bustling city markets, and early tourists to the Lowcountry might attend “a black church service” or “go out in the country to the cabin of an old ‘mammy’ who was a famous cook.” But these early tourism ventures did not offer significant or consistent income, particularly as promotional materials increasingly depicted African Americans as “picturesque” aspects of the southern landscape, best appreciated from a distance.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as early twentieth century southern tourism depictions and Jim Crow segregation pushed African Americans further into the popular culture background, Kenneth Goings argues that white tourists throughout the U.S. South became increasingly familiar with consuming black racial stereotypes embodied in tourist souvenirs and popular performances, such as Mammy dolls and “blackface” minstrel shows.<sup>10</sup> In Charleston, as found throughout the southeast, the myth of black historic insignificance translated to ongoing economic, social, and political exclusion for African Americans in the present.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 79. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 134-135.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Goings, “Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose Travel the USA: The Marketing of Memory through Tourist Souvenirs,” in *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism*, Graham M.S. Dann and A.V. Seaton, editors (New York, New York: The Haworth Press, 2001), 134-135. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> See introduction and conclusion, where I further discuss the role of white elite nostalgia influencing African American political access and civil rights activism in Charleston and throughout South Carolina.

For most of the twentieth century, the tourism industry in Charleston perpetuated this pattern of white elite-focused historic interpretations with unequal, destructive impacts for African Americans. But while dominant white public history producers ignored their perspectives and experiences, African Americans in this region generated and disseminated their own counter-narratives within black-run institutions, including churches and schools as well as informal family and neighborhood channels. As Katherine Mellen Charron describes in her biography of Charleston civil rights activist Septima Clark, white southerners claimed “the right to control the public meaning of their region and to interpret it for the rest of the nation,” but African Americans still used “memory and place to locate themselves in history” and attach “different meanings to the same geography.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, some of the earliest forms of African American history tours in Charleston most likely began with black community leaders and teachers guiding young black students through their own translations of Charleston’s historic landscape. These grassroots historic and cultural narratives were not part of popular tourism attractions, but they played a powerful role in the lives of many individuals. For example, Charron documents how Mamie Fields (born in 1888) described her teacher, Annie Izzard, taking older African American students on “walking tours” around Charleston, including the Battery, which was customarily “off-limits” to African Americans during the Jim Crow segregation era. From this location, Fields recalled, “we found out about the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, how people made money during slavery . . . . She

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<sup>12</sup> Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher*, 16.

taught us how strong our ancestors back in slavery were and what fine people they were.”<sup>13</sup>

In Charleston, Jim Crow laws limited black students’ access to African American teachers such as Annie Izzard. When Clark started attending a segregated African American public school in Charleston in 1904, a city-wide restriction permitted only white teachers to work in the city’s black and white public schools. According to various accounts, these white teachers often “looked down” on their black students, so that as Clark described, “we didn’t learn too much.”<sup>14</sup> Clark’s parents were able to enroll their daughter in a private school with African American teachers, but when Septima Clark became a teacher in 1916, the whites-only law for the city’s public school teachers meant that she had to leave Charleston and move to rural John’s Island to find work. In 1919, local advocates successfully petitioned to overturn this city ordinance, but before that time white teachers maintained exclusive access to coveted teaching jobs in Charleston.<sup>15</sup> African Americans strived to generate historic counter-narratives, but new generations of black Charlestonians could miss these empowering representations within white-controlled segregation.

In 1963, Millicent Brown was one of the first African American students to desegregate public schools in Charleston.<sup>16</sup> Like Clark in the early 1900s, before desegregation, Brown was able to attend public and private schools with African

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<sup>13</sup> Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> I later discuss Millicent Brown’s public history work and perspectives more in depth this chapter and in the dissertation conclusion.

American teachers. In a 2011 interview, she describes these black teachers as “the best teachers from anywhere ever” because they stood for “excellence” and expected the same from their students.<sup>17</sup> She also notes that the segregated black neighborhoods of Charleston provided a range of cultural resources for African American children, including what she described as “black history classes” on Saturdays at the black YMCA.

In the aftermath of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954, white public schools throughout the southeast used delay tactics to stall desegregation. Nearly a decade later, the 1963 court case *Millicent E. Brown et. al vs. Charleston County School Board District 20* finally forced integration in Charleston and throughout South Carolina’s public schools. Brown explains that the goal of her participation, along with other African American students, was to demand equal social, political, and economic access. As she asserts, “there was nothing magic about being with white people . . . this was about equality.” But as white and black schools increasingly merged through desegregation in the 1960s and 70s, whites again demoted or pushed out African American leaders, particularly black teachers and principals. The result, as Brown describes, is that “all children, but especially African Americans” in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have limited exposure to African American history and information about the racism-based systems that shaped U.S. and South Carolina history, including slavery. Brown offers this example: “I queried one of my nieces the other day, something about slavery and she says, ‘no, my teacher says slavery was a really long time ago, so we don’t talk about it.’” Brown suspected that the teacher was uncomfortable with the

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<sup>17</sup> Millicent Brown, interview with author, 20 October 2012, Charleston, South Carolina.

subject, or did not understand the history, and the school system did not provide the resources to change this negligence. The result was that her niece did not understand the history either. Without more support for inclusive historic education, lack of understanding about African American history and slavery continues to be a systemic problem in U.S. public education, particularly in southern states.<sup>18</sup>

Brown is currently a professor at Claflin University, a historically black college in Orangeburg, South Carolina. A major goal in her courses is to educate students about the complex goals, strategies, and results of the mid-twentieth century U.S. civil rights movement. She also seeks to fill in the gaps of their knowledge about African history and African American slavery. These educational gaps are not just confusing or misleading for young students, she argues, they are also dangerous. “The gaps eliminate the possibility that another generation will understand all the forces that are working against them,” she explains, particularly gaps in understanding how slavery formed ongoing U.S. race and class inequalities. To Brown, these gaps are “deadly.”

In the context of tourism, aspects of African American grassroots narratives did begin to emerge on Charleston’s public history stage starting in the 1980s and 90s. In particular, a handful of local African American interpreters began to organize and disseminate African American history representations based on local oral sources as well as scholarship. Their independent historic tourism narratives appeared many years, even decades, before African American history tours on established tourism sites in the area.

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<sup>18</sup> Ira Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, New York: Touchstone, 2007).



They also made a living from their work in the process, which demonstrated to local site producers and tour guides throughout Charleston that interpreting African American history and culture could serve as an economically viable part of the region's tourism industry, as well as a more accurate and inclusive way to represent the region's past. In contrast to hospital strike marchers or teachers, tour guides may not seem to make the most likely activists, particularly when their profession relies on enticing predominantly white visitors.<sup>19</sup> But the presence of African Americans interpreting underrepresented African American history for tourists in Charleston did open crucial opportunities for future transformation throughout Charleston institutions. These entrepreneurial interpreters demonstrated the possibilities of inclusive change in Charleston's public history narratives for the first time.

When formal public history institutions began to develop in Charleston in the early twenty-first century to focus on African American experiences and perspectives — such as the International African American Museum (IAAM) and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) — they frequently called on these early African American interpreters to be on planning boards alongside scholars, politicians, and prominent business persons. For both of these emerging organizations the future is

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<sup>19</sup> Various scholars even argue that tourism suppresses activism for social equality, due to industry concerns that demonstrations of societal unrest and histories of struggle might “frighten away the tourists,” and their much needed consumer spending. Caribbean tourism scholarship frequently addresses links between suppressed political activism, racial inequalities, and tourism. In his essay “Resort Structure and ‘Plantation’ Dynamics in Antigua and Coastal South Carolina,” David B. Weaver describes a similar social, economic, and political dynamic in the Lowcountry region. David B. Weaver, “Resort Structure and ‘Plantation’ Dynamics in Antigua and Coastal South Carolina,” *Managing Coastal Tourism Resorts: A Global Perspective*, Sheela Agarwal and Gareth Shaw, editors (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2007), 204-215. Ian Gregory Strachen, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville, Virginia and London, UK: University of Virginia Press, 2002). Polly Pattullo, *The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean* (London, UK: Cassell & Company, 1996). George Gmelch, *Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003).

tenuous due to budget constraints associated with the economic downturn starting in 2008. New, cost-effective digital technologies and multi-institutional collaborative strategies still offer planning boards access to a range of widely influential interpretation possibilities. These strategies have the potential to sustainably increase the visibility of underrepresented multicultural histories in Charleston and the Lowcountry within a fuller range of present-day landscapes and structures, while also influencing how visitors and locals interact with existing historic sites. Despite significant challenges, the public history pathways opened by early African American interpreters in Charleston in the 1980s and 90s will not close with current economic struggles.

Local changes in Charleston's public history interpretation from the 1980s and 90s into the twenty-first century also reflect broader national and international shifts towards inclusive, multicultural change in U.S. public history.<sup>20</sup> But in contrast to the local plantation sites I discussed in earlier chapters, where a pre-existing white elite narrative must *transform* to engage African American history and culture, Charleston's black historic interpreters began by including overlooked or hidden narratives. Their primary challenge is to locate and organize their narratives from grassroots resources and scholarship, and to make them visible and engaging. For this reason, I argue that they are *emerging* historic narratives. In this chapter I address the challenges and opportunities of emerging representations led by entrepreneurial African American interpreters, African Americans working within white-dominated institutions, and developing African American history projects led predominantly by African Americans. I focus on a few

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<sup>20</sup> Fath Davis Ruffins, "Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham: Duke University Press 2006).

select examples, but the work and experiences of these individuals demonstrate a broader pattern of how a small, but significant number of African American public history producers are organizing and promoting their own understanding of local history to instigate groundbreaking interpretation in recent decades.

### *Independent African American Tour Guides*

Charleston's mobile tour guides are institutionally independent, but they operate within an organized, city-wide system. The city government requires guides to take a history exam to obtain a license, enforces and regulates set tour routes, and requires limits on the number of participants allowed in a tour group to avoid street congestion and noise disturbances for downtown residents and businesses.<sup>21</sup> Beyond these structured guidelines, mobile tours have the option to form their own content and interpretive strategies. Without an overarching management structure, different guides or tour companies can individually determine their tour narratives. Much like the different management structures of historic sites in Charleston, this leads to wide variation in tour experiences.

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<sup>21</sup> Danielle Dillahey, interview with author, 24 July 2009, Charleston, South Carolina. Dillahey oversees tourism management for the city of Charleston. She notes that Charleston's tourism industry is more organized than many similarly sized cities. The tour guide exam for obtaining certification to offer tours in the city is particularly exceptional. In 2009, the city's tour guide manual (given to prospective guides to prepare for the exam) was in the process of being updated due to numerous inaccuracies in the original guide manual. I was not allowed to see the new manual or an example of an exam, but a number of African American guides I spoke with stated that they were doubtful that it would include significantly more materials on African American history and culture, or suggestions for how to emphasize social history instead of material culture. One promising area for promoting inclusive change for Charleston's downtown guides is in an ongoing "continuing education" lecture series that all guides are required to attend to maintain their license. In 2011 I observed a presentation where Dr. Bernard Powers from the College of Charleston described the history of slavery in Charleston for guides, but the city did not require a follow-up exam or tour observation research afterwards, to see how his lecture and others about African American history influenced guide narratives. Comprehensive tour guide observation and critique, as well as educational engagement regarding African American history and slavery, could be an area for future research and outreach for city tour guides' instruction and examination.

This independent mobile tour guide structure also allows for quick adaptation to changing trends in audience demographics and interests, including growing interests in multicultural inclusion. Though many Charleston area guides maintain a traditional focus on narratives of white elite nostalgia into the present, in the 1980s a handful of entrepreneurial African American guides took advantage of burgeoning consumer enthusiasm for African American history and started their own historic tours. At that time, most local plantation sites were still years away from introducing added focus tours, but these entrepreneurial guides were able to effectively market narratives of African American experiences, including discussions of slavery and post-Emancipation struggles, to tourists in downtown Charleston. Mobile tours particularly served as an entry point for these groundbreaking guides because they did not have to wait for approval from a formal board or director. By the 1980s, any individual who could pass the tour guide exam and find a steady market of tour participants could become a guide. This entrepreneurial approach, combined with shifting consumer trends in the late twentieth century, allowed African American history tours to be part of Charleston's public history landscape, and tourism economy, for the first time.

Alphonso Brown became one of the most influential guides from this early group of African American historic interpreters in Charleston. He grew up in Rantowles, a rural community outside of Charleston in the 1960s, and first considered working as a downtown tour guide as a second career after teaching music in local public schools in the 1980s. Brown successfully took Charleston's tour guide exam in 1985, but as he explained in a 2011 interview, he initially worked for "regular" tour companies, and

generally “did the same thing that they did” rather than focus on African American history.<sup>22</sup> He soon found that his tour participants demanded more from him. As an African American guide, they expected, and *wanted*, Brown to speak about African American history. “One day I had a lady in my car for the tour,” he recalled, “she said, ‘Well what about the blacks, did they do anything here?’ And I said, ‘Oh my God, that’s the truth.’” Soon after this interaction, Brown stopped working for other tour companies and went to the library to conduct research. He was amazed by what he found in various scholarly works, stating, “it was like hitting gold.” Brown used this information to organize a route through downtown Charleston, and he began asking local African Americans to give feedback on his tour plans. As he explained, “once you start talking about it, and showing people — people here in Charleston will show you more things.”

For example, when Brown drives by the former city jail in Charleston on his tour, he points out the “Black Mariah” wagon still parked outside that policemen used to transport prisoners. He notes that an African American oral history informant explained to him, “when we heard that thing coming down the street, we run and hide because if the policeman can’t find who they looking for, they’re going to take the first black young man they find.” Brown provides a number of similar stories based on local oral histories on his tour. He could only obtain such narratives from interviews with local African Americans, which he then augments with historic research. In this way, secondary scholarly sources and primary oral history sources are crucial in Brown’s tour. When I asked Brown if he interviewed white Charlestonians about African American history, he

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<sup>22</sup> Alphonso Brown, interview with the author, 5 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

responded that in the 1980s at least, when he was first developing his tour, “whites still were covering up.”

Brown chose the name “Gullah Tours” to acknowledge his cultural heritage in Rantowles and Charleston, but he also saw Gullah as a marketable “hook” for interpreting African American history. As he explained, “you know in business, you gotta have a gimmick.” For Brown and a number of guides I observed, describing the distinctive features of African American Gullah Geechee culture in the Lowcountry, such as dialect, storytelling, foodways, and crafts, provides an accessible as well as marketable representation framework for recounting histories of enslavement, racial inequality, oppression and resistance. At the beginning of his tour, Brown explains that “Gullah is a language, Gullah has been recognized as a language since 1939. Did they bother to tell us anything about it? No. They just made us think we were speaking bad English.” He then provides examples of Gullah words, and explains that Gullah is a creole language first developed by enslaved African Americans who fused European and African language influences. He concludes his introduction by again asserting his frustration with discrimination against the Gullah Geechee language, humorously pointing out that he went to great lengths as a child to learn how to say “this, that, they and them” rather than “dis, dat, dey, and dem.” Then — as I saw him repeat on a number of tours, like an actor’s lines in dramatic performance — Brown stops himself before he gets too angry while telling this story, and states, “Oh nevermind — let’s go see Charleston!” At that point, his tour of Charleston begins.

In contrast to a classroom lecture, a tour guide's narrative of historic figures and events must always interact with a present day landscape. In the context of downtown Charleston, identifying physical markers of African American history can be a challenge within a landscape shaped by nearly a century of preservation efforts focused on colonial and antebellum white elite nostalgia.<sup>23</sup> Brown confronts this problem by offering his tour participants ways to reinterpret and refocus their understanding of the different historic structures and spaces they see outside of his tour bus windows. When Brown stops his bus by the Aiken-Rhett antebellum mansion, he points out the former slave quarters standing beside the house, and explains that real estate agents now call these structures "carriage houses" or "dependencies." Once his tour participants recognize the original

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<sup>23</sup> Charleston's downtown landscape has a long history of preservation efforts shaped by white stakeholders. This began in the 1920s with the Preservation Society of Charleston, which was made up of local elites who brought in tourism revenue by preserving homes and constructing memorials and narratives that appealed to their own "Lost Cause" nostalgia, as well as new twentieth century business interests. In the 1950s, the Historic Charleston Foundation made historic preservation in a "living city" feasible through rehabilitation strategies that were groundbreaking at the time, but are now standard throughout the United States — such as revolving funds to purchase and rehabilitate historic buildings that are then sold for contemporary use to "preservation minded" buyers, rather than turned into museums. They also sought to preserve the historic "integrity" of entire neighborhoods rather than targeting a single building. But the Foundation's early disregard for African American history and interests meant that preservation led to increased costs of living and displacement in low-income neighborhoods predominantly occupied by African Americans. The terms "Negro slum" and "slum eradication" were used in 1950s' press campaigns to rehabilitate downtown Ansonborough, which ultimately led to the displacement of many African American families from their homes. The Foundation's history of gentrification and displacement in the 1950s and 60s caused many residents in low-income areas to distrust historic preservation efforts in the city in general, so that when the city attempted to have the predominantly African American East Side neighborhood placed on the National Register in the 1980s, residents resisted, and ultimately the nomination was not approved. Today, tour guides that I spoke to such as Christine Shedlock noted that many guides claim that it is difficult to locate visual cues in the downtown landscape that directly and obviously point to African American history topics, though as I describe, Brown found creative ways to address this issue. Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000). Christine Shedlock, interview with the author, 27 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

purpose of these buildings, Brown then notes that despite visitors claiming they cannot find black history in Charleston, “slave quarters all over the place!”<sup>24</sup>

This continued visual engagement with the present-day landscape on Brown’s history tour prompts questions about contemporary race and class inequalities in Charleston, particularly on sections of the tour that go through historic African American neighborhoods. Rather than directly discussing current issues in these neighborhoods (such as gentrification, crime, or poverty), Brown uses storytelling strategies of humor and juxtaposition of points, so that his tour participants can make, or not make, their own connections about the historic and contemporary experiences he narrates. For example, on a tour I took in January 2011, Brown dramatically stopped midway through, and in a low whisper asked the van full of tourists, “Are y’all ready to go into the ‘hood?” After a few chuckles Brown offered a suggestion — “Maybe all the white folks should lean down.” This led to more laughter from the tour group, numbering around fourteen people, with a balanced mix of whites and blacks. No one ducked, but this humor seemed to keep everyone listening and at ease as Brown pushed on the gas and began his narrative of “the projects,” which included describing the effects of segregation and discrimination in downtown Charleston. He later points out that the College of Charleston would love to “get their hands” on these housing projects predominantly occupied by African Americans, because their downtown location makes them “prime real estate,” but then he

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<sup>24</sup> Brown also encourages his tour participants to visit the Aiken Rhett Mansion as a historic house where they can see slave quarters as they appeared in the nineteenth century, in contrast to other homes where they have been destroyed or renovated. “Aiken-Rhett House Museum,” *Historic Charleston Foundation*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.historiccharleston.org/Visit/Museums/Aiken-Rhett-House-Museum.aspx>.



moves on to the next tour topic rather than elaborate on the city's history of gentrification.

In the consumer context of tourism, and with the goal of accessibility in public history, Brown's strategies of cajoling visitors about painful and complex subjects enables him to make race and class history from slavery to the present visible to a wide range of visitors. As he later explained in a 2011 interview, "you definitely don't want to hurt nobody's feelings." Today, Alphonso Brown's African American history tour is one of the most popular in Charleston. It has won numerous awards and in 2009, *Southern Living* magazine listed it as one of the top five tours in the city.<sup>25</sup> Brown uses his success to encourage other city tour guides to include African American history. As he told a city-wide meeting of tour guides in 2011, "keep in mind that the less you mention about slavery, and don't use the word slavery, the more that is going to fill my bus up, because people want to hear it." Though many guides do not heed his advice, they cannot avoid noticing the success of his tour.

Alada Shinault-Small is another early African American tour guide in Charleston who has worked for decades to instigate inclusive change in the area. As she described in a 2011 interview, she grew up in Charleston in the 1960s and 70s and decided to settle in the city after graduating from University of South Carolina in 1981.<sup>26</sup> Shinault-Small struggled to find a job, so her father introduced her to a local guide who suggested she try his profession, based on her communication skills from her undergraduate journalism major. Shinault-Small was intrigued, although in school she found "regular" history

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<sup>25</sup> *Gullah Tours*, accessed January 14, 2011, [http://www.gullahtours.com/alphonso\\_brown.asp](http://www.gullahtours.com/alphonso_brown.asp).

<sup>26</sup> Alada Shinault Small, interview with the author, 20 January 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

classes to be boring, and always “wiggled around straight history.” But the engaging presentation style of historic tour guides appealed to her. Shinault-Small obtained her tour guide license in 1982, which made her the first full-time licensed African American tour guide in Charleston. She began narrating driving tours downtown and gave lectures and performances, specializing in African American history.

At first, mobile tour guides resisted her interpretive focus. One company manager told her in 1982 that “Nobody’s ever spent money on black history. You’re not going to do well on that at all.”<sup>27</sup> By 2011, this same tour company had a number of African Americans on their staff who discuss African American history, including Shinault-Small. Instead of providing regular, daily tours, today she specializes in contract tours for large groups, particularly African American family reunions. These groups come to Charleston from a wide range of northeastern and midwestern cities because they have family connections in the southeast through the legacies of the twentieth century African American Great Migration.<sup>28</sup> By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a growing African American middle class in various U.S. urban centers emerged as a significant tourism consumer group. Guides such as Shinault-Small found a lucrative niche in presenting historic tourism in southern areas that provide a vehicle for African American tourists to explore southern backgrounds and family connections. Being African American helped Shinault-Small in this endeavor. “There’s a lot of times visitors

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<sup>27</sup> Alada-Shinault Small, interview with the author, 20 January 2011, North Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York, New York: Vintage Press, 1991). James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

now are very specific,” she says. “Many will want an African American guide to do the African American tour.”

Rather than guarding her interpretive niche, Shinault-Small encourages guides throughout Charleston to be more inclusive. African American history cannot function as an exclusive commodity only offered by black guides for black visitors, just as white guides cannot restrict themselves to white history for white visitors. Despite the problems of “segregated knowledge” in Charleston’s public history, historic and present day multiracial experiences are too entangled. For this reason, in addition to providing independent and company based tours, in the early 1990s, Shinault-Small also started volunteering as a guide on plantation sites in the Charleston area, such as Middleton Place.<sup>29</sup> As one of the only African American volunteers at that time, Shinault-Small advocated for Middleton’s overwhelmingly white staff to address African American history in their tours, including the house tours. She pointed out that this inclusion could encourage the African American reunion groups she frequently worked for to visit plantations as a space to learn about their ancestral history. Though Shinault-Small acknowledges that “there are a lot of African Americans who won’t even go on a plantation, they just can’t handle it,” she believes that guides can change this feeling for visitors by offering effective interpretation. “In recent times you have people who will go, but they’re still queasy, and they’re still angry. When you sense that and hear the comments, it’s your job as the guide to turn that around and make them see the positives and the necessary of having this experience.” In this context, the ability for white as well

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<sup>29</sup> I also draw from this 2011 interview with Shinault-Small in the first section, based on her experience working as an interpreter or independent tour guide on area plantation sites.

as black guides to convey accurate, inclusive information, and use effective interpretation strategies throughout the site rather than compartmentalizing African American history to an isolated tour, is crucial. “What doesn’t help,” she says, “is when you already squashed [concerns about addressing slavery] and then they go on and hear this other crazy interpretation, you know, that then pisses them off again.” While many guides and site producers on plantation sites were slow to see her perspective (and some continue to resist), Shinault-Small notes that she has witnessed changes in recent years. As she explains about recent site producer attitudes towards African American history: “You know these people are coming here, and they want this, they’ve articulated orally that they want this, they’ve put it in a suggestion box they want this, and so maybe for us to appear in the loop of diversity and inclusiveness in telling the whole story, and because if it’s out that we’re doing this, that’s more of a money stream, you know let’s do it.”

### *Costumed Cultural Performers*

Also starting in the 1980s and 90s, a number of African American interpreters in the Charleston area began to offer cultural performances involving music, dance, and crafts, and they frequently appeared in historic costume. While costumed interpretation has long been a standard practice for white elite and military reenactment history representations in Charleston, interpreting African American history in costume, particularly regarding slavery, reveals the complications of this cultural performance strategy.

Sharon Murray is an example of a costumed African American interpreter who works on plantation tourist sites as well as in downtown performance events, and her presentation includes music, dance, and storytelling in Gullah Geechee dialect, as well as historic narrative interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Though she emphasizes Gullah Geechee culture in her performance, Murray is not from the Lowcountry. She first learned about Gullah culture when she moved to Wadmalaw Island in the 1980s to live with her aunt and uncle.<sup>31</sup> Having grown up in a more inland part of South Carolina in the 1960s and 70s, the unique rural Lowcountry dialect of the African Americans who came to her uncle's general store intrigued Murray. After she married a Wadmalaw resident, Gullah language and cultural practices started to play a larger role in her life. Murray began conducting research and oral histories to learn more about the Gullah Geechee culture she encountered on Wadmalaw. She drew two conclusions from this research that motivated her to become a costumed African American historic interpreter on a plantation site — first, that “everything about Gullah led me back to plantations, the antebellum South, and the colonial South,” and second, as she bluntly exclaims, “My God, this is marketable!” For Murray, like Brown, Shinault-Small, and eventually plantation site producers by the early 2000s — interests in African American culture, history, and commerce merged.

Murray experienced resistance when she took her interpretation work from rural Wadmalaw to downtown Charleston in the 1990s, particularly because she dressed as an enslaved person during her performances. Like most African American cultural

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<sup>30</sup> For more information on Sharon Murray's work, see: *The Gullah Lady*, accessed 12 March 2013, <http://thegullahlady.wix.com/thegullahlady>.

<sup>31</sup> Sharon Murray, interview with the author, 15 August 2007, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

performers I observed in Charleston, Murray does not reenact an enslaved character in first person, but she does wear clothing to reflect the time period of slavery. As she explains, initially, many local African Americans either were not convinced that predominantly white tourists and site producers would be interested in African American history, or they believed that representing this history to the public through costumed performance was destructive:

[They] seemed to think that going to town wasn't going to work . . . that it was more or less a waste of time. And then I had other groups that were thinking that, 'why would you want to do that?' You're going to dress in the slave clothes and look like that, I mean see how bad you look' . . . so I was battling a number of things.

Murray was persistent, and by the time Boone Hall Plantation (located just outside of Charleston in Mt. Pleasant) hired her to regularly perform her “Gullah Show” in 2001, she believes that many of these critics started to see the value of her representations. She also believes they saw the economic opportunities her work offered, as she hired locals from Wadmalaw for many of her projects and group performances.

Murray's performance work is striking in the context of Boone Hall Plantation. This site has been privately owned and managed since it opened to the public in 1956, and like Magnolia Plantation & Gardens, ticket sales are crucial to the site's operation. The financial necessity of popular appeal shaped how Boone Hall's site producers constructed representations on the site throughout its tourism history. Again like Magnolia, this led to producers adding entertainment-based attractions like an “Old South” play and costumed, predominantly white interpreters on house tours, as well as country music concerts, battlefield reenactments, and holiday events like haunted corn

mazes and zombie carnivals around Halloween.<sup>32</sup> Hiring Sharon Murray in 2001 indicates that by that time, Boone Hall's site producers also saw African American history interpretation as a lucrative endeavor.

Murray's contract employment on this plantation site reveals another entrepreneurial niche for African American history representations in Charleston. Just as the market dynamics and independence of mobile tours allowed for African American history and culture to develop in the late-twentieth century, a private historic site like Boone Hall could quickly adapt to employ an interpreter like Sharon Murray in the 1990s, based on her ability to implement a marketable performance. In contrast, non-profit or government funded sites adapt their representations based on broader institutional changes, which can be slower in their implementation process and audience influence. But like Magnolia's "From Slavery to Freedom" tour, Murray's show stands as an optional "addition" on Boone Hall's tour menu, despite its popularity. Like most area plantation sites, Boone Hall site producers still emphasize white elite nostalgia in site representations, which undermines the inclusive potential of African American history tours and performances.

Based on my observations of Sharon Murray's Gullah Show in 2007 and 2009, and of other performers in the Charleston area, interpreting African American slavery in costume varies in terms of educational effectiveness and audience response. Moving beyond a description of facts to create a dramatic historical performance does often help visitors connect and empathize with information about the past. But as Lisa Woolfork

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on Boone Hall Plantation's numerous entertainment events, see: "Boone Hall Plantations: Special Events," <http://boonehallplantation.com/events.php> accessed 27 October 2012.

explains, interpreting slavery in costume in the context of a tourist site risks problematic pitfalls. Costumed interpreters often struggle with the emotional stress of attempting to embody the enslaved status of their characters, or they tread dangerously close to presenting African American struggles during and after slavery as “amusement.”<sup>33</sup> In addition, African Americans dressed as slaves on a tourist site may echo demeaning Mammy figures or minstrel show characters, particularly when they perform music or dance.<sup>34</sup> As Lowcountry activist Queen Quet explains, at its worst, costumed performers of African American history end up bolstering traditional white elite nostalgia on plantation sites because they just “come and sing.” “[Site producers] want them,” she continues, “because if you just sing, you can be entertained. But you don’t have to be *edutained*.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Millicent Brown notes that when she observes African American cultural performances “there’s something still I think not happening — yes they need to keep doing what they’re doing, and they kind of inspire a certain sympathy for slave life, because they’re trying to humanize the people, and that’s good, for white kids, black kids, whatever.” But she continues, “it’s in a vacuum. It’s still not getting at critiquing the system that did it and the people that did it. . . . You need to spin that story further and talk about not only racial disparities or inequities but also political inequities and ongoing legacies.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 115.

<sup>34</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Queen Quet, interview with the author, 25 May 2012, Beaufort, South Carolina.

<sup>36</sup> Alphonso Brown, interview, 2012.



These tensions between entertainment and inclusive historic education in cultural performances had a direct impact on Murray's work in 2010, when she and her husband Frank Murray posed for a photograph in costume with South Carolina senator Glen McConnell. McConnell is a conservative white politician who has participated in Confederate soldier reenactments for decades. In September 2010, all three performers took part in "A Southern Experience," an event hosted in Charleston by the South Carolina Federation of Republican Women. In the picture, McConnell wears a Confederate uniform, and the Murrays are dressed as enslaved people. They are smiling with their arms around each other. According to a Charleston *Post & Courier* article, after a blogger posted the image online, it became a "nationwide Internet firestorm." As Charleston's NAACP branch president Dot Scott states in the article, when she looks at the picture she sees "the master standing in the middle with the two slaves standing at his side." Scott continues, "It's like [McConnell] has this playground where he can play dress-up, and think nothing of how offensive it is for folks whose ancestors actually lived in the era." In the same article, Murray responds to criticism of her appearance in the photograph by stating that she and her husband were there to teach the women's group about Gullah culture, and "help promote efforts to preserve the history."<sup>37</sup>

Other African American costumed interpreters I interviewed also described struggling to control the intended meaning of their work when they dressed and performed as enslaved people. Anne Caldwell is a local singer in Charleston who regularly conducts the Gullah Show at Boone Hall when Murray is out, and leads a

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<sup>37</sup> Yvonne Wenger, "McConnell defends photograph," *Post & Courier*, 16 September 2010, <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20100916/PC1602/309169873> (accessed 1 October 2012).

spirituals performance for tourists in a downtown church. Both during the Gullah Show, and when she is not in costume for the spirituals concert, Caldwell is careful to assert her intentions for her performance. In the opening of a concert I observed in 2009 she stated, “Y’all know when the ancestors were brought to this country in slavery, and they would get together in the praise house . . . they shout they-self happy, and sing their troubles out.” In the conclusion of the concert she again re-asserts this crucial interpretation for her performance. “Some people think slaves were singing because they were happy about their condition — they were not. It was just because they had to survive, they would sing themselves happy, shout their troubles out.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite these attempts to re-articulate and transform the meanings of African American music and dance performance in historic costume, the audience may not follow the new interpretation lead. Ron Daise worked with his wife Natalie Daise performing a show about Gullah Geechee heritage and culture throughout the Lowcountry in the early 1990s. In a 2008 interview, he describes encountering a range of undesirable reactions from black and white audience members, particularly when he attempted to interpret the history of slavery.<sup>39</sup> Daise recalls how at an elementary school in the Lowcountry town of Bluffton, an African American third grader covered her eyes and ears when he began showing older photographs of enslaved black individuals from the Sea Islands. Her teacher explained that this student was not aware of “positive representations” being

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<sup>38</sup> Observation of Praise House Singers performance, July 2010, Circular Congregational Church, Charleston, South Carolina. Anne Caldwell is the lead singer of this group.

<sup>39</sup> The Daises’ performances eventually caught the attention of television producers, and in 1994 they became the hosts of a popular children’s television program on Nickelodeon’s Nick Jr. entitled “Gullah-Gullah Island.” After the show ended in 1999, Daise continued his work representing African American culture and history as the vice president of creative education at Brookgreen Gardens, in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina. Ron Daise, interview with the author, January 6, 2009, Murrells Inlet, South Carolina.

made about her cultural background, so that “when she saw pictures of African Americans, and the whole topic matter of slavery—she was quite resistant.” Daise also experienced responses from white audience members at public performances that shaped how he and wife adapted their future presentations:

...there were numerous older whites who would pull us aside afterwards, and they wanted to confide, they just loved hearing those spirituals. That their parents had such and such a plantation, and at different holidays they would bring in the slaves and they would sing, and they would hold our hands. And I remember one telling my wife that she was “as cute as a button. Just as cute as a button.” And we would have to say, “Well, that’s not our purpose.” So we would alter our program . . .

African American historic interpreters who shape narrative transformations take on a complex and daunting task. This is particularly true when their goal is to re-articulate the historic meaning of the enslaved experience they enact through costume and performance, while also relying on tourism revenue for their income. Nearly all of the costumed African American performers I observed were careful to assert at some point to audiences that the music and dance they performed should not be misconstrued as filling stereotypes of happy, loyal enslaved black people. But despite their assertions, their new framework could easily fail to transmit to audiences. The challenges of costumed performance for African American interpreters does not mean that they do not have potential to offer engaging, and effectively educational historic interpretation, particularly considering the importance of music, craft, and dance in the lives of African Americans

during and after slavery.<sup>40</sup> Instead, like Daise indicates, performers must continue to adapt their narratives and further assert their intentions. Queen Quet argues that they must do this through emphasis on educational historic narrative as well as entertainment. Millicent Brown also suggests that interpreters and educators could address the political and economic history of Africans and later enslaved African Americans as well as craft and culture. “Look how we’re willing to embrace the music, the food, the nets, the baskets,” Brown says, “they’re all wonderful, but when was the last time we talked about African political systems, which were quite sophisticated?”

As I concluded my fieldwork research in 2012, I observed that some African American cultural performers were increasingly bringing more scholarship-based and educational historic discussions into their interpretation strategies. For example, at the 2012 Gullah Festival in Beaufort, South Carolina, African American performer Anita Singleton Prather, or “Aunt Pearlie Sue,” included a lengthy description of the experiences and political struggles of Emancipation in the Sea Islands in her performance. She particularly interwove details about “The Big Gun Shoot” on Hilton Head that led to Union occupation, and early release from slavery for a large number of

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Creel, *"A Peculiar People:" Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 1989). Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1991). Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Dale Rosengarten, Theodore Rosengarten and Enid Schildkrout, *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* (New York, New York: Museum of African Art, 2008). Mark M. Smith, *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2005). Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor, 2000). Leonard Todd, *Carolina Clay: The Life and Legend of the Slave Potter Dave* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

Lowcountry African Americans.<sup>41</sup> Much of her description drew upon scholarly research and oral history, which she intertwined with storytelling skills, dance, and musical performance, while wearing a costume.<sup>42</sup>

***Michael Allen: National Park Service Historic Sites in Charleston***

In contrast to the entrepreneurial pathways of independent African American guides and performers, National Park Service ranger Michael Allen is an example of an African American interpreter in Charleston who carves out space for inclusive representations within an established, federally-funded, hierarchical public history institution. I first met Allen in 2009 for a joint interview with park ranger Carlin Timmons at the Charles Pinckney National Historic Site in Mt. Pleasant (just outside of Charleston).<sup>43</sup> Allen also works for the Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Park sites in the Charleston area, but his main office is located at the Pinckney site. In their interview, Timmons and Allen revealed that the funding and management structure of the National Park Service requires different strategies for instigating change in contrast to private or non-profit sites within the same public history landscape. National Park sites are partially funded by the federal government, as well as site revenue, so they do not rely heavily on ticket sales, or require extensive additional attractions to maximize visitor

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the history of “The Big Gun Shoot” and the early Union occupation of this part of the Lowcountry, and the Port Royal Experiment to transition enslaved African Americans to agricultural wage workers, see: Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976). Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York, New York: Knopf, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> “Explore Gullah culture in South Carolina with Aunt Pearl Sue,” *Gullah Net*, accessed online, 27 October 2012, <http://www.knowitall.org/gullahnet/index.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Allen and Carlin Timmons, interview with the author, 9 January 2009, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

numbers.<sup>44</sup> Instead, their interpretation is managed and scrutinized through an overarching nationwide system. For the Pinckney site, the result of this non-commercial, federal institution-based structure is a plantation site with far fewer entertainment and nostalgia-based attractions than other local plantation tourist destinations. The Pinckney site features fields instead of gardens and petting zoos, a comparatively sparse 1820s farmhouse as the main plantation house, and enslaved settlements marked by a brick outline rather than restored cabins. Though the NPS fort sites in Charleston include more extensive exhibitions and facilities compared to the Pinckney site, these features did not develop only as “multi-use” revenue-generating attraction strategies. Instead, these facilities mainly serve to accommodate high visitor traffic due to national interest in the major military events that took place at these sites.

A federally-supported funding structure means that representations of African American history on Charleston’s National Park sites developed through a range of influences beyond popular appeal, such as top down institutional changes and individual interventions from staff like Allen and Timmons. Timmons became a ranger for the Park Service in the 1990s as a second career. She noted that her work with Allen to produce more inclusive representations at NPS sites would not have been possible without broader administration changes at that time. “We were really lucky in that we had a superintendent [John Tucker] that hired Michael who wanted to walk that journey,” says Timmons. “The reason that we could do what we could do is because we had his

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<sup>44</sup> Though Charleston area National Park Sites do include commercial features such as gift shops and food vendors, and rent out site facilities for events such as weddings and even citizenship ceremonies in the case of the Pinckney site, these features and events occur more minimally and less frequently than private sites. Timmons and Allen, interview, 2009.

support.” Starting in 1995, Tucker also had the backing of Dwight Pitcaithley (chief historian of the National Park Service until 2005). In contrast to earlier chief historians, according to Timmons, Pitcaithley was “a man on a mission” to revamp “the standardized literature” of the National Park Service, particularly regarding how NPS defined the role of slavery and emancipation in the Civil War. These national and regional administrative changes enabled Timmons and Allen to begin “gradually opening the doors to social history, enlarging the stage so that it’s not just military” at Charleston NPS sites. On the local level, Timmons led the development of exhibitions at Charleston’s NPS sites to address African American experiences starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. “Some of the things that I’ll look back on that have meant the most to me,” she says, “you know when I retire, is getting some hard things out there, some concrete things that folks can look to.” Timmons’ efforts demonstrate how some local white public history producers not only supported, but also led interventions into Charleston’s traditional historic tourism framework in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

For Michael Allen, however, being one of the first African American rangers to work in Charleston area National Park sites also meant that the area’s skewed representation problems came to him in a direct, physical way. “Being out there, and being faced with questions as to why I’m out there,” he explains, “other employees who were not of African descent, those questions were not posed to them.” Allen grew up in Kingstree, South Carolina, in the 1960s and 70s, and he first began working for the National Park through an internship program at South Carolina State University (a historically black college in Orangeburg). By 1980, he became a full-time park ranger. As

he noted, early in his career some visitors questioned why an African American would work at sites like Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie (the Pinckney site did not open until the 1990s). Other visitors sought him out to complain about the lack of African American historic and cultural representations, because in the 1980s and 90s, site interpretation at these forts did not address African American history. Ranger-led tours, introductory films, exhibition panels, and gift shops at Fort Sumter did not include materials or discussions about the significance of slavery to the U.S. Civil War. Site interpretation at Fort Moultrie did not address the history of Sullivan’s Island, where the fort is located, as a major point of disembarkation and quarantine for enslaved Africans during the North American trans-Atlantic slave trade. As Michael Allen noted, being African American helped him recognize these interpretive absences:

I recognized pretty early that things we did not see were things that needed to be here . . . But then when I began to look around at what we had to offer for those who were asking those questions — no one that looked like me was really involved in the process. Or displayed in the exhibits. So I was out of place to the place I was working. And I realized that was a problem.

Allen used his “out of place” experiences and feedback from visitors to encourage Charleston area National Park sites to construct new exhibitions with Timmons that convey the central role of African Americans in Lowcountry history. He also encouraged site managers to host events that brought in local residents, particularly African Americans, to offer their thoughts and opinions before officially opening these displays to the public. Their responses helped validate Allen’s interventions and introduced new perspectives on the lack of local African American representation to the park administration. As Allen describes, in the eyes of the administration, bringing in



local input “raised the level” of urgency for transforming site narratives and representations.

In 2001, roughly two decades after Allen began questioning site representations, Fort Sumter finally launched exhibitions on the causes and results of the Civil War, with a particular emphasis on the abolition of slavery, in the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center at Liberty Square.<sup>45</sup> Today visitors to Fort Sumter wait in the Liberty Square exhibition area in the Education Center before boarding a ferry to visit the fort in the middle of Charleston Harbor. Thanks to the efforts of Allen and Timmons, the relevance of African American history and slavery to Civil War history is currently hard to miss at Fort Sumter, at least in this entrance area for the site.<sup>46</sup> When the Civil War Sesquicentennial launched in Charleston in 2011, bringing a surge of visitors to Fort Sumter as the site of the first military conflict for this war, this inclusive interpretation played a significant role.<sup>47</sup> Allen is in charge of organizing many of the Sesquicentennial events connected to National Park sites from 2011 to 2015, and he has been diligent in making sure that “things go differently this time” in contrast to the celebratory, pro-

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<sup>45</sup> “Fort Center Visitor Education Center Exhibit,” *National Park Service*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.nps.gov/fosu/historyculture/lisqexhibit.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Historian Peter Wood informally observed in a 2011 lecture at the College of Charleston that the tours on the ferry to Fort Sumter and at the actual fort site still do not effectively emphasize the role of slavery in the causes of the U.S. Civil War.

<sup>47</sup> As I described in the introduction of this dissertation, I do not comprehensively research Sesquicentennial events as part of my dissertation. To learn more about Sesquicentennial events in Charleston and South Carolina, see: “Live 5 WCSC: Civil War Sesquicentennial Calendar of Events,” accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.live5news.com/story/14425101/civil-war-sesquicentennial-calendar-of-events>. For critical scholarly discussions of these events in Charleston, see upcoming publications by Blain Roberts and Ethan Kytyle, who are currently researching the Sesquicentennial in Charleston for a book manuscript.

Confederacy displays during the 1960s Civil War Centennial. Liberty Square's recent exhibitions help him articulate a new interpretive tone for the Sesquicentennial.<sup>48</sup>

In 2009, Fort Moultrie also opened the exhibition *African Passages* in the main visitor's center, a year after the National Park Service and the Toni Morrison Society placed a bench on the fort grounds to commemorate the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on Sullivan's Island.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the exhibitions launched within the main house of the Charles Pinckney Historic Site in the early 2000s are markedly different from interpretation found at neighboring plantation sites. Rather than antiques and architecture, this self-guided house tour presents information about former site owner Charles Cotesworth Pinckney as a nationally influential supporter of slavery throughout his political career in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The house exhibition also emphasizes the experiences of enslaved people at this site, and future plans of

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<sup>48</sup> Events like the Secession Ball in downtown Charleston in December 2010 still echoed this celebratory nostalgia approach to representing the U.S. Civil War. Blain Roberts and Ethan Kytte, "Dancing Around History," *New York Times* "Disunion" blog on the Civil War Sesquicentennial, 21 December 2010, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/21/dancing-around-history/> (accessed November 2012). Events connected to the College of Charleston's Jubilee Project to commemorate Emancipation and desegregation demonstrate how more inclusive history approaches are also emerging for the Sesquicentennial in South Carolina as it unfolds from 2011-2015. *The Jubilee Project 2013: Commemorating 150 years of Emancipation and Educational Access in South Carolina*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://jubileeprojectsc.wordpress.com>.

<sup>49</sup> Dottie Ashley, "'Bench by the Road' tribute to slaves," *The Post and Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, 27 July 2008, <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20080727/PC1602/307279923> (accessed 2 November 2012). Felicia R. Lee, "Bench of Memory at Slavery's Gateway," *The New York Times*, 28 July 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/28/arts/design/28benc.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/28/arts/design/28benc.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1) (accessed 2 November 2012).

honoring their history through the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.<sup>50</sup> Though Charleston's significant African American history merits a major museum as well as these various exhibition and monument additions, Allen and Timmons' efforts to introduce inclusive representations, and their interest in engaging local input to generate support for these exhibitions, have had a great impact on Charleston's National Park sites.

As National Park sites become more inclusive, complaints about neighboring Lowcountry tourist sites continue to impact how the public perceives Charleston's historic representations in general. As Allen explains, "If they go across the street and get a sour program, that's going to taint all of us." For this reason, along with other park rangers, in the 1990s Allen began to reach out to various historic sites to discuss their representation problems. This outreach role was new for the National Park Service. Rangers and staff usually work within the boundaries of their designated site rather than collaborating with local sites. But Allen again recognized a problem, and academic institutions stepped forward to facilitate this dialogue about changing tourism narratives, particularly at the College of Charleston's 2000 conference "Plantations of the Mind." Allen describes this conference as one of the first times that interpreters from major historic sites in the Charleston area came together to speak about their experiences, the need for change in tourism narratives, and to "poke fun" at how they were doing

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<sup>50</sup> As Timmons and Allen explain, this emphasis on African American history does not just reflect the influence of GGCHC, it also saved the site from demotion from the National Historic Site list in the 1990s. When NPS acquired the site in 1992, they believed the house on the site was formerly occupied by politician and U.S. Constitution signer Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Their mission was to preserve the structure to represent the history of the house in connection to Pinckney. Archaeologists soon found however that the main house on the site was not the original house, which had burned. The current house dated from the 1820s. To salvage the site, site producers returned to their original mission statement to interpret all of the former occupants of site, which included enslaved African Americans, as well as Pinckney, and they shifted their interpretive focus to African American social history and the plantation landscape, rather than the architectural history of house and its connections to Pinckney. Timmons and Allen, interview, 2009.

business.<sup>51</sup> In the years after this conference, many sites increased efforts to launch or enhance their African American history interpretations.

For Allen, these multiple site discussions and academic collaborations are crucial for helping all relevant historic sites and tours effectively address slavery and African American history and culture, regardless of their varying institutional funding structures. National Park sites have greater economic freedom from ticket sales in comparison to private sites and non-profit sites. While change can be slow to unfold within the Park's hierarchical institutional structure, once the administrative support for inclusive interpretation came together by the early twenty-first century, rangers like Allen and Timmons could take risks on a site-specific level. They could also engage local input to collaboratively construct new public history narratives within their own sites, and to encourage transformation on sites throughout the region.

***The National Park Service  
and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor***

A striking example of this growing public history outreach strategy for the National Park Service in the Lowcountry is the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC). As described earlier, the distinctive Gullah Geechee culture reflects West African cultural retentions sustained and adapted within rural African American

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<sup>51</sup> The “Plantation of the Minds” College of Charleston conference included a range of local public history producers and scholars. Because over a decade has passed, a second conference of a similar theme would be productive for considering how African American history representations have changed in the area since this 2000 conference.

communities during and after slavery, particularly in large rice plantation areas.<sup>52</sup> In public history contexts, this cultural identity often frames how Lowcountry interpreters articulate black historic experiences and identities. In 2006, South Carolina congressman Jim Clyburn sponsored a bill in U.S. Congress to allocate federal resources for preserving and interpreting this culture, not just in South Carolina, but throughout geographic areas where Gullah Geechee culture originally developed — along the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. The GGCHC will be the first national heritage corridor project to focus explicitly on African American culture and history.<sup>53</sup> It will provide resources for expanding public awareness of Gullah Geechee culture within the designated geographic area through educational centers, signage, branding, and organizational support for relevant cultural institutions and their staff, as well as independent interpreters, and scholarly, environmental, and public history projects.<sup>54</sup> The National Park Service serves as the administrative organization for the

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<sup>52</sup> See description of Gullah Geechee culture in the dissertation introduction. Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984). William S. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1999). Margaret Creel, *"A Peculiar People:" Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 1989). Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Lorenzo Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002 (original publication 1949)). Salikoko S. Mufwene and Charles Gilman. "How African Is Gullah, and Why?" *American Speech*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Summer, 1987), 120-139. Dale Rosengarten, Theodore Rosengarten and Enid Schildkrout. *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* (New York, New York: Museum for African Art, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> National Heritage Corridors are also considered National Heritage Areas, and are intended to encourage historic preservation of an area. There are currently forty-nine National Heritage Areas in the United States, mainly designated to preserve unique landscape features or the locations of significant historic events (which means GGCHC's focus on a cultural group is also rare). National Heritage Areas are not apart of the National Park Service, though NPS does play an advisory role. Instead, National Heritage Areas or Corridors are administered by state governments, non-profit organizations, or other private corporations. "National Heritage Areas," *National Park Service*, accessed 28 April 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/>.

<sup>54</sup> "Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor," *National Park Service*, accessed 30 November, 2010, <http://www.nps.gov/guge/index.htm>.

GGCHC during its planning process, in partnership with state historic preservation offices in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.<sup>55</sup> Allen acts as GGCHC coordinator, and before the bill passed, he led a Special Resource Study in 2005 to examine the feasibility of the project. Once the designation launched, Michael Allen worked with other park rangers to lead twenty-one public meetings throughout the Corridor in 2009 to engage local input. NPS staff recorded opinions and testimonials from these meetings, and the fifteen member GGCHC commission (with representatives from each state) used this documentation as they put together the project's management plan. Michael Allen's offices on the Charles Pinckney site temporarily serve as central headquarters for the Corridor, while GGCHC staff work to establish permanent main offices in downtown Charleston.<sup>56</sup>

Intended audiences for this project include K-12 students and local populations as well as visitors. But generating tourism revenue, particularly within areas struggling with unemployment or underemployment, also serves as a major objective in project planning.<sup>57</sup> Though the GGCHC's federal commission includes representatives from a range of professions, a significant number have a background in public history and tourism. The current chair of the GGCHC commission (Ron Daise) and the past chair (Emory Campbell) work or have worked in historic tourism, and give cultural

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<sup>55</sup> As noted in a 2012 GGCHC planning meeting in 2012, the GGCHC Commission has not yet determined what National Park Service's role will be in the long term once the planning and implementation process is complete for this heritage corridor project.

<sup>56</sup> To demonstrate the multi-institutional collaboration involved with GGCHC, these future permanent offices will be located in a downtown building on King Street owned by the College of Charleston at no charge.

<sup>57</sup> Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, *2012 Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Management Plan*, prepared and published by the National Park Service, Denver Service Center, accessed online internet, 2 November 2012, <http://www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org/?Itemid=126>

performances or guided tours. Like Allen, many instigators of early African American historic interpretations in the Lowcountry in the 1980s and 90s later became influential leaders on planning boards for institution-based projects like the GGCHC and the International African American Museum (IAAM) in the early 2000s. Their long term experience with interpreting African American history and culture provides insight for confronting the challenges these developing public history projects currently face.

Scholars such as Antoinette T. Jackson (a member of the GGCHC Commission), are already producing works on the development of this groundbreaking project.<sup>58</sup> The tangible and intangible cultural heritage materials that will become accessible through GGCHC support will be immense for scholarly research. The project documentation already available online through the GGCHC website, including the 2005 Special Resource Study, the three hundred page General Management Plan published in 2012, and full transcriptions of the numerous public meetings that took place throughout the rural and urban areas of the corridor, are invaluable resources.<sup>59</sup> While I do not provide a comprehensive assessment of this project across multiple states, within the scope of the Lowcountry's historic tourism industry, I did obtain numerous insights about this project from interviews with South Carolina GGCHC commissioners.

In 2012 I interviewed Queen Quet, a historic interpreter, artist, leader of the Gullah Geechee Nation on St. Helena's Island, GGCHC Commissioner, and IAAM board

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<sup>58</sup> Antoinette T. Jackson, *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> For documents, transcriptions, and further information about the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, see: *Official Site: Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org>.

member.<sup>60</sup> When I told her that I was impressed with the public outreach meetings conducted by the National Park Service as part of the GGCHC planning process, particularly one I attended on John's Island outside of Charleston in 2009, she responded that she did not have the same experience. "I take it you're not Gullah Geechee," she began, "so the way even you look at the Corridor meetings, you look at it in a positive way, wherein most of the Gullah Geechees don't. Because they don't feel them to be held in places they would really go to. They don't feel they're really pushed toward them, and I'm saying this because people tell me." The overarching problem Queen Quet observed in the GGCHC public outreach meetings was that most National Park Service staff members are accustomed to managing natural or historic resources, rather than collaborating with living cultural communities. "They were used to [managing] the dead stories," she explained, "but not the living stories. That's number one — like uh-oh. Really? They talk back to us? We can't just interpret this and they're not going to say anything? Oh they talk!"<sup>61</sup> Queen Quet also asserts that the National Park Service has to overcome a long history of their own institutional discrimination. "The National Park Service has not done a good job with working with communities of people of color," Quet stated, "so they had a lot of friction."

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<sup>60</sup> Queen Quet, interview with the author, 25 May 2012, Beaufort, South Carolina. Queen Quet is the elected head-of-state for the Gullah-Geechee Nation. As the "Gullah-Geechee Nation" website explains, "The Gullah/Geechee people have been considered "a nation within a nation" from the time of chattel enslavement in the United States until they officially became an internationally recognized nation on July 2, 2000." *Gullah Geechee Nation*, accessed 4 March 2013, <http://gullahgeecheenation.com>. In her online biography, Queen Quet further explains that she is a "chieftess" and "art-ivist," and conducts community advocacy through her organization, The Gullah Geechee Sea Island Coalition. *Queen Quet: Chieftess of the Gullah Geechee Nation*, accessed 4 March 2013, <http://www.queenquet.com>.

<sup>61</sup> Queen Quet also questioned the academics hired to help organize the corridor, who "took it like it was a thesis, as opposed to dealing with a living culture." Queen Quet, interview, 25 May 2012.



This friction came to a head during early public planning meetings. As Quet described, at one meeting a white park ranger attempted to manage crowd responses by asserting he would be a “taskmaster” with the microphone. This term offended audience members who heard it as a reference to the role of an overseer on a plantation. At another public meeting, a white ranger asked that local respondents not speak in Gullah Geechee dialect, so that the stenographer would be able to understand their responses for recording purposes. According to Queen Quet, this triggered an outcry from the Gullah Geechee attendees in the audience, and she stood up to point out the problem. “How dare you ask that we not speak in our language,” she recalled telling the ranger, “which is the whole reason that you are here . . . to actually study our culture.” Queen Quet noted that Michael Allen helped calm the crowd as the leader of these meetings, so that “we could get people to finally talk,” but ultimately she later told attendees they would have to be patient with the Park Service. “The whole reason y’all are here is to educate them about our culture,” she explained to attendees, “take it as ignorance.”

Allen noted in 2009 that the National Park Service had to work to overcome Gullah Geechee concerns about working with the federal government. “We had to deal with the sins of the past . . . we had to acknowledge that bad things had been done. . . . But you have to trust that we’re not as those who came before.”<sup>62</sup> For public history institutions throughout the Lowcountry, these “sins of the past” include a long history of demeaning popular and scholarly representations, economic marginalization from tourism dollars, and land development exploitation in the twentieth century and twenty-first

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<sup>62</sup> Timmons and Allen, interview, 2009.

centuries. As Queen Quet suggests, overcoming distrust and systemic racial barriers will continue to be a struggle throughout the GGCHC planning and implementation process. But as Allen explained, ongoing communication through community meetings and various forms of outreach are essential to moving forward. “We want to be as transparent as we possibly can,” he asserted, “we’re just here to listen and in listening, we will come back to you to check if what we heard is what you really said.”

In a 2009 interview, Emory Campbell, chair of the GGCHC planning commission from 2006 to 2012, detailed the challenges of defining Gullah Geechee culture and identity across dynamic social contexts in a large and diverse geographic area.<sup>63</sup> Being Gullah Geechee varies for different individuals, and across locations. Public perceptions of this cultural identity have also changed dramatically in recent decades. The standard markers of Gullah Geechee culture (including dialect, spirituality, oral history, foodways, crafts, and music) formed through a long-term creolization process during and after slavery that featured strong West African cultural influences. But individuals claiming and promoting their Gullah Geechee identity beyond their home communities is a more recent phenomenon. In the mid-twentieth century, as Alphonso Brown suggested in his tour, people outside of Gullah Geechee communities believed the dialect was just “bad English,” and it became a source of shame for Gullah Geechees. In response, Campbell explained, “as Gullah and Geechee people we didn’t embrace [our culture] because it was pejorative for so long . . . we became so good at masking our culture, particularly from the speech standpoint.”

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<sup>63</sup> Emory Campbell, interview with the author, 8 January 2009, Hilton Head, South Carolina.

The Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North and Midwest during the twentieth century greatly impacted Gullah Geechee identity and culture. Transplanted Gullah Geechees could further distance themselves from this “pejorative” rural black identity, as Campbell notes, “We might say we were from Charleston or Savannah when we went away. And then, eventually we thought of saying we were from the Sea Islands. But never Gullah or Geechee, until maybe about twenty years ago, we began embracing it, because it became something that we understood better.”

At the same time, moving to cities with greater activism and education resources could help Gullah Geechees gain a more empowering understanding of their culture. For example, Campbell found that moving to Boston, Massachusetts, opened up his own awareness and appreciation for his Gullah Geechee background in Hilton Head, South Carolina. While pursuing graduate studies in environmental engineering and working at the Harvard School of Public Health in the 1960s, Campbell attended various “Civil War and history” lectures, and he noticed that scholars frequently mentioned his home area. “For the first time I realized how important these islands were,” he explained. When Campbell returned to work in environmental research in the Lowcountry region, this new appreciation for Gullah Geechee history led him to become more involved with historic and cultural work, because “I had a different perspective on who we were.” Campbell noted that through civil rights activism in the 1960s, which he encountered through school and work in the northeast as well as at home, he learned to embrace his African ancestry long before his African American Gullah identity. “We started wearing the afros

and the dashikis, that was a national thing,” he recalled, “little did we know that the root of our identity, probably the most visible root, was in the Gullah Geechee culture. But we never embraced that, we still just talked about being black and proud, and we talked about Africa.”

Campbell noted that scholars such as African American linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner centrally contributed to opening up public appreciation for Gullah Geechee culture and its connections to West Africa within and outside of Gullah Geechee communities. Turner’s work marked a significant shift in the role of scholarly research on rural black culture in the Lowcountry. Before Turner identified West African influences in the Gullah Geechee language in the 1940s, various white scholars in the 1920s and 30s published research about this population that supported racially demeaning stereotypes, by describing the dialect as a sign of low intelligence, poor English skills, or “baby talk.”<sup>64</sup> During the decades after the publication of Turner’s *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* in 1949, further scholarly works appeared that provided valuable insights into the

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<sup>64</sup> Lorenzo Turner, *Africanisms of the Gullah Dialect* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002 (originally published 1949)). In a 2007 interview, Dr. Marvin Dulaney (former director of the Avery Research Center of African American History and Culture in Charleston) noted that the Avery Center had a large collection of books by white scholars about Gullah Geechee culture. As he described, “I think our most important Gullah Geechee Collection, believe it or not, is a collection of books, the William Stuart Collection. William Stuart was a linguist out of New York City who had this driving interest in Gullah Geechee culture and particularly the language, so he bought all these books, it’s about 400 books in the collection related to Gullah Geechee culture . . . I was just blown away by the number of books William Stuart had found where white authors had basically tried to write about Gullah Geechee . . . the titles were things such as *Nigger to Nigger*, *Congaree Sketches*, and then the Julia Peterkin books . . . It’s a dissertation for somebody to look at. Why were whites trying to imitate and become experts on Gullah Geechee language in the ‘20s and ‘30s?” W. Marvin Dulaney, interview with the author, October 26, 2007, Charleston, South Carolina.

international, multicultural origins of Gullah Geechee culture and history.<sup>65</sup> Campbell believes that these publications influenced not only scholars, but also local African Americans in the area interested in pursuing public history work in the 1980s and 90s. “As we became more enlightened, Ron Daise, myself and others,” he explains, “[we] began performing, and we began drawing on research that had been done during the 60s and 70s.” Like Brown, Shinault-Small, Murray, and others, Campbell began to see his cultural and historic background as personally empowering, and as a valuable educational resource and economic opportunity in area tourism. Before becoming chair of the GGCHC, Campbell served as director of the Penn Center (a former African American school and current cultural community center on St. Helena’s Island). Throughout and between these leadership roles, he also operated a driving tour on Hilton Head Island about Gullah Geechee culture and history.<sup>66</sup> In this way, though Gullah Geechee culture grew from long historic connections and African continuations, changes in scholarly research and growing tourism market opportunities promoted awareness and appreciation for Gullah Geechee culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

At the same time, twentieth century tourism development in the Lowcountry often proved to be detrimental for African Americans. As I have described, early public history representations framed Lowcountry African Americans as marginal or picturesque

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<sup>65</sup> Examples include: Guy and Candie Carawan, *Ain’t You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1994 (originally published in 1966)). Joyner, *Down by the Riverside*, 1984. Margaret Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community Culture Among the Gullah* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 1988). And more recently, William Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and their African Heritage* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005 (originally published in 1999)).

<sup>66</sup> *Penn Center*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.penncenter.com>. In 2009, Emory Campbell based his tour out of the Coastal Discovery Museum. *Coastal Discovery Museum, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.coastaldiscovery.org>.

features of the landscape, which was not only demeaning, but also limited the economic benefits they could access from historic tourism. In addition, many Lowcountry African Americans struggled with property ownership exploitation and underemployment at the hands of resort tourism developers in the mid-twentieth century. As June Manning Thomas writes in her 1980 article “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on the Gullah,” “The new resorts and the jobs [tourism producers] bring are a blessing, but a mixed one.”<sup>67</sup> Manning acknowledges that in the 1960s and 70s, when resort facilities such as hotels, resorts, and golf clubs surged in the Lowcountry as well as historic sites, many local African Americans welcomed the jobs that came with the corporate tourist industry.<sup>68</sup> But she also points out that tourism jobs offered a low wage scale, part-time hours, and income that can fluctuate seasonally and is highly vulnerable to economic “ups and downs” for visitors and investors.<sup>69</sup> Studies have also shown severe racial segregation by job categories. Manning points out that in the 1970s, interviews with hotel managers indicated “dismay over sullenness and resentment that many [African Americans] display toward white visitors,” but she believes this resentment stems from the fact that, “so many blacks work in menial, low-pay jobs, with only a few ‘showpieces’ in high positions . . . a chambermaid-caddy economy never made anyone except motel owners solvent.”<sup>70</sup> Though Manning agrees that generating jobs is critical where unemployment and poverty are urgent problems, another issue with low-wage

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<sup>67</sup> June Manning Thomas, “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks: Notes on Issues of Employment,” *Phylon*, Volume 41, No. 1, (1<sup>st</sup> Qtr., 1980). 7.

<sup>68</sup> Manning, “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on the Gullah,” 3.

<sup>69</sup> Manning, “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks,” 3.

<sup>70</sup> Manning, “The Impact of Corporate Tourism on Gullah Blacks,” 6.

tourism positions is that they do not encourage advancements in education, political leadership, or activism, but rather “rely on a large pool of relatively powerless, unskilled workers, and are extremely low level.” The employment introduced by the expanding tourism industry in the 1960s and 70s did not lead to widespread upward economic mobility for African Americans.

Manning’s article was published in 1980, but by the early 2000s Margaret A. Shannon and Stephen W. Taylor argue that in addition to ongoing low wage employment opportunities, tourism development depleted black land ownership in the Lowcountry, through manipulation of heirs property laws.<sup>71</sup> Heirs property landownership — in which a number of family members own a single tract of land, is prevalent among rural African American communities. Developers can take advantage of this type of property ownership by convincing one family member, who may not live in the area or know the other family members, to sell their share, which forces the whole property to go up for sale at a low price against the will of other family members who own shares. Many families have had their land sold out from underneath them through this tactic. Shannon and Taylor note that heirs property problems in Beaufort County and on Hilton Head

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<sup>71</sup> Margaret A. Shannon and Stephen W. Taylor, “Astride the Plantation Gates: Tourism, Racial Politics, and the Development of Hilton Head,” in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, edited by Richard A. Starnes (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 182-83. This black land ownership came from “bought or assumed ownership of subdivided, abandoned, and confiscated plantations” after the Civil War. When developers began accumulating these properties in the twentieth century through a legal loophole in the “heirs property” system used by so many African Americans in this area, along with “rising property taxes, and the decreasing availability of jobs outside the tourist economy,” Gullah communities faced further economic and social problems rather than the promised prosperity.

Island are “just small examples of a larger southern problem,” but this “legal land-stealing” particularly plagues rural African Americans in the Lowcountry.<sup>72</sup>

With this history of exploitation, it is not surprising that many Lowcountry African Americans are wary of tourism development for historic sites or resorts. Developments connected to this industry often trigger major resistance and concerns, even when the goal is to emphasize African American history and culture. As more inclusive African American history and culture representations increase, history and culture producers could also generate greater awareness of this long term development exploitation, and encourage strategies for more effective economic as well as interpretive inclusion for local African Americans in the tourism industry. For the GGCHC, commission members believe that a greater public understanding of Gullah Geechee history and culture will tie directly to promoting greater appreciation and support for social, political, and preservation values that could also economically benefit these communities. As the introduction of the General Management Plan outlines:

By implementing this management approach, the Commission aims to increase understanding and awareness of Gullah Geechee people, culture, and history; support heritage-related economic development, primarily for the economic sustainability of Gullah Geechee people and communities; promote preservation of land and natural resources related to the culture; and preserve Gullah Geechee resources, primarily through documentation.<sup>73</sup>

For cultural heritage interpretation, the Gullah Geechee Management Plan includes detailed historic backgrounds and assessment criteria to identify and preserve

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<sup>72</sup> Shannon and Taylor, “Astride the Plantation Gates,” *Southern Journeys*, 182-83. For more information about heirs property land ownership in the Lowcountry and legal representation, see: *Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation*, accessed 2 November 2012, <http://www.heirsproperty.org>.

<sup>73</sup> *Gullah Geechee Management Plan*, ii-iii



Gullah Geechee culture.<sup>74</sup> But in a dynamic living culture context, establishing geographic boundaries and terms for defining Gullah Geechee culture, values, and needs is an immense challenge for the GGCHC planning commission. To move forward with project implementation, a number of commissioners feel that the most appropriate structure for identifying relevant histories, as well as the present day needs of the Gullah Geechee, will be through oral history research and grassroots engagement. Antoinette Jackson's research on the GGCHC emphasizes the importance of analyzing the "legacy of the trans-atlantic slave trade, antebellum and postbellum plantation spaces through the incorporation of descendant *voices*" [italics added].<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Campbell stated in his interview that if GGCHC uses standard historic interpretation strategies such as physical historic markers, they will only be useful as landscape points to launch oral interpretation based on stories gathered from local residents. "So much of it will not be able to be explained with markers, markers would not be appropriate," he explained, "so you have to tell stories and use the marker as a point to tell stories about what happened."<sup>76</sup>

Herman Blake, a sociology professor, GGCHC commissioner, and IAAM board member, argues that oral history research and grassroots engagement are critical for these developing African American history and culture institutions. The public outreach meetings throughout the Corridor are a beginning, but Blake believes many Gullah Geechees do not have effective access to understanding and engaging GGCHC planning. Though the General Management Plan and other information materials are available

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<sup>74</sup> *Gullah Geechee Management Plan* 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Jackson, *Speaking for the Enslaved*, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, interview, 2009.

online, he notes that “the people I want to reach don’t even have computers.”<sup>77</sup> Blake argues that GGCHC and IAAM must implement continued “face to face” public outreach strategies with local organizations such as churches and schools, as well as online audiences and meeting forums, to achieve this connection. “It’s going to take a lot of work to get it out,” he says, but implementing an ongoing, wide-reaching strategic plan for oral history and grassroots engagement will be essential to developing effective and inclusive interpretation of Gullah Geechee culture and history, while also convincing local communities that they have a “vested interest” in the success of these public history institutions. The “sins of the past” will most likely continue to haunt GGCHC planning and outreach efforts, but commissioners, administrative officials, and community leaders can begin to overcome these obstacles by acknowledging and educating others about demeaning representations and exploitative development actions in the past and present.

To implement local engagement strategies and innovative inclusive interpretation, both the GGCHC and IAAM must overcome major financial limitations due to the effects of the Great Recession starting in 2008. Since it launched in 2006, GGCHC lost access to millions of dollars of seed money initially promised by the federal government. IAAM also had to entirely reconsider project planning due to major economic losses.<sup>78</sup> To move forward, these projects must pursue new resources, while also building political pressure to restore federal support. As I will describe through a site study of the International African American Museum, multi-institutional collaboration, grassroots oral history and

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<sup>77</sup> Herman Blake, interview with the author, 19 July 2012, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>78</sup> During a GGCHC public planning meeting in Mt. Pleasant in June 2012, commissioners asserted that they did not have guaranteed access to the funding initially promised in 2006, but they would help participating sites and individuals access resources for promoting their work as part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

local engagement, and innovative digital interpretation strategies will be essential to the survival and growth of these emerging institutions.

***The International African American Museum  
Re-Envisioning a Museum Project during an Economic Crisis***

In November 2010, Charleston Mayor Joseph Riley delivered a devastating announcement during a public meeting of the board of the International African American Museum (IAAM).<sup>79</sup> The major museum project that this group of local community leaders, educators, historians, politicians, and business people spent years planning was about to lose twenty-five million dollars in potential funding. Starting in January 2011, U.S. Congress was going to remove financial earmarks from the federal budget for special projects due to the recession. These earmarks included the bulk of start-up funding for IAAM, which was poised to serve as the first major museum for preserving and interpreting African American history and culture in the Lowcountry region. At that time, IAAM's projected budget was eighty million dollars to build a seventy-five thousand square foot building in downtown Charleston.<sup>80</sup> Without initial federal support, the IAAM board would not only have to downsize their plans, they would also have to entirely reconsider their development strategies.

When I left the November 2010 board meeting, I believed I had witnessed the end of the project — the financial loss was just too overwhelming. Fortunately, I was wrong.

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<sup>79</sup> Excerpts from this section are included in a published article by the author. Mary Battle, "Re-envisioning the Museum: Developing the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina during an Economic Crisis," *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, Volume 5, Issue 1 (Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing, 2012), 11- 24.

<sup>80</sup> Institutional funding information based on budgets distributed during IAAM board meetings and 2012 planning documents provided by IAAM museum director Dr. John Fleming. John Fleming, interview with the author, 7 February 2011, Charleston, South Carolina. For more information about IAAM, see *IAAM: International African American Museum*, accessed 17 August 2012, <http://www.iaamuseum.org>.

IAAM's consultants continued to work with board members and staff to revamp the design and implementation plans for the museum. By March 2012, they revealed a new board-approved development plan that was not only more cost-effective, but also introduced innovative strategies for constructing a widely influential history and culture museum. Though they have yet to be tested in Charleston, these strategies are promising. They introduce dynamic approaches for how a museum can exist in various physical and virtual contexts, particularly by collaborating with existing historic sites within the region, and through engaging digital interpretation strategies. In addition, the sudden precariousness and reconfiguration of IAAM's planning process between 2010 and 2012 makes this project a strikingly relevant museum study in the current economic climate. The solutions proposed for IAAM's budget changes point towards adaptation strategies that could greatly benefit a wide range of public history and culture institutions.

I first began attending IAAM's public board meetings as part of my dissertation research in 2007. I watched the numbers of public attendees to these meetings swell and wane as locals expressed both enthusiasm and concern about the museum, as well as frustration with a planning process that took so many years to implement. But throughout these meetings, as board members and public attendees haggled over different interpretation strategies and funding issues, one point remained clear to me — Charleston needs this museum. As I have described, when sites or tours attempt to be more inclusive, black and white public history producers struggle to effectively convey the broader contexts of slavery and its race and class legacies in shaping African American history. In addition to limited resources and staff training, one of the major challenges for these

inclusive interpretations is time and space. How do you make the complex history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, U.S. slavery, Lowcountry slavery, Emancipation, Jim Crow segregation, the civil rights movement, and current race and class legacies of these histories understandable for visitors in a limited exhibition space or tour time structure? In this context, an effectively inclusive museum in Charleston that addresses African American history during and after slavery could promote greater public awareness of the region's diverse history, for visitors and locals. It would also alleviate pressure on individual public history producers to synthesize this entire history in their interpretations. Instead, they could focus on detailing specific aspects in their tours, and then encourage visitors to visit the museum for further historic context and connections. In this way, as a major museum centrally located in downtown Charleston, IAAM was poised in 2010 to be a central catalyst for making inclusive Lowcountry history widely accessible, and unavoidable for visitors, history producers, and local residents. Then the economy crashed.

Before discussing IAAM's new development strategies to overcome these economic challenges, I will outline how this museum project began. By 2010, planning for IAAM had been underway for a decade, which spans a period of significant changes for the role of African American history and representations of slavery in U.S. public history. Mayor Riley, the former chair of the IAAM board, explained in a 2012 interview that he first considered a major African American history museum for Charleston after reading *Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball. Published in 1998, this nonfiction work describes the intertwined lives of Ball's own white elite slaveholding ancestors and the

African Americans they enslaved in the Lowcountry, while also tracing how this history impacts their present-day descendants.<sup>81</sup> *Slaves in the Family* received wide acclaim, became a *New York Times* bestseller, earned the National Book Award, and was featured on *Oprah* the same year of its publication. As I described earlier, the success of *Slaves in the Family* tied to broader shifts in U.S. popular culture trends towards embracing the ethics of multiculturalism and acknowledging race and class inequalities in the nation's history.<sup>82</sup> In this context, a major museum focused on the prominent role of slavery in Charleston's history seemed not only feasible, but imperative. Riley felt that Charleston "really needed to do something substantial."<sup>83</sup>

By 2000, Riley announced Charleston's intention to develop IAAM. Steering committee members came together in the summer of 2002. They recruited prominent supporters such as Congressman Jim Clyburn from South Carolina and former president Bill Clinton.<sup>84</sup> In 2005, IAAM became incorporated and received City Council funding

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<sup>81</sup> Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (Ballantine Books, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> Ruffins, "Revisiting the Old Plantation," *Museum Frictions*, 2006. Ira Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America," *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 2006), 2. Jack Citrin, David O. Sears, Christopher Muste, and Cara Wong, "Multiculturalism in American Public Opinion," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2001), 247.

<sup>83</sup> Mayor Joseph Riley, interview with the author, 15 May 2012, Charleston, South Carolina. Mayor Riley was born in Charleston in 1943 and is one of the longest running mayors in the United States, and has served as mayor for ten terms (or thirty-six years) since he was first elected as the mayor of Charleston on December 15, 1975. He is a member of the Democratic Party and also served for the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1968 to 1974. During interviews, many IAAM board members noted that Riley wants the International African American Museum to be a major feature of his parting legacy when he leaves after his current, and reportedly final term.

<sup>84</sup> By 2010, both of these supporters were no longer directly involved with the museum. As Dr. Fleming and Mayor Riley described in IAAM meetings, without federal support, President Clinton decided to focus his attention on other projects, and Congressman Clyburn had to distance himself from IAAM once his nephew became involved with the architectural firm designing the museum.

and staff support to begin project planning.<sup>85</sup> By 2006 IAAM held the first meeting of the Organizational Partners and Steering Committee.<sup>86</sup> This museum board, like the GGCHC planning commission, consisted of a range of influential leaders from the Carolina Lowcountry region. As board member Queen Quet noted in a 2012 interview, “The IAAM powerhouse has star power . . . . I always brag on the IAAM board because they have these many minds, extraordinary minds, in everything from art to film to TV to politics in the same room. And you do have historians in there, and they don’t choke each other out? It’s amazing.”<sup>87</sup> The planning process was slow. As board member and former state government and academic administrator Lucille Whipper explains, members had to move through a meticulous process of selecting contractors and approving or critiquing their plans. Locals began to question how much they were included in the planning process, and when they would see any progress. “Especially in our community,” Whipper noted, “the African American community, people would say, ‘what y’all doing?’”<sup>88</sup>

Various points of contention about the purpose of the museum also emerged. One major issue was the interpretive focus. As former IAAM steering committee member Millicent Brown explains, while one group of board members wanted the museum to focus on the prominent role of slavery in Charleston’s history, another group was wary of the pejorative connotations of defining African American history as the history of slavery.

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<sup>85</sup> Planning documents, 2012, provided by Dr. John Fleming, IAAM museum director. City of Charleston staff Eugenia Singleton and Carolee Williams were particularly influential in this early phase of developing IAAM.

<sup>86</sup> Planning documents, John Fleming, 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Queen Quet, interview, 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Lucille Whipper, interview with the author, 7 May 2012, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

Instead, they wanted to frame the museum's focus to be about empowering African American history, and then additionally international history, to reflect the Atlantic World connections of Gullah Geechee culture through the African Diaspora. Should the museum work to unravel the multiracial history of slavery for the public, one of the most complex and underrepresented aspects of American history, or focus on African American culture and achievements that developed despite the struggles of slavery?

Fath Davis Ruffins explains that this concern ties to a broader pattern of ambivalence from African Americans about representations of slavery in U.S. public history. "In the more than one hundred African American museums," Ruffins notes, "most exhibitions have explored the post-slavery history of achievements in arts and science."<sup>89</sup> For Brown, slavery is central to Charleston's African American history, and overall history. "I think Charleston needs a slavery museum," she says "We need to put slavery up front. I want to tell about how South Carolina could not have grown without it, I want to talk about all of the intricacies of the slave system." She notes that "I understand that sensitivity, but it might be the historian's job to convince [the board] that we're not trying to say that this is all African American history."<sup>90</sup> Today, the name of the museum, the International African American Museum, suggests that slavery may not be the central focus of the museum, but during recent planning meetings, I observed board members assert that this was not entirely the case. In a 2011 meeting, board member Frances Anne Bleeker, a local white attorney, announced that she thought interpreting

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<sup>89</sup> Fath Davis Ruffins, "Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham, North Carolina and London, UK: Duke University Press 2006), 394 and 407-408.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, interview, 2012.



slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade should be the dominant role of the museum. “I want my kids to be able to walk into that museum and know exactly what happened out there in Charleston Harbor,” she asserted, “I want that history to hit them in the face.”<sup>91</sup>

In addition, though the majority of IAAM board members are African American leaders from the Lowcountry, the intended audience and developers of this museum are not exclusive, and their interpretation will have a multiracial focus. As board member Jonathan Green explains, African American history is central to Charleston history and more broadly, the Atlantic World diversity of U.S. history. “That museum— it’s a black and white museum. It’s a museum about the South. It’s the culture. What is African American? Internationalism. That’s about all the people, whether they’re mixing or have mixed or not, it’s about all of them.”<sup>92</sup> As the IAAM board continues to define the interpretive emphasis of the museum, African American history, the multiracial history of slavery, and post-Emancipation and civil rights struggles, have merged into one goal.

Brown also described becoming frustrated during IAAM’s early planning stages because the board did follow a structured development process. While the institutional oversight of the National Park Service could be problematic at times for the GGCHC’s public outreach, it also provided concrete federal guidelines to follow from the beginning of the project for vetting the credentials of commission members and project consultants, and for providing planning materials to the public before allocating financial resources for implementation. In contrast, with IAAM, Brown felt this process structure was lacking. She particularly saw organized engagement of critical debate, from the public

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<sup>91</sup> Author notes from IAAM board meeting (open to the public), December 2011.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathan Green, interview with the author, 16 May 2012, Daniel Island, South Carolina.

and from board members who are willing to assert arguments based on scholarly research as well as business interests, as crucial for an effective, professional planning process. “Let’s fight, let’s get everything out on the table,” she says, “we have to accept that we need to go through that process.” Brown also felt that the board struggled to develop a “rapport” with local African Americans in the early decision-making phases.<sup>93</sup> She gradually withdrew from the IAAM steering committee in the early 2000s based on her concerns about the museum’s planning process.

Despite these early challenges, momentum and organizational structure started to pick up for IAAM in 2009, when the board selected a museum director, Dr. John Fleming, who had worked on numerous significant African American museum projects throughout the United States.<sup>94</sup> Also in 2009, a curatorial team headed by Faith Davis Ruffins at the Smithsonian Institution initiated the process of developing IAAM’s exhibition texts. In the spring and summer of 2010, architects Moody-Nolan and Antoine Predock completed the board-approved concept design for the museum building, and design firm Ralph Appelbaum and Associates presented their exhibition and outdoor landscape concept to the board (see figure 22, page 172). By 2010, IAAM was finally ready to implement the next phases of the project — which again made the timing of the mayor’s budget cuts announcement seem devastating.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Millicent Brown, interview with the author, 20 October 2012, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>94</sup> In particular, Dr. Fleming served as director for the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio, and for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. Fleming was also influential in the initial development of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.

<sup>95</sup> Planning documents, John Fleming, 2012.

Rather than giving up, 2011 became a year of pursuing new development strategies for IAAM. Ralph Appelbaum and Associates received a new contract to reduce museum design costs. Dr. Fleming investigated various institutional partnerships, and the board conducted workshops to re-envision the project. Three major development strategies emerged from this process to make IAAM a more financially feasible, but still widely influential museum: (1) Engage and interpret the historic location and space surrounding the museum rather than just the design and contents of the museum building. (2) Collaborate with existing historic sites as an African American history resource rather than operating as an isolated, self-contained institution. And finally, (3) collaboratively develop an extensive website and digital resources to generate a wide-reaching virtual presence for the museum, particularly through mobile device applications as well as online exhibitions.

The first of these strategies came from Appelbaum and Associates. Based in New York City, this exhibition design firm works with museum projects all over the world. During IAAM's redesign phase they were able to offer a wide array of alternative development options, which they displayed during a board meeting in December 2011. Rather than following the traditional museum structure of a large building that houses artifact collections and permanent exhibitions, Appelbaum suggested that IAAM could become more of a community center to host lectures and performances, or an artistic monument to African American history and culture, or a restaurant and farmer's market that reflects the significance of African American foodways in Lowcountry cuisine. The numerous options in Appelbaum's presentation were exciting, but also dizzying. Notably,

it was during this meeting that Bleeker asserted IAAM's central purpose — to make Charleston's historic connection to slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade clear to the public, as well as to firmly highlight the significance of African American history and culture in the Lowcountry.

Appelbaum's team offered a cost-effective design plan that spoke to this intervention role. While researching the site, Appelbaum consultants uncovered strikingly relevant history surrounding Gadsden's Wharf in downtown Charleston, where the museum would be located. Historian James McMillin asserts that between 1783 and 1810, approximately 97,900 enslaved Africans passed through Gadsden's Wharf. This population was 57 percent of approximately 170,300 Africans imported into the southern United States during this twenty-seven year time period. Though North America played a relatively minor role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout its history in contrast to the Caribbean and Brazil (only three to six percent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade went to North American ports), the African American descendants of these enslaved Africans in North America increased exponentially.<sup>96</sup> By the eve of the Civil War, four million African Americans lived as enslaved chattel property in the United States.<sup>97</sup> Forty to fifty percent of their African ancestors came to North America through Charleston.<sup>98</sup> Though the board frequently discussed Charleston's dominant role in the North American slave

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<sup>96</sup> *Voyages Database: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 30 November 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>.

<sup>97</sup> Berlin, "Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America," *Slavery and Public History*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Voyages Database: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 30 November 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>.

trade, this 2011 meeting was the first time they considered highlighting the singularly prominent role of the museum's location.<sup>99</sup>

Based on this history, Appelbaum's team suggested that IAAM work with the National Park Service (who owned the surrounding property) to rename the museum area "Arrival Square," and use the outdoor space around the museum as a commemorative interpretive area. As a recent planning document explained, Arrival Square would then serve as "an iconic public square that interprets its historical footprint, provides stunning, thought-provoking earth, water, and artistic installations, and serves as a gathering place and venue for performances." Despite reducing the size of the museum building, the new concept of Arrival Square meant that IAAM could work with the National Park Service to have a powerful visual and educational impact on Charleston's highly trafficked downtown landscape.<sup>100</sup> Historically, Gadsden's Wharf covered three-and-a-half blocks of waterfront and one block inland in downtown Charleston. Today, the spatial boundaries of the wharf are composed of the National Park Service's Fort Sumter Visitor

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<sup>99</sup> In addition to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Gadsden's Wharf also ties to a wide range of historic events and issues from the revolutionary period to the present. Owned by Revolutionary War General Christopher Gadsden by the mid 1760s, the wharf became a central hub for exports of plantation staples of rice, indigo, naval stores, and packed beef, as well as imports of enslaved Africans. Notably in 1782, Gadsden's Wharf briefly became a space of embarkation and freedom for African Americans, when British forces included more than 5,000 enslaved people in their evacuation after the Revolutionary War. Scholars estimate that as many as 30,000 African Americans in South Carolina attempted to join British forces to escape slavery during the War. The British sold many back into bondage, but a significant number of those who left with the 1782 evacuation from Gadsden's Wharf were able to seek freedom abroad. After Emancipation, formerly enslaved longshoremen became wage workers on this wharf, and the area was surrounded by newly free African American neighborhoods. Today many of these historically black neighborhoods have been threatened or destroyed by urban development issues such as gentrification and pollution, and IAAM and GGCHC staff hope to preserve what remains of these community stories through oral histories as well as archival research. McMillin, *The Final Victims*, 2010. Michael Lanning, *African Americans in the Revolutionary War* (New York, New York: Kensington Publishing, 2000). Michael Thompson, *Working on the Dock of the Bay: Charleston's Waterfront 1783-1861* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, forthcoming publication).

<sup>100</sup> To clarify, reducing IAAM's museum building does not mean losing exhibition space. As Dr. Fleming explained in an email to the author on July 11, 2012, "We were always looking at about 20-22,000 square feet (of exhibition space). We are still in the ball park. What has changed is the ratio of exhibition space to total space. It is now about half of the total space of the building."

Education Center at Liberty Square and the future site of IAAM. The site is also located within close proximity of the South Carolina Aquarium. According to National Park Service visitation figures, approximately 760,000 people visit Liberty Square annually, which encompasses the Gadsden's Wharf area. The site also faces Charleston Harbor, which provides powerful visual contexts for interpreting the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and military events connected to resistance against slavery. From this prominent vantage point location, in addition to addressing the history of slavery and trade at the site, the interpretive scope of Arrival Square could include a range of nationally significant landmarks and events, such as the "pest houses" for the quarantine of enslaved Africans after the Middle Passage on Sullivan's Island, Denmark Vesey's thwarted slave rebellion in 1822, the beginning of the Civil War at Fort Sumter in 1861 that ended in Emancipation for all enslaved peoples, and the attack on Fort Wagner led by the 54th Regiment Massachusetts (one of the first major American military units made up of black soldiers) in 1863, and much more. In addition, after Emancipation, formerly enslaved longshoremen became wage workers on this wharf, and the area was surrounded by newly free African American neighborhoods. Today many of these historically black neighborhoods have been threatened or destroyed by urban development, gentrification, or pollution. IAAM and GGCHC staff hope to preserve what remains of these narratives through oral histories as well as archival research.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The above historic online summarizes information gathered a planning document produced in 2012 by Hayden Smith and Mary Battle, in collaboration with Dr. John Fleming and Michael Allen, to propose National Historic Landmark status for Gadsden's Wharf as the future site of the International African American Museum.

The second strategy, multiple site collaboration, speaks to a criticism I first heard about IAAM from a local African American history tour guide, Alada Shinault-Small. “Why build something new,” asked Shinault-Small, “when you’ve got all these sites around here that could be augmented, accentuated or whatever? Finance [these sites] further rather than spending millions on a new something.”<sup>102</sup> The challenge to Shinault-Small’s point, as described earlier, is that although the Charleston area features numerous historic tourism sites, these sites ultimately fall short of comprehensively interpreting African American history. Plantation and historic mansion sites cannot effectively address African American history by adding new tours, and their tour guides often demonstrate more familiarity with addressing white elite material culture such as antiques and architecture, or isolated military events, than African American history or social history topics such as race, class and gender more generally.

Public history resources in downtown Charleston, such as the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture and the Old Slave Mart Museum, do offer powerfully effective resources for addressing specific aspects of Charleston’s extensive African American history, but they are limited in their ability to comprehensively lay out the foundations and legacies of this history. The Avery Center mainly functions as an archive and research center as part of the College of Charleston, with limited exhibition space and tour availability for addressing the history of the site as an African American school. The Old Slave Mart Museum is a public history site, but again the interpretive space is limited to a relatively small physical structure, and the

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<sup>102</sup> Alada Shinault-Small, interview, 2011.

museum focus is explicitly on the trans-Atlantic and domestic slave trades.<sup>103</sup> Neither site can accommodate significant visitor traffic like a major museum institution, or present a comprehensive public history interpretation of African American history during and after slavery, into twentieth century civil rights struggles. Like other historic sites in the area, these institutions could also benefit from a connection to a major foundational museum.

IAAM can serve as a crucial educational and consultation resource for augmenting or expanding the inclusive interpretive capabilities of existing historic sites and tours. In addition, a major role for the museum would be to promote these local historic resources to visitors. As Dr. Fleming outlined in a recent planning document, IAAM will function as a “walking-distance extension of Charleston’s downtown heritage district,” as well as a regional “heritage trailhead” that points to a web of relevant African American history sites in the Lowcountry.<sup>104</sup> But as Fleming observed in 2011, for this collaboration to work, sites and guides that traditionally focused on white elite history, or demonstrated “segregated knowledge” approaches to African American history, must reassess their current representation strategies to be more comprehensively inclusive — which IAAM could also enable through educational outreach. “If we are going to guide the general public to those particular sites,” he noted, “then the expectation is that they

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<sup>103</sup> Stephanie Yuhl, “Re-mapping the Tourist/Trade: Confronting Slavery’s Commercial Core at Charleston’s Old Slave Mart Museum,” *The Journal of Southern History*, upcoming article publication (Summer 2013).

<sup>104</sup> This collaborative structure could be particularly effective for addressing the needs of Charleston’s multi-faceted public history landscape. In contrast to U.S. historic destinations such as Colonial Williamsburg, “Historic Charleston” is not run by a single organization, but consists of various historic tourism producers and site funding structures (ranging from privately owned to state and national park sites) that all must function within living urban and suburban spaces and communities. In this context, interpretation changes often hinge on varying, site-specific factors, which can lead to mixed results depending on different site resources and market interests. Establishing an area resource for collaboratively educating various sites across management differences about inclusive interpretation strategies would be highly beneficial throughout the region. John Willson, interview with the author, 18 June 2009, Charleston, South Carolina.



present a pretty accurate history of the site and do away with some of these fairy tales that they like to tell. So I think it's going to be on us or somebody to do an assessment or evaluation of how these interpretive programs are working."<sup>105</sup>

Finally, economic constraints encouraged IAAM to pursue digital historic interpretation strategies in their redesign plans. Like many major museums, IAAM will feature a website, but they will also engage their local institutional and academic partnerships to develop a series of online exhibitions and mobile device applications that generate an extensive virtual presence for the museum throughout the city and the region. Various cultural, library, and academic institutions in the Lowcountry region contain multimedia archival and research resources that could be organized for this digital content, particularly through partnerships with the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) at the College of Charleston. Since 2009, LCDL has offered collective access to digital archiving for large and small institutions throughout the region.<sup>106</sup> They are currently working in partnership with IAAM to translate these multi-institutional resources into digital public history projects such as online exhibitions, online tours, and interactive maps and timelines built through open source software and permanently stored online through College of Charleston resources.<sup>107</sup> Though the research, staff, and archival materials for producing these digital projects and exhibitions may reside in various institutional contexts, one of the great benefits of online interpretation is that multiple

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<sup>105</sup> Fleming, interview, 2011.

<sup>106</sup> *Lowcountry Digital Library*, accessed 16 August 2012, <http://lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu>.

<sup>107</sup> In 2013, Lowcountry Digital Staff staff are building these collaborative online exhibitions and digital projects in durable, cost-effective open source software programs such as Omeka and Omeka's Neatline. For more information see: *Omeka*, accessed 13 August 2012, <http://omeka.org>. *Neatline*, accessed 13 August 2012, <http://neatline.org>.

institutions can link to the projects they collaboratively produce. Rather than competing, all participants can benefit from the virtual traffic these interconnected, multi-institutional digital projects receive. IAAM can serve as an organizing vehicle, or “brand,” for promoting digital projects and exhibitions that offer inclusive history interpretation relevant to African American history and culture, and can help make these digital resources available to visitors and locals through public kiosks and mobile applications as well as a museum website platform. Online tours and exhibitions can help articulate the diverse social histories hidden within existing Lowcountry landscapes and structures for user audiences at minimal costs and impacts on the physical environments and populations currently living in these spaces. In this way, if the costs of developing a major collections-based museum are unattainable for IAAM, its staff can collaboratively implement digital strategies that influentially engage the Charleston area’s highly trafficked public history landscape.<sup>108</sup>

The IAAM board’s new development strategies have streamlined the museum’s projected budget from eighty million dollars to fifty million dollars. Though this is a significant reduction, it still requires major fundraising. As Mayor Riley explained, without federal support, the museum must diversify its financial resources to launch a capital campaign. In addition to private fundraising, Riley believes city, county, and state governments should, and at this point in time are ready, to see an investment in a major

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<sup>108</sup> In addition to the cost of developing a collections-based museum, IAAM must also grapple with the concurrent development and potential collections competition with major national African American museums such as the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture. Focusing on the Lowcountry’s existing landscape and structural resources helps make IAAM a unique, and even collaborative resource for African American history museums throughout the country. *NMAAHC: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture*, accessed 29 August 2012, <http://nmaahc.si.edu>

African American history museum as “an undeniable responsibility.”<sup>109</sup> But as Lucille Whipper suggested, a difficult planning process has caused the museum to struggle with its local public relations image. Jonathan Green also noted that public perceptions of the museum are often racially divided. “Some people just see the International African American Museum as a black museum, which it is not, it can’t be,” he explained, “and some African Americans see it as a museum that’s being perpetuated by white people. So there is a disconnect, and that has to be worked out.”<sup>110</sup> As the museum initiates the fundraising phase of its development, it can immediately implement digital history projects that publicly demonstrate the inclusive interpretive value of this museum. Once the building is in place, the unique flexibility of collaborative partnerships and digital public history technologies means that IAAM will continue to function as an open and dynamic museum.

Queen Quet believes that this open structure will prove to be beneficial for strengthening IAAM’s relationships with local communities, particularly her own Gullah Geechee culture. As she stated, “the museumization of our culture is what has been killing the culture . . . it has been exclusionary, it has blocked access of the real world getting to the real people.” In contrast, Queen Quet sees IAAM as a “connection point” museum that could link the grassroots cultural and historic activities of local African American communities, as well as historic site partners, to a major museum institution. According to Queen Quet, IAAM will ideally function as “a living institution, in that we’re not the end all . . . when you come in, we’re carrying one part, but we want you,

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<sup>109</sup> Riley, interview, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Green, interview, 2012.

when you head out the door, to end up where the rest of it really is.”<sup>111</sup> IAAM board member Herman Blake is also interested in pursuing grassroots engagement strategies for the museum as well as the GGCHC. His current fundraising plan includes contacting a network of local African American organizations to donate to IAAM, even in small amounts, for the purpose of encouraging this local engagement.<sup>112</sup>

Major fundraising efforts in various forms still loom, but the re-envisioning process triggered by significant budget limitations in 2010 generated creative pressure for this museum to experiment with a range of new development strategies. As Queen Quet observed, when it does finally open, IAAM will not only be more cost-effective, it will also introduce a museum structure that is flexible and widely accessible, which may ultimately prove to be a better fit for the twenty-first century needs of Charleston’s diverse local and visitor audiences. As this city emerges as one of the major tourist destinations in the United States and the world, a foundational museum resource that helps a wide range of local tourism producers construct interpretations that are inclusive and relevant to increasing numbers of multicultural and international audiences will be invaluable. In addition, IAAM’s multi-institutional outreach and “trailhead” collaboration structure for physical and virtual interpretation in a historic area could serve as a model for museums in various contexts, particularly as the capabilities and accessibility of cost-effective digital public history resources improve over time. Ultimately, like many cultural institutions, IAAM board members, staff, and consultants will continue to confront challenges for developing a major museum in a volatile economic context, but

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<sup>111</sup> Queen Quet, interview, 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Blake, interview, 2012.

their new design and implementation plans reveal that they are willing to adapt, which is an encouraging new start.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have identified patterns for how a number of African American interpreters in Charleston and the Lowcountry organized and launched narratives for tours and performances in the 1980s and 90s, using oral history as well as scholarly research mixed with entertainment-based strategies such as storytelling, humor, and music and dance performance. Despite some obstacles, these African American interpreters generally demonstrate greater awareness of how to use these diverse resources for developing inclusive interpretation strategies. In contrast, with some notable exceptions, many white guides I observed both on downtown mobile tours and plantation sites continue to promote traditional narratives of white nostalgia, and present disjointed descriptions of material culture and architectural features with minimal connections to broader social history contexts of race, labor, and class.

In the twenty-first century, the International African American Museum and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor are poised to enhance these early individual interpretation strategies by linking them to the cohesive foundational resources and support of major public history institutions. The economic and structural challenges these developing institutions face continue to be daunting, but through multi-institutional collaboration they could encourage local public history producers to dedicate staff time and financial support to expanding scholarly resources and grassroots input for transforming history narratives throughout the Lowcountry. This requires adapting

traditional professional development and public outreach approaches to emphasize these priorities, and becoming open to new interpretive strategies as they unfold. Early successes and challenges suggest that change is beginning in Charleston's surging tourism industry, but the region's long history of racial hierarchies and African American exclusion limits inclusive public history possibilities. Current outreach and interpretive strategies must account for past and present injustices; what Michael Allen describes as "the sins of the past." Charleston's increasing numbers of African American interpreters and public history producers are vital resources for exploring these future directions.

## Conclusion

### *The Gaps are Deadly*

In October 2012, I met Dr. Millicent Brown for an interview at her family home in James Island, just over the bridge from downtown Charleston.<sup>1</sup> Brown is a professor at Claflin University, a historically black college in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where she teaches history, sociology, and African American studies. We initially met because Brown served as a scholarly consultant on museum projects relevant to African American history in and out of the Lowcountry region. She also grew up in Charleston, and experienced first hand of some of the greatest changes in the city's civil rights history in the twentieth century. Millicent Brown's father, J. Arthur Brown, was president of the Charleston NAACP from 1955 to 1960, and from 1960 to 1965 he was the president of the South Carolina NAACP. As Brown recalled, this made her childhood home in downtown Charleston a hub for civil rights activism. When new editions of the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine came out, the mailman dropped off stacks at their house, because local African Americans working for whites did not want their employers knowing they had a subscription. Instead of risking direct home delivery, they would pick up their copies at the Brown family house, and discuss the latest activism news with a regular gathering of friends and family. Brown not only took part in picketing and boycotting at ages as young as twelve and thirteen years old, she also stood at the front lines of desegregation when she became one of the first African American children to desegregate schools in Charleston. Following alphabetical order, her name became centrally associated with a

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<sup>1</sup> Millicent Brown, interview with the author, 20 October 2012, Charleston, South Carolina.

1963 trial involving a number of African American students spearheading this historic change, *Millicent Brown et. al. vs. School Board District 20*. This case ultimately forced the desegregation of all South Carolina public schools. Today Brown is working on a nationwide oral history project, “Somebody Had to Do It,” to interview individuals who similarly found themselves at the forefront of school desegregation, an experience that could be painful and even traumatizing for young African American students, despite the groundbreaking results of their brave actions. As Brown described her project in an online article, “We as children were used for significant social change. They’re not yet identified as being pioneers but every community has them. There has not been a concerted effort to document who these people are.”<sup>2</sup>

During our interview, I asked Brown to describe what role her early experiences with civil rights activism plays in her current public history work, as well as college-level teaching. She responded that she was just discussing this question with her sister, Minerva Brown, to prepare for an interview they were about to conduct with NPR’s StoryCorps program.<sup>3</sup> From early exposure to activism, the Brown sisters determined that, “We understand struggle, political process, to be patient, understand strategizing, not operating out of fear, and then as [Minerva] put it — understanding that those experiences prepared us to always be ready for challenges we would meet in our professional lives, not just in the civil rights arena, but on jobs when we confront

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<sup>2</sup> Phil Sarata, “Clafin professor tracking experiences of those who lived school desegregation,” *The Jonathan Jasper Wright Institute at Clafin University*, posted 28 February 2009, [http://somebody.clafin.edu/newspaper\\_article.html](http://somebody.clafin.edu/newspaper_article.html) (accessed 22 December 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Shirley Greene, “GREENE COLUMN: Storycorps wants to record your stories,” *Post & Courier*, Charleston, South Carolina, 23 October 2012, <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20121023/PC16/121029703/1126/greene-column-storycorps-wants-to-record-your-stories> (accessed online 24 December 2012). *StoryCorps*, accessed 24 December 2012, <http://storycorps.org>.



reactionary thinking — black and white — we got bred in how to critique and see the bigger picture.” Brown then continued to explain that her motivation in teaching history and taking part in public history work was to help people see this bigger picture, to fill in the gaps and develop a concept of citizenship. “It’s not just because I like history and I want everybody to know this stuff,” she asserted, “It’s because I know that — how are you going to have an informed citizenry when we put so little emphasis on citizenship training?” Brown described how African American students in her Claflin classes generally only knew the “sound bites” of history rather than broader contexts and nuances. She also felt they had few resources to know more, based on their school backgrounds, and she did not see this poor foundation as “innocent.” “I’m not a conspiracy person necessarily,” she stated, “but the gaps allow people to stay apolitical . . . I need people to understand that African American history is only a part of the bigger history of the country, and the world for that matter. But the gaps eliminate the possibility that another generation will understand all the forces that are working against them . . . they are not afforded an opportunity to understand struggle across classes, struggle that transcends race.” Without an understanding of race and class histories in the United States as an ongoing process that all citizens are a part of, Brown feels that new generations are left unequipped to move forward into an integrated world. “That’s not what we’re doing in this country,” she asserted, “and the gaps are deadly because of that.”

As described throughout this dissertation, public history venues in Charleston, South Carolina, have traditionally stood far from the vanguard of inclusive representations of history. As a major tourism destination, history in Charleston became

an elite aesthetic backdrop for vacationers as they dined, toured, and shopped — not a vehicle for engaging long term, nationally influential race and class struggles in this region that still influence the present. This disarming of the Lowcountry's diverse history in public memory also served a political purpose — slavery became a distant, unfortunate subject to be avoided, and civil rights activism took place somewhere else. White elite power structures, racial hierarchies, and political rhetoric could carry on unobstructed, and Charleston's multi-billion dollar tourism industry continued to surge in popularity. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Charleston seemed like the last place that would embrace public history change.

Remarkably, in the 1990s and early 2000s, various historic sites did begin to offer historic representations of African American history during and after slavery. In the studies I have presented in this dissertation of both longstanding and developing historic sites, tours, and projects, I assessed some of these recent representations and identified their strengths and challenges with the underlying assumption that they indicate the beginnings of broader public history change in Charleston. As I conclude this dissertation, I am aware that this optimism is a choice rather than inevitable. My assumption may even function as a prop to enable me to imagine inclusive public history in Charleston. A number of people I interviewed for this research do not share my optimism — they saw the obstacles as too overwhelming and the racial inequalities and biases as too entrenched. In addition, Charleston's historic tourism industry is booming in the twenty-first century. Why would traditional historic site producers and interpreters need or want to change?

In 2010 I interviewed Bill Saunders, a South Carolina commissioner for the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and one of the main organizers for the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike in 1969.<sup>4</sup> After decades of ongoing civil rights activism in Charleston, he admitted he was less hopeful than he had been in the 1960s and 70s. In 1970, shortly after the strike, Saunders formed the Committee on Better Racial Assurance (COBRA) to address ongoing race-related problems in the area and provide assistance to local citizens in need of financial or legal assistance. By 2010 he had to move his main offices outside of downtown Charleston because the building costs were too high, and he was concerned that he may not be able to keep COBRA open for much longer. In our interview, Saunders confessed that he was jealous of his friends who were content to “watch game shows at home” and not worry about race and class struggles in Charleston — he was exhausted.

Despite his frustration, Saunders finds an outlet through offering African American history tours, based on his own experiences and research. He is not a licensed tour guide or part of a mobile tour business. Instead, as a favor, he regularly drives visiting friends (or friends of friends) around the Charleston area and describes where major historic events took place related to African American history during and after slavery, into twentieth century and present day civil rights struggles. Change often seems impossible in Charleston, but Saunders still chooses to interpret these underrepresented histories to willing audiences through an occasional tour. Even when optimism is not his motivation, he maintains an ongoing interest in producing a new public history narrative.

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<sup>4</sup> William Saunders, interview with the author, 21 February 2011, North Charleston, South Carolina.

Millicent Brown similarly noted that she felt worn out from years of struggling with public history producers in Charleston. Too many times she was told change would happen in response to her numerous outreach efforts, and then the resources or staff to implement inclusive public history representations never appeared. After I delivered my optimistic argument to her for why I thought Charleston was finally on the brink of change, she responded, “that’s a stretch, honey.” But she also added, “that’s a nice way to think about it,” and by the end of our interview she concluded, “I’ll go ahead and put my hat in that ring with you, I’m the eternal optimist, just because why the hell not?”

Ultimately, I am choosing to be an optimist about transforming and emerging history narratives in Charleston. I believe the diverse history and struggles of this region are too important to leave to romanticized nostalgia. As African American feminist scholar bell hooks recently told Brown after they toured local plantation sites together, Charleston is the “belly of the beast” for U.S. history in terms of slavery and its race and class legacies. If public history producers can invest in and acquire the resources to effectively interpret African American history in Charleston during and after slavery, it could be groundbreaking for inclusive change throughout the U.S. public history, and international public history. From this idealistic viewpoint, I also believe that developing inclusive public history representations are crucial for historic sites and tours throughout Charleston and the Lowcountry, not only in terms of public education, accuracy, and contemporary ethics of multiculturalism and diversity, but also in terms of good business practices for current visitor and local audiences. Rather than alienating visitor audiences, inclusive public history strategies could prove to be vital to the dynamic growth and

relevance of historic sites and tours throughout the Lowcountry as new generations and demographics of visitors, locals, historic interpreters, and site producers engage tourism representations in this region. These increasingly diverse audiences expect to see contemporary ideals of multiculturalism and inclusion reflected in the sites they visit. As Alphonso Brown, one of Charleston's most successful African American history tour guides, told a city-wide tour guide meeting in 2011, "keep in mind that the less you mention about slavery, and don't use the word slavery, the more that is going to fill my bus up."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps market interests and inclusive public history goals can merge in Charleston, but to effectively address the region's African American history during and after slavery, site producers and interpreters must be willing to dedicate time and resources to support this change.

Since completing my dissertation research in 2012, public history producers on the sites I assessed do appear to be moving forward with inclusive history developments, albeit gradually. After D.J. Tucker left and Preston Cooley moved on to another career path in 2012, Magnolia Plantation hired a full-time African American history scholar, Lisa Randle, to develop and implement more cohesive historic interpretation throughout the site. They also hired Joseph McGill of the National Trust for Historic Preservation to provide consultation for the Cabin Project. McGill's work in spearheading the Slave Dwelling Project, a nationwide effort to draw attention to under-acknowledged spaces

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<sup>5</sup> Alphonso Brown, interview with the author, Charleston, South Carolina, 5 January 2011.

and structures where enslaved people lived and worked, suggests that he could introduce further strategies to highlight the interactive educational potential of Magnolia's cabins.<sup>6</sup>

At the International African American Museum, Dr. John Fleming is no longer the director, but new museum staff and board members are working with Mayor Riley to focus on significant fundraising. They are also actively developing multi-institutional partnerships with local cultural institutions, historic sites, and academic institutions, as well as national organizations such as the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. IAAM's major goals at this point are fundraising, local outreach, and developing digital interpretation strategies to implement the museum's "trailhead" role in the Lowcountry area.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in May 2013, at a meeting in Conway, South Carolina, the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor announced that the federal government officially approved their General Management Plan. This means commissioners are finally poised to begin implementing the public history strategies they have been meticulously developing since 2005. Though the potential of these African American history organizations are not yet fully realized, these next steps in their development are promising.

As one of the top U.S. tourism destinations in 2012, Charleston's historic representations are nationally and internationally influential. Local public history producers can embrace this spotlight by professionalizing and transforming the traditionally exclusive, homespun, white elite-focused interpretation strategies found

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph McGill, "Slave Dwelling Project," *Lowcountry Africana*, accessed 3 June 2013, <http://www.lowcountryafricana.com/tag/slave-dwelling-project/>.

<sup>7</sup> Information based on informal meetings in 2012 between the author and IAAM staff.

throughout the area to include emerging history narratives of African American experiences during and after slavery. In the process, they could greatly enrich the knowledge and experiences of the millions of tourists who visit Charleston each year, while also generating greater historic awareness, understanding, and potentially economic benefits for local communities. The challenges to this inclusive change are daunting, but not insurmountable, and the creative pressure to implement this change could generate new, unexpected interpretation strategies and opportunities. And as Brown suggests, why the hell not try?

During a speech at the 2010 annual meeting of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission in Columbia, South Carolina, National Park Service ranger Michael Allen offered a concise explanation for why he dedicated his life to encouraging inclusive change in Charleston's public history landscape. Despite a long history of overwhelming and ongoing race and class struggles and inequalities, this city, region, and state are Allen's home, and he believes it could be different. "South Carolina could do better," he stated simply in his speech, "I want to see this state do better." As a South Carolinian, I agree with Allen. One of the few things we can change about the state's long history of slavery and race and class struggles is how this history is represented in the present. We can change how we tell the story. In the twenty-first century, Charleston has an opportunity and shared responsibility to embrace this change, but history producers must have the courage and vision to invest the time, resources, and energy to challenge and transform this region's traditionally exclusive history narratives — to begin to heed Allen's call and "do better."

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### **Interviews Conducted by Author**

I conducted all interview research for this dissertation with the approval of Emory University's Institutional Review Board. I recorded all interviews on a minidisk or digital voice recorder with the permission of the participant, and obtained signed consent forms to demonstrate their understanding and approval that I use their interviews as source material in my dissertation.

For my overall fieldwork, I interviewed roughly one hundred individuals whose work or personal experiences are relevant to my dissertation research. The following list accounts for interviews I specifically cite in the dissertation, but I am deeply grateful for the insights I gained from each interview participant.

**Aldrich, Jane. Interview. 18 November 2011. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**

Aldrich has worked on various public history sites, projects, and institutions throughout Charleston, including the Avery Research Center, Drayton Hall, and the South Carolina Historical Society

**Allen, Michael. Interview. 9 January 2009. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**

National Park Service Ranger on Charleston area sites, Community Outreach Organizer for the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, International African American Museum planning board member

**Allen, Michael and Carlin Timmons. Interview. 9 January 2009. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**

Allen see above. Timmons is a National Park Service Ranger on Charleston area sites

**Blake, Herman. Interview. 19 July 2012. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Humanities Scholar in residence at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), Charleston, South Carolina, International African American Museum planning board member, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor commissioner

**Brown, Alphonso. Interview. Charleston, South Carolina, 5 January 2011.**

Founder and guide for "Gullah Tours" in Charleston, South Carolina, International African American Museum planning board member

**Brown, Millicent. Interview. Charleston, South Carolina, 20 October 2012.**

Clafin University Associate Professor of Sociology and History, principal investigator of "Somebody Had To Do It" project

**Campbell, Emory. Interview. 8 January 2009. Hilton Head, South Carolina.**

Former Executive Director of the Penn Center, Former Chairman of the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, Head of Gullah Heritage Consulting Services, manager of Gullah Heritage Trail Tours on Hilton Head, South Carolina

**Cooley, Preston. Interview. 26 January 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Assistant Director of the From Slavery to Freedom Tour, Former House Director, Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Daise, Ron. Interview. January 6, 2009. Murrells Inlet, South Carolina.**

Chairman of the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, cultural performer and storyteller, actor on children's television show, "Gullah-Gullah Island" (Nickelodeon, 1994-1998)

**Dillahey, Danielle. Interview. 24 July 2009. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Head of tourism management for the City of Charleston

**Eltis, David. Interview. 16 November 2010. Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.**

Robert W. Woodruff Professor of History, Emory University, project leader and historian for *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*

**Fleming, John. Interview. 7 February 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Former director of the International African American Museum

**Green, Jonathan. Interview. 16 May 2012. Daniel Island, South Carolina.**

Artist, International African American Museum planning board member

**Harrell-Roye, Shelia. Interview. 26 June 2009. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Former historic interpreter at Drayton Hall, Education Outreach Coordinator at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston

**Hastie, Winslow. Interview. 28 July 2009. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Family board member at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens, Director of Preservation and Museums at the Historic Charleston Foundation

**Leach, Isaac. Interview. 15 March 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**

Garden supervisor, Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Littlefield, Daniel. Interview. 13 May 2011. University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.**

Carolina Professor of History, University of South Carolina



**McDaniel, George. Interview. 10 March 2011. Charleston, South Carolina**  
Executive Director at Drayton Hall

**Mestor, Joe. Interview. 10 March 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Project Assistant and historic interpreter at Drayton Hall

**Murray, Sharon. Interview. 15 August 2007. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**  
Cultural performer at Boone Hall Plantation

**Neale, Jeff. Interview. 5 February 2012. Middleton Place, Summerville, South Carolina.**  
Historic interpreter at Middleton Place

**Nelson, Taylor Drayton. Interview. 24 March 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Former director of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Opala, Joseph. Phone interview. 8 August 2011.**  
Historian, Bunce Island Project, Bunce Island, Sierra Leone

**Quet, Queen. Interview. 25 May 2012. Beaufort, South Carolina.**  
Community activist, head-of-state for the Gullah-Geechee Nation, International African American Museum planning board member, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor commissioner

**Riley, Joseph. Interview. 15 May 2012. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Mayor of Charleston, South Carolina, former chairman of the International African American Museum

**Saunders, William. Interview. 21 February 2011. North Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Community activist, organizer for 1969 Hospital Workers' Strike, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor commissioner, head of COBRA (Committee on Better Racial Assurance)

**Scott, Leigh. Interview. 17 March 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Former House Director at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Sensenbaugh, Abbey. Interview. 9 August 2007. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**  
Former Tour Director at Boone Hall Plantation

**Shedlock, Christine. Interview. 27 January 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Former carriage tour guide, Charleston, South Carolina

**Shinault-Small, Alada. Interview. 20 January 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Cultural performer and historic interpreter, Charleston, South Carolina

**Silk, Iris. Interview, 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
House interpreter at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Taylor, Cornelia. Interview. 20 April 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
House interpreter at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Todd, Tracey. Interview. 20 October 2011. Summerville, South Carolina.**  
Vice president of Museums at Middleton Place

**Tucker, D.J. Interview. 24 June 2009. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Former director of the From Slavery to Freedom Tour at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens

**Tucker, D.J. and Preston Cooley. Interview. 7 April 2011. Charleston, South Carolina.** See earlier entries

**Vido, Ron. Interview. 5 February 2012. Middleton Place, Summerville, South Carolina.**  
Historic interpreter at Middleton Place

**Whipper, Lucille. Interview. 7 May 2012. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.**  
Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Human Relations at the College of Charleston, first African American female to serve in the South Carolina House of Representatives, International African American Museum planning board member

**Willson, John. Interview. 18 June 2009. Charleston, South Carolina.**  
Director of Administration and Assistant to the Director, Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau