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"Sir, I Cannot Entertain You": Tour Guides as Agents of Truth and Transformation at the Whitney Plantation

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**“SIR, I CANNOT ENTERTAIN YOU”: TOUR GUIDES AS AGENTS OF
TRUTH AND TRANSFORMATION AT THE WHITNEY PLANTATION**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
Sarah Latham
B.A., Webster University, 2009
May 2019

This thesis is dedicated to the Africans and African Americans who were enslaved in South Louisiana. We long to know your names, your passions, your fears, and your sorrows. We long to commune with your humanity.

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ABSTRACT

According to the Louisiana office of tourism, one out of every nine workers in Louisiana relies on the state's tourism industry for their wages, of which plantation tourism is a growing part (2016). This research examines the experiences of tour guides at the Whitney Plantation. How do tourists' expectations and concepts of heritage affect the way tour guides do their jobs? What are tour guides' experiences of being objectified by visitors? How are tour guides' experiences shaped by race and racialized expectation? Specifically, I examined tour guides at The Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana. This project drew on participant-observation and in-depth interviews on plantation tours, as described below.

This study, contributes to the multidisciplinary literature on tourism, social memory, and the legacy of slavery in North America. While many studies examine plantations as cultural landscapes few have considered the experiences and perspectives of tour guides themselves. Additionally, few studies in geography & anthropology have addressed plantation tours which focus on enslaved populations. (Alderman, 2016, Small, 2013, Brunner, 1996) Given how few of these sites exist, this is understandable. With growing public interest in historical sites which focus on non-dominant perspectives grows, my research will contribute to a framework for how to best analyze and understand narratives as they are memorialized in heritage sites.

I found that as a community, tour guides strived to change peoples' perceptions of our nation's history in such a way that it has a positive impact on society today. Guides employ the use of present day connections to the past, individual tour guiding practices, and highlighting an under-represented truth, as tools to transform visitors'

understandings of our society. Though perhaps intangible, this guide community shares a common hope that museum visitors leave with a more critical knowledge of the realities of enslaved people and an ability to make connections between those realities and our shared experiences in the modern world.

INTRODUCTION

I was talking with Lynn, a tour guide, about her experiences at the Whitney, when she reported what one museum visitor told her: “Africans were better off in slavery than when they were in Africa swinging from trees.” Stunned, I asked her how she reacted. Her response was simply, “Sir, I cannot entertain you.” Hearing this story, I was simultaneously shocked but unsurprised. I was shocked by the content of what this visitor was saying. It was such an egregious violation of unspoken tour etiquette, not to mention blatantly racist. I was not surprised however by the fact that visitor had said something like this to a tour guide. Through my history of antiracism work, I’ve become aware of a pattern of awful things that are said to people of color who are in positions of leadership or power. This story illustrates one of the many ways that visitors at the Whitney try to fit their guides into roles which match their preconceptions. Something about the labor of bringing non-dominant narratives to life is inherently fraught with tension, yet also reveals possibilities for incredible outcomes.

This description displays one of the more extreme experiences of performance and expectation that guides are consistently navigating at The Whitney Plantation. Tour guides referenced minstrel shows frequently when talking about visitor demands and preferences for black tour guides at a slavery museum. The dynamic illustrated in this story is what has guided me to the center of my inquiry. The research questions that I examine include: What is the role of the tour guide in the experience of visitors to the Whitney Plantation? How do race and racism play a role in structuring those

encounters? How do tourists' expectations and concepts of heritage affect the way tour guides do their jobs?

The rationale for this research is largely informed by conversations with the Director of Museum Operations at The Whitney Plantation. During our interviews, she reported a long-standing concern with issues of race, racism and treatment of tour guides. She went on to cite specific examples of encounters between visitors and guides that had confused and concerned her. Additionally, I was an employee of the museum and consider myself a member of the broader Whitney Museum community. This research attempts to respond to these concerns in so far as it sheds light on the additional layers of performance and expectation that may be occurring alongside a curated museum experience.

I began my graduate program at LSU in the anthropology department fully intending to conduct a study of material agency and statehood, in my hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. However, during a family member's visit to Louisiana, I toured the Whitney plantation and was deeply moved. I came to learn that The Whitney Plantation is the only plantation museum in Louisiana with an exclusive focus on the lives of enslaved people. In December of 2014, they opened their doors to the public and they received an estimated 88,000 visitors by the end of 2018. The museum is owned by a retired New Orleans Lawyer, John Cummings (who is white) and its curation is based on years of research by Senegalese historian Dr. Ibrahima Seck. This partnership between a white attorney and an African historian is a striking element of the Whitney Museum. Their collaboration also distinguishes it from many plantation museums, which are run

by mostly white individuals or collectives, often involving descendants of the antebellum owners.

A tour at the Whitney begins at the church built by the Anti-Yoke Benevolent Society in 1871. Visitors are then led to a series of three memorials bearing the names of the enslaved adults and children of Louisiana. The tour ends with a combination of historic and original structures: slave cabins, a detached kitchen and finally, the big house.

Upon finishing my first visit, I immediately emailed the museum director asking if there were any volunteer opportunities. She replied that there were not, but that they needed a new tour guide. I accepted. As I grew accustomed to my role at the Whitney Plantation, certain themes and questions began gnawing at me. I couldn't help but wonder, how do race and racism play a role in structuring the daily encounters at the museum? How do tourists' expectations and concepts of heritage affect the way tour guides do their jobs? The questions that later became the focus of my research developed in me as a natural response to my daily experiences and relationships as I became a member of the Whitney Museum community.

On a day working at the Whitney in May 2018, an anti-racism university group from Kalamazoo, Michigan came for a tour. This group just happened to have a white tour guide. After their tour, their groups leader gave the following feedback to the visitor services director, "We felt like we were being led around a plantation by white supremacy." They then spent the rest of the day at the museum processing their feelings, meeting off and on with the visitor services director. While it is not uncommon for student groups from all around the country to come to the Whitney, this group's

experiences and interactions led me to consider whether they were revealing a greater complexity taking place at the Whitney than I had previously considered.

Despite my years as an anti-racism organizer, I initially felt confused by this feedback. I was confused because I had attended many of the tours led by this particular white guide and had never experienced a similar thought. However, I do understand the normative nature of whiteness and the nuanced ways it makes itself unseeable to those enacting it. How did having a white guide get framed as “being led by white supremacy?” This experience was formative in stoking a strong curiosity within me about what was going on in these spaces, as well as how different employees and visitors were interpreting the variety of interactions which took place at the Whitney.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

US Plantation Tourism

In the southern US, there are hundreds of plantation museums that, in various ways, attempt to show visitors a historical or cultural view of antebellum life. In southern Louisiana, just between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, there is a stretch of museums such as these along the famed 'River Road'. These museums have historically focused on information about the white plantation-owning family and their lifestyle, including a tour and glorification of their home (also known as the Big House.)

In the literature concerning U.S. plantation tourism, (Alderman 2016, Ebron 2014, Small 2013, Jackson 2012, Goings 2001, most notably), one of the most salient points discussed is the lack of representation, of non-dominant narratives. In this case, the narrative I refer to is that of the history and voices of the enslaved populations on these sites. Few plantation museums include or prioritize the stories of the enslaved people who lived on the plantation. Instead, much of the focus is on the big house and the lifestyle of the planter class. Many of the enslaved peoples' cabins were demolished or allowed to decay, while the big houses were typically preserved or restored. The result is that many surviving plantation sites no longer have the structures through which they might portray the lives of enslaved people, or so they claim (Modlin, 2011). As Modlin shows, enslaved people also existed in the big house, and their stories could be told there as well. Indeed, they worked there as members of the household staff cooking serving food, working as housekeepers, and some even slept there when looking after small children.

While plantation tourism sites that present a narrative counter to that of the hegemonic discourse are still emerging as a tradition among plantation museums, additional work is needed on connecting the past to the present more explicitly (Cook, 2016). The slave cabin is the location where the majority of the people on plantations lived, yet they are often the most overlooked at heritage tourism sites (Small, 2013). Visitors to these sites also exist along varying points of a spectrum regarding their adherence to, or identification with, a dominant hegemonic narrative. They may even go as far as to fall in the category of “oppositional interpretive community,” actively and verbally challenging tour guides and museum staff when they present information that falls outside of white supremacist or white-washed norms (Buzinde et al, 2009).

There are two ways in which visitors’ responses to these historic plantation spaces have been collected and analyzed. One of these is Alderman and Modlin’s research in which they conducted exit interviews at four plantation museums along River Road (not including The Whitney Plantation.) In their discussion of visitor responses, they write that “verbal expressions from tourists can be oppositional in nature in the sense that they challenge the docent’s perspective on the past and hence his/her authority over the narration of history.” (2016: 284) They continue,

While it would be ideal for researchers to accompany tour groups and document tourist utterances and docent reactions to those utterances, this was not feasible at River Road given the number of tours that would need to be shadowed over long periods of time at each plantation to collect a sufficient number of observations (Alderman and Modlin 2016: 284).

Geographers Alderman and Modlin deemed it impractical or they may have been reluctant to conduct extensive fieldwork at plantation sites. This could be a product of the sheer number of tours one would need to shadow. This is precisely where

ethnographic methods come in. Immersive participant-observation, the foundation of ethnographic research methods, is ideally suited to this project.

Non-dominant narratives are also shaped at plantation museum historic sites in the varying ways they are presented by tour guides. Tour guides play an important role in performing and creating tour experiences. Tour guides are vessels carrying and presenting information in these spaces and serve in roles far beyond that of a basic script-reader (Potter, 2016.) Emphasizing the agency of tour guides is essential because guides are “unremittingly making judgments about the type of tour they will offer” (Potter, 2016, p.259).

Presenting historical information at plantation museum sites about the enslaved population can be a complex task. As a result of this historical information having been systematically buried, supplying a history of enslavement at sites like these is often a nuanced act of negotiating a landscape of historical pain within the context of present-day politics. According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003), this begins with the creation of the archive itself, and is deeply influenced by the politics of literacy in the U.S.: who was, and wasn't, permitted to learn to read and write. There is a glaring scarcity of first-person narratives about the experience of slavery. There has also been a tragic neglect of historic buildings and the archaeological value of plantation sites until recently. Even the “salvage anthropology” paradigm, which oriented the field of anthropology toward indigenous, rather than diasporic populations, perhaps unwittingly contributed to a dynamic of granting priority to certain cultures, such as African cultures as opposed to African Diasporic cultures which were, deemed to contain more valuable information which justified their being recorded and saved. Pushing against this orientation, Zora

Neale Hurston and her colleagues, working in Black communities in the U.S. and elsewhere, were part of an expansion of the Boasian vision for anthropology. However, plantation museums today are increasingly being pressured to provide non-dominant narratives—not only by black tourists and consumers but also by white travelers who are tired of white-washed historical presentations. According to Alderman et al., “The reproduction of social memory at tourist plantations involves complex interactions among visitors, tour guides, and museum management” (2016, p.212). Examining how a tourist plantation tangles with the legacy of white supremacy in its planning and organization is no exception: it involves studying this complex set of factors.

Return Tourism

There is a substantial and ever-growing field of anthropological research in tourism studies. Within this field, many authors are helping to contextualize the concept of “the return,” or ‘Sankofa’. Generally, this term is used when those identifying as African-descendants currently living in western countries travel to the African continent with a concept of home in mind, but also can be used to refer to a return to the U.S. South by descendants of the Great Migration to Northern (and Western) cities; as portrayed in the film *Sankofa* by Haile Gerima (2003). Many authors identifying as members of the global African Diaspora problematize this concept in a variety of ways (Clarke 2004, Brown 1998, Gilroy 1993). Of primary interest for this study is the essentializing and commodification of African diasporic identities. I chose to seek out literature addressing this in collaboration with interlocutors on my field site.

Interestingly, the Whitney Plantation’s marketing team has been increasingly identifying and promoting the museum on social media and other outlets with the

hashtag #blacktourism. It is worth noting that a conversation about marketing cannot disregard the concept and experience of commodification, a term commonly understood as the turning of services or goods into items for trade or profit. Commodification is discussed by many of the authors writing in the field of return tourism. Whether it relates to who is profiting from a trip, or who owns (and is kept from owning) a specific site, commodification and capitalism cannot be ignored. In "Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics," Paulla Ebron participates in a "corporate-sponsored African-American homeland tour." (1999:910) Ebron explores the ways McDonald's enacts the commodification of culture by using familiar ideas and images to foster transformative personal experiences. She argues that "the very success of certain culturally oppositional formulations of African American identity has become the basis for consumerism tied to commercial (rather than political) critique and commentary." (912) Similarly, In *Mapping Yoruba Networks*, Kamari Maxine Clarke writes,

In the context of these processes of norm formation as a form of what I refer to as 'heritage economy,' today we are witnessing the changing demographics of 'ethnoracial' identity composition in the United States, which is contributing a desire to both diasporic membership and ethnic controversy. (2004:113)

Clarke details a political timeline of Black American identity and its shift from mediation by legislation to mediation by commodification. Because of factors such as the New Negro Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, Clarke asserts, the dominant hegemonic powers were losing their grip on the power to contain and define black racial identity. Clarke argues that the rise of African heritage consciousness came about because of the black middle class rejecting biological concepts of race and desiring a restructuring of racial identity through consumerism. In the study of black tourism,

consideration of the historical contexts that have produced specific concepts of African American heritage as connected to market forces is essential to understanding how exactly the forces of global power influence and constrain diasporic identity.

In fact, Edward Bruner writes that “tourism [is] the commodification of social relations and experience.”(p.290, 1996) He highlighted the fact that (as in many realms of commerce) it is essential for the commercial nature of tourism to be masked so that a visitor can feel like the tour guide is their “friend” who just so happens to be showing them something interesting. This comes into sharp relief when the tour-going visitors contest the commercial transactions themselves. Bruner describes a scene in which African American tourists at Elmina Castle argued that they should not have to pay the entrance fee because it was their ancestors who were possibly held in this space; seeming to demonstrate a trans-Atlantic sense of ownership. There are ways in which the Sankofa framework itself plays a role in masking the commercial transaction, yet Bruner’s tourism frame itself is a little too narrow. When we conceptualize a pilgrimage, we think of a religious journey, something we do as an homage to something greater than us. Instead, for the travelers that Bruner observes, they are often faced with commercial transactions that jolt them from the experience they were expecting.

Visitors come to return sites with an array of expectations regarding what they will see and who will be showing it to them. It is useful to examine the emotional affect of visitors at sites such as these. Paula Ebron describes a white tour guide and says, “This was history once again not told from the perspective of the people it was reportedly about.” (2014,148) The experience of expectation is crucial to tourism and is a fluid process. According to Skinner et. al, “the meaning of expectation in tourism is

dependent upon the social context of their production, that they are never static, but constantly open to creative reinterpretation and improvisation.” (2011: 5)

Tourist’s expectations on “return” trips are undoubtedly influenced by the fact that these experiences attempt to portray versions of non-dominant narrative. Bruner used interviews and focus groups to interrogate the multiple “meanings” Elmina Castle carries for different people, and the commercial nature of tourism. To analyze his data, he drew on the work of Paul Gilroy in his canonical work *The Black Atlantic* in which he “distinguishes between the essentialist view of blackness and the more constructivist and synchronistic concept of an emergent black Atlantic culture” (1993, 296).

Bruner and Gilroy argued that “America has not come to terms with slavery or its representation,” and this contributes to an essentializing of blackness that erased four-hundred years of differing diasporic experiences. Gilroy writes from the vantage point of the UK and is primarily concerned with the international experiences and analyses of Blackness in diaspora. His work seeks to understand how Black Atlantic culture was created not just through one foundational moment, “the middle passage” (as is often emphasized by US African American scholars), but through centuries of ongoing movement across the Atlantic; travels that included African and Black sailors moving in various directions between North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa.

Tourism Literature Connections

In a very casual conversation with Dr. Marcello A. Canuto, I was describing my research findings. At the point at which I mentioned tour-guide’s desires to change or transform visitors, he told me a contrasting anecdote. He talked about some of his conversations with tour-guides at the ancient archeological site of Tikal in Guatemala.

He explained that guides at this site lament having to present information that visitors are expecting to receive, or else their tips suffer. While these guides are being consistently trained by various archeologists on the scientific evidence contained at this site, they know that if they don't "give the people what they want," or verify their previously held understandings of the place (i.e. stories of virgin sacrifice) visitors will leave dissatisfied. This pressure clearly has something to do with the extreme disparities in income (and thus social power) between those involved in that transaction. This contrasts greatly with my experiences at the Whitney Plantation. Remarkably, my findings indicate quite the opposite. I found that through the use of historically grounded information, personal agency, and present-day connections, guides are hoping to present something new while ultimately changing the way people think about this history.

As we see, there are many similarities within these bodies of scholarship; return tourism literature and U.S. plantation tourism literature. My work bridges them by exposing complexity, expectation, and tour guide agency at the Whitney Plantation, which is increasingly being marketed as a #blacktourism site. In contrast with Canuto's experience, I argue that tour guides and tourists at the Whitney come together around a common desire to challenge hegemonic ways of thinking through a direct experience of truth, agency, and transformation.

METHODS

The Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, La. Wallace is located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana on the west bank of the Mississippi River. The community I investigated is that of Whitney museum tour guides. At any given time, there are from 6-8 guides employed at The Whitney Plantation. I have engaged several methods to gather the data to answer my questions. These include taking field notes of my own tours (when possible), taking extensive field notes on other guides' tours, and interviewing tour guides who have been working at least one year, as well as, members of the administrative staff.

I was an employee at the museum before I decided to make it my field site. I started training at the Whitney in December of 2017 and began research in February of 2018. I observed and led tours for an average of 8 hours a week, for a total of about 40 hours. This research, however, was for a small semester-long project which then led me to choose The Whitney as the focus for my thesis. From that point on, between May and August 2018, I spent over 300 hours doing formal participant-observation on site.

While doing the participant-observation portion of the fieldwork I attended tours led by my coworkers. This gave me an understanding of the content of questions visitors ask, as well as the ability to analyze and examine tour content later in the process. During interviews with guides, I focused on their experience of being questioned by tour goers and their memories of the various comments and questions they received. Additionally, I asked guides for their insights on their personal connections to this place. These conversations have given me an idea of the scope of the interaction between expectation, race, guides, place, and heritage.

Ethnographic Participant Observation and Informal Conversations

Participant observation took place during tours of the plantation given by the museum staff that last approximately 90 minutes. During all my observations, I carried a small notebook and a pen. I wrote simple notes that reminded me of the longer interactions so that I could write them down in full length later. I occasionally asked people clarifying questions while conducting observations. As a tour guide myself, I was able to notice the moments the other guides went off-script to emphasize their connections to the plantation. I also paid close attention to the utterances of tour-goers, both among themselves and directly to the guide.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview questions were qualitative and open-ended. They evolved and informed by other methods as I was conducting, but their basic topical areas appear in the preliminary question list below. As the ethnographic research progressed, new questions were added to the list. I conducted a series of recorded interviews with tour guides employed by the museum. I chose to only interview the four guides who were currently employed there and who had worked there for over a year. These were also the four employees I had the closest relationships with and I believed that this combination would provide the kind of depth of experience I was looking for. When contacting a potential interviewee, I approached them in person and asked them if they would like to take part in an interview in which their identity would remain confidential. I mentioned at the beginning and again in the middle of the interviews that participants could choose to stop the interview at any time. Some examples of the questions I asked include:

- 1) How long have you worked at this plantation museum? How did you come to work here?
- 2) Did you have previous experience with plantations, working as a tour guide, or working with this history?
- 3) How would you reflect on your connection to this place and this history? (How) Does it intersect with your personal or family heritage?
 - a) What are some of the best parts about working here?
 - b) Challenges?
- 4) What experience do you think tour-goers are looking for when they come to the Whitney Plantation?
- 5) Do you have any moments that stick out in your mind, such as things tour-goers have said to you?
- 6) If you could change anything about the way the tour is structured, what would that be?
- 7) What else do you think is going on that I should be thinking about?
- 8) What other questions do you think I should be asking?

I received consent from the museum administration to do observations and I had consent from fellow tour guides when I was observing their tours. I did not ask visitors for consent to observe because it would have been disruptive to the museum, and I did not ask them questions or interview them. I only observed visitors in public spaces. I have protected the identities of guides by using pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

Through analyzing this data, I learned about the process of open coding. Open Coding can be thought of as a way that a researcher begins to sift through data by looking for themes (Emerson et al.:2011) I began by looking through my field notes and trying to notice what topics repeatedly showed up. I then grouped these into general codes and broke the general codes into specific codes. Then I applied these same sets of codes to my interview data. The most important thing I learned from this process was how to sit with data and let it speak to you. I came to realize that my data was too rich and nuanced to fit into pre-delineated codes and categories. Through slowly combing through my own words and the words of my collaborators, new ideas and themes spoke to me instead of my imposition of themes on the data.

Collaboration

I received the Robert C. West Graduate Student Field Research Award from the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University in December 2018 and returned to The Whitney over winter-break to follow-up with study participants. Over a period of 10 days, I provided all interlocutors with their interview transcripts and we discussed what they might like to change or clarify. The purpose of this period of follow-up was to bring my participants into a collaborative role.

I also displayed a poster that I presented at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in November 2018 in the employee breakroom. I provided multiple colorful pens and requested and received feedback on the content. This idea came to me after I showed my draft poster to the Director of Museum Operations, and it elicited valuable feedback. This step toward collaboration feels essential to my research because the nature of being a tour guide is often characterized by isolation.

As I have been gone over my field notes and interview transcripts, disparate concepts and themes have emerged. I have struggled with my role as a white ethnographer to understand how to ethically produce research about a space with such historical and contemporary racial gravity. Bringing others closer to the research in this small collaborative role has added necessary depth and nuance to the project.

This brings me to the question of who am I in the field? And in what ways does this influence my data? Engaging ethnography on this context has provided me with a simultaneous insider/outsider role. As a young white woman born and raised in a Midwestern city, I had only been a part of the Whitney community for a few months before I began my inquiry. Before moving to Louisiana, I had work on a number of anti-racism projects. This shaped my approach to being and guide and thinking about this project. Because I was aware of the dearth of voices of African Americans in the U.S. education system's historical narrative, I consistently tried to de-center my own thoughts, and highlight or uplift others'.

I was also coming to the field with an anthropological lens. I was observing all of the interactions around me and analyzing them through my anthropological training, unlike any of my other coworkers. I was also, however, an insider. I was hired to fulfill a certain job and I did it well. I worked close to full time hours all summer and built relationships with my collaborators in the field.

All these aspects of my identity no doubt affect the way I was perceived in the field and the connections that I am making in my data. It is clear to me that another researcher with different outward appearance and life experience, but the same methods would likely produce a qualitatively different thesis. Because of my

positionality, it is important that this study contain elements of collaborative ethnographic practice. For example, presenting my poster from the AAA, as well as sharing the initial interview transcripts during follow-up interviews with my coworkers for feedback and clarification, therefore, allowed me to exchange the role of interlocutor for a role of collaborator. For Luke Eric Lassiter, collaborative methods in anthropology is fundamentally about the sharing of power with members of the studied community – from the conceptualization of the research questions, to the research design, fieldwork, analysis and writing.

The collaboration of anthropologists with their interlocutors during ethnographic practice and analysis allows for more direct and fruitful engagement with the public (Lassiter 2005, Rappaport 2008, Madison 2011). It is clear to me that my task is not to write an exposé, and this is not a journalistic endeavor. This is especially important in a field site in which my colleagues and I are working to give voice to the voiceless (the enslaved) using their own narratives.

HISTORY

The swath of land that is now The Whitney Plantation Museum was first colonized by the French in the 1720s. A large section of land along the Mississippi River came to be known as the German Coast by the 1760s because several German farmers, contracted into indentured servitude by the French, had settled there. In 1752, Ambroise Heidel, an indentured German farmer, and his wife moved to the location where the Whitney plantation museum currently operates. They named their plantation Habitation Heidel and grew indigo as their first cash crop.

Ambroise and his wife had nine children, one of which went on to found the Evergreen plantation downriver from the Whitney. When Ambroise died, his son Jean-Jacques Sr. took over the operations of the plantation, and it was Jean-Jacques who transitioned the plantation from indigo to sugar in the early 1800s. When he died, his two sons Jean-Jacques Jr. and Marcelin Heidel took over running the plantation. When Marcelin died in 1839, his widow Marie Azilie took over as the sole proprietor.

Marie Azilie died in 1860, six months before the civil war began. At this point, the property went up for auction. It wasn't until 1867 that the land was purchased by a Northern businessman by the name of Bradish Johnson. Johnson owned rum distilleries and sugar plantations throughout the U.S. He was already somewhat infamous due to the "swill milk scandal" during which milk from his stables was cited to be the cause of death for over 8,000 infants. It was Johnson who changed the name of the property from Habitation Heidel to the Whitney Plantation, in honor of his grandson Harry Whitney.

The plantation has changed hands many times since then; however, every subsequent owner retained the name Whitney Plantation. In 1975 the property was purchased by a rayon company, Formosa Chemical and Fibre Corporation, for industrial development. Whenever new industrial development is planned to take place anywhere in the U.S., the company is required by the National Environmental Policy Act to first allow archaeological research to take place on the land. Coastal Environments of Baton Rouge was the cultural resource management firm that was contracted for this work. Professor Jay Edwards from LSU was also contracted, and he produced an architectural report.

For twenty-five years the land virtually sat empty, and for unknown reasons in 1999, without having developed anything, the rayon company sold the property to John Cummings, a retired lawyer from New Orleans. Mr. Cummings's law practice specialized in class-actions and mass tort litigation. He has always worked to represent victims and their families. Upon reviewing the archaeological and historical evidence from this property, Mr. Cummings knew that he had to dedicate this property to a museum about enslavement. It took him 15 years and over \$11 million to turn the Whitney plantation grounds into the museum that it is today.

Dr. Ibrahima Seck, the director of research, is an historian and former Fulbright scholar and has been working full-time on the Whitney project since 2013. He is a member of faculty in the history department of Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (UCAD), Senegal. His 1999 doctoral dissertation was titled *African Culture and Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley, from Iberville to Jim Crow*. In 2019 the museum expects to host over 86,000 visitors. By 2019, if all goes according to plan, the museum will

officially have 501© (3) nonprofit status with a functioning Board of Directors. Until then it is privately owned by John Cummings.

Today the Whitney Plantation is the only plantation museum in Louisiana with an exclusive focus on the lives of enslaved people. McCloud Plantation and Summerset Plantation in North Carolina, and Drayton Hall in South Carolina, also focus on the lives of enslaved people.

At the Whitney, the tour starts with the Wall of Honor on which the names of 354 people enslaved on the Whitney property are inscribed in granite. The first side of the wall is dedicated to the international slave trade and the diverse ethnic backgrounds and knowledge held by African captives. The second side of the wall is dedicated to the domestic slave trade and the methods by which slave traders commodified human beings within the United States.

The next memorial encountered is entitled “The Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall.” Gwendolyn Midlo Hall is a historian whose life’s work was assembling the Afro-Louisiana genealogical and historical database. Additionally, her book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (1995) is widely considered to be a foundational text in the field of Louisiana historical studies, and is cited frequently by scholars and researchers. The wall itself is inscribed with the names of over 107,000 people who were enslaved in the state of Louisiana before the year of 1820. For the vast majority of these individuals (as of the writing of this document) these memorial walls are the closest thing they have to a cemetery. As a result, guests are asked to walk through with respect and acknowledge their names and stories.

The third memorial is entitled 'the Field of Angels' and is dedicated to the 2,200 children who lived and died enslaved in St. John the Baptist parish between 1820 and 1860. Another memorial that is not included on the tour, but guests are strongly encouraged to visit, is the 1811 German Coast Uprising memorial in which artist Woodrow Nash commemorates the thirty revolutionaries who were beheaded at Destrehan plantation. Woodrow Nash is an artist originally from Akron, Ohio. He met the owner of the museum, John Cummings, at Jazz Fest in New Orleans and their collaboration birthed a truly remarkable monument to revolt against the system of slavery.

After the uprising was stopped by a planter-class militia, these revolutionaries' heads were placed on top of pikes and placed along the Mississippi River in front of the plantations where they were originally enslaved (D. Rassmussen, 2011). This uprising is often referenced by scholars and interpreters of black history to speak against the presumption of passivity of enslaved people in the face of oppression. The brutal display of the remains of the revolutionaries also speaks to the uses of terror by the planter class to keep enslaved people docile.

The tour goes on to include original slave quarters, an explanation of the sugar making process, and the slave pens. The tour ends with a look at the original detached kitchen and a brief look at the 'big house.'

This tour is different than other plantation tours in the area because there is little focus on the opulent lifestyle of the white owning family (Potter, 2016, Cook 2016, Alderman and Modlin 2016, Small 2013, Jackson 2012, Goings 2001). At the Whitney, the lives of the plantation owners are only mentioned in reference to the ways they

profited off of the labor of enslaved people on their property. *New York Times* Sunday Magazine did an eight-page spread only three months after the museum opened (Amsden, 2015). After its publication, visitation tripled. The author of the piece, David Amsden, lives part-time in New Orleans.

ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the introduction, I first came to The Whitney Plantation as a tourist, during a family member's visit to Louisiana. By the end of the tour, I was so moved by the experience that I wanted to help the project in any way that I could. My guide, Lynn (who I came to know very well much later) had mentioned during the tour that the museum had only been open for a few years and they were still, in some ways, getting their feet off the ground.

The next day I emailed the executive director and asked if there were any volunteer opportunities. Over a series of emails, she related to me that what they needed most were tour guides, and she thought I should apply for the position. I was shocked that she even thought I was qualified for that position, having had no previous experience working as a tour guide. My own tour guide, Lynn, was so incredibly impactful that I was sure there must be a more stringent vetting process. However, in an informal interview I conducted with the museum director some months later, she told me that the personality traits that make a good tour guide are the same needed as a waiter in a restaurant, or in a theatre performance; namely, the ability to genuinely connect with a variety of strangers on the same level of quality without becoming overwhelmed or exhausted.

Through my hours of observation and months employed as a tour guide, I can attest to the fact the tour experiences are curated as the result of years of research. At the same time, these curated experiences are constantly being renegotiated and re-created based on myriad and variables; including visitor feedback, group size, weather, and walking speed. Here I argue that tour guides are constantly negotiating their roles

as agents, vectors of truth, forgers of connection, and catalysts of transformation. They are perhaps shape-shifters and visitors' clumsy efforts to fix them into one shape are doomed to fail.

Truth Telling

The very first code that emerged during my analysis of the data was "Truth." Visitors and museum staff alike often mention the word truth throughout a variety of environments at the field site. In the visitors' center of the Whitney Plantation there is a large white wall on which visitors are invited to leave comments containing feedback on Post-it notes. As I gave the Post-it notes a cursory glance, I observed, without question, the word truth over and over again. For example, one of my favorites says, "your willingness for TRUTH & RECONCILIATION is our path through this darkness."

Truth is such a complex concept in a context like the Whitney Plantation. This is demonstrated in the multiplicity of times during the interview in which my collaborators felt compelled to mention it. My first encounter came in conjunction with highlighting the fact that the Whitney plantation is a unique space among museums and cultural institutions. When I asked Avery, a fellow tour guide, "What do you think visitors are looking for when they come to the Whitney Plantation," he told me:

People come here looking for the truth. The truth, plain and simple. Like we say, the majority of people that come here, don't know anything about slavery. People of all colors don't know. The majority of them never read the history of slavery. So, I think what people want when they come here is the truth.

By saying this Avery is alluding to the fact that The Whitney Plantation is presenting a non-dominant narrative. He is also hinting at how the history of slavery does not show up within the hegemonic education system. He continues:

“And then once you deliver the truth, I think that really in their minds, of course, they don’t know the story, they don’t know if what you’re really telling them, at that point, is the truth for sure. But, they trust that it’s a museum and so we have an obligation to deliver the truth. I think that most people are looking for a truth, that if they ever decide to research something that they heard here, that it is going to be found to be true. I’m not saying every person is going to do that, but I think people come here looking for the truth, and I think people already have that conception. When most people come here, they know it’s a museum and think ‘I don’t know what I’m going to hear but I’m sure whatever I’m going to hear is going to be the truth.’

Here, Avery describes the role of the museum based on the expectation of the visitors. Visitors to Whitney are self-selected. They ‘ve chosen the Whitney among all the plantation tour options and are likely arriving with a willingness to learn something different. Some have traveled from different states, or from farther away, to visit this distinctive site. Unlike the conversations Dr. Canuto had with tour guides in Guatemala regarding the feeling of pressure to present a farcical tale to entertain tourists, here we see the guide identifying verifiable truth as an expectation of visitors to the site and an obligation to fulfill.

Avery continued,

It’s not like you’re just riding with somebody or coming down River Road and you don’t know if what they’re saying is true. Here you know that you’re coming somewhere that the history has been curated, research has been done, the original documentation of things that back up some of the facts and stuff here. So I think people come here just looking for truth, for the most part. I don’t think the majority of them know anything beyond that, or what to expect, unless they’re going off of what they saw on

movies, which we know are not too accurate, if they're accurate at all. But another good reason for this place is for people to get real facts about history. Not just what they see in the movies because the movies are for entertainment to get some real facts of slavery what really went on, to separate entertainment from what really happened.

Finally, here we see Avery drawing a distinction between visits to this museum and what often takes place in the dominant narrative as represented in the world of entertainment and film. Often during my tours, I would get questions that I knew were informed by movies like *Gone with the Wind*, *Django Unchained*, or the TV show, *Queen Sugar*. Movies and shows like these are generally produced and viewed for entertainment. Here, Avery creates a clear contrast in naming how visitors to the Whitney Plantation attempt to separate false narratives from true ones.

Another Whitney guide, Pauline, creates a similar distinction. "Because we are the only place, really, that focuses on this history, there's more weight on us to get it right." She suggests that this weight comes not only as an expectation from the public, but also as a sense of pressure to provide people with a truth that is difficult to obtain from other museum sites. Alice also mentions this theme,

I think a lot of people who don't know this history come because they want to be introduced to this history. I think a lot of people come here because it's the only place that does this and they have read about it.

Tour guides repeatedly told me that they are expected to provide a response to the misrepresentations and erasure of enslaved people's experiences – misrepresentations perpetuated by the dominant culture, including what is portrayed at other plantations, in history books, school curricula, and the popular culture. Another

context in which “truth” is often mentioned is in the context of discussing broader society’s general lack of information about enslaved people in the south. In “Counter-narratives of Slavery in the Deep South: the Politics of Empathy Along and Beyond River Road,” Matthew Cook writes,

One major area in which counter-narrative sites in the Deep South can continue to work and improve upon is how to make these connections between the institution of slavery, the foundation of the USA, and slavery’s impact on present-day race relations more explicit to the public. (2016: 305)

Lynn, another guide that I interviewed, stated:

Most the time people don’t know this is what happened because they’ve heard about the big hoop skirts or the beautiful homes. People are so disappointed when they see the big house. Usually, they are there like “That’s how big it is?” and we’re like “Yeah, it’s seen through the eyes of the enslaved children.” That is what I like to tell them so that when they get there and they are disappointed.

This quote uncovers the tension between visitor expectations regarding the built environment and reality. This is a visitor response that I heard time and time again while giving tours. Visitors are not only surprised by their perceptions of the house being small, but also the lack of opulence to observe once inside. Here we see Lynn describing the affective state of visitors, which is often a way that guides attempt to measure the effectiveness of their tours.

The affect of visitors is also important in the work of Paula Ebron (2014). Ebron contrasts the emotional reactions of African American tourists attending return trips to West Africa with visits to plantations sites in the Southern U.S. She points out that while on trips to the African continent, African American

tourists most often display joy and gleefulness, while at U.S. plantation sites they display more sadness and anger. She attributes this to the unjust nature of U.S. culture more broadly.

This is further explained by Whitney guide Avery:

Right here in the beginning of the tour, with the church, I tell them how they built it, the former slaves, these are the people that they said were illiterate and unskilled, but these are the people that built this whole church, with their own money. I show them how the benevolent societies operated and why they came into existence, people being self-supporting and providing things that they weren't given like normal citizens in the United States. And that right there starts it, they look around and think, "oh they couldn't read or write, but they built this, they had benevolent societies where they're burying people's family members and paying for medication all kinds of things." So, when they find out those kinds of things, it opens their eyes. I also like to talk about how following emancipation, when reformation is going on and you have black people that are doctors and lawyers and senators, representatives in Congress. I like to tell them that, so they know that it's not that black people never did anything, it's just that you're not told about it.

I love this quote because it is such an emotional look into the mind of a tour guide at The Whitney Plantation. We are always trying to find ways to reform people's often ignorant, preconceived notions. So much of the hegemonic narrative in the U.S. regarding slavery leaves out the brilliance and the ingenuity of the African captives, slaves, and African Americans. Avery discusses the skills and the organizing power of formerly enslaved communities after emancipation.

Black leadership during reconstruction is also a mostly unknown fact in the U.S. By bringing this time period up during his tours – an historic period that is mostly outside of the scope of the Whitney's specific task – Avery illustrates his commitment to spreading truth and knowledge that have largely, and

intentionally, been ignored. Also ignored are the true horrendous details of the process of commodifying human beings. Another guide, Alice, discusses how she brings the auction block to life from the perspective of enslaved people:

Then bringing information to people that they have never heard. You know, I'm an educator at heart, so to be able to come up and say, 'yeah, they had to wash themselves down in greasy water, and some of that was bear grease, to make themselves shine, so that they look pretty or acceptable for white viewers, who were there shouting and haggling on while they stood there on the block.' Condensing a lot of information and then being able to make people see that, see it, imagine it, that's the best part of it.

Because the Whitney focuses on slave narratives and the Federal Writers Project interviews with those who were enslaved as children, working as a guide felt like an opportunity to uplift the truth revealed by these historical documents. Being there opened my eyes to real stories of real people that I felt I had never had access to (though I now know that anyone can access the FWP interviews through a quick Google search). Sometimes hegemony functions not by keeping elements of counter-cultural stories hidden but instead distracts us from their very existence. Tour guides at the Whitney get our attention and illuminate parts of history that have been pushed out of sight.

Present Day Connections

The second theme that became apparent to me was “present-day connections.” Because I had been employed as a guide and had gone through the training required to fulfill the job, I am aware that the outline which guides are given to structure their tours does not mention the effect that this past has had on the present. However, every guide that I observed, including myself, makes these connections implicitly and explicitly

during their tours. This small but significant divergence from the script speaks to the ways in which guides themselves come to understand their role within the larger context of the Whitney.

Here's how Alice put it:

What would be good is that they think back about how they felt at the Whitney, when you walk into the voting booth, when you have a discussion with a person who is not like you either in color or gender or gender orientation. I hope you take what you learn here about what was done to people and then apply that in your own space.

Here, Alice is describing her goals for people to whom she has given a tour. We also see her switch from using third-person plural pronouns to the second person after the first sentence. I see the first sentence of this quote being directed at explaining something to me as the interviewer. She then switches to illustrating her point by using her tour guide register for the remainder of the statement. Even though all the information she shares with her tour group is set over a hundred years ago, her hope is that, after having heard what is presented in the tour, people are able to use the context of the Whitney tour when navigating contemporary political situations. Whether it is a conversation with a distant family member or actively voting in an election, she seems to be implying that if more people knew the truth about the history of slavery, they would make better decisions and interact more compassionately with each other.

We also see Alice appealing directly to visitors' feelings. She says that when people are in a voting booth or talking with family it would be good if they, "think back to how they felt." Later, in my discussion of the Transforming Visitors

theme, I will revisit the consistent presence of targeting visitors' feelings in the guides' interviews, and what this could mean pedagogically.

Avery also contributes to this contextualization:

I also tell people sometimes, think about it, if I told you this story from the viewpoint as if it was happening right now today, you'd be saying 'well I hope they put those psychopaths in jail those people are psychos they're crazies, they're lunatics.' There's no way you can say that this is right, or the anything about this was good. If I tell you the story from the perspective of today, you'd be saying 'well I hope they got locked up, people like that don't deserve to be out in society.'

Here Avery creatively discusses putting tourists in a situation where they have to consider enslavement outside of their normal narratives. He is making a moral and political argument by inviting visitors to collapse time. In using this as a tool to engage visitors' moral imagination, he invites them to see the cruel and inhumane nature of the historical information he is presenting. He continues:

That's why I like to mention the 13th amendment and the fact that they tell us that the Emancipation Proclamation is the big document but it's not. It's the 13th amendment and that loophole that's left in that 13th Amendment. Usually, that's another lightbulb moment for a lot of people, when you explain to them that the only person you can enslave in America is an inmate. And that's why I like to explain the going from slavery, to that sharecropping, wage working, and I mentioned convict leasing too. For African-Americans to be unemployed, then they bring you to a working farm to work off a fine for being unemployed.

Avery is doing two things here. First, he says "they tell us." With this, he is referring to broader hegemonic culture and the United States education system. He is talking about present-day cultural power-brokers obscuring the true nature and intent of the 13th Amendment. Avery then moves from asking visitors to imagine chattel slavery today to the realities of the connections between slavery and the U. S. prison system. His analysis leaves little room for confusion. Mass

incarceration is slavery by other means. This is significant because it illustrates the ways in which Avery desires to tie his tours based on information from the past to contemporary social conditions. He continues by describing how these political changes happened over time:

Sometimes I tell them the mass incarceration that we face today, is mass incarceration 2.0. The 1.0 is the convict leasing, and other things immediately following emancipation. That system, sharecropping, wage working, was essentially slavery for everybody, and those people weren't getting paid money. They can't leave the farm if they say they want to, move and go somewhere else. They can't just pick up and leave if they want. So that's slavery for everybody. Those coal miners could not leave those little coal mining towns. You know, you owe the company and so that's slavery, and then right into today. Throw them in prison, make money off them working for you. They could educate those people cheaper than it's going to cost to build a prison. But if they educate those people, then they must pay them job rates and salaries for that skill that they have. Why do that if I can just build a prison and put you in the prison, and have you doing that same job, and I don't have to pay you for it?

Avery's exposition considers the transformations of capitalism in relation to bondage. Unfree labor today continues to be more profitable than free labor. But who pays and who benefits?

Another example of my interlocutors addressing present-day connections occurs when Lynn began to talk to me about visitors who say disrespectful or egregious things on her tours. Lynn states:

They feel like [formerly enslaved] people should have just moved on. How could they have been this way? And of course, people don't understand a lot of things that you might see in the African-American communities. Some people say, "Why don't people pull themselves up by their bootstraps?" But when you have a race of people who are at least 300 years behind everybody else, it's kind of hard to catch up.

Here we see Lynn implicitly referring to someone who might challenge a connection being made between slavery and the present-day structural inequalities African

Americans face. Based on her experience, she attributes a 'get over it' attitude to certain visitors when grappling with the legacy of slavery. The bootstrap reference draws on Booker T. Washington's famous Atlanta Compromise speech (Washington, 1895) which was very popular with the white people of the time and urged Black folks to be self-reliant in improving their lot, rather than making demands on society for equal treatment, social inclusion, or reparations.

Here Lynn is taking a vindicationist stance. According to St. Clair Drake, vindicationism refers to the work of setting "straight the oft-distorted record of the Black experience and [filling] in the lacunae resulting from the conscious or unconscious omission of significant facts about Black people" (Drake 1987, 1:xviii) This implies that, at least on some tours Lynn gives, these connections are being made by visitors.

Guides' Agency

The third theme that emerged through open coding was the agency of tour guides and the ways in which they make their tours their own. While I observed my coworkers, I noticed that every guide's tour was significantly different from others who worked there. During the interviews, it also became apparent to me that tour guides take great pride in the individual nature of their tours. The opportunity to make the tour their own usually factors heavily into why they enjoy working at the Whitney Plantation.

When I started my training at the Whitney, I was given an outline of what points need to be covered at each stop on the tour, two full books on the history of slavery, and access to a google folder that contained selections from various sources pertaining to the site, or general South Louisiana history. I was told to read over everything and come back in a couple weeks prepared to discuss it. During the discussion, I was able

to clarify anything that I needed. I was also encouraged to read any books we sell in the book store and incorporate information into my tour as I see fit. It was explained to me that a script wasn't important, what the director wanted for the tours were historically grounded facts and knowledge to be shared. By giving guides the space to include what they've read, what is important to them, the museum administration was promoting agentic practice among the guides.

As a guide, I was highly affected by some of the negative feedback that I received, and often took it to heart, sometimes changing the ways I gave my tours because of it. Once, in the middle of a tour, a visitor stopped me and asked if all I was going to talk about was how "White people mistreated and made money off of (her) ancestors." She told me I wasn't offering enough information about resilience and culture. I apologized and attempted to discuss this more with her, but she walked away. I took this very seriously. Despite the fact that all of the Whitney Museum promotional material states, "The Story of Slavery," and all of the information has been carefully curated, I shifted how I do my tours to include more of a focus on the brilliance of people of African descent.

A few weeks later, towards the end of a tour, a different visitor became very angry with me for not talking enough about the ways enslaved people were beaten, and raped. They told me I was whitewashing the information. In that moment, I felt blindsided and stuck. I see now that I exist in a context of centuries of miseducation, oppression, and exploitation. I cannot present such painful information multiple times a day and predict every single visitor's reaction, but that is what I was trying to do. We all have specific lines that we know work well at certain points in the tour, and we each

have our own ways that we try to make the tour our own. Alice describes the topics she prefers to discuss with visitors on the way out:

I start talking to them, once we get past alligator pond, we start talking about food, about mundane things, where you staying, what you doing, just a kind of for a moment to get them back into reality, and although we want people to, to decompress, I think sometimes just bringing them back to reality is the best way to go, and say where you eating tonight. Like I told some people a couple weeks ago, "You think New Orleans is about food and sex, it's really about food and death." So, go have a nice meal and go visit a cemetery.

When I asked Pauline whether visitors suggest topics for her to cover, she explained:

I try to do my best to shoot all that down because I'm not here to be used as a conduit for your agenda, no matter what that is. I will be more than happy to talk about certain aspects of this history. If you wanted to know if or where people were treated better, I will talk about that. If you want people to know about buck breaking and stuff like that, people can do the research on it, because I'm not going to talk about that. If you want people of color to just shock white people into this history, we're not here for that either. I'm not here to listen to how white men of the time, it was the only thing they could do, it's the only way that they could be profitable, and everybody was doing it. I'm not here for you.... So, I try to not only honor myself, but also honor the history of the people who were forced into subjugation, and how ultimately, they were categorized, and how their histories have constantly been used for other people's agendas. I'm not going to participate in, or be a living version of that. I just don't engage it, it has no integrity. I don't think people realize that's what they're doing, you know. I know that people are not trying to come from that angle, but it just degrades all of us to be involved in trying to manipulate these narratives to fit our modern brains, and make sense of things.

Here we see that Pauline has very strong commitments to what she will and will not discuss on tours. She draws a clear and intentional line between presenting history and performing.

In the quote above, Pauline references 'buck breaking.' From a brief review of Reddit forums, there was a period of time when memes were circulating the internet that were conflating two horrendous true facts that absolutely did happen into one that probably didn't; sexual abuse of enslaved people by the plantation owners, and example-making through public punishment. These memes often claimed that groups of white plantation owners would hold public events where they gang-raped an enslaved male and forced other enslaved people to watch.

Pauline uses 'buck breaking' as an example of the misinformation that visitors often bring with them to the tour and expect to have verified. She is saying she sometimes feels used as a tool by black tourists wanting to shock white people, as well as white tourists wanting to humanize and excuse the slave-owning elite. She rejects this as often as she can by having a clear goal for her tours.

Pauline's tour is very information heavy, and she is one of the most well-read staff members at the Whitney. Her brand of tour is factual and blunt, unlike others who admit to attempting to create an emotional connection with visitors, as we see in the following description from Lynn:

I know a lot of people are here to make money, but this is personal for me. My tour has a personal flavor to it, and it's also, in my opinion, a place of healing reverence and all those things you can really feel...

So, for me, when I first came to take the tour, and it started to connect for me, I'm like "this is home." So, it feels like home. It's not like you're going someplace where you really don't feel comfortable at all, you just do your job and you go home. Even when you come in the morning, it's like an extension of home. I don't know if anybody else feels that way, but I do.

So, for me, it's really a pleasure to give my tours, to talk to people and tell them I'm from here and I'm connected to this plantation. That's when people get a little bit more comfortable, it's not like I'm reading, or just telling them a story that's been passed on to me, it's that it comes from within, it's in the heart.

Lynn told me, as she tells visitors, that she is from the area and grew up hearing stories from these sugar plantations. On her tours, I saw her draw on these connections, and I too perceived visitors responding very positively. Her connection to place is fundamental to her sense that being a guide at the Whitney is more than just a job. Lynn claims belonging to, and ownership of, the site; thus the source of her authority to tell this story. Nonetheless, a visitor could be startled to hear her say "this is home," in reference to a site commemorating slavery, and therefore unspeakable hardship and suffering.

She continues:

My tour is a little bit more on the personal level, and you want to be more connected to your group, and that's what I strive for on my tours. So that's what makes people feel more comfortable, and they feel comfortable to ask the questions that they don't understand. And I really appreciate that, because I hate it when I know a group comes in and leaves the same way Because I believe people need, not bragging but, they need somebody like me more on that level. I'm slow, I know, I don't rush, and I really strive to just keep it going in that manner, more personal, so that people can feel comfortable, to ask me the stuff that might be unpleasant. Ask it anyway.

We see how Lynn's stance is quite different from Pauline's. The way they present information is very important for both, but Lynn wants to make sure that people are comfortable. She sees the Whitney as an extension of her home. Pauline, on the other hand, wants to get as much well-researched information into each tour as time allows.

And finally, Avery:

I tell all the kids that come here, 'do your homework, do a lot of reading, and ask a lot of questions.' Because anywhere you are, if they don't want you asking questions, that's probably not the place for you to be. Nobody that's looking out for your best interest, or looking out for your good should be trying to hide anything from you. And so, I tell them, 'ask a lot of questions. Nothing wrong with asking questions. You want to know? Ask.'

Here, Avery is commenting on his own experiences with the U.S. education system and other institutions. He is again echoing the hidden or obscured nature of the history of Slavery in the U.S.

Unlike anyone I interviewed for this project, beyond my year of employment, I have no real historical connection to this land or this museum. I sometimes found myself reaching to legitimize my authority to tour groups. I would say that I am a graduate student studying this topic. It was often a struggle for me to maintain focus when I thought a tourist was disappointed with my presentation. There were many times that someone would approach me after hearing my tour as say something along the lines of, "when I saw that you were going to be the guide I was disappointed, but you actually did a really great job," or "when I first saw you I wondered what a white woman could have to teach me about this, but this was really great." Given the fact that there were a few people who did say it to me, I can assume there are more people who thought similar things and didn't choose to tell me.

Transforming Visitors

When I initially began the analysis portion of this project my intention was to only have the three codes that I have detailed above. However, as I was editing quotes, a fourth theme continuously jumped out from the data which could not be ignored. I

labeled that theme, “transforming visitors.” In some interviews, the word “transform” was used directly, while others talked of hoping that people are “changed” by the time they leave or “have a different view.” I return to the words of Alice here to consider this theme:

I want them to understand, that this knowledge can be used, and used in their own way, and that they have to think about this knowledge every time they make a decision. What would be good is that they think back about how they felt at the Whitney, when you walk into the voting booth, when you have a discussion with a person who is not like you, either in color, or gender, or gender orientation, whenever that you take what you learn here about what was done to people, and then apply that in your own space, you know. That is really important so something, there has to be a take away from this place. I don't want them to necessarily remember me, I want them to remember one scrap of information that I've given to them, that they can remember, that they can say “Wait! Maybe I need to Google that. Maybe I need to look into some other articles about that.” But just to apply the knowledge and the feelings to their personal lives. It's that simple. I want them to think about the plight of the enslaved, which was horrendous, but then apply what they've learned about them to something that is grander and broader in their own lives, hopefully. I don't want this just to be “oh that was nice” or “oh that was sad.” That is what we can hope for. That's what I hope for.

The quote from Alice above is the full transcript from a conversation I quoted previously. We see how Alice truly hopes to have a lasting impact on visitors. She indicates that she doesn't want this to be a simple, easy to process experience. She wants people to wrestle with the information they received and change the way they might behave in certain situations. In Alice's use of the words “grander and broader,” she implies that the time spent at the museum is brief, but the impact, she hopes, is lasting. She echoes what other guides consistently are communicating; a desire to bring visitors out of their comfortable

sense of self and into a space where they are thinking about what other people might be struggling with.

My coworkers and I all agreed that the “Wall of Honor” stop on the tour is where we tended to get people on board that seemed to otherwise be disinterested. We could often identify disinterested people by having their arms crossed, a skeptical look, or maybe checking their phone. It was commonly understood among tour guides, however, that it is when we show the names of the people who were enslaved and their specific stories that we can connect with people. I think this is because up until that point in the tour, what has been presented is a collection of generalized information about U.S. history and the local area. It seems tourists are more interested, or let their guards down, when presented with specific, qualitative data.

Many times, when the guides were describing their goals for transformation to me, emotions would naturally arise. Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas, describe what they call a pedagogy of discomfort. They explain that, “By closely examining emotional reactions and responses . . . one begins to identify unconscious privileges as well as invisible ways in which one complies with dominant ideology” (2003, 108).

There are times as a guide I would end up getting choked up suddenly about the gravity of what I was saying. Sometimes it would be because I made eye contact with someone, while in other situations emotions appeared out of nowhere. These moments would jolt me out of the mundane nature of working a job and I would really hear what I was saying. I found that there is no way to do

the job as a guide at the Whitney without becoming emotional about it, and often by the end of the tour I felt very connected to the strangers with whom I had just spent the last ninety minutes. Not only was I aiming to transform visitors through emotional appeals, I myself was continually transformed.

Below we hear Lynn discuss visitors' intentions for visiting and some of their reactions after going through the museum.

They want to know so they can teach it to their kids. Certainly, you have people that come here for all reasons, and some people are going to be changed when they leave, and some people are not going to change. Sometimes the Whitney ends up on people's bucket list.... because it is just something to do. A lot of people are going to leave here the same way they came, but some people are going to be changed after they come. Some people are going to feel better, because now they know, and some people are going to be angry when they leave. None of it is our intention, just come and listen and hear what you have to hear and move on.

Lynn illustrates the dichotomy of 'changed' and 'unchanged' visitors as she sees it. She uses the phrase, "just something to do," to index a type of casual visitor to the plantation who came to the tour maybe without knowing much about the unusual mission of this museum, or who lacks curiosity; in contrast with those people who "want to know." The phrasing of "now they know" implies that people learn something new and critical when they come to the Whitney Plantation. She juxtaposes some visitors feeling better after coming, with others leaving with angry feelings.

I observed Lynn making a speech during her tours that other guides do not. It sounds similar to the above quote, and she tells people that she is not trying to "make anyone angry." There are many justifications for visitor anger that I have seen and heard discussed. On my own tours, when someone was angry,

and they told me about it, it was usually because they thought I was either portraying their ancestors' history too harshly or not harshly enough.

Pauline put it:

I think the best aspect of working here is... being able to have an open dialogue about challenging history, in an atmosphere where people are open and listening, instead of combative. Which is something that you see in our society today. It is very difficult for people to hear each other's experiences, especially when the subject of subjugation and discrimination, especially pertaining to black Americans, comes up. There's a lot of defensiveness, and a lot of anger and a lot of guilt that people haven't processed, and how people express these emotions of discomfort here is more open and not so combative. People are genuinely trying to work things out. They're trying to have a dialogue about subjects that they really don't know too much about. Hopefully, by the time they leave here, they understand that this is very much a part of everybody's identity. But I just hope that when they leave, it makes everybody think a little bit differently about who they are.

Pauline describes the Whitney as a place that creates the conditions in which transformations can happen through open dialogue. She identifies as having a desire to instill a very personal sense of responsibility for the information that visitors learn. Also, by saying that she hopes that personal responsibility results in changing how they see themselves, it implies that she believes she is telling them something new, something they have never heard before.

On this subject, Avery concludes:

I think when people get all the information you, get the true information pertaining to this, they leave with a different outlook. A lot of people leave here and they tell me, 'Up, until today, I had a completely different outlook on this. But I've taken this tour, you know, now I see it from a whole different angle. It's not something that people need to get over, and it's something that our children need to know about, and that we need to be talking about.' So that's the best thing about working here.

CONCLUSION

With this study, I attempt to add more nuance to the multidisciplinary literature which deals with the legacy of slavery on our social memory and institutions. Studies centering the voices of those most directly responsible for the delivery of the interpretation of this legacy are greatly needed. This is why I have chosen tour guides as my object of inquiry. The field of museum studies and the scholarship on tourism demonstrates a lack of research which highlights the perspective of tour guides.

Additionally, current scholarship in anthropology and geography regarding plantation tours almost completely overlooks sites with an exclusive focus on the enslaved (Alderman 2016, Jackson 2012, Goings 2001). Given how few of these sites exist, this gap is understandable. In order to move this discourse forward, as well as respond to suggestions for further research which point to the importance of documenting tour guide experiences, my work focuses solely on the Whitney Plantation. Given my year working as a tour guide at the Whitney, and the growing interest in historical sites which focus on non-dominant perspectives, my research contributes to a growing framework for how to best analyze and understand narratives as they are memorialized in our social and cultural institutions.

One of the most important insights from my fieldwork is the great variety of experiences and goals that tour guides have from and for their tours. Guides see themselves as having a great deal of agency to help shape the impact that the museum has on tourists. My primary findings include complex explanations of guides' agency; tour guides each in our own way believing that WE are the ones who can create a valuable visitor experience. Also, because this is a space that uplifts and displays non-

dominant narratives, ideas of truth-telling are present in much of the interview data. As a guide myself, I am aware that, although the training materials do not mention present-day connections to slavery, I consistently observed these connections being made on tours and brought up during the guide interviews. Finally, the desire to change or transform museum visitors stands out as a shared goal for Whitney tour guides.

In many ways, interviewing the tour guides confirmed many of my own observations as I was guiding. In the interviews, guides spoke of the work being somewhat isolating, and of a feeling of heaviness that doesn't leave when we go home. They mentioned feeling vulnerable when someone on the tour looks like they aren't connecting with the information. However, they also highlighted nuanced elements of their own experiences that I couldn't have known on my own, such as a feeling of connection to the land. Listening to tour guides describe their justifications for highlighting and presenting certain information during their tours also provided a deeper understanding of the meaning behind these choices.

The section of my Literature review that focuses on plantation tourism highlights an article by Alderman and Modlin in which they interview tour guides. They describe previous work on southern plantation heritage tourism as having established the importance of the verbal expressions of museum staff perspectives on visitors' experiences. They also claim that a worthwhile project would be to observe and document plantation tours over a long period of time in order to collect information on docent speech. My research answers this call. The insights from my research speak to the intentionality and agency of museum staff. In its own way, this project confirms

Alderman and Modlin's argument in that guides know that they play a pivotal role in the tourist's experience; a responsibility that my tour guide collaborators took very seriously.

Bruner's work on diasporic tourism discusses travel and expectation in relation to meaning-making. Here, at the Whitney, we see guides play with the tension that exists when tourists expect to experience something novel or untold. At the Whitney, tour guides highlight previously unspoken aspects of this history because we believe by doing this we might humanize the enslaved, creating a change in the way the public perceives this history.

Clarke's work deals with how Black identity was first legislated, and more recently, commercialized. Guides at the Whitney demonstrated a variety of ways to re-shape present-day notions surrounding blackness by providing contrasting truths. We find that it is, in fact, these moments of contrast that cause change within visitors, even those who seem resistant at first.

The conceptual tools that I have used in my analysis include ideas of hegemony, authenticity, representation, cultural mediation and transmission. As I began this project, my focus was on authenticity and performativity. However, as I began analyzing my field notes and interview transcripts, the concepts of power (hegemony), representation and cultural transmission arose much more effective in properly contextualizing the data.

As a white researcher steeped in my own cultural preconceptions, I fell into the trap of thinking that this project was about me. Before analysis, I thought the fact of my serving as a white tour guide at a slavery plantation museum would provide the bulk of my data. My experience collecting and reflecting on others' stories demonstrated to me that what is going on in this space is not solely centered around my experiences. Yes,

my perspective has great value, however, the bigger picture is much more complex, interesting and nuanced. As I researched the centering of non-dominant narratives, I found my own narrative naturally taking its place among a myriad of narratives that had been systematically hidden or ignored.

We, as guides, all experience different emotions and reactions with every tour we give. A strong motif which emerged was that tour guides desired to present primary source research to their tour groups. Through a focus on the actual words of people who experienced enslavement, we are providing a contradiction to a hegemonic narrative of history that has endeavored to delete these voices. I found that as a community, tour guides strived to change peoples' perceptions of our nation's history in such a way that it has a positive impact on society today. Though perhaps intangible, this guide community shares a common hope that museum visitors leave with a more critical knowledge of the realities of enslaved people and an ability to make connections between those realities and our shared experiences in the modern world.

My thesis is distinct from many published studies because of the immersive methods I employed. My participant observation as a guide over many months enriches my analysis in several ways. The first and most important is the relationships built with my collaborators. As explained before, this work can be emotionally taxing and isolating. Months of helping each other and building a supportive community together not only aids in the reliability of my data, but also, I hope, decreases the likelihood that it is exploitative.

As previously stated, I had a different notion of the project going into it than I do now. Spending hours immersed in the field allowed me to see beyond my preconceived

ideas and reactions and observe the nuances of the site, and the complex patterns which emerged in the coding process. The strongest of these is the common theme of collaborators desiring to add their personal stories and world views to each tour in the hopes of changing the way this particular cultural history is transmitted through their direct and intentional participation in it.

My work extends the scholarship of Bruner, Ebron, Brown, Clarke, Jackson, Holsey and others by adding an American plantation site to the literature surrounding African roots tourism. Holsey writes, "This homecoming to Africa experience helps [African Americans] to negotiate their relationship to a painful past of slavery and to its lingering presence in their ongoing experience of racism."(2004, 173) My research suggests that guides at the Whitney see it as their responsibility to aid not only African Americans but people of all ethnicities, from all over the world, in negotiating these painful experiences.

Jacqueline Nassy-Brown's work is focused on gendering diasporic space. During my time employed at the Whitney, most of the tour guides were in fact, women. In my interview data, Pauline and Lynn both express how their gender was involved in the ways they do their jobs. A common theme emerged of certain visitors seeming comfortable 'challenging' them, possibly undermining their authority, because of their gender presentation.

My work contributes to an ongoing conversation between scholars regarding plantation tourism and critical theory of hegemonic narratives. What I have presented here is also in dialogue with the geographers Alderman and Modlin's work, as well as that of Jackson's and Bruner's. I also believe these four scholars would be the ideal

reviewers for this article. Because of the length of time I spent at my field site and the in-depth nature of participant-observation methodology, I am able to contribute a perspective that cannot be gleaned simply by taking a handful of tours or conducting exit interviews.

Additionally, my work highlights the important role of tour guides as mediators and transmitters of counter-hegemonic narratives. As tour guides, my interlocutors and I constantly navigated a variety of verbal and nonverbal feedback from tourists and modified our approaches in order to achieve the best, most transformative, experience. As more museum and memorial sites begin to focus on non-dominant narratives, I see my work being useful to scholars exploring guide/tourist interactions and reactions in these spaces. My recommendations for further study include investigating communities of guides at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, The Legacy Museum in Alabama.

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VITA

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