

BETWEEN PLANTATION, PRESIDENT, AND PUBLIC:
INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SLAVERY,
GENOCIDE, AND DEMOCRACY AT ANDREW JACKSON'S HERMITAGE

By

Elizabeth K. Barna

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of
the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

August 7, 2020

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Shaul Kelner, Ph.D.

Evelyn Patterson, Ph.D.

Daniel Cornfield, Ph.D.

Joachim Savelsberg, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2020 by Elizabeth K. Barna

All Rights Reserved

To Lyncoya, Theodore, and Charley,
who were torn from their families and sent to The Hermitage
during American military assaults on the Muscogee (Creek).

To Gracy Bradley,
who did not take the last name of her husband or her enslaver.

To the unknown enslaved child
who left tiny fingerprints in the clay bricks of the Hermitage smokehouse.

To all who tell their stories in the present,
and to all who do not just hear,
but
listen, learn, and act.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls,
which molds and develops men.*

-W.E.B. DuBois

This acknowledgements section is long¹, and for good reason. Given W.E.B. DuBois' broad conception of education, I have many people to thank who have helped me along this journey. With these acknowledgements, I seek not to be self-indulgent, but to counteract the myth of the lone (male) scholar and to give credit where credit is due. I want to acknowledge a few of the many service workers who keep the world turning and highlight the importance of early-education teachers and caregivers of all kinds. Education occurs "within and without the school house walls," and we can only learn, grow, and enact change with the love, support, and care of community. I view this dissertation as not only the product of six years of graduate education, but of 27 years of "human training." I will inevitably neglect to mention someone in this acknowledgements section, and I hope that you will attribute this not to a lack of gratitude, but to the simple fact that I have been overwhelmed by love and support.

First, thank you so much to all of the participants in this project and all of my fellow interpreters at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. Thank you for your time and your energy, both inside and outside of work. Thank you to the security staff for our conversations in the garden and on the back porch, to the gardeners who answered my many questions about all of the flowers in Rachel's Garden, and to all of the staff in the ticket office, guest services, education,

¹ Brace yourself; it's seven pages!

and public programs for letting me live in their world for a little while. Thank you to the administrators for trusting me to do this project in the first place, and also to the housekeeping staff who maintained the break room where I sought out respite from the heat and the crowds on many occasions. Thank you to the guests at The Hermitage, who helped me to more fully understand what Jackson means to people and expressed great support for this project when I mentioned it between tours. And thank you to all of the Hermitage volunteers, who made the “Line” station much easier to manage on the weekends and kept my spirits up overall!

Infinite thanks to my dissertation chair, Shaul Kelner, who supported this project from the beginning and supported me, too. “This, too, is for the good” is a piece of wisdom from the Talmud that I will always carry with me as I balance rest with activism and paid work. Thank you for cheering me on after particularly difficult days in the field and at my desk, and for keeping me from giving up—as you know, I considered it many times! Those e-mails saying, “This chapter needs a lot of work. But do not despair, I have an idea,” and “You stuck the landing! Perfect!” mean more than I can express. And of course, thank you for roping me in to TAing your course on Sociology of Tourism, Culture, and Place. I thought my dissertation project would have nothing to do with tourism, but in fact, it has *everything* to do with tourism.

I would like to acknowledge my other dissertation committee members as well. Thanks to Dan Cornfield for his mentorship throughout my Ph.D. journey and his faith in me as an ethnographer and a sociologist of work. You have been a positive force throughout my graduate education, both personally and professionally. Thanks to Evelyn Patterson, for taking me under her wing when I wanted to study deviance and racial inequality, and for helping me to integrate the sociology of deviance into my understanding of human rights. Thank you for encouraging me to balance work and life outside of it. And also, thank you to my outside reader, Joachim

Savelsberg, for his willingness to provide guidance on this project after our conversation by the fountain at the American Society of Criminology conference. I find your integration of the sociology of law with human rights inspiring and am grateful to have you on my committee.

I would like to acknowledge the Vanderbilt Graduate School and the Vanderbilt Sociology Department for their generous financial support of this research. Thanks to Margaret Littman for gifting me a copy of her book, *Nashville to New Orleans: Road Trip*, and to Alex Frenette for his suggestions for literature for the chapter on customer service. Thanks to Mariano Sana for his confidence in my project, and to George Becker for believing in the power of qualitative sociology and in my ability as a writer. Thank you to Laura Carpenter for helping me to decide on Andrew Jackson as a case to study and for her emotional support throughout my graduate career. Many thanks also to Alejandro Baer for helping me to settle on the Jackson project out of my various dissertation ideas.

I am eternally grateful for Amy Cooter's guidance and mentorship throughout this project, and especially for her help in approaching an interview guide and the process of conducting in-depth interviews on difficult topics. Thank you for your friendship and for being a model of what it can mean to parent as an academic. Thanks to LaTonya Trotter for supporting me as an ethnographer and as a person, to Holly McCammon for encouraging me to think in terms of processes and mechanisms. I would also like to acknowledge Lijun Song for her continued support, and to Jay Geller for letting me take his course on Remembering and Reflecting on the Holocaust without the prerequisites.

Thank you to my cohort-mates, Ashleigh Hope, Megan Robinson, Rachel McKane, and Tom Moore, for their camaraderie, especially during difficult times. Many thanks also to all of my fellow graduate students, and especially Megan Jordan, Hannah Regan, Hannah Ingersoll,

Moni Vaughan, Dasom Lee, Amanda Brockman, Philip Pettis, Ethan Gibbons, Yvonne Chen, Ryan Talbert, Yu-Ri Kim, and Lacey Satcher. Thanks also to Vanderbilt alumni Anna Jacobs, Carly Rush, Courtney Thomas Tobin, Samantha Perez, and Peter Vielehr. I appreciate all of you so very much, and your support means more than I can say.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my family for their endless support. Mom, thank you for your never-ending support, compassion, and companionship, and for always encouraging me to follow my heart, do what is right, and be engaged in my community. Dad, thank you for your boundless enthusiasm for lifelong learning, my education (and for this study on Andrew Jackson and The Hermitage!) and especially for the last-minute copy edits. I also want to thank my little brother, Matthew, for his love, humor, and being a second driver on my cross-country road trips between Tennessee and California. Uncle Gary, Auntie Bev, Alex, Vala, and Diane, thank you for your love and encouragement as well! Although they are no longer with us, Grandma, Grandma Barna, Auntie Kathie, Uncle Jordan, and Aunt Carolyn remain central figures and silent cheerleaders in my life, and I hope I make them proud.

Thank you to friends who have become family: Kathy Evans, Kathy Earls, Diana Craven, the Atienza family, Linda Saucedo, Noemy Pook, Jeannette Chaves, Sally Vejar, and the Westby family. Alma, Sarai, Johnny, and Blanca, thank you for all you have done to care for Grandma, and for me. Julie Henry, Peter Vielehr, and Ashley Dixon, thank you for your care and for helping me grow into an activist. Ben Howard and Rudy Saliba, thank you for our conversations over coffee and for your sense of humor. (And while I'm thanking my coffee buddies, I would like to also thank the baristas at the Starbucks on 21st Avenue and at Ugly Mugs in East Nashville, who helped me to survive graduate school more than they realize.) Thank you to my lifelong friends from Bellflower: Kevin John C. Vargas, Merlin Kulangara, Melissa

Jimenez, Ernesto Vaca, Kathryn Violago, Jeannie Saldana, Roger Zendejas, Cindy Ramirez, and Tyler Griffin. You all have helped me through graduate school more than I can say, and have reminded me that love and friendship are more important than achievement.

To educators at every stage of my education. To my preschool teacher, Mrs. Hom, my kindergarten teacher Mrs. Henke, and my elementary school teachers Mrs. Stallings, Mrs. Dalton, Mr. Benson, Ms. Ober, Ms. Caldarella, and Ms. Taugner—thank you! Thank you to Mrs. Blankenship and Lori French as well for their continued support. Special thanks are also in order to Ms. Zeller, Mr. Ellis, Mrs. Christian, Ms. Nicoletti, Mr. Hogan, Ms. Izumita, Mrs. Yasuhara, Mrs. Becerra, and all of the teachers who guided me through middle and high school. To Rahuldeep Gill, thank you for your mentorship at Cal Lutheran, both in the classroom and at the Center for Equality and Justice. Many thanks also to Linda Ritterbush, William Bilodeau, and Barbara Collins for their support and fun and insightful moments in the classroom and on field trips. Thank you to Teresa Madden and Colleen Windham-Hughes, for guiding me as I struggled to learn who I was and who God is. To Adina Nack, thank you for fostering my inner ethnographer and my sense of self and for encouraging me to pursue a graduate education. And to Molly George, thank you for sparking my passion for sociology in your intro class, for helping me apply to grad school, and for seeing me through to the Ph.D. as a lifelong mentor and friend.

I would not have been able to reach this point in my academic training without the help of a multitude of others at Vanderbilt. Pam Tichenor, Anne Wall, Sandy Cherry, and Maria Miller helped make the sociology department a brighter place and provided emotional support in addition to logistic support with paperwork and event coordination. Infinite thanks to the janitorial staff who greeted and encouraged me when I ran into them in Garland Hall and elsewhere on campus. Ruth Schemmer and Sheri Kimble at the graduate school and Samantha

K. York at the Center for Student Wellbeing have been so compassionate throughout this journey and helped me to make it to the finish line.

Many thanks to Betsy Phillips at Vanderbilt University Press, who has been an enthusiastic fan of this project since we met at the Crossroads Symposium at the Historic Franklin Masonic Hall last year. To my colleagues and beloved librarians affiliated with the Vanderbilt Center for Digital Humanities—Lynn Ramey, Mickey Casad, Sarah Swanz, Stacy Curry-Johnson, Melanie Forehand, and so many others—thank you for your friendship, support, feedback, and belief in me as a public historian.

While we are on the subject of public history, I would also like to thank several public historians and interpreters I admire, who were not officially part of my dissertation research but who have supported it tremendously. I am grateful to Joseph McGill, Dontavius Williams, Sara Daise, and Nicole Moore at the Slave Dwelling Project for their justice-oriented public history work. Thanks to Rachael Finch at the Historic Franklin Masonic Hall for her friendship and mentorship and for her commitment to justice and uplifting marginalized voices, and to Grace Abernethy for her willingness to discuss future digital projects.

I would also like to acknowledge the therapists and other mental health professionals who have made my success (and survival) in graduate school possible. Mary Phillips, thank you for recommending that I read *Man's Search for Meaning*; it has changed my life. Brian Pollock, thank you for your empathy and the last-minute medication refills. Thank you to Paulette Theresa, my first therapist as an adult, who also happens to be the person who explained the genocidal origins of the Thanksgiving holiday. Our conversations planted seeds for this project ten years later! And finally, to Rachel McRoberts, thank you for supporting me through many losses and gains over the past two years, and for encouraging me to develop a “relationship” with

my anxiety. Thank you for encouraging me to finish the dissertation—It’s just one giant final paper, right?—and helping me to think of the Ph.D. as a process in which you “give birth to yourself.”

This acknowledgements section would be far from complete if I did not thank the companions I have shared my home with during my graduate education. King, thank you for sitting on my lap to keep me focused on reading, writing, and “productive procrastination” emails. (I very much missed you during the dissertation writing stage, my friend, but I know you are nipping at Andrew Jackson’s heels on the other side!) Ruthie, thank you for harassing me to take you outside for walks and for the relentless kisses, which forced me to get some fresh air and wash my face. Otis, thank you for your quiet, gentle presence and your friendship, and for embracing me as your mom as I got to know your dad.

And of course, thank you to Luke Myers, for being my partner and an amazing dog dad to Ruthie, King, and Otis. You have helped me through this last year and a half more than I can express—from helping me through five family deaths, to helping me navigate the Warsaw Airport after my first transatlantic flight, to being my “handler” at the International Educational Conference in Poland when I had a fever, to making me Greek coffee with lavender syrup during this intensive period of writing. You have taught me much about self-compassion and about the importance of directness and being true to myself, and I love you for it. Thank you to Derrick and Tracy Myers, and to Mark and Emily Myers, for welcoming me into your family. And to Lisa Myers, who died long before Luke and I met, but who I thank for raising Luke to be the wonderful man he is.

And finally, thank you to the child(ren) who are now just a twinkle in my eye, but will soon enough bring resounding laughter to our home. I want to be deserving of you, not through

academic or career achievement, but through my advocacy, my character, and my heart. I thank you for being my “why.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| DEDICATION..... | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | xvii |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. THE (WHITE) PEOPLE’S PRESIDENT? INTRODUCTION AND METHODS IN STUDYING REPRESENTATIONS OF ANDREW JACKSON | 1 |
| Literature Review and Theoretical Framework | 3 |
| <i>Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Culture and Tourism: Aesthetic Management and Nesting Geographies as Contributors to Institutionalized Polysemy</i> | 4 |
| Social Memory Studies and Tourism | 7 |
| <i>Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work: The Role of Conflicting Organizational Logics, the Customer Service Triangle, and Genre in Social Memory Production</i> | 9 |
| <i>Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Deviance: Revisiting Neutralization Theory and Considering the Impact of Humanization on Human Rights Education</i> | 11 |
| The Case: Andrew Jackson and The Hermitage | 12 |
| <i>The Multifaceted Legacy of Andrew Jackson</i> | 12 |
| Jackson and Military Heroism | 12 |
| Jackson and Democratization | 13 |
| Jackson and Slavery | 14 |
| Jackson and Genocide | 15 |
| Continued Controversy | 17 |
| <i>The Hermitage: A Contested Place for Competing Memories</i> | 17 |
| Purpose, Research Questions, and Methodology | 21 |
| Methodology..... | 22 |
| Participant-Observation | 22 |
| Access and My Relationship to the Organization | 24 |
| <i>In-Depth Interviews</i> | 25 |
| <i>Content Analysis of Museum Materials and Texts</i> | 25 |
| Analysis..... | 26 |
| <i>My Positionality</i> | 26 |
| Chapter Outlines..... | 27 |

| | |
|---|----|
| II. INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY AT THE HERMITAGE AND A BARRAGE OF REPRESENTATIONS OF JACKSON | 29 |
| Uses of the Site Itself..... | 35 |
| Tour, Living History, and Classroom Offerings | 41 |
| <i>Additional Tour Options</i> | 41 |
| Wagon Tour and “In Their Footsteps” Tour | 42 |
| Garden Tours | 43 |
| Ghost Tours | 43 |
| <i>Living History Programs</i> | 44 |
| <i>Classroom Programs</i> | 46 |
| The Standard Presentation Itself | 47 |
| <i>The Mansion Tour</i> | 49 |
| <i>Signage and Audio/Multimedia Tour around the Property</i> | 53 |
| Museum Store Merchandise | 54 |
| Conclusion | 57 |
| III. THE IMPACT OF AESTHETICS, OPTICS, AND NOSTALGIA | 59 |
| Beauty, Southern Nostalgia, and Institutionalized Polysemy at The Hermitage..... | 62 |
| <i>The Hermitage Mansion</i> | 63 |
| <i>Mansion Tours, Hospitality, and Positioning Visitors as White</i> | 64 |
| <i>The Hermitage Garden, Grounds, and Slave Dwellings</i> | 66 |
| Rachel’s Garden | 68 |
| Jackson’s Tomb and Alfred’s Grave | 70 |
| The Hermitage Grounds | 73 |
| Intact Slave Dwellings | 75 |
| The Memorial to the Enslaved | 77 |
| <i>Seasonal Changes in Aesthetics and the Role of Aesthetic Management in Crafting Visitor Experiences</i> | 78 |
| The Optics of Historic Costuming and Staff Demographics, and the Production of Institutionalized Polysemy through Aesthetic Labor and Management..... | 82 |
| Presence and Conspicuous Absence in Producing Institutionalized Polysemy | 89 |
| <i>Evidence of Agriculture and the Absence of Representations of Enslaved Workers</i> | 89 |
| Visitor Agency in Evaluating Aesthetics, Presence, Absence, and Representations of Enslaved Life | 95 |
| <i>Visitor Recognition (or Lack Thereof) of Historical Presence of the Enslaved</i> | 95 |
| <i>Visitor Nostalgia for Slavery as an Unintended Use of the Space</i> | 96 |
| Maintaining the Aesthetics of the Site..... | 97 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Aesthetic Management in Response to Vandalism</i> | 99 |
| Weddings, Special Events, and Institutionalized Polysemy | 100 |
| Conclusion | 103 |
| IV. THE IMPACT OF DUAL MUSEUM GENRES AND COMPETING GEOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES | 106 |
| Institutional Identity and Dual Genres: Historic Plantation House and Presidential Museum | 108 |
| <i>The Landscape of U.S. Presidential Museums and Association with Historic House Museums</i> | 109 |
| <i>Local and National Pride, Valuing Domesticity, and a “Shrine” To Jackson</i> | 111 |
| Nesting Geographies | 116 |
| <i>Tension between Geographies</i> | 118 |
| <i>Case-in-Point of Nesting Geographies: Marketing Collaboration with Local and State Partners</i> | 119 |
| <i>Case-in-Point of Nesting Geographies and Overlapping Genres: The Museum Store</i> | 121 |
| Representing Slavery at a Bifurcated Site over Time..... | 123 |
| <i>Links to the Enslaved and Romanticizing the “Old Plantation Days”</i> | 123 |
| <i>Archaeology and the Unearthing of Narratives of the Enslaved</i> | 124 |
| <i>A Cultural Shift in Presidential and Plantation Museums and Reworking Narratives of Slavery</i> | 126 |
| <i>Slavery in Presidential Terms</i> | 128 |
| Representing Native American Relations and the Trail of Tears at a Bifurcated Site..... | 129 |
| Toward Integration of Narratives? | 131 |
| Conclusion | 133 |
| V. THE IMPACT OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRIANGLE, COMPETING ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS, AND THE TIME CLOCK | 135 |
| The Customer Service Triangle, Emotional Labor, and Organizational Logics | 137 |
| Dominant Organizational Logics at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage | 140 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 1: Preservation and Security</i> | 140 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 2: High-Quality Education</i> | 142 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 3: High Attendance (and Revenue)</i> | 143 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 4: Highlighting Jackson’s Character</i> | 144 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 5: Introduction of Difficult Histories</i> | 145 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 6: Fostering Positive American Identity</i> | 145 |
| <i>Organizational Logic 7: Positive Guest Experience</i> | 146 |
| Organizational Logics in Harmony | 148 |
| Conflicting Organizational Logics and Representations of Slavery, Genocide, and Democracy | 149 |
| <i>Logics Conflicting with Positive Guest Experiences and High Attendance (and Revenue)</i> | 152 |
| <i>Logics Conflicting with Introduction of Difficult Histories</i> | 156 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| High Attendance (and Revenue) versus Introduction of Difficult Histories | 156 |
| Positive Guest Experience versus Introduction of Difficult Histories | 157 |
| Racialized Tailoring of Content | 159 |
| Highlighting of Jackson’s Character versus Introduction of Difficult Histories | 161 |
| <i>Fostering Positive American Identity versus Introduction of Difficult Histories</i> | 162 |
| Emotional Labor, the Time Clock, and Conflicting Organizational Logics | 165 |
| Conclusion | 167 |
| VI. A “MAN OF HIS TIME” AND A MAN OF OUR TIME: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TIME OF TRUMP | 169 |
| Chapter Summaries | 172 |
| <i>Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work: The Role of Conflicting Organizational Logics, the Customer Service Triangle, and Genre in Social Memory Production</i> | 176 |
| <i>Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Deviance: Revisiting Neutralization Theory and Considering the Impact of Humanization on Human Rights Education</i> | 177 |
| Contemporary Relevance and Directions for Future Research | 178 |
| A Final Word and a Call to Action..... | 180 |
| REFERENCES..... | 187 |
| APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HISTORIC INTERPRETERS | 192 |
| APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MIDDLE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION | 195 |
| APPENDIX C: GUIDESTAR PROFILE SUMMARY OF ANDREW JACKSON FOUNDATION’S FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN (FY15-19) | 198 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| 2.1: Typology of Hermitage Events..... | 37 |
| 5.1: Competing Organizational Logics at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage..... | 150 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1.1: “Stop the Runaway” Ad..... | 15 |
| 1.2: Carnation at the Memorial Wall..... | 19 |
| 1.3: Collecting Libations Materials at the Memorial Service..... | 19 |
| 1.4: Jackson’s Tomb Decorated for His Birthday..... | 20 |
| 1.5: Sign outside the Cabin by the Spring..... | 20 |
| 1.6: Facebook Post on Trump’s Wreath at the Tomb..... | 21 |
| 2.1: Dog’s Day at The Hermitage and Sara & Alex’s Wedding..... | 29 |
| 2.2: The Hermitage’s Main Webpage..... | 34 |
| 2.3: Thumbnails for “Andrew Jackson” and “Mansion & Grounds” Links..... | 34 |
| 2.4: Tweets Advertising Upcoming Hermitage Events..... | 36 |
| 2.5: The Author with Colonel Easter..... | 40 |
| 2.6: Black History Month Memorial Service Bulletin..... | 41 |
| 2.7: Tweet Advertising Wagon Tour..... | 42 |
| 2.8: Advertisements for “The Duel: Art of the Southern Gentleman”..... | 45 |
| 2.9: Advertisement for “The Horse Race: Gentlemen of the Turf”..... | 46 |
| 2.10: Erasure of the Enslaved in Lithograph Reproduction | 49 |
| 2.11: Museum Store Display with Romance Novels and Nonfiction..... | 55 |
| 2.12: Shirts Sold in the Museum Store..... | 55 |
| 2.13: Cookbooks and Roasted Nuts for Sale..... | 56 |
| 2.14: Presidential, Early American, and Confederate Bobbleheads..... | 57 |
| 3.1: A View from the Back Porch..... | 59 |
| 3.2: “Garden & Grounds” Webpage..... | 68 |
| 3.3: The Center of Rachel’s Garden in Early Spring..... | 69 |
| 3.4: Alfred’s Gravestone Adorned with Stones and a Flower..... | 72 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 3.5: Deer on the Hermitage Grounds..... | 73 |
| 3.6: A Spring Near the Field Quarters..... | 74 |
| 3.7: Bride and Groom Photo from Wedding and Event Rentals Site..... | 74 |
| 3.8: Fireplace and Faux Food in Alfred’s Cabin..... | 75 |
| 3.9: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of Alfred’s Cabin Interior..... | 76 |
| 3.10: Guests Approaching Alfred’s Cabin..... | 77 |
| 3.11: Victorian Easter Eggs..... | 80 |
| 3.12: Jackson’s Bedroom and Formal Parlor Curated for the “Farewell, General Jackson” Exhibit..... | 81 |
| 3.13: Reproduction Women’s Clothing and Costuming Books..... | 83 |
| 3.14: Author and a Fellow Interpreter in Costume..... | 85 |
| 3.15: Selfie of the Author in Costume..... | 86 |
| 3.16: Slave Dwelling Project Interpreter at The Hermitage..... | 88 |
| 3.17: Plowing and Planting Demonstration..... | 90 |
| 3.18: Bringing Living History to the Garden..... | 91 |
| 3.19: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of the Wagon Ride..... | 91 |
| 3.20: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of Visitors Picking Cotton..... | 92 |
| 3.22: Evidence of Agriculture..... | 93 |
| 3.23: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of The Duel..... | 93 |
| 3.24: Post-Emancipation Photos of Hannah and Aaron..... | 94 |
| 3.25: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of the Hermitage Kitchen..... | 94 |
| 3.26: TripAdvisor Reviewer Photo of Andrew and Rachel Jackson’s Tomb Shrouded after Vandalism..... | 100 |
| 3.27: Venue Photos from Wedding and Event Rentals Site..... | 102 |
| 3.28: Author Exploring Tulip Grove Mansion..... | 103 |
| 4.1: The Hermitage Smokehouse, circa 2019 and 1970..... | 113 |
| 4.2: Jackson Statue Iconography..... | 117 |
| 4.3: Andy’s Candy Cardboard Cutout Display..... | 120 |
| 4.4: Tennessee Presidential Trail Logo..... | 121 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4.5: Museum Store Window Signage..... | 122 |
| 4.6: “Learn” Section of The Hermitage Website..... | 123 |
| 4.7: “Hermitage Slave Families and Occupations” Document..... | 128 |
| 4.8: Online Poster Advertising “Wager to Win: Art of the Southern Gentleman”..... | 132 |
| 5.1: Benches for Visitors Waiting in Line..... | 147 |
| 5.2: Advertisement for “Family Fun Day”..... | 148 |
| 5.3: The “Eighth of January” Mantel..... | 153 |
| 5.4: #AJonthe20 Photo Op Cutout..... | 164 |

CHAPTER I. THE (WHITE) PEOPLE’S PRESIDENT? INTRODUCTION AND METHODS
IN STUDYING REPRESENTATIONS OF ANDREW JACKSON

In February of 2017, I ventured onto the Hermitage property—the home of President Andrew Jackson—for the first time. I was hesitant to do so, considering the legacy of the man who lived there. Growing up in Southern California, my high school U.S. history class painted Jackson as synonymous with the Trail of Tears. To make matters worse, The Hermitage was a sprawling plantation site where Jackson had profited on the backs of enslaved people. During my time in Nashville, I had avoided plantation museums, concerned that I would fund white-washed narratives of supposedly benevolent slaveowners if I bought a ticket. The ceremony I was there to attend, however, was free of charge and was a Black History Month Memorial Service, so I decided I would try.

When I arrived, the Hermitage Church was packed, the white painted wooden pews full. It was standing room only, with a nearly 50-50 blend of Black and white attendees. Black costumed historic interpreters had been invited to perform, and they stood at the front of the church singing the words, *Wade in the water. Wade in the water, children. Wade, in the water. God’s gonna trouble the water.* We laid white carnations on a low memorial wall outside the church, each flower bearing a small nametag listing an enslaved person’s name. As I drove back up the road lined with stately Eastern Red Cedar trees, I noticed that the parking lot for the museum was full, and the tourists emerging from their cars were almost exclusively white.

I returned for the 2018 memorial—a little earlier this time—and found myself puzzled by the bulletin. The front read “Black History Month Memorial Service” and bore a logo for The

Hermitage, featuring Andrew Jackson's signature and the slogan, "HOME OF THE PEOPLE'S PRESIDENT." I turned the bulletin over and was surprised to see that none of the "Upcoming Programs" listed had to do with Black history. Rather, the month of March would abound with the opportunity to "Explor[e] Your Scots-Irish Genealogy," celebrate "President Jackson's 251st Birthday," or participate in the annual Easter egg hunt. A paragraph above this list of events detailed the Andrew Jackson Foundation's mission, which included engendering understanding of the "complex life and times of Andrew Jackson," examining their relationship to today, and "inspir[ing] citizenship and pride" in the nation.

Little did I know that, a year and a half later, I would apply for a position as a costumed historic interpreter at The Hermitage and write an institutional ethnography on the museum. I entered this dissertation project with a simple empirical question: How and why does a single heritage site present so many conflicting representations simultaneously? This ultimately raised further questions challenging the notion of memory as unified, as well as the notion that memory production is the result of ideological conflict between competing "sides." I argue that multiple meanings are possible, even within the representations of a single custodian of memory, and that memory production is shaped by aesthetic, organizational, historical, geographical, and individual factors.

This dissertation is based on nearly a year of participant-observation as a historic interpreter at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, on latent content analysis of museum materials, signage, and websites, and on supplementary in-depth interviews with five staff members in middle management positions. At this plantation site and presidential house museum, I find that Andrew Jackson is not represented in a unified manner. Rather, visitors are met with a barrage of competing images of "the People's President" as they relate to his career and family life, as

well as his legacies of slavery and genocide amidst democratization. This dissertation examines the manner in which this comingling of contrasting images—which I term *institutionalized polysemy*—is produced at this historic site, through a combination of aesthetic, historical, geographic, and interactional factors.

I challenge current understandings of social memory as a unified product generated through conflict between competing ideologies. Rather, I argue that multiple representations of a given past can comingle in a seemingly incoherent way, and that representations not only shift across sites, but within them. I integrate the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work with current understandings of representations of slavery and genocide by arguing that the customer service triangle and competing organizational logics play an underappreciated role in social memory production.

I continue this introduction with further discussion of my work’s theoretical contributions. I then introduce the case of Andrew Jackson and of Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage, and provide an account of my research questions and methods I used to approach those questions. I conclude by discussing my positionality as a white woman from the West Coast, and provide an outline of subsequent chapters.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is situated in four literatures: Social Memory Studies; Sociology of Culture and Tourism; Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work; and Crime and Deviance. In this introduction, I offer a broad overview of Collective and Social Memory Studies to situate my case within this theoretical, multidisciplinary frame. As the Hermitage is a heritage museum, I then discuss the Sociology of Tourism and the ways my work contributes to this. Next, I review

scholarship on Organizations, Occupations, and Work, and highlight how incorporating perspectives from this framework into Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Tourism can strengthen the analytic power of both and reveal things that research in these fields has tended to overlook. Throughout my discussion of social memory, work, and tourism, I integrate scholarship on the Sociology of Crime and Deviance as a way to better understand each.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Culture and Tourism: Aesthetic Management and Nesting Geographies as Contributors to Institutionalized Polysemy

The study of social memory (originally referred to as “collective memory”) was initially rooted in the Durkheimian tradition, within which memory is a social phenomenon that unites members of a group through shared understandings of a common past. In his foundational text, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim (1912) argues that religion is characterized by group understandings of a division between the sacred, or “set apart,” and the profane, or everyday. Commemorative rituals are key to collective life, as they maintain the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Participants in these rituals reaffirm their shared values and common understanding of the nature of the sacred—which Durkheim argues is actually the nature of the society itself.

Maurice Halbwachs was Durkheim’s student and is widely regarded as the “father” of collective memory as a concept, and ultimately to the field of social memory studies. Halbwachs argued that memory—which is often viewed as individual—is inherently social. He asserts that “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories” and that society is also the context in which “they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1925, p. 38). For

Halbwachs, collective memory is a “reconstruction of the past in the light of the present” (Halbwachs 1925, p. 34 of Coser’s introduction). Social and moral props sustain collective memory through religion, family relationships, and other institutions. Drawing from this tradition, I examine the role of heritage sites as conduits of social memory.

For Halbwachs, a community must “accommodate itself to contradictions” as long as no single subculture dominates—in other words, as long as the majority’s collective memory prevails (Halbwachs 1925, p. 224). This leaves little room for multiple, conflicting meanings or for battles among advocates for alternative meanings. Later studies in social memory studies explore the role of conflict between groups in memory production (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991), but they tend not to account for the possibility that a given institution may present multiple, conflicting images of a single past. I intervene here by introducing the concept of *institutionalized polysemy*, which understands social memory in terms of processes that generate multiple, often divergent, but nevertheless coexisting narratives.

A key debate in the sociology of collective memory is the debate over Halbwachs’ presentism. In his work on the democratization of George Washington, Schwartz (1991) asks whether conceptions of the past are truly molded by present social needs, or whether existing conceptions endure. Mead and Halbwachs conceive of the past as mutable to meet present needs, while Durkheim, Lively, Shils, Burke, and deMaistre conceive of collective memory as outlasting societal changes. In a middle vein, Schudson (1989) contends that the past is “constantly being retold in order to legitimate present interests” but that tradition offers a source of resistance to revision (Schudson 1987, p. 15).

To test these competing claims, Schwartz (1991) examines the works of producers of Washington's image before and after the Civil War. He finds that between 1800 and 1865, images of George Washington as remote, genteel, and exhibiting flawless virtue dominate in biographies; but that after 1865, images of Washington as ordinary and imperfect (and with whom common people could identify) emerged. The Civil War served as a major turning point, Schwartz (1991) argues, with more hostile statements arising afterward—especially with the rise of (even) larger-than-life figures like Lincoln in an ever-expanding nation. This “dualism of commonness and distinction” leads Schwartz (1991, p. 232, 234) to argue that with each new generation, there is an “assemblage of old beliefs coexisting with the new.” In this manner, Schwartz (1991) agrees with Shils and Coser and notes that Mead and Halbwachs “underestimate the present’s carrying power in sustaining multiple memories.” In this manner, Schwartz argues that “the past is not a foreign country” and that memory is “neither totally precarious nor immutable” but rather a “stable image upon which new elements are intermittently imposed” (Schwartz 1991, p. 234).

In focusing on the biographies and works of cultural producers, however, Schwartz assumes that their conception of Washington aligns with the public's views. Although Schwartz admits that cultural producers' views may have “imperfectly reflected the public's taste and values,” he contends that there is still a general relation to public perception (p. 223). I would argue, however, that this relationship cannot simply assumed but needs to be problematized and studied empirically. In the pages ahead, I do just this, exploring how collective memory is produced at a heritage site through staff members' work that is informed and constrained by organizational guidelines even as it is constructed in dialogue with the public. The two may sometimes pull in the same direction, and sometimes in the opposite.

Social Memory Studies and Tourism

This dissertation project focuses on the representations of Andrew Jackson at The Hermitage in the time of Trump, a populist president who may serve as a present analogue to Jackson. What is Jackson known for, and how do both the organization and individuals within it contribute to representations of him?

One of the inspirations for this project is Eichstedt and Small's (2002) study on *Representations of Slavery*. In their study of representations of slavery at plantation museums in Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia, Eichstedt and Small (2002) find that public sites are more likely than private sites to provide more information about slavery, but that in general, plantation tours focus on the "hospitality, generosity, and romance" of the Old South (71). Eichstedt and Small (2002) create a typology of types of representation of slavery: 1) symbolic annihilation, 2) trivialization, 3) segregation, and 4) relative incorporation. Although they note that white-centric plantation museums "employ strategies for handling or managing a racialized past" (102), they do not examine the role of individual museum educators and administrators in maintaining or altering the current "racialized pattern, or regime, of presentation" (102).

This project expands on Eichstedt and Small's (2002) insights by delving into day-to-day interactional strategies of staff members as they seek to balance institutional goals with their own, and with those of the public. Rather than focusing on the range of representation, I will focus on the micro-level mechanisms and interactions—including conflict within the customer service triangle—that characterize a movement toward acknowledging Andrew Jackson's enslavement of African-Americans and grave harms to the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole tribes.

The anthropologist of tourism, Edward Bruner, asserts that culture, history, heritage, and tradition have a “processual, active nature” (2004, 127) and, invoking Foucault, that “museums and monuments may be seen as new ‘knowledge’ that arises in relationships of power” (127). He emphasizes the role of visitors to sites in the dialogic construction of narrative, noting that “without a specified audience, narratives have no meaning” (128). Bruner argues that the struggle over meaning at heritage sites provides an opportunity for “diverse segments of a democratic society...to express their interests and stake their claims” (144). He finds that in many cases the meanings of sites are contested not only between competing demographic groups, but between museum professionals and historians and visitors who bring their own popular interpretations to the site. In his ethnographic work on Abraham Lincoln’s New Salem, Bruner (2004) notes contestation in a “quiet sense,” as historians’ knowledge of the site as a major hub of trade and as less critical to Lincoln’s development as other sites is subverted by visitors’ interpretation of the site as an “old-timey” dedication to Lincoln.

In this dissertation, I not only examine contestation in the “quiet sense” that Bruner discusses (129), but also in the very “loud” sense of deciding whether a former U.S. president should be remembered and represented as a hero and truly “The People’s President,” or as a staunch opponent of racial equality in the United States. As such, this study intends to contribute to a better understanding of this tension between “quiet” and “loud” types of contestation, and the ways in which a destination’s “produc[tion] as a site” can ultimately “subvert...the main message of the professional staff who are the producers” (Bruner 2004, p. 140). Bruner (2004) argues that the physical production of the space itself is crucial at quietly contested sites, and this dissertation extends that argument to sites of loud contestation as well. Drawing on the concept of *aesthetic labor* (Warhurst and Nickson 2007, Wilson 2016), and introducing a new concept of

aesthetic management, I ask how the labor of both curatorial and maintenance staff in cultivating the nostalgic air of the site relates to educational efforts by staff about the grisly history of slavery there. Does the aesthetic beauty of the Hermitage’s mansion, garden, and grounds subvert the effort to address legacies of slavery and Indian Removal?

Contemporary scholarship on collective memory (Wagner-Pacifici 2010, Zerubavel 2003) challenges the notion of collective memory as a product of consensus. In addition to exploring the ways collective memory unites, this dissertation will explore the manner in which “mnemonic battle[s]” (Zerubavel 2003) rage over the memory of Jackson, particularly pertaining to his relationship with African-Americans and Native Americans. I also challenge the idea that these debates are between two sides, as the case of The Hermitage shows that a single institution can produce mixed messages. I also argue that conflict between representations is not always the result of overt ideological or political conflict, as in Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz’s (1991) study of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial or Linenthal and Engelhardt’s (1996) exploration of the conflict over the Smithsonian exhibition of the Enola Gay. Rather, it is often the product of organizational and individual factors within a customer service environment.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work: The Role of Conflicting Organizational Logics, the Customer Service Triangle, and Genre in Social Memory Production

This dissertation also seeks to contribute to the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work by examining the role of interactive service work (Leidner 1993; O’Riaian 2010) in

producing representations of difficult histories. In this case, I explore the ways that catering to a largely white audience with the occasional non-white visitor may generate a shifting constellation of representations of “the People’s President.” I also highlight ways institutional contexts inform and constrain museum educators’ public presentations of history, largely with regard to questions of genre (West 1999).

I invoke DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) concept of *institutional isomorphism* in discussing the role of competing genres in shaping institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage. Institutions seek to emulate similar ones (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), and in this case, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage seeks to resemble its presidential museum counterparts while retaining aspects of its legacy as a historic plantation site. This integrates the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work into Social Memory Studies and suggests that the trappings of genre shape institutional isomorphism among heritage sites.

While the traditional sociology of work tends to focus on structural constraints on workers, the “new sociology of work” emphasizes worker agency in adapting to these structural constraints. In this dissertation, I draw from the concept of the *customer service triangle* (Subramanian and Suquet 2018), to argue that interactions between individual staff members and customers contribute to institutionalized polysemy. The strains of conflicting organizational logics (Thornton and Ocasio 1999; Thornton et al. 2012) and the emotional labor of pleasing visitors with divergent goals exacerbates this situation.

Thornton and Ocasio (1999: 804) define organizational² logics as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by

² They use the term “institutional logics.”

which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.” I identify seven dominant organizational logics at The Hermitage that historic interpreters must navigate, even (and especially) when they conflict. This involves heavy *emotional labor* (Hochschild 1983) and is complicated at a site where guests may have conflicting goals for their visit. I argue that conflicting organizational logics (Thornton and Ocasio 1999; Thornton et al. 2012), combined with the nature of historic interpretation as shift work on a rigid timetable, shape institutionalized polysemy, even at the level of the individual interpreter on a given day.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Deviance: Revisiting Neutralization Theory and Considering the Impact of Humanization on Human Rights Education

The final intended theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the application of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) classic (and individualistic) *neutralization theory* to the study of human rights and social memory. I argue that producers and consumers of narratives of atrocity at heritage sites distance historic figures from human rights violations by invoking individualistic *techniques of neutralization* (Sykes and Matza 1957). These include Sykes and Matza’s (1957) *denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, appeal to higher loyalties, condemning the condemners*, which I argue apply across time and space. Contemporary work on neutralization theory, which Maruna and Copes (2017) deem “a theory of its time and ahead of its time,” applies this framework to forms of crime and deviance that did not exist when Sykes and Matza developed neutralization theory. This includes digital and software piracy (Sanhi and Gupta 2019; Suponen et al. 2010), cybercrime (Brewer et al. 2019), and personal use of the

Internet at work (Cheng et al. 2014). I argue that neutralization theory is not only useful for understanding digital deviance in the present, but collective atrocities of the past. I also contend that neutralization of historic atrocities is reinforced by notions of *color-blindness* (Bonilla-Silva 2010) and the ever-present *white fragility* (DiAngelo 2018) among staff and visitors alike

THE CASE: ANDREW JACKSON AND THE HERMITAGE

To address these questions of social memory production as a customer service transaction and tourist attraction, I adopt Andrew Jackson and The Hermitage as a case. I provide a brief introduction to both here.

The Multifaceted Legacy of Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson was born in Waxhaw (a settlement between North and South Carolina) in 1767 and served as president of the United States from 1829 to 1837. Jackson's national prominence and his conflicting reputation for being democratic and supporting the "working man" and for being a supporter of slavery and engineer of genocide make him an excellent case for the study of collective memory and reputation over time.

Jackson and Military Heroism

Jackson was known for his bravery and heroism in the military arena. As a child during the Revolutionary War, he was struck with a sword by a British soldier after he refused to shine his boots—a tale recounted in Meacham's (2009) acclaimed biography, *American Lion*, and at

Jackson's 251st Birthday Celebration at the Hermitage this past March. In his early military career, Jackson gained acclaim for his decisive victory over the Red Stick faction of the Creek nation in the Creek War, which earned him a rise in rank to a Major General in the U.S. Army (Meacham 2009). General Jackson is perhaps most famous for his role as in the War of 1812 and for his valor in the Battle of New Orleans from December 14, 1814 to January 18 1815, in which the outnumbered Americans managed to defeat British troops with an astoundingly low 71 casualties among General Jackson's troops.

Jackson and Democratization

Jackson was quite popular during his lifetime, defeating incumbent John Quincy Adams with 56% of the popular vote in 1828 and being reelected over his rival Henry Clay with 54% of the popular vote in 1832. Although some of Jackson's critics derisively referred to him as "King Andrew," the nicknames "Old Hickory" and "the People's President" have endured and remain a part of twenty-first century parlance.

In his role as the seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson has been credited with making the United States more democratic, by eliminating property-owning requirements for voting and pioneering the two-party system. The period of movement toward more democratic government with the advent of Jackson has since been deemed "Jacksonian Democracy." Orphaned during early childhood, Jackson later became a hero in the War of 1812, a general, a lawyer, and later, president of the United States, and is remembered by many as a rugged, "self-made" man who is, as his nickname implies, tough as "Old Hickory" (Meacham 2009). A man who himself noted that he was "born for the storm, and the calm does not suit me" (Meacham 2009) and engaged in duels with rivals, Jackson earned a reputation as a rough-

and-tumble, no-nonsense southern gentleman with great physical and mental fortitude, both on the battlefield and in the White House.

Jackson and Slavery

In addition to his role as a lawyer, general, and finally, president of the United States, the Andrew Jackson owned enslaved African-Americans who worked at his plantation at the Hermitage outside of Nashville. At the Hermitage's peak, Jackson owned over 150 people on the property (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2018), enslaving an estimated 300 people over the course of his lifetime. Throughout his presidency, Jackson simultaneously supported the preservation of the Union, as rumblings of discontent arose from southern slaveholding states, and the preservation of the institution of slavery (Meacham 2009).

In 1804, Jackson published a now-famous "Stop the Runaway" ad offering a fifty-dollar reward for the capture and return of an enslaved man in the *Tennessee Gazette*. In addition, Jackson offered "ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred." As I learned during my time as a historic interpreter, three hundred lashes was enough to kill a person.

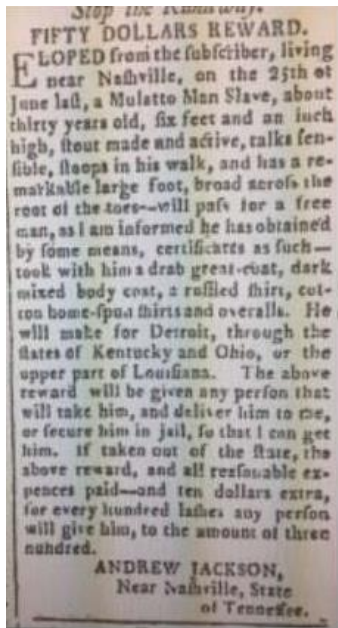


Figure 1.1: "Stop the Runaway" ad by Andrew Jackson, published in the *Tennessee Gazette* in 1804, the year the Jackson family moved to the Hermitage property.

Jackson and Genocide

Jackson's victory in crushing the Creek uprising in 1814 not only earned him a reputation for military prowess, but also served as a start of his lifelong policy of displacing and killing members of Native American nations in what would become the southeastern United States. Jackson had critics of his treatment of Native Americans throughout his career (Meacham 2009), with Jeremiah Evarts (1781-1831) being the most well-known (Meacham 2009). Today, Jackson is widely condemned for paving the way for a series of forced removals of members of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole tribes between 1831 and 1850, through signing the Indian Removal Act of 1830. During the infamous Trail of Tears, over 4,000 of the 15,000 Cherokees forced west and 3,500 of the 15,000 Creeks forced west died (History 2018).

Although the Trail of Tears took place after Jackson's presidency, during Van Buren's administration, a removal and genocide was central to Jackson's policy agenda, and his instrumental role in signing the Indian Removal Act in 1830 made the Trail of Tears possible.

Jackson contributed to the genocide of Native peoples in North America during the early- to mid-1800s, including the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminoles—sometimes still referred to as the “Five Civilized Tribes” (Hine and Faragher 1986) but most commonly called the Five Southeastern Tribes. Despite the negotiation of multiple treaties and Supreme Court protection of the Cherokee Nation in *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832, Jackson pushed removal forward, with devastating consequences for the native peoples of the southeast (Hine and Faragher 1986).

Jackson’s letter “To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians” is particularly telling, regarding his disposition toward native peoples during his presidency. In this document, published in the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* in 1835, Jackson encouraged members of the Cherokee in the southeast to consider the manner in which their existence east of the Mississippi River was “incompatible” with white society:

You are now placed in the midst of a white population. Your peculiar customs, which regulated your intercourse with one another, have been abrogated by the great political community among which you live; and you are now subject to the same laws which govern the other citizens of Georgia and Alabama. You are liable to prosecutions for offences, and to civil actions for a breach of any of your contracts. Most of your people are uneducated, and are liable to be brought into collision at all times with their white neighbors. Your young men are acquiring habits of intoxication. With strong passions, and without those habits of restraint, which our laws inculcate and render necessary, they are frequently driven to excesses which must eventually terminate in their ruin.

He continued by noting the manner in which wild game are largely eradicated and that, despite the need to transition toward agriculture, members of the Cherokee own very little land. To encourage Cherokee to abandon their homeland, he asked:

How, under these circumstances can you live in the country you now occupy? Your condition must become worse & worse, and

you will ultimately disappear, as so many tribes have done before you.

Jackson strongly encouraged them to move west and argued that the “fate of your women and children, the fate of your people to the remotest generation, depend on the issue [(that is, removal)].” Although he signed the letter, “Your friend,” the message was clear: Native Americans east of the Mississippi must move west or suffer dire consequences.

Continued Controversy

With a mixed legacy of slavery, genocide, and democracy, there is fierce debate over how Jackson should be remembered. Does he represent a rags-to-riches story and the triumph of the “common man,” or is he a symbol of racist brutality and exploitation? President Donald J. Trump considers himself a 21st-century protégé of Jackson—an “outsider” who will “Make America Great Again”—and a portrait of Jackson hangs in Trump’s Oval Office. This generated major controversy, especially as debate rages on as to whether Harriet Tubman, a Black abolitionist, should replace Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill. Jackson was, and continues to be, “beloved and hated, venerated and reviled...the most contradictory of men” (Meacham 2009).

The Hermitage: A Contested Place for Competing Memories

Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage, “Home of the People’s President,” is a heritage site located twelve miles east of downtown Nashville. In 1856, the State of Tennessee purchased 500 acres of the Hermitage property to preserve as a “shrine” to Jackson, and in 1889, the Ladies’ Hermitage Association arose to manage the property and accommodate its growing number of visitors (National Park Service 2018). It is currently operated by the non-profit Andrew Jackson Foundation. The Hermitage was originally a plantation and currently houses a visitor center,

Jackson's Greek-revival-style home, tomb, garden, slave cabins, and sites of slave cabins. Jackson lived on this property from 1804 until his death in 1845, with the exception of the time he lived in Washington during his presidency from 1829 to 1837. Its current mission is to "preserve the home place of Andrew Jackson, to create learning opportunities, and to inspire citizenship through experiencing the life and unique impact of Jackson" (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2018). Since 1889, nearly 15 million people have visited the Hermitage from around the world (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2018). The Hermitage currently stands on 1,120 acres, has 27 buildings, and has a staff of 106 (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2018).

The Hermitage is currently a site of contested meanings; it serves as a "place" for a variety of memories. A memorial to the Hermitage's enslaved population has been built on-site in the form of boulders arranged in the shape of the Drinking Gourd (and sponsored by Cracker Barrel Foundation), and an annual memorial service is held in honor of the Hermitage's victims of slavery during Black History Month (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2017). (See photos below, taken by the author at the 2018 Black History Month Memorial at the Hermitage.) Andrew Jackson's Hermitage is also deemed part of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.



Figure 1.2: A white carnation with a name tag reading “Unknown,” placed on the memorial wall by an attendee. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.



Figure 1.3: Collecting the libations materials from the wall after the Black History Month memorial service. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.

At the same time, tours of the Hermitage focus on Andrew Jackson’s mansion and tomb, and the site’s main tour does not include the slave quarters on the itinerary. The memorial to the enslaved is located near the back of the property, far past the main house, and wedding ceremonies are performed in the same chapel as the memorial service. In addition, last spring marked the first Dog’s Day at the Hermitage, a special event for dog-lovers to bring their dogs to the Hermitage, attend animal welfare talks, and stop by a pet adoption fair on-site (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2017). Although efforts at memorialization are being made and there is increased acknowledgement of Jackson’s role in slavery and genocide, it can be argued that this

slavery-era plantation is still largely a site for (white) southern nostalgia wedding celebrations and special events (Eichstedt and Small 2002).



Figure 1.4: Jackson's Tomb, decorated with a red, white, and blue banner and a wreath of flowers, in honor of Andrew Jackson's birthday. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.



Figure 1.5: A sign outside the Cabin by the Spring building at the Hermitage, which advertises the availability of the space for "meetings, weddings, receptions and other events" and boasts, "Winner of the 2014 Perfect Wedding Guide's Diamond Award" and, "Voted Nashville's Best Wedding Venue." Note the educational signage behind the yellow rope at the bottom left. Photo by Elizabeth Barna

As a "place" (Nora 1989) for a variety of memories, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage is a symbolically charged site that exploded onto the public stage with the rise of Donald J. Trump in American politics. President Trump made a point to pay his respects at the Hermitage in March

of 2017, after his successful (and polarizing) bid for the presidency in 2016. In April of 2018, Jackson’s tomb was vandalized by an unknown person (or persons), with the word “killer” and various profanities and anarchy signs scrawled across the graves of Andrew Jackson and his wife Rachel (Allison 2018). Visitors frequently ask about Trump’s visit and about the vandalism, both of which made headlines.



Figure 1.6: A Facebook post by Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage encouraging followers to visit and “take your picture with the wreath laid by President Trump on Jackson’s tomb!” This post gained heavy traffic compared to others by the museum, with a flurry of both heart reacts and angry reacts. This is one of many instances of The Hermitage being placed (or placing itself?) in the midst of contemporary conversations about Andrew Jackson (and perhaps his relationship to the current president).

PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore representations of a controversial political figure during tumultuous and polarizing times at a heritage site. More specifically, I ask the following research questions:

- 1) What factors contribute to the coexistence of conflicting images of a controversial figure presented by a single institutional custodian of memory?
 - a) What role do aesthetics and notions of nostalgia play?
- 2) What strategies have staff members at heritage sites developed to relay difficult pasts to visitors?
 - a) To what extent are staff constrained by the demands of the institution and by the demands of customers within the customer service triangle?
- 3) How do individualized techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957) and white fragility (DiAngelo 2018) play out when discussing historic atrocities and staff and visitors' relationship to them?

Methodology

To address these questions, I conducted nearly a year of participant-observation as a historic interpreter and as a visitor, undertook content analysis of museum materials and texts about the museum's history, and also conducted supplementary in-depth interviews with long-time staff members and those in middle management positions.

Participant-Observation

I conducted 11 months of participant-observation as a part-time costumed historic interpreter at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. I began my work as a historic interpreter in early July 2018, but visited and recorded notes as a guest several times in the months prior and several times after resigning as a staff member. As a historic interpreter, I dressed in an 1830s reproduction costume—a blue day dress with a white pelerine and day bonnet, a blue coal shuttle

bonnet adorned with faux flowers in winter outdoors, and a petticoat beneath the dress—and provided guided tours of the Hermitage mansion. During the warmer months, I was also posted at outdoor stations on the property—including near Alfred’s Cabin (where a formerly enslaved man who stayed on the property after emancipation lived) and near Jackson’s tomb—to answer questions and present supplemental information. Each interpreter is familiar with all of the stations, and rotates from one station to the next every half an hour, typically. To help me remember the exact words spoken during tours, I occasionally recorded audio of my own presentations in the mansion.

The seasons bring dramatic changes, both in the weather and in attendance. Summers bring sweltering heat and humidity and are tremendously crowded, with over 1,000 visitors (mostly white out-of-towners, ranging from families with young children to octogenarians) filing into the mansion per day. There is often an hour-long wait outside the mansion for tours. In the fall, the site is flooded with schoolchildren on field trips, some of whom also serve as costumed “junior docents” who are posted at outdoor stations for a few hours of their trip. Attendance drops dramatically in the winter, with approximately 200 visitors per day on average. The poplar trees, crepe myrtles, and oaks on the property are bare, and a wet cold descends on the landscape. The liminal time between Christmas and the New Year brings a summer-like boost in attendance, with 800 to 1,000 visitors on-site. Attendance is driven largely by school field trips and out-of-town visitors.

In the summer, I tended to work three days per week from 8:45 AM until 5:00 to 6:00 PM, and in winter, when attendance is lower and daylight hours are shorter, I tended to work one day per week from 8:45 AM until 4:00 PM. Approximately thirty part-time historic interpreters, all but one of whom are white, worked at The Hermitage during my time there. The non-white

interpreter is of African-American and Native American descent. Most interpreters were either college students, young professionals who completed Master's degrees in history or public history, or retirees.

Access and My Relationship to the Organization

I obtained permission from the Hermitage's CEO to make observations, conduct interviews with staff and volunteers, and analyze written and visual materials produced by the site. I also sought permission from my individual coworkers to make observations, and to write about my experiences working on-site. To protect participants' confidentiality, I have changed all individual names and altered identifying information.

I became truly integrated in this occupational community—coworkers asked me to hang out (although we frequently got busy and many of those plans did not materialize), the CEO recognized me and said hello to me when I saw him, and my coworkers supported me through several deaths in my family. We developed inside jokes and formed our own friendships and “alliances,” if you will. My fellow interpreters asked me “how school is going,” I included the title “Historic Interpreter, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage” under my “Ph.D. Candidate, Vanderbilt University” title in my signature on cover letters for fellowship applications. I began to refer to my days at the Hermitage as “work” rather than “fieldwork” and jumped in to help visitors even when I am there on my day off, the list goes on and on.

With this in mind, I would like to make it clear that I write this dissertation not as a representative of the Hermitage or any other organization, but as an independent scholar. Although I do present my thoughts on current practices at the museum and make suggestions for

similarly situated sites, my main goal is to illuminate factors that impact the ways difficult histories are presented in the current tumultuous social and political climate—and what guests might take away from these presentations.

In-Depth Interviews

To supplement these data and triangulate my findings on the ground with frontline interpreters, I conducted in-depth interviews with five Hermitage staff members in middle management positions. Major points of inquiry during the interviews included the nature of the work; interactions with visitors and with the organization; and meaning-making and values among staff (see Appendices A and B). Interviewees were eager to discuss their experiences and perspectives, and my interviews lasted from one hour to nearly three hours. I conducted these supplemental interviews during the coronavirus pandemic, which culminated in temporary museum closures in Spring of 2020, and for this reason conducted interviews either over the phone or over the video chat app FaceTime. My interview participants ranged in age from early 30s to early 80s. All were white, and their time working at The Hermitage ranged from three years to 41 years.

Content Analysis of Museum Materials and Texts

I also conducted latent content analysis of museum materials, including signage, audio tour stops, brochures, and guide books. Primary texts for analysis included books written by early members of the Ladies' Hermitage Association, including Mary Dorris' (1915) *Preservation of The Hermitage* and Mary Caldwell's (1933) *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage*. I also examined more contemporary publications of the Andrew Jackson Foundation, including

Andrew Jackson: The People's President, an illustrated biographical sketch of Jackson published in 2016 and *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Official Guidebook* to the property, published in 2018.

Analysis

My analysis of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and museum materials was holistic, using note-management software with built-in tagging features to support thematic analysis. I transferred jottings from my iPhone Notes and field notes from Word Documents into Evernote and used Evernote's tagging feature to keep track of themes I noticed during latent content analysis.

My Positionality

My positionality as a white woman in her late twenties undoubtedly shaped my experiences in the field. My whiteness likely allowed me to better understand the ways white visitors discuss race and historic atrocity, but kept me from exploring the ways that white visitors interact with interpreters who are not white. Being a woman also shaped my experiences in the field, as condescension from male guests was common for me and other women interpreters in a way that male colleagues did not report experiencing. On another note, my lack of a Southern accent likely shaped visitors' perceptions of me as a (non)representative of the region, and my California primary and secondary education likely shaped my perceptions of Jackson as I entered the field.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 2 is a descriptive chapter in which I outline key ways that Jackson is represented at The Hermitage. I introduce the concept of *institutionalized polysemy* to describe the coexistence of conflicting images of Andrew Jackson within a compressed time frame in the same physical space. At The Hermitage, visitors are presented with a barrage of images of Jackson as an orphan, war hero, family man and devoted husband, Westerner, Southerner, foster parent to three Native American children, signer of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, champion of democracy, and staunch defender of slavery. I also identify four main domains in which this institutionalized polysemy is present: 1) uses of the site itself; 2) tour, program, and classroom offerings; 3) the standard presentation itself (in the main museum, the mansion tour, and signage and self-guided audio tours); and 4) Museum Store merchandise.

Chapters 3 through 5 are analytic chapters in which I seek to account for institutionalized polysemy with a range of aesthetic, individual, organizational, historical, and geographic factors. Chapter 3 centers on the role of the aesthetics of the site and the optics of a nearly all-white frontline staff in producing conflicting images of Jackson. I find that the beauty of Southern plantation imagery contrasts with staff members' statements about the cruelty of slavery as an institution. This is exacerbated by the presence of evidence of agriculture and of household labor at The Hermitage, combined with the conspicuous absence of pervasive visual cues indicating that enslaved labor was central to this production. Drawing from the concept of aesthetic labor, I introduce the concept of *aesthetic management* to describe the manner in which curatorial and maintenance staff—as opposed to simply frontline staff—play a role in co-producing the meaning of the historic site, anticipating and responding to visitor reactions.

In Chapter 4, I highlight the role of nesting geographic narratives and competing genres in producing institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage and discuss the manner in which this has played out across the site's 130-year history as a museum. I argue that The Hermitage's dual legacy as a historic plantation site and a presidential museum contributes to a bifurcation between Jackson's career and domestic life—the man and the property—that ultimately results in the distancing of Jackson's personhood from Indian Removal and slavery. I illustrate the utility of individualistic theories of neutralization of crime (Sykes and Matza 1957) in typologizing the abdication of a historic figure's responsibility.

In Chapter 5, I consider The Hermitage as a service industry workplace whose customer-service orientation contributes to the production of institutionalized polysemy. I address the influence of competing organizational logics, the pressures of the time clock, and the strain of emotional labor in interpreter-visitor interactions in producing ever-shifting images of Jackson and his legacy. The tension between introducing difficult histories and achieving high attendance, positive visitor experience, and instilling a positive American identity is great, and in many cases, difficult histories are omitted for the sake of competing logics.

In Chapter 6, I conclude by highlighting the theoretical contributions and practical applications of my work. Drawing on Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory, I argue that this framework for understanding the justification of individual crime can be applied to human rights violations by historical figures. This, in turn, can help scholars and human rights advocates to more precisely identify mechanisms by which we refrain from assigning responsibility, particularly when considering them in light of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010) and white fragility (DiAngelo 2018).

CHAPTER II. INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY AT THE HERMITAGE AND A BARRAGE OF REPRESENTATIONS OF JACKSON

It was a sunny late afternoon in April, and the sun cast long shadows on the back lawn of The Hermitage mansion. I marched across the grass to the break room at the end of my shift, changed from my costume into leggings and a t-shirt, clocked out, and headed back outside to take a look at The Hermitage’s inaugural “Yappy Hour” event for visitors and their dogs, which was set to begin at the end of the site’s regular operating hours. I sat on a bench under a mature magnolia tree facing Alfred’s Cabin, and couldn’t resist greeting a tan pit bull mix whose foster parent was parading him around the grounds. “He’s up for adoption,” she told me, smiling.

A white woman with a black tank top and blonde hair pulled into a ponytail walked her black and white dog along the paved path toward the slave dwelling, pausing momentarily to read the signage about Alfred, the headline of which reads, “ALFRED’S CABIN: A Life of Toil.” In the foreground of this scene—a woman walking her dog toward a slave dwelling—an arrow-shaped placard pointed wedding attendees toward the Cabin by the Spring, where “Sara & Alex’s Wedding” was to be held that evening.



Figure 2.1: Left: Dog's Day at The Hermitage participants walking their dogs on the grounds near Alfred's Cabin. Right: A sign directing wedding attendees to "Sara & Alex's Wedding" on the same day as the Dog's Day event. Photos by Elizabeth Barna, April 27, 2019.

A wedding celebration, a temporary dog park, and a slave dwelling, all compressed into the same heritage museum space? This may seem jarring, yet this intermingling of imagery and land usage is commonplace at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. This juxtaposition of contrasting narratives and themes is central to the mansion tour as well. "Welcome! Come on in! Feel free to take a look into both parlors." I began my presentation of the mansion's Entry Hall with a warm greeting, holding the faux-painted wooden door open. "The one at the front is the formal parlor, and the one at the back is the family parlor," I explained, gesturing widely toward the two large rooms off to the left behind glass, as a group of twelve filed in. I explained that this was "the way the mansion would have looked in 1837, when Jackson returned from the White House."

However, something would have been different in that "there would not be a paid historic interpreter to greet you at the door." (Guests sometimes laughed in response to this remark, which I had initially not intended to be a joke, but later sheepishly smiled at as I spoke.) Rather, during Jackson's time, "an enslaved woman named Hannah would have greeted guests at the door and ask if they were 'here to see the General,'" as Hannah often phrased it. I routinely showed a laminated photo of Hannah and her husband, Aaron, and mentioned that Jackson was one of the largest slaveholders in the area, enslaving somewhere around 300 people over his lifetime.

Then I turned to the wallpaper behind me, gesturing toward it and noting, “Hannah would have seen this wallpaper. Visitors to The Hermitage would have seen it. Jackson would have as well. Rachel Jackson purchased it from a black and white, mail order catalogue from the Defore Company in Paris.” I noted that the wallpaper is “original” and “183 years old”ⁱ and briefly described the technique of wood block printing on rag paper before turning my attention to the parlors. I shared that the formal parlor being a space for Jackson to impress his guests, highlighting the genuine marble mantel, “wall-to-wall wool carpeting,” and the drapes that “pool onto the floor to show they could afford the extra fabric.” I pointed out a “bayonet taken from Chalmette Battlefield during the Battle of New Orleans in 1815” sitting on the table before noting that Jackson was a general, senator, congressional representative, and a judge before serving as president, but that “General was the title he preferred.”

Next, the family parlor, and an opportunity to introduce the group to the Jackson family. “Andrew Jackson Junior,” who is an adopted nephew, and his wife, Sarah, I explained, drawing their attention toward the portraits on either side of the Tennessee limestone fireplace. I sometimes mentioned that the Jacksons raised at least twenty boys in the home, including “three Native American children.” One was named Lyncoya, and Jackson sent him to The Hermitage “after his troops had killed his entire family at the Battle of Tallushatchie.” A quick mention of Little Rachel’s piano in the corner—“the most expensive piece of furniture in the house” sometimes with reference to the cost being equivalent to a blacksmith’s annual wage, and closing with an introduction to an enslaved blacksmith named Aaron—and then I sent visitors “down the hallway, where you’ll see Jackson’s bedroom off to your right, and Junior and Sarah’s room to your left.”

On a busy day, I relayed this information—and these conflicting images of Jackson—in a matter of three minutes or less. This barrage of images of Jackson would continue in the Side Hall portion of the mansion, and then again Upstairs, as historic interpreters mentioned enslaved people at The Hermitage alongside stories of Jackson’s family life and political legacy. This tendency to present a variety of narratives on Jackson manifested itself in the ways the site is used and also in the images of Jackson presented on mansion tours, in the museum, and in other educational offerings on-site. Overall, I found that Jackson is represented in the following ways:

- A child of immigrants and an orphan
- A family man, a loyal husband, and a grieving widower
- Humble and wealthy—a self-made man
- A military hero
- A Westerner and a champion of the “common” man
- A Southern gentleman
- A “typical and unapologetic slaveowner,” as the Hermitage’s education director Anna describes Jackson
- Signer of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which led to the Trail of Tears
- A foster parent to three Native American children

In this chapter, I introduce the varied and often conflicting ways Jackson is presented, and provide an overview of ways the representation varies across the site. The Hermitage is a “place”³ (Nora 1989) for a variety of memories, and these memories often butt up against one another starkly. This presents visitors to The Hermitage with a barrage of images of Jackson to consume.

I refer to this phenomenon as institutionalized polysemy⁴, which I define as the presentation of multiple (and often conflicting) meanings produced by a given institution and its

³ Nora defines a “place” or “site” of memory (in French *lieu de mémoire*) as an artifact or location that has garnered such significance in a community that it serves as a “symbolic element of the memorial heritage.”

⁴ During an e-mail conversation with Dr. Joachim Savelsberg, my outside reader, he suggested that the various images of Jackson, slavery, and genocide presented constituted an “institutionalized poly-semi—open to many interpretations.” I agree with his assessment, and I adopt and expand on the concept here.

representatives. The term polysemy derives from the field of linguistics and in its original sense refers to the phenomenon in which “a single word form is associated with two or several related senses” (Vicente and Falkum 2017). Drawing from this practice, I use polysemy to denote the presentation of a multitude of meanings attributed to a given historical figure or site. I term polysemy at cultural institutions like The Hermitage *institutionalized* rather than institutional, as the former captures the process by which the setting creates multiple meanings, while the latter implies the one-time production of a static set of meanings by the setting. I have found the production and presentation of a barrage of conflicting meanings to be a dynamic process, both at the larger institutional level over the course of the museum’s 130-year history and at the level of day-to-day interactions between frontline staff and visitors.

This chapter is largely a descriptive one, in which I outline the various representations of Jackson presented at The Hermitage and the various domains in which the site represents him and his era in conflicting ways. The three chapters that follow are analytic chapters that seek to account for the institutionalized polysemy I describe in detail here. This descriptive chapter may feel like a mere list, but I want to ensure I provide a thorough series of examples of institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage, so that I can better use the remaining chapters to explain how and why these various conflicting representations of Jackson emerge and persist.

A cursory glance at the Hermitage website reveals this polysemy, as the “Andrew Jackson: Tough as Old Hickory” section is divided into four major categories: Orphan, General, President, and Legend. Similarly, the “Mansion and Grounds: Home of the People’s President” section is divided into The Mansion, Garden and Grounds, Jackson’s Tomb, and Slavery. Note

that Slavery is included along with “Mansion and Grounds” rather than Jackson himself, and the Indian Removal Act of 1830 is discussed under the “President” tab.

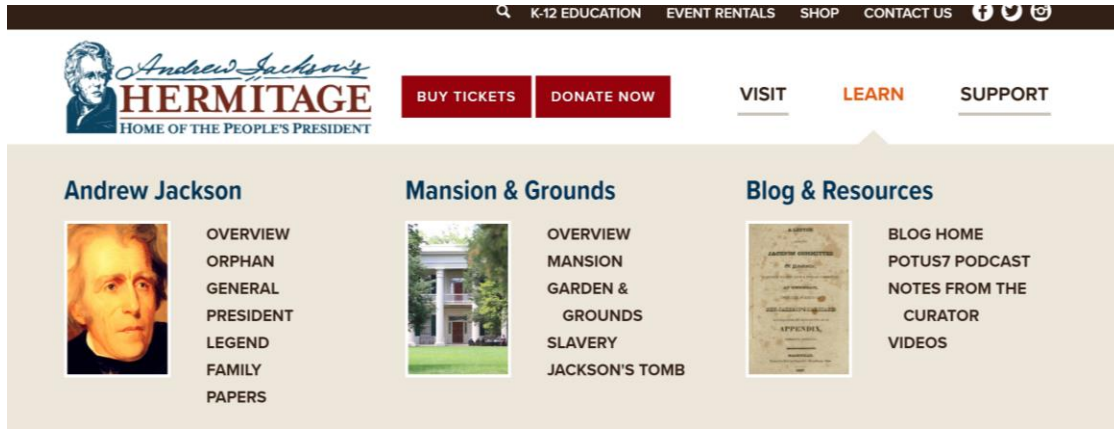


Figure 2.2: A screenshot of The Hermitage’s main webpage under the “Learn” tab, which delineates “Andrew Jackson” (and his family and legacy) from “Mansion & Grounds” (and slavery). The Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Trail of Tears are discussed on the website (under “President”), but do not merit their own tab here.

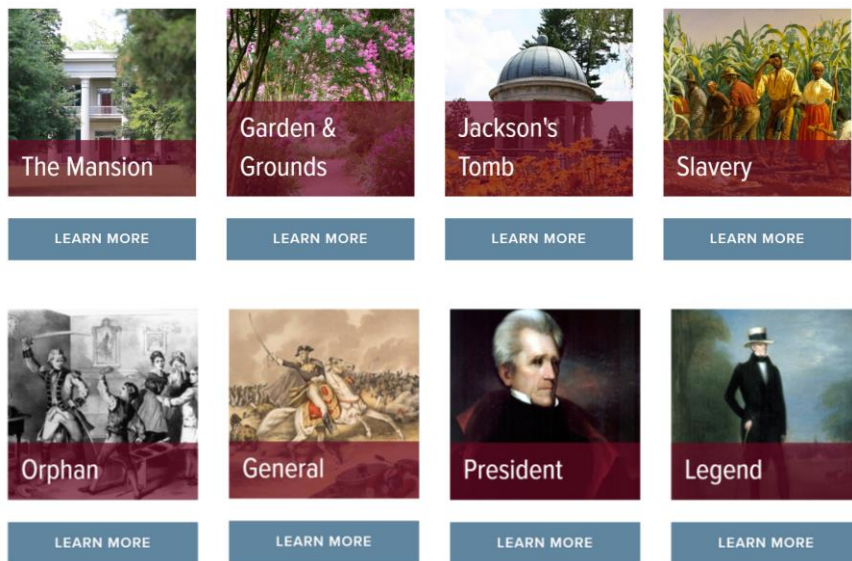


Figure 2.3: Thumbnails for each of the “Andrew Jackson” and “Mansion & Grounds” options. Note that Orphan, General, President, and Legend are the four images of Jackson highlighted on the website, while the enslaved are included under “Mansion & Grounds.”

During my participant-observation as a historic interpreter and a visitor at The Hermitage, I observed this institutionalized polysemy in a variety of other domains, namely:

- Uses of the Site Itself
- Tour, Program, Classroom, and Exhibit Offerings

- The Standard Presentation Itself (in the main museum, the mansion tour, and signage and the audio tour on the grounds)
- Museum Store Merchandise

I will discuss each in turn, and in subsequent chapters I will account for this presence of competing images by analyzing a range of individual, organizational, and historical factors.

USES OF THE SITE ITSELF

Andrew Jackson's Hermitage is a multi-use site that embraces a variety of communities, purposes, and events. From Ghost Tours that are sold out from mid-September through November, to Family Fun Days and Presidential Easter Egg Hunts, to yoga classes to Yappy Hour for guests and their dogs, to Battle of New Orleans and Jackson's Birthday celebrations, The Hermitage hosts a variety of events designed for family and seasonal fun, as well as historical education. The Hermitage is also a venue for public and private events, and is a top wedding venue in the Nashville area. At the same time, The Hermitage holds events related to chattel slavery on-site, namely the Black History Month Memorial held every February and a celebration of emancipation on Juneteenth. Indeed, this 1,120 acre property serves a variety of purposes—from mourning to outright celebration.

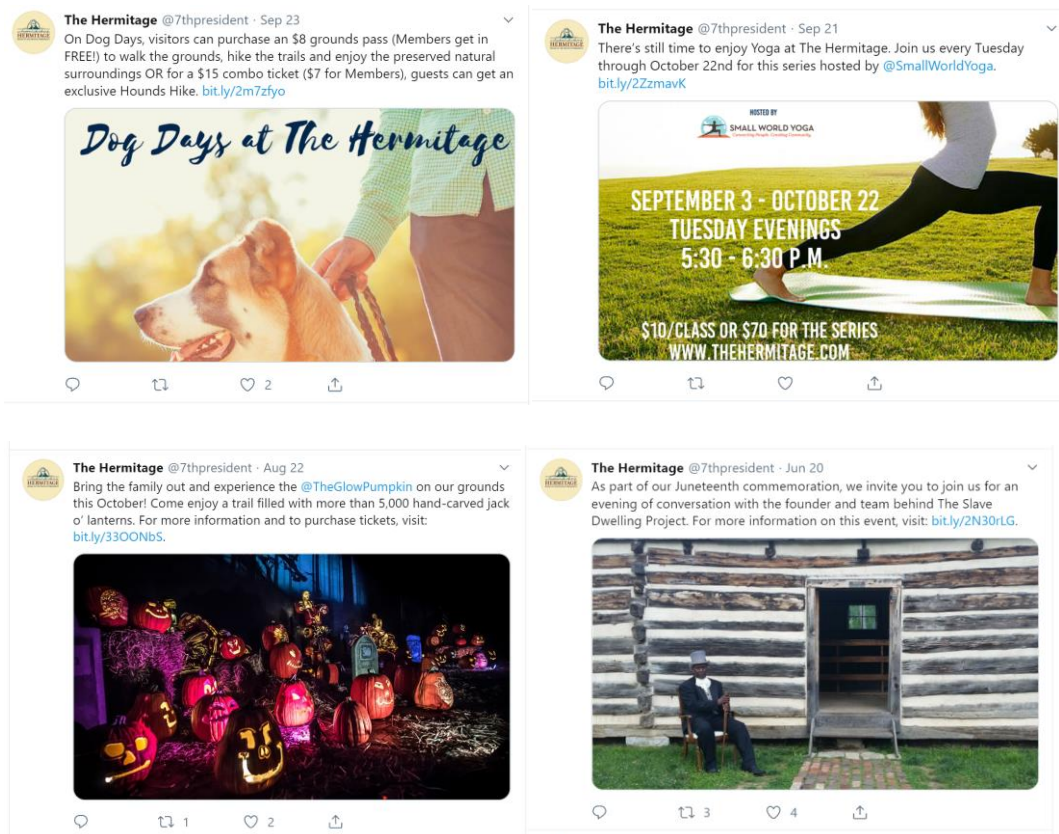


Figure 2.4: A selection of Hermitage Tweets advertising upcoming events on-site, including Dog Days, yoga, Pumpkin Glow, and Juneteenth.

Table 2.1 provides a rough typology of the types of events held at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage: Holiday/Seasonal, Group/Event Venue, History, Patriotic/Political, Fundraising, and Outdoor. There is plenty of overlap between categories, however, as this is a series of ideal types (Weber 1904). For example, I categorize Vintage Baseball as an Outdoor Event, but it can easily be argued that this event evokes Nostalgia and provides participants insight into the History of the sport. A single event has the potential to appeal to multiple audiences and integrate entertainment with education, while allowing participants to have different purposes for participating in the activity and to derive different meanings from it.

Table 2.1: Typology of Hermitage Events

| Event Type | Examples |
|-------------------|---|
| Holiday/Seasonal | <p>Presidential Easter Egg Hunt</p> <p>Pumpkin Glow</p> <p>Ghost Tours</p> <p>Hauntings at The Hermitage (discontinued event)</p> <p>Christmas Market</p> <p>Candy Egg Decorating Workshop</p> <p>Mother’s Day Tea and Fashion Show</p> |
| Group/Event Venue | <p>Sons of the Confederacy Meetings (cemetery on property, use conference room)</p> <p>Weddings</p> <p>Memorial services</p> <p>Donelson family picnic/reunion</p> <p>Reunion for Alfred Jackson’s descendants</p> <p>Professional Photographer’s Association</p> <p>Buddy Walk (and mansion tour for children with disabilities)</p> |
| History | <p>Black History Month Memorial</p> <p>Black History Month Lectures</p> <p>The Slave Dwelling Project</p> <p>Juneteenth</p> <p>Battle of New Orleans celebration</p> |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| | <p>Jackson's Birthday</p> <p>Jackson's Funeral</p> <p>Edgar Alan Poe, Charles Dickins, and Washington Irving living history readings</p> <p>Presidential Trivia</p> <p>Exploring Your Scots-Irish Genealogy</p> <p>Conversations with the Classics Series</p> |
| Patriotic/Political | <p>Veterans Day</p> <p>Presidents' Day</p> <p>Presidential Speeches and Visits (Donald Trump most recently)</p> |
| Aesthetic/Nostalgic/Relaxing | <p>A Shot of History (presented by Clayton James Tennessee Whiskey)</p> <p>Yoga</p> <p>Painting with the President</p> <p>Pinot with the President</p> <p>Scots-Irish Festival</p> <p>Fall Fest</p> |
| Fundraising | <p>Gala</p> <p>Spring Outing</p> |
| Outdoor | <p>Vintage Baseball</p> <p>Dog Days at The Hermitage</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>Yappy Hour</p> <p>Family Fun Days (themes include on the farm, games and kites, and gardens and plants)</p> |
|--|--|

Another example of a polysemous event is the annual Presidential Easter Egg Hunt and Egg Roll, which is held on the neighboring Tulip Grove property, a plantation site where Jackson’s nephew and his family lived. Hermitage staff members led the Easter egg roll on the front lawn, and kids could also color Easter eggs and decorate spring-themed sugar cookies. I volunteered to help with the event and staffed the ticket booth and also a table where children and their guardians could write “Cards for the Troops.” Egg hunts were held for three age groups, and attendees of all ages could take a photo with Colonel Easter, an Easter bunny wearing a War of 1812 military outfit amidst large novelty eggs and colorful pinwheels.

During my time staffing the Easter Egg Hunt and Egg Roll, a white woman in her mid-thirties approached me on the porch of the mansion with her young son, asking if they could have a look inside the building. She explained that she wanted to show her son where she got married. Slavery and Native American history were not mentioned as part of the programming for the day, however. This event constituted a blend of Aesthetic/Relaxing/Nostalgic, Outdoor, and Patriotic/Political activities, with a touch of History, as the Easter egg roll is a longstanding White House tradition and the bunny’s costume provided the opportunity to talk about Jackson’s role in the War of 1812.



Figure 2.5: A photo of the author posing with Colonel Easter at the 2019 Presidential Easter Egg Hunt and Roll. This event is held on the lawn of the neighboring Tulip Grove mansion and plantation site. Colonel Easter is wearing a War of 1812 uniform, reminiscent of Jackson’s famed Battle of New Orleans. Photo by an anonymous passerby.

The Hermitage’s annual Black History Month Memorial Service is also quite illuminating with regard to institutionalized polysemy. The event is held every February at the Hermitage Church—which is also one of the property’s three wedding venues—and concludes with a wreath and flower-laying ceremony at the adjacent Memorial to the Enslaved—which was installed immediately next to the Donelson family cemetery *and a Confederate cemetery*. Upcoming programs listed on the back of the bulletin for the memorial service are not related to slavery or Black history, but instead include Exploring Your Scots-Irish Genealogy, celebrating “President Jackson’s 251st Birthday,” learning about the role of Jackson’s niece and daughter-in-law in “Hosting The People’s House,” and participating in the site’s annual Easter Egg Hunt. Furthermore, The Hermitage’s logo is posted on the front and back of the bulletin with the slogan “Home of the People’s President.” In this manner, images of Jackson as a democratic hero and a slaveholder exist in tension with one another, providing visitors to The Hermitage with a barrage of competing images of Jackson and his time period.

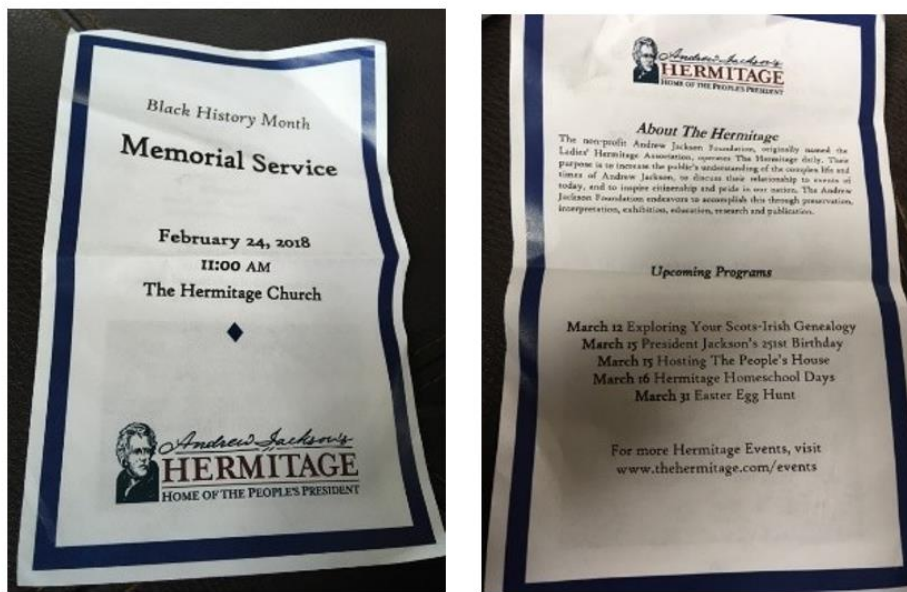


Figure 2.6: Black History Month Memorial Service bulletin/handout (front and back). “Black History Month Memorial Service” contrasts starkly with the listed upcoming events on the back of the handout, including “Exploring Your Scots-Irish Genealogy,” “President Jackson’s 251st Birthday,” and “Easter Egg Hunt.” In addition, the title “Black History Month Memorial Service” casts doubt on the logo’s characterization of the site as “Home of the People’s President” immediately below. Photos by Elizabeth Barna.

TOUR, LIVING HISTORY, AND CLASSROOM OFFERINGS

In addition to hosting a range of events on site or sponsored by the Andrew Jackson Foundation, The Hermitage presents conflicting images of Jackson within single events and tours as well. In addition to the traditional mansion tour and long-term museum exhibitions, The Hermitage hosts a variety of special living history programs, classroom programs, temporary exhibitions, and additional tours, which contribute to expanded opportunities for meaning-making at the site.

Additional Tour Options

Wagon Tour and “In Their Footsteps” Tour

The primary additional tour The Hermitage offers is its Hermitage By Wagon tour, most commonly referred to by interpretive and ticket office staff as simply the “wagon tour.” The tour is offered seasonally, through a partnered local contractor, Carriage Rides Through Time—although the content of the tour was vetted and approved by Hermitage education staff. On its website, the museum advertises this \$12 add-on tour as offering “a look into The Hermitage’s past from a unique perspective”—that of the enslaved community and stops at archaeological sites “associated with slavery and farming.” At the same time, in addition to providing “stories of the enslaved community who once lived and worked here,” the wagon tour is touted as an opportunity to “enjoy the nostalgia of a carriage ride” and to absorb the “beauty of a once prosperous plantation” (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2019). In this manner, enslaved people’s humanity and agency—as implied by the use of the term “enslaved community” and the absence of mention of Jackson as perpetrator—is presented side by side with appeals to Southern nostalgia.



Figure 2.7: A Tweet by The Hermitage on September 13, 2019, advertising the Wagon Tour as an opportunity to “enjoy this fall weather.”

Partway through my dissertation writing period and after my period of official participant-observation ended, The Hermitage poised to launch its “In Their Footsteps” tour about the lives of enslaved people at The Hermitage. The coronavirus crisis arose before the first official tour could be held, but lead interpreter Mark informed me that this tour will present visitors with information about individuals enslaved at The Hermitage in a way that complements the Wagon Tour, rather than replicating the existing tour given by Carriage Rides Through Time (i.e., duplicating or competing with the tour provided by the private contractor). During my in-depth interviews, when I inquired about conversations surrounding slavery, all five interviewees referenced “In Their Footsteps” as a way the site is discussing slavery.

Garden Tours

Another seasonal tour option is a weekend garden tour, given by volunteer docents. The tour leaves from the garden gate to the east of the Hermitage mansion and winds through Rachel’s Garden, ending at Andrew and Rachel Jackson’s tomb, the family cemetery, and Alfred’s grave. The tour is “more historical than horticultural,” said volunteer Roger as he pitched his tour to guests awaiting their mansion tour on benches facing the front porch. It includes the financial troubles Andrew Jackson Junior faced after his father died, as well as the manner in which a formerly enslaved wagoner named Alfred became a tour guide and tenant farmer and was buried in the garden next to General Jackson’s tomb.

Ghost Tours

Ghost tours are common and fraught part of heritage tourism across the South, and the Hermitage is no exception (Miles 2015, Gentry 2007). The Hermitage offers ghost tours Thursday through Saturday nights at 7 and 9pm, from mid-September through mid-November.

These wildly popular tours nearly always sell out and boast an opportunity to “explore the haunted side of history,” including “ghosts of the Battle of New Orleans” and Jackson’s “infamous meeting with Tennessee’s Bell Witch!” Ghost tours tend to vary from interpreter to interpreter, with some core staples consistently included throughout: the Bell Witch, early Ladies Hermitage Association members’ encounter with the ghost of Jackson, sightings of an enslaved nanny named Louisa, and the “creepy” dolls in Little Rachel’s bedroom. Interpreters who believe they have had supernatural experiences of their own freely share those tales on ghost tours as well.

Slavery and Jackson’s relationship with Native Americans are covered during ghost tours, including tales of past visitors seeing an enslaved nanny named Louisa sitting on Little Rachel’s bed upstairs and of past Native American visitors hearing voices emanating from “witness trees” collected from sites of battles Jackson fought in. The education director also includes gruesome facts that are “stranger than fiction,” such as Jackson’s practice of having his troops remove dead Native Americans’ noses after battles to ensure an accurate count of enemy casualties. When presenting the story of Louisa on ghost tours, I have deemed it “poetic justice” that she would be seen sitting on the bed, as she was forced to sleep on the floor at the foot of Little Rachel’s bed or in the hallway during her lifetime.

Living History Programs

In addition to the mansion tour, museum, and grounds, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage offers two regular living history programs to guests: The Duel and The Horse Race. The Duel: Art of the Southern Gentleman (most frequently referred to simply as “The Duel”) is a thirty-minute living history program debuted in 2018 in which interpreters demonstrate the process of

dueling in the Jacksonian Era. The Duel is held Thursdays through Sundays at the top of every hour, from 10am to 3pm. “Keep your friends close...and enemies closer” is a tagline used to advertise the duel, which is enacted by younger male interpreters and includes audience participation as each duelist’s “second” (assistant).



Figure 2.8: Advertisements for “The Duel: Art of the Southern Gentleman.”

Wager to Win (Formerly called The Horse Race) debuted in the spring of 2019 and illustrates the art of placing bets. To complement The Duel, Wager to Win is offered at the bottom of every hour, Thursdays through Sundays. This programming includes women interpreters as well, and discusses the role of enslaved people (including children) in the development of the sport and in jockeying. This program was a past lead interpreter’s pet project for several years, and part of the motivation for its development was 1) to integrate more stories of the enslaved into the site’s programming, and 2) to provide an opportunity for women interpreters to participate in living history programs (Women didn’t duel, but they did bet).

Although an actual thoroughbred race does not happen during the thirty-minute program, visitor participation is encouraged in placing bets on horses, and a thoroughbred horse was recently brought on site for the purpose of the program. In this manner, Wager to Win marries

southern nostalgia with historical education, and includes representations of both Jackson’s cult of personality and of enslaved people’s lived realities.



Figure 2.9: Advertisement for The Horse Race: Gentlemen of the Turf (later renamed “Wager to Win: Art of the Southern Gentleman”).

Classroom Programs

The Hermitage also provides resources to K-12 students, including Homeschool Days and school programs with “a range of classes to further explore Jackson’s life and legacy.” Classroom programs include Archaeology at The Hermitage, Christmas at The Hermitage, General’s Children, I Spy the Past, Junior Docents, Origin of the Specie: Andrew Jackson and the Bank War, Slavery at The Hermitage, The Corrupt Bargain, The Importance of Andrew Jackson, Trail of Tears, War of 1812, and What is America? Slavery at The Hermitage and Trail of Tears focus on the realities of slavery and Indian Removal, respectively, but several of the other presentations engage with questions of slavery and Indian Removal as well. Christmas at The Hermitage, for example, compares and contrasts the holiday experiences of the Jacksons and those of the enslaved. The Importance of Andrew Jackson includes the Trail of Tears as a key component of Andrew Jackson’s legacy.

These classroom options are consistent with Tennessee’s K-12 standards and with the site’s new interpretive plan, which encourages questions about what it means to be a citizen and also incorporates histories of women, Native Americans, and African-Americans. The education director informed me that of all of the programs, Trail of Tears is the most popular because “teachers don’t know how to talk about it.” Slavery at The Hermitage and The Importance of Andrew Jackson are also frequently requested.

The Hermitage also hosts Homeschool Days for homeschooled children in the area. Homeschool Days offerings include a Get Back to Nature program on the Hermitage landscape itself, A Presidential Toast presenting “historic table etiquette” and James Monroe’s visit to the property in 1819, and Christmas at The Hermitage, highlighting Christmas celebration among the Jacksons and the enslaved people of The Hermitage.

THE STANDARD PRESENTATION ITSELF

The standard elements of a tourist’s Hermitage visit include the museum building (officially called the Andrew Jackson Center), the mansion, and various audio tour and signage stops around the property. Each of these also presents conflicting images of Jackson, contributing to institutionalized polysemy.

After purchasing a ticket at an outdoor kiosk, visitors are encouraged to watch a 20-minute film on Jackson’s life and legacy (including slavery and Indian Removal, in addition to his championing of the “common man”) in the museum building, pick up an audio or multimedia tour from the front desk, and explore the museum’s main exhibit, *Andrew Jackson: Born for a*

Storm. The exhibit provides a timeline of Jackson's biography, focusing on his military and political achievements. The Battle of New Orleans and weapons of the time period are featured prominently. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 is discussed on a panel that is small in comparison, and includes a touch-screen timeline of Native American history in the United States. A panel on Jackson's election addresses questions of popular vote versus the electoral vote and alludes to the contested election of George W. Bush over Al Gore. Jackson's original ornate black presidential carriage stands grandly behind velvet rope, across from a screen that shows interviews with presidential historians Jon Meacham and Daniel Feller talking about Jackson's complex legacy, on a loop.

When I mentioned the subject of my dissertation to a coworker in Guest Services, she drew the front of the exhibit to my attention. There, a modified version of a 19th-century lithograph of the Hermitage mansion erases the presence of enslaved people greeting guests in front of the mansion, as shown in Figure 2.10. Down the hallway from this, however, an interactive kiosk on stories of enslaved individuals at The Hermitage, raising questions as to why the enslaved figures were erased from the wall mural. This, in turn, stands across from a timeline covering the War of 1812, as well as the Creek Wars. Multiple images of Jackson, democracy, slavery, and conflict with Native Americans stand in tension with one another within the museum space, with images of Jackson's ruggedness, perseverance, and strong personality predominating.



Figure 2.10: Left: The original image, featuring enslaved people interacting with visitors in front of the fence. Right: A portion of the image, as presented in the Andrew Jackson Center. Note the erasure of the enslaved in this use of the image. Curiously, a Hermitage guidebook features the unaltered photo, with the caption making the caveat that it would not have been typical for the enslaved to greet visitors on the main road. Photo taken by ticket office staff.

In addition to the permanent “Born for a Storm” exhibit documenting Jackson’s biography and legacy, The Hermitage also presents temporary exhibits. Past exhibits have included the History of the Ladies Hermitage Association, an exhibit on President James Monroe, one on African-American History and slavery at The Hermitage, and one covering his death and funeral (“Farewell, General Jackson”).

The Mansion Tour

Tours of the Hermitage mansion provide competing images of an admittedly complex historic figure and personality. As mentioned, throughout the tour, regardless of the guide presenting, Jackson is represented as a combination of the following:

- A child of immigrants and an orphan
- A family man, a loyal husband, and a grieving widower

- Humble and wealthy—a self-made man
- A military hero
- A champion of the “common” man
- A “typical and unapologetic slaveowner”
- Signer of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which led to the Trail of Tears
- A foster parent to three Native American children

With the tours themselves lasting roughly fifteen to twenty minutes on average, this is quite a few narratives! They are often presented one on top of the other, in quick succession, with little elaboration on the contradictions between them. On some interpreters’ tours, slavery is a key component, but on others, an enslaved woman named Hannah who greeted guests at the door is the only reference to slavery. Similarly, while some guides note that the Trail of Tears ran through Nashville or that Jackson killed men, women, and children during the Creek War, others’ only reference to indigenous history, if any, is mentioning three Native American children Jackson raised (without mentioning how they were orphaned by Jackson’s troops).

In our interpreter handbook outlining key learning objectives and talking points for each station, the education director included the following points of interest for interpreters to be sure to mention in the Entry Hall station (which itself includes the entry hall, formal parlor, and family parlor): the wallpaper, the bayonet from the Battle of New Orleans, the family portraits, and Hannah. A presentation at a given station tends to last seven minutes or more during “slow” times (i.e. when there is no wait to tour the mansion), five to seven minutes during “regular” times (when the wait outside is about twenty minutes), and as little as three minutes during busy times. This means that representations of Jackson as a military hero, as a president, as a devoted grandfather, and as a “typical and unapologetic slaveowner” (as the education director, Anna, puts it) are often presented in a three-minute-period.

Indeed, my visitor experience on a slow day contrasted sharply with my visit as a guest on General Jackson's March 15th birthday (the second busiest day of the year, as admission is free). On a slow day in the summer of 2017, a tall, young man with a booming voice (Tony, whom I later shadowed when I was hired as an interpreter in 2018) opened his commentary on the grandchildren's upstairs bedrooms by loudly proclaiming, "Make no mistake" and noting that in Jackson's day, the Hermitage property not a fantasy land but a "working plantation." He then continued by saying that Jackson was able to amass the wealth he had by "treating people made in the image of God like cattle."

The large crowds on Jackson's birthday, however, sped the pace of the tour dramatically. On March 15th of 2018, I found myself rushed and disappointed when I visited the mansion, and heard only one mention of an enslaved person. The doors opened, and we went inside. A middle-aged woman in period attire with brown eyes and a badge reading "Lead Interpreter" (who upon being hired, I would later recognize as Janet) greeted us and told us that, if we were visiting The Hermitage during Jackson's day, Hannah would be the one to open the door and greet us. From what I remember, this was the only reference to slavery during the house tour, and I don't even think she used the word "slave" to describe Hannah. The interpreter discussed the cost of whale oil originally used to burn the lamps in the chandelier overhead. In my notes, I expressed feeling "overwhelmed by the speed of the tour and how it differed from my last."

Even during times of moderate flow, in the entry hall of the mansion, interpreters' announcement that "an enslaved woman named Hannah would have greeted you at the door" quickly transitions into conversation about the original (then) 182-year-old wallpaper that "Rachel Jackson picked out of a black and white mail order catalogue from the Defore Company

in Paris.” During my first few months as an interpreter, I would show a black-and-white photo of Hannah and her husband Aaron to the group, then turn it over when transitioning to talk about the wallpaper, as I felt uncomfortable showing a photo of her while talking about antique wallpaper, crystal chandeliers, and Jackson’s military career.

As time went on, I developed the strategy of continuing to show the photo, but explicitly mentioning her in my transition to talking about items in the home: “This wallpaper is one of our six rooms of original paper in the home. Hannah would have seen it, Jackson would have seen it, and guests to The Hermitage would have seen it.” Some interpreters simply mention that “an enslaved woman named Hannah would have greeted you at the door,” and do not discuss slavery in the Entry Hall beyond that. This softens the starkness of institutionalized polysemy in the mansion, but also has the effect of softening discussion of slavery.

Another special tour offering is the VIP tour, which is an extended version of the traditional mansion tour that includes time in the museum, a guided visit to Alfred’s Cabin and Rachel’s Garden, and time on the balcony of the mansion. A “step above” a VIP tour is a Behind the Glass tour, in which The Hermitage’s CEO or other high-level staff member takes visitors behind the glass panels in the doorways and into the rooms in the mansion. The content of these special tours is similar to the traditional mansion tour, with competing images presented in succession. It does not feel quite as compressed, however, as time in the mansion amounts to approximately 45 minutes to an hour, as opposed to a mere fifteen to twenty. Lead interpreters,

who often give VIP tours, expressed to me that they enjoy the ability to have more nuanced conversations about Jackson during these extended tours.⁵

Signage and Audio/Multimedia Tour around the Property

The General's Tour is the standard Hermitage ticket price and includes a self-guided audio tour device. The President's Tour provides a multimedia device for an added fee. The stops are color-coded, with "red" stops signifying stops about Andrew Jackson and the site (also called "The General's Tour"), "green" stops focusing on Rachel Jackson ("Rachel Jackson's Tour"), and "blue" stops noting a kid's audio tour stop ("Poll the Parrot's Tour"). The kid's stops are narrated by Poll, Andrew Jackson's parrot. Most stops correspond to a given place on the property marked by the same number on the map and signage, serving as a way to "name" and "frame" the location for the visitor, in the absence of a live human guide (MacCannell 2013). There is great contrast between the adult and children's tour's coverage of slavery, as The General's Tour weaves the role of the enslaved throughout the tour stops, while Poll the Parrot's tour reserves emphasis on slavery for Alfred's Cabin, with acknowledgement also in the Kitchen stop. The contrast between the children's and adult tours is another example of institutionalized polysemy, in which narratives of slavery and 19th century domestic life are either highlighted or downplayed.

In addition to these location-based stops, there are six "Anywhere Stops" on The General's Tour and one on Poll the Parrot's Tour. Two of the six General's Tour Anywhere Stops explicitly signal discussion of slavery ("Who Were Andrew Jackson's Slaves?" and "Jackson as a Slave Owner"), while the rest engage with the stories of women, religion, the

⁵ I will discuss the role of the time clock, conflicting organizational logics, and demands of customer in producing institutionalized polysemy in the standard mansion tour in Chapter 5.

preservation of the site, and the relationship between Andrew Jackson and Rachel (“Andrew and Rachel Jackson’s Letters”). The children’s tour Anywhere Stop is about “Children at The Hermitage” and includes a comparison of what life as a kid was like “depending on the color of your skin.” These Anywhere Stops serve to either a) achieve dislocation by divorcing the commentary from a given spot, or b) mark the entire property as relevant to that particular information. In either case, this generates institutionalized polysemy by providing multiple images of Jackson and 19th century life at a given location.

MUSEUM STORE MERCHANDISE

Finally, the bricolage of competing narratives and images is also evident in the Museum Store (staff are discouraged from referring to it as a “gift shop.”). The Museum Store, in addition to the mansion, is a space in which romantic and critical images of the slavery-era South coexist in tension with one another. Handmade soaps, recipe books, dried bolls of cotton, and decorative figures of Jackson are sold alongside W.E.B. DuBois’ *Souls of Black Folk* and books on Native American history. A shirt on display quoting Jackson read, “I was born for a storm, and a calm does not suit me” and another alluded to The Duel presentation with the words, “Keep your friends close...and enemies closer.” Southern nostalgia, the force of Jackson’s character and military heroism, and stories of marginalized people of color are all on the shelf.



Figure 2.11: A display at the Museum Store, showcasing romantic novels cataloguing Jackson’s relationship with his wife, Rachel, as well as nonfiction works on the Underground Railroad and the Trail of Tears. A packet of information about The Hermitage’s enslaved workers (adapted from a temporary exhibit on the Hermitage enslaved), as well as devotional candles featuring Harriet Tubman, are displayed for sale on the bottom shelf. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.



Figure 2.12: Shirts sold in the museum store evoke a sense of Jackson’s ruggedness, as in the child’s shirt on the left, as well as his presence on the \$20 bill and The Hermitage’s duel program and Rachel’s Garden (right). Photos by Elizabeth Barna.

On my way out of Jackson’s birthday celebration in 2018, I quickly ventured through the Museum Store, in which many representations of Jackson and the slavery-era South and West

mingled. A line of six or seven people waited as Andrew Jackson VI was signing large novelty \$20 bills, after having given a speech about his great-great-great grandfather at the tomb earlier that day. Jackson biographies covered a front table, and handmade soaps, Southern recipe books, decorative figures lined shelves toward the back of the store. Dried cotton stalks with bolls of cotton abounded, and ceramic and metal tabletop fountains brought the ambiance of a creek to the front of the store.



Figure 2.13: A section of the museum store focused on Southern and 19th-century cuisine, with cookbooks and roasted nuts for sale.

The Museum Store’s website includes a selection of products, and its division of categories is telling: Books, Collectibles, Home Décor, Gourmet Gifts, and Corporate Gifts. The Hermitage also partnered with two Tennessee staples, Goo Goo Clusters and Old Hickory Bourbon, to produce a special-edition “Andy’s Candy” to sell in the shop as a distinctly Tennessee souvenir. Institutionalized polysemy is also crystallized in the display of bobbleheads of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson alongside one of Confederate General Robert E. Lee (see Figure 2.14). Historical education and Southern nostalgia are presented side by side for visitors to consume at their discretion.



Figure 2.14: In the Museum Store, a bobblehead of Abraham Lincoln is sold alongside one of Robert E. Lee. Benjamin Franklin, “Uncle Sam,” and Presidents Washington and Jefferson bobbleheads are also available.

CONCLUSION

The Hermitage presents a barrage of images of Jackson, the plantation, and 19th-century America. This pattern of institutionalized polysemy is evident in the organization of The Hermitage’s website; in uses of the physical site itself; in special living history programs, tours, and classroom programs offered; in the standard museum and mansion presentations for tourists; and in merchandise sold at the Museum Store. Within each of these domains, there is often a striking juxtaposition of competing narratives within a compressed space or time frame: Jackson as a slaveowner, as a devoted family man and adopted father, as a passionate general and advocate for the “common man,” and as a destroyer of indigenous peoples.

Following German studies and collective memory scholar Daniel Reynolds’ (2018) focus on the possibilities for visitor experience in his study of the production of Holocaust tourist sites, I will consider potential responses to this barrage of representations presented in this polysemous environment. Visitors may find the conflicting images of Jackson jarring (both emotionally and morally) or exhausting, or they may find it pleasant to be able to connect with certain aspects of

Jackson's identity or of The Hermitage's programming that they identify with. In Chapter 5, I will explicitly discuss visitor responses to the site's programming and the ways in which varied visitor reactions to Jackson and his legacy encourage polysemy rather than a unified representation.

In the chapters that follow, I explore factors that contribute to this institutionalized polysemy at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, particularly with respect to representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy. I begin by discussing The Hermitage as place, and specifically, produced place, focusing on the manner in which the aesthetics of this visually pleasing green space contrast with staff statements about the cruelties of slavery, and in which the optics of a nearly all-white interpretive staff contrast with the realities of Jackson's time. Then I discuss the The Hermitage as institution, examining how a complicated institutional legacy that oscillates between historic house museum and presidential site leads to the representation of multiple nesting geographies simultaneously. Finally, I will discuss The Hermitage as a service industry workplace, analyzing the manner in which interactions between staff members and visitors, and the nature of the customer service relationship, shape representations of difficult histories on site.

CHAPTER III. THE IMPACT OF AESTHETICS, OPTICS, AND NOSTALGIA

“Make no mistake. This may look like a fantasyland, but during Jackson’s time, this was a working plantation, where people made in the image of God were treated like cattle.”

-Tony, historic interpreter while presenting upstairs

“The grounds are beautiful and relaxing. I just don’t care for him as a person.”

-Commenter on a Facebook advertisement for Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage

To put it simply, The Hermitage is a beautiful place. With lush lawns and a park-like setting, a wooded area with a creek running through it, a small cotton field and vegetable gardens, and a large ornamental garden that belonged to Rachel Jackson, the grounds are unmistakably gorgeous and impeccably maintained. The well-preserved Greek Revival style mansion with over 90 percent original artifacts inside is visually impressive as well, especially when decorated for Christmas.



Figure 3.1: A view of lush lawns, blooming crepe myrtle trees, and a blue sky from the back porch of the mansion. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.

During Jackson’s time, however, the Hermitage property looked, sounded, and felt quite different. It was not a park-like green space, but a “working plantation” where over 150 people were enslaved at a time, as interpreter Tony frequently reminded visitors during his tours. There

are currently three intact slave cabins onsite, yet they stand quietly and peacefully—not crowded with 20 or more people each. They are situated on lush lawns rather than massive fields of wheat, corn, or cotton or bustling work yards echoing with the voices of enslaved families or the crack of an overseer’s whip. The brutality and embodied reality of slavery fades, and nostalgic images of Southern and rural charm rise to the forefront. This raises the question of the role aesthetics play in presenting multiple representations of Jackson and his legacy, and in sending conflicting messages to visitors about the realities of 19th-century life for African-Americans in particular.

In this chapter, I highlight the role of aesthetics and optics in creating institutionalized polysemy in The Hermitage’s representations of Jackson and of 19th-century America, particularly with regard to agriculture and chattel slavery. Here, I use “aesthetics” to refer to the beauty and ambiance of the site and air of southern hospitality, and “optics” to refer to the messages presented by the way historic interpreters appear—particularly their demographic characteristics. In various domains, aesthetics evoke a sense of nostalgia, and clashes between the messages on signage and the beauty of the landscape present visitors with multiple ways of interpreting their experience on-site. When discussing aesthetics and optics, I focus primarily on the mansion, garden, grounds, and slave cabins, and save my discussion of the Andrew Jackson Center’s “Born for a Storm” Exhibit when discussing museum genre in Chapter 4. I reserve my discussion of the legacy of Indian Removal and Jackson’s relationship with Native Americans for the subsequent chapters on geography and genre and on the site’s strong customer service orientation.

Following sociologist of art Howard Becker, this dissertation “does not itself make aesthetic judgments,” but rather “treats aesthetic judgments as characteristic phenomena of collective activity” (p. 39). At The Hermitage, staff and visitors alike make meaning of this simultaneously preserved and embellished 19th-century landscape through a 21st-century lens, and the site has been described by individual staff, institutional documents, and guests as “beautiful,” “peaceful,” “relaxing,” “stunning,” “tranquil,” and “gorgeous.” In this manner, aesthetics and optics encompass not just the visual or otherwise sensory experience of visiting the site, but also a “coherent and defensible” set of built and embodied characteristics that “stabilize values and thus...regularize practice” (Becker 2008, p. 134).

The establishment and maintenance of a given aesthetic on site allows for the establishment of “regular patterns of cooperation” (Becker 2008, p. 134) in the production and consumption of The Hermitage as a historic plantation site. This collective understanding of the site as a beautiful green space, combined with contemporary understandings of Jackson’s era and slavery presented on modern-day signage, audio tour material, and presentation by costumed interpreters, contributes to institutionalized polysemy at the site.

I also draw on the concept of *aesthetic labor* (Warhurst and Nickson 2007) and introduce the concept of *aesthetic management* to outline the manner in which the labor of both frontline and curatorial and maintenance staff contribute to the nostalgic imagery and ambiance of the site, even as the formal materials presented at the site by these same staff highlight the individuality of enslaved people and the reality of slavery at The Hermitage. This builds on anthropological work on tourism that explores the ways that a destination “is produced as a site” can ultimately “subvert...the main message of the professional staff who are the producers” (Bruner 2004, p.

140). What impact might the beauty of Rachel's Garden or the tranquility of its grassy fields have in subverting educational efforts by staff about the legacy of slavery at the site? Bruner (2004) argues that the physical production of the space itself is crucial at "quietly contested" sites in which the staff's messaging about the site contrasts with visitors' preconceived notions of the site.

BEAUTY, SOUTHERN NOSTALGIA, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY AT THE HERMITAGE

As I noted above, there is a disconnect between The Hermitage's 21st-century appearance as a tourist attraction and its 19th-century appearance as a slavery-era plantation. Yet linkages between the two, namely through the presence of costumed interpreters, original buildings and artifacts, the ownership and maintenance of nearly Jackson's entire original property by the museum, and reproduction items to make the site feel "alive," seek to blur the distinction between then and now. Here, I outline key elements of aesthetics and optics that can produce a sense of nostalgia, which when paired with interpreters' and signage's presentation of slavery and limited reference to Indian Removal, contributes to institutionalized polysemy at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage.

Here, I define nostalgia as a feeling of longing for a "simpler" past and for 19th-century imagery and craftsmanship, particularly in our postindustrial age of postmodernity. Nostalgia in this conception entails both a warm orientation toward an agrarian, pre-industrial past and can include a sense of sadness or loss in the present absence of it. This is consistent with Davis' notion of nostalgia as a sense of sadness and longing in his 1979 book, *Yearning for Yesterday*.

In my conception, nostalgia can both build and reflect identity, which aligns with contemporary notions that nostalgia is key to a sense of self and can be beneficial in an ever-changing world (Wilson 2005).

The Hermitage Mansion

The Hermitage mansion is decorated and restored to appear as it would have to “a guest in 1837, when Jackson returned from two terms in the White House,” as interpreters often share with visitors when they open their tours. Over 90 percent of the non-fabric artifacts in the home are original, “not only to the time period, but to the Jackson family,” I would often boast to visitors before they entered the historic home. Original paintings of Jackson and his family, a 19th-century guitar that belonged to Jackson’s daughter-in-law, and a robe and slippers that Jackson wore are several points of interest in the mansion.

Using objects in the mansion to highlight key elements of 19th century life is a major component of mansion tours, which can have a nostalgia-generating effect through guide *naming* and *framing* of the object (MacCannell 2013). Interpreter Lorraine presented to a group of young, mostly white school children with two or three adult chaperones by showing the wallpaper in the entry hall and asking, “Does anybody know how old it is?” and adding that Rachel Jackson ordered it out of a catalogue. “Have you all studied the Battle of New Orleans?” and then directed the group to have a look at the bayonet on the table in the formal parlor. “He’d talk about it for a long time, and you had to sit and listen to him,” she added with a chuckle. She gestured toward the lamp and revealed that the lamp used to burn lard. “Do you know what lard is? Hardened grease like for pork chops. Come on over here. This is the family parlor.” The

group peered into a room furnished with a pianoforte, a French guitar, and a flute. “Do you think they played video games in there? No? Maybe?”

Visitors, too, often anticipate seeing original items that actually belonged to the Jacksons. As a teenage boy joked with his companion as they waited in a long line, “Maybe we’ll see a desk,” and mocked a potential interpreter saying, “This was the General’s favorite candlestick.” He appeared to bring expectations from other historic house tours—which focus on the family and the objects—to his experience at The Hermitage, and those expectations are largely realized during a mansion tour at the site.

Mansion Tours, Hospitality, and Positioning Visitors as White

A large component of a visit to The Hermitage mansion is not only the ability to view original items from Jackson’s lifetime, but to also experience the “Southern hospitality.” The rooms and artifacts in the mansion are kept safe and temperature controlled with glass panels, so that visitors can look into the rooms but not enter them. This, reads a staff memo on costuming and interpretation, makes it necessary for the interpreter to make guests feel like they are at home and actually there. This both addresses the needs of visitors who feel nostalgic for a “simpler time” and generates nostalgia among those who don’t enter the site feeling it⁶.

Part of generating nostalgia through a 19th-century aesthetic is performing Southern hospitality. During training, lead interpreter June said that one of the first things we as interpreters should do when guests enter the mansion is to “make them feel welcome.” She suggested saying, “Come on in! It’s warm inside,” and encouraging guests to “Let your eyes adjust” under the dim light of the original chandelier in the entry hall. “You have such a

⁶ As my chair Shaul Kelner suggested during a conversation about nostalgia, “Even people who aren’t nostalgic know that there is such thing as ‘Gone with the Wind’ nostalgia, and can enjoy playing with it for a bit.”

soothing voice,” lead interpreter Janet complimented me, and lead interpreter June frequently complimented me on my “sweet smile.” Interpreters with Southern accents had an advantage in producing a sense of being “at home” at a Southern plantation, with the accent being an artifact in and of itself⁷.

One interpreter described the Jacksons’ use of expensive but clean-burning whale oil in their chandelier as “Southern hospitality at its best.” Seasoned interpreter Maryanne, who was born in Tennessee and is in her early eighties, assured visitors that Jackson was known for his hospitality and that “whether you were dirt poor, wealthy...you were always welcome here.” She described the lavish meals guests would be invited to in the dining room, and conceded good-naturedly that “poor Betty the cook” was “always busy,” without mentioning Betty’s enslaved status. For Cameron, an interpreter in his mid-seventies, hospitality was the most important thing to convey to visitors.

There were limits to appealing to nostalgic images of the Old South, however, Education director Anna lamented one day that there was an older interpreter who “sounded so southern” and would say things like, “sweet little Hannah,” referring to the enslaved housekeeper, or declare that, “There were happy times at The Hermitage! Happy times!”⁸ Similarly, interpretive manager Robert admonished the room of staff during a morning meeting, that we should not try to mimic the dialect of an enslaved person when presenting the history of the enslaved. The younger interpreters in the room and I looked at each other in shock, while the older interpreters’ response seemed a bit more muted.

⁷ Lead interpreter Janet, from Mississippi, said that a man once told her, “I could just sit here all day and listen to you talk.” This occasionally veered into sexual harassment, as she noted that “men have their fantasies” about women in historic costumes, and that one man once asked what was under her day dress.

⁸ This interpreter was fired after a very short tenure at the site, largely because he could not retain many of the details about the mansion and family.

Perhaps most importantly, mansion tours at The Hermitage implicitly *position all visitors as white*, regardless of their race. This is achieved by welcoming tourists of all races and ethnicities through the front door of the mansion and painting a verbal picture of what a visit to “the President’s home” may have been like in 1837. This tension between the positioning of visitors as white and the occasional presence of a Black or otherwise non-white guest was particularly apparent when Lorraine, a middle-aged interpreter with shoulder-length reddish hair and a light blue dress, shared with me on our first day of training that the director of education told her that she should not say, “*You* would have sat in that parlor,” but instead use the word “guests” or an alternative to speaking in the second person. In other words, The Hermitage sought to keep this implicit whitening from being made explicit by interpreters. This positioning of all visitors as white is necessary in providing a nostalgic hospitality and a recreation of a 19th-century visit to The Hermitage, but grates against museum content and staff discussion of the realities of slavery and racial inequality in Jackson’s era.

This tension between recognizing the race of enslaved people as African-American while striving for whitening during contemporary tours in the present suggests that *colorblind racism* (Bonilla-Silva 2010) and *white fragility* (DiAngelo 2018) can operate in an internally inconsistent manner when relaying histories of enslavement to diverse contemporary audiences. This includes the counterintuitive notion of implicit whitening of visitors at a plantation site where notions of race governed status and social interactions.

The Hermitage Garden, Grounds, and Slave Dwellings

The Hermitage grounds and historic buildings are well-kept, pristine, and largely quiet in the absence of guests. During Jackson’s lifetime, up to ten or so Jacksons and 150 enslaved

people lived on the property at any given time. The Hermitage was not a managed historic site, but a slavery-era plantation, where cotton was the main cash crop, and where corn, wheat, oats, hemp, and tobacco were also grown and dairy and beef cattle, hogs, and chickens were raised and slaughtered. Here, I discuss the tensions between past and present-day uses of the site, as well as tensions between what historic interpreters say about the Jacksonian era and what visitors see at the site itself. Even at a site that places increasing importance on interpreting slavery, these tensions generate a multitude of conflicting meanings and allow for a variety of interpretations of Jackson's life and legacy, and of 19th-century life more generally.

The Hermitage property is currently 1,120 acres—nearly all of the 1,200 acres Jackson owned at the plantation's peak—and is mostly open grassy fields and some woodlands. These fields and woodlands are punctuated by the mansion, three intact slave cabins and the footprints of six others, and by Rachel's ornamental garden, a two-acre cotton field, and several small vegetable and herb gardens (maintained by the Master Gardeners of Davidson County). The Hermitage's website presents the garden and grounds as "Andrew Jackson's retreat," as opposed to Andrew Jackson's Former Plantation, or A Site of Enslaved Labor, 1804-1864. This characterization affirms many visitors' notions of plantation sites as sites of relaxation and nostalgia—a step into a "simpler" time—by framing it from Jackson's perspective rather than that of those he enslaved.



Figure 3.2: The “Garden & Grounds” segment of The Hermitage’s website, featuring a banner image of spring flowers in Rachel’s Garden, and a subtitle describing the property as “Andrew Jackson’s retreat.” Screenshoted November of 2019.

At the garden, mansion, and grounds alike, there is tension between presence and conspicuous absence, particularly in terms of original items, reproductions, and evidence of agriculture, and discuss the manner in which this tension contributes to institutionalized polysemy at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage.

Rachel’s Garden

Rachel’s Garden is a centerpiece of the Hermitage property, featuring a reproduced English-style garden with geometric quadrants of herbs and flowers enclosing small lawn areas. Andrew and Rachel Jackson’s tomb stands in the back righthand corner of the garden, where there is a small family cemetery with 17 graves, as well as the grave of Alfred Jackson, a formerly enslaved man who became a tenant farmer upon emancipation and a tour guide when The Hermitage opened as a museum in 1889.

Squirrels scurry through the garden, browsing for food, and interpreters routinely feed them nuts. The garden blooms with peonies, oak leaf hydrangea, tulip tree, and foxglove in the spring, and butterflies in a wide array of colors flutter through the Mexican sunflowers in summer as stately crape myrtles bloom. “It’s a beautiful garden,” a middle-aged woman wearing an event vendor lanyard noted during Fall Fest in October. Cardinal couples perch together in

the quince tree near the family cemetery, and unseen birds chatter and whistle to one another between the willow and quince trees. The fragrance of roses greets visitors to the garden in spring, and in summer the ageratum unveils its tiny blue pincushion blooms beneath the willows beside the tomb. An overnight security contractor, hired after Jackson’s tomb was vandalized in April of 2018, declared, “I could sit here all day and take pictures!” when I relieved them by coming to the garden for an opening shift.

Indeed, Rachel’s Garden was one of my favorite stations in the summer because of its beauty and relative quiet, as compared to working at the mansion with its steady flow of visitors. A volunteer name Roy came into the garden one morning where I was stationed, saying “I hope I’m not interrupting your solitude” as he joined me and explained that he “wanted to see if they did anything with that area in front of the garden.” He declared that the space, once littered with dying seasonal plants, had been cleared out and “looks much better.” Immediately after Jackson’s tomb was vandalized, an interpreter was scheduled to be the “opener” for the day and began their rotation in the garden, long before any guest would arrive. A peaceful post and with the promise of leaving earlier in the day, this was a vied-for position—especially among interpreters who were avid readers.



Figure 3.3: The center of Rachel’s Garden in early spring. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.

Jackson's Tomb and Alfred's Grave

The Tomb of Andrew and Rachel Jackson is a centerpiece of the garden and features as a highlight of the tours. It is one of many places on the property in which Jackson is presented as a humble high-achiever, as a rough-and-tumble general, and as a devoted husband with a sensitive side. The simple engraving of "General Andrew Jackson" on Andrew's grave and the lengthy, poetic epitaph on Rachel's signals to visitors that Jackson was a humble "man of the people" who deeply loved his wife. It is also a site that concentrates sentiment, becoming a focal point for strongly held emotions about what Jackson represents to people: Visitors have left candle lit beside Jackson's tomb as a gesture of reverence. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one or more people secretly entered The Hermitage property at night and spray painted on the tomb in April of 2018. The Hermitage as an organization never revealed to interpreters what the graffiti said, but it was rumored to have been "Indian Killer," along with "profanity" and "anarchy signs." In this manner, vandals recognized the aesthetics of the tomb as key to The Hermitage's enshrinement of Jackson and decided to challenge this with spray paint.

The small headstone marking Alfred Jackson's grave, positioned roughly three yards from the tomb, is one of the most explicit reminders of the presence of the enslaved during Jackson's time. The plot is marked off with a simple black chain and four posts, and the stone itself reads,

UNCLE ALFRED
DIED
SEPT. 4, 1901
AGED
98 YEARS
FAITHFUL SERVANT OF
ANDREW JACKSON

The signage accompanying Alfred's grave presents him to visitors as "a former Hermitage enslaved worker" who "requested that the Ladies' Hermitage Association bury him next to Jackson's tomb." A black and white photo portrait of Alfred sits to the right of the caption, which itself is included on a larger sign interpreting "Rachel and Andrew's Tomb." Discussion of Alfred and of the enslaved more generally tends to focus on the individuality and humanity of each enslaved person, as opposed to framing the enslaved as victims of a systemic racial hierarchy or Jackson as an individual perpetrator. It seems that humanizing enslaved people is a sensible organizational goal in a society that has historically degraded and animalized Blackness. However, this restoration of humanity, when combined with downplaying the abuses of slavery as a system of race-based oppression, serves to mask the systemic.

As one might imagine, the presence of the antiquated language of "faithful servant" and "uncle" generates a range of possible interpretations by guests. While working in the garden as an interpreter, I witnessed countless visitors exclaiming excitedly "Uncle Alfred!" or reading the title matter-of-factly on the stone. The Hermitage has sought to distance its current position from the language the Ladies' Hermitage Association used in 1901 by explaining in the audio tour that the Andrew Jackson Foundation decided to keep the original stone in place as an "education tool," and noting on the signage that "The marker reads 'Uncle Alfred' because in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the terms 'uncle' and 'auntie' were considered a polite way of addressing elderly black people," adding that "No longer used today, these terms are now seen as derogatory."

Still, the tension between the original stone and contemporary museum materials is often lost on visitors, who base their interpretation of Alfred's experience on the carved stone—a clear

and concrete visual that to some visitors, speaks for itself. A visitor’s TripAdvisor photo of Alfred’s gravestone in October of 2019 includes a caption, “Special grave for one of Jackson’s slaves,” which suggests that some visitors either enter with a (mis)understanding of slavery as benevolent, or that they gain this (mis)understanding by prioritizing the artifact over educational scaffolding as a source of knowledge. However, I also frequently observed visitors highlighting Alfred’s humanity and agency amidst structural inequality, noting “He was a smart man,” after listening to the audio tour segment about Alfred trading items he had bought from the Jacksons post-emancipation for this burial spot. The relationship between what visitors see and what they hear is complex, and multiple interpretations of Alfred’s burial in the garden are possible.



Figure 3.4: Alfred’s gravestone adorned with stones (left) and a flower picked from the garden (right), presumably by visitors but possibly by a volunteer or staff member. I saw his stone adorned in this manner on at least three occasions over the course of my fieldwork. Photos by Elizabeth Barna.

The Hermitage Grounds

The present-day appearance of the grounds also present visitors with a largely nostalgic view of this plantation site as tranquil and beautiful. The view from the back porch of the mansion is of sprawling, well-manicured lawns rather than the busy work yard, domestic animals, and massive cotton fields that would have been present and visible in Jackson’s time. A mile-long “nature loop” guides visitors past a babbling stream and a spring to the footprints of four slave quarters located at the back of the property, and the present-day site of the former cotton gin and field greets guests with a picturesque field of tall grass.



Figure 3.5: Deer are a common sight on the Hermitage grounds on a spring morning. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.



Figure 3.6: A spring held sacred by many enslaved people at The Hermitage who observed West African traditions. Called Muddy Spring by white settlers, the spring has never run dry in The Hermitage’s history. The spring feeds a stream that runs near the field quarters. Photo taken by Elizabeth Barna, November 15, 2019.

The quietness and tranquility of Rachel’s Garden and the Hermitage grounds belie its history as a space maintained by enslaved workers under the threat of force. Some historic interpreters highlight the differences in the site during Jackson’s lifetime, emphasizing that this was not a “fantasyland” but a place of brutality where “people made in the image of God were treated like cattle,” as historic interpreter Tony put it during a tour of the upstairs portion of the mansion. Yet even with staff noting the distinctions in aesthetics, there is a question of how much horror one can imagine amidst beauty. As Janet once told me during training, “Visitors won’t remember everything you say, but they will remember what they see.”



Figure 3.7: Photo from The Hermitage’s Wedding and Event Rentals site, of a bride and groom posing at the site of a former cotton field on the property.

Intact Slave Dwellings

There are three intact slave cabins at The Hermitage, including Alfred’s Cabin and The First Hermitage (a set of two buildings, one of which was once a two-story cabin where the Jacksons lived before the mansion’s construction). The First Hermitage’s buildings are not furnished, but instead have informational signs on the walls, elements of the architecture (chinking and hidey holes) exposed, and archaeological artifacts in glass cases. Alfred’s Cabin, on the other hand, is furnished with reproduction items to appear as it was around the time of Alfred’s death in 1901. A simple four-poster bed, a basket with sewing materials, and a drinking gourd (which the lead curator put in as “artistic license” in reference to the spiritual “Follow the Drinking Gourd”), as well as a pot of reproduction beans and a plates of faux fish and vegetables are some items on display. Both The First Hermitage and Alfred’s Cabin contrast with the interior of the mansion, in which over 90 percent of the non-textile and non-food items are original.⁹



Figure 3.8: Guests approaching Alfred’s Cabin and reading the signage along the way. Photo by Elizabeth Barna, November 15, 2019

⁹ This is largely due to the history of the museum’s 130-year history and the Ladies’ Hermitage Association’s emphasis on preserving Jackson’s legacy, not those of the enslaved.

As compared to the mansion, there is a relative lack of historic interpreters present at the slave dwellings on-site. “Covering” the interior of the mansion by having an interpreter in each section of the house to present to guests and protect the original artifacts is the first priority. The First Hermitage has no interpreter present, and it is not included as a rotation for interpreters, and Alfred’s Cabin is an optional station only available in the summer when there is a large staff presence that day. This dearth of direct interaction between historic interpreters and members of the public at slave dwellings makes it harder to combat visitor misconceptions about slavery, or to supplement visual input from the site’s aesthetic with qualifying information. For example, there is only one bed in Alfred’s Cabin as it stands today and as it was in a photo of Alfred in his cabin around the time of his death after emancipation, when he was a tenant farmer and tour guide. During the time of slavery, however, ten people would have lived in that room. If visitors do not read the accompanying signage closely, they may draw from preconceived understandings of a “slave cabin” and assume that a slavery-era dwelling is what is being presented.

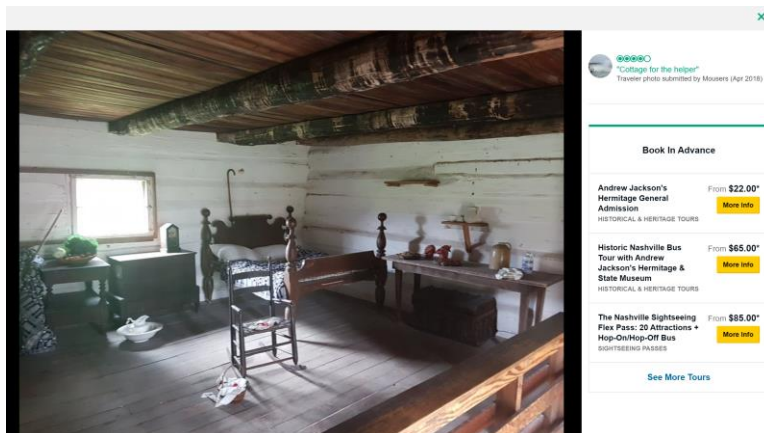


Figure 3.9: Photo of the interior of Alfred’s Cabin taken by a TripAdvisor reviewer and posted in April of 2018 with the caption, “Cottage for the helper.” Screenshoted November 19, 2019.

The decision to furnish Alfred’s Cabin to appear as a post-emancipation dwelling was also challenging. Members of the curatorial team explained to me that they did not want to unintentionally make Alfred’s Cabin or the other cabins to look “too nice” and give a false impression of enslaved life or life soon after emancipation, yet they also didn’t want to make it

so poorly furnished that it appeared to guests that the museum didn't care about the enslaved or their history. Regardless of the manner in which the cabin was furnished, there is a chance that guests would interpret the outcome as "whitewashing history" or as degrading the legacy of the enslaved. This suggests that visitors acknowledge aesthetics as something that the organization *produces* rather than something that "just is," and that agency on the part of curatorial and maintenance staff and of visitors are key to the generation of institutionalized polysemy through aesthetics.



Figure 3.10: The fireplace in Alfred's Cabin, with lemons, beans, fish, and other foods believed to have been available. Photo by Elizabeth Barna, April 7, 2019.

The Memorial to the Enslaved

A Memorial to the Enslaved stands toward the very back of the property, immediately beside the Hermitage Church, the Donelson family cemetery, and the Confederate cemetery associated with the confederate soldiers' home on the property. This memorial was added to the Hermitage landscape in 2009, after the remains of 61 enslaved people were uncovered during

development on the former site of the neighboring Ingleside and Cleveland Hall Plantations, owned by the Donelsons, in 2006. The bodies were exhumed and moved to the Hermitage property, because of the close relationship between the Jacksons and the Donelsons, an administrator explained.

The bodies were interred under a low rock wall encircled with large boulders and trees planted in the shape of the Drinking Gourd. The design for the memorial, titled “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” was derived from a design contest sponsored by The Cracker Barrel Foundation, as administrator Joseph Edwards explained during the 2017 Black History Month Memorial Service. This exhumation and reinterment of enslaved people’s bodies, and the construction of the memorial, is a particularly compelling form of aesthetic management, especially since the location of The Hermitage’s enslaved cemetery is unknown. The presence of the memorial immediately next to a Confederate cemetery and the cemetery of a slaveholding family further contributes to institutionalized polysemy on-site.

Seasonal Changes in Aesthetics and the Role of Aesthetic Management in Crafting Visitor Experiences

The appearance of the Hermitage mansion and property is not static throughout the year, however, but rather changes seasonally through shifting weather conditions and also through staff effort. I term this staff effort at generating a seasonally appropriate aesthetic for the site *aesthetic management*. Examples of aesthetic management include decorating the mansion for Christmas, covering the mansion’s mirrors in a black shroud to commemorate Rachel Jackson’s death, opening the mansion at nighttime in the fall to lead ghost tours, and holding a Victorian Easter egg workshop.

Aesthetic management entails managing a tension between faithfulness to historic accuracy and “artistic license” to curate the mansion in a manner that provides visitors with something to learn and something they might expect seasonally. The curatorial staff do not place a Christmas tree in the mansion, as the Christmas tree did not become popular in this part of the United States until the “Victorian Christmas explosion” later in the century, but a group of staff and volunteers did arrive early in the morning soon after Thanksgiving to weave artificial evergreen garland and faux fruit along the rail of the cantilever staircase and on the mantles and to hang a magnolia wreath on the front door.

Chief curator Wanda admitted that this was likely more décor than the Jacksons would have had, but that visitors come from Opryland or other Nashville tourist sites and wonder, “Where is the Christmas stuff?” True to Jackson’s era, curatorial staff also place faux sillabub (a 19th-century foamy drink), bundt cakes, and candies in the parlors and reproduction firecrackers in the grandchildren’s rooms to commemorate Christmas, and Rachel Jackson’s bonnet (bloodied from bloodletting procedures) in Jackson’s bedroom to remind visitors that Rachel died on December 22nd and was buried on Christmas Eve.

This aesthetic management of the site by curation staff, security, and maintenance team couples with emotional labor by frontline interpreters to produce varying emotional responses in visitors to the site. The script in the mansion varies from season to season, and from tour to tour, based on these changes as well. The shift in built and natural environment and in frontline staff presentations need to align in order to generate a cohesive aesthetic.



Figure 3.11: Photo of sample Victorian Easter eggs and baskets of chocolate for workshop attendees (left), and the author's Victorian Easter egg, featuring three bunnies and a bouquet of flowers topped with a bluebird (right).

The week of the anniversary of Jackson's death, for example, the tomb had black shrouds hung on the fence, and a magnolia wreath graced Jackson's grave. In the museum, a sign printed on poster board with foxing read "Farewell, General Jackson!" with a portrait of him seated in the center, hands folded. Text on the sign included, "On June 8, 1845 America said farewell to one of the country's most legendary figures, President Andrew Jackson. With nearly three thousand people in attendance, President Jackson was buried in the Hermitage garden next to his beloved wife beneath an ornate cupola in the family cemetery." Outside the mansion, interpreters wore sprigs of rosemary in their pockets to demonstrate the manner in which attendees of Jackson's funeral would have masked the odor of decomposition. An empty cylindrical cage with a couple of red and gray feathers serves as an object interpreters can point out to talk about Poll, Jackson's African Grey parrot who swore at the funeral so persistently that he needed to be removed.



Figure 3.12: Jackson’s bedroom (left) with 19th-century medicines and a lancet for bloodletting on the table and the mirror shrouded in black, for The Hermitage’s “Farewell, General Jackson” exhibit on the anniversary of his death. The formal parlor (right), similarly outfitted with black shrouds and candles, to make it appear as though his body had just been removed from the room and buried. Photos by Elizabeth Barna, June 8, 2019.

As one might imagine, seasonal shifts in the artifacts and décor can present a challenge in terms of relaying information to guests in a given amount of time (I discuss this further in the chapter on customer service). Lead interpreter Lorraine encouraged us to “Just mention one or two things” when family heirlooms were laid out in the family parlor as Christmas presents. “Don’t stress yourself out over it. Incorporate it into the narrative.” Giving an example, she continued, “The aquamarine necklace belonged to Sarah. We think it was passed down from Rachel to Sarah, after her death, through Junior. It makes sense she would have a March birthstone.” Inserting a snippet of seasonal narrative into the broader narrative in the mansion introduces an element of institutionalized polysemy by adding a seasonal layer to the plethora of other representations of Jackson, slavery, genocide, and 19th-century life represented at the site.

THE OPTICS OF HISTORIC COSTUMING AND STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS, AND THE PRODUCTION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY THROUGH AESTHETIC LABOR AND MANAGEMENT

Historic costuming and staff demographics are another domain in which we see presence and conspicuous absence that contribute to the overall aesthetics and optics of the site, and to institutionalized polysemy. Interpretive staff also contribute to the aesthetics and optics of the site, both through costuming and their personal demographic characteristics. As lead interpreter Robert expressed, “People want stories. Bringing living history in. That’s what people want to see,” and to which interpreter Charla nodded in response. During a staff training on historic costuming toward the end of my time at The Hermitage, Robert shared that the site was at risk of losing the costumes (a move that many similarly situated sites have made¹⁰) and “we’ve got one shot to get it right.” Robert continued, “I’ll tell [the president and CEO] right to his face” that without the costumes, “the site is dead.” A subsequent staff policy handout reiterated that costumes make up for the items in the mansion being behind glass, and that costumed interpreters help compensate for the disappointment among guests of not being able to enter the rooms.

¹⁰ Interpreters I have talked to about costuming believe that this shift is due to the cost of purchasing or making historically accurate costumes. I do wonder, however, what role the optics of white nostalgia might play in this decision as well.



Figure 3.13: Articles of reproduction women’s clothing (left) and bonnet and costuming books (right) on display during a staff training on historic costuming.

Historic interpreters bring a nostalgic aesthetic to mansion tours at the Hermitage. We wear historically correct costumes, with women in 1830s day dresses, bonnets, pelerines, and petticoats, and men in 1830s vests and slacks. Costumes provide a tangible look into the past and allow guests to engage in conversation and ask questions about what life was like during Jackson’s time. Indeed, an older white woman visiting The Hermitage with a friend posted a photo of themselves with a male historic interpreter in an 1830s reproduction cloak and black top hat to TripAdvisor, with the pillars and dome of Jackson’s tomb visible in the background. Her review was titled, “See How Life Was.”

A visitor I spoke to on the front porch said that when interpreter Maryanne spoke in the mansion, “it was like you were there.” Maryanne has worked at the site for over forty years and has sewn all of her own costumes. That day, she wore a magenta day dress with a white lace pelerine and a white bonnet. Beneath the dress, she wore black loafers and black socks, which are comfortable but not visible to the public. Her Tennessee accent likely enhanced the

experience for this visitor, as Janet who is from Mississippi shared with me, “sometimes the men just want to listen to you talk.”

Wearing and maintaining a historic costume requires extensive labor, both on an off-site. Warhurst and Nickson (2007) coined the term *aesthetic labor* to encompass the process by which employers require workers to manage their faces, physiques, body modifications, voices, hair styles, and other embodied features in order to “enhance the economic value of the service being provided” (Pietrykowski 2019, p. 61). Aesthetic labor is crucial to the work of historic interpreters at The Hermitage, with the older women staff members frequently fixing younger interpreters’ bonnets or letting them know if their petticoat was showing. Janet showed me that there was a drawstring on the top and bottom of my bonnet and asked if it was “too tight” after she adjusted it. “You’re so pretty,” she assured me as I nodded, my ears slightly squished. Ellen shared that she puts her hair in an especially high ponytail beneath the bonnet to make the bonnet “poof.”

Rose and I, who are roughly the same age, admitted to one another that we wore leggings or jeans underneath our petticoats to stay warm on cold days. Janet was relieved to find a plain red scarf she could wear with her costume, since it was the only thing she had that was “passable” for a historic scarf. Gwen frequently asked if her pelerine adequately hid the small tattoo on her neck, and purchased wire rimmed glasses during her tenure at The Hermitage that were “historically ambiguous”—in other words, passable in the eyes of the average visitor. Although historical accuracy was a goal, comfort and cost-effectiveness were acceptable compromises, so long as the given article matched with visitors’ sense of a 19th-century aesthetic.



Figure 3.14: Photo of me with a fellow interpreter, posted on Facebook by the interpreter and used with her permission. This photo was taken in the early months of my fieldwork, when I still wore modern-looking red acrylic glasses (which guests frequently noticed and commented on), before a seasoned interpreter gave me her blue coal scuttle bonnet to wear over the white day cap, and before I realized that the white day cap has draw strings to make it smaller on my head—and that I should wear it further back on my scalp.

Indeed, the costumes were widely perceived as “out of place” beyond the Hermitage property. Gwen frequently shopped in her costume after a shift at the mansion, and ensured to keep her nametag on so that passersby understood that the long, patterned dress and petticoat were for work. She had become accustomed to being stared at, until finally many of the staff at her local store recognized her. I asked her what she thought of the costumes being a work requirement, and she said, “If it weren’t for the costumes, I wouldn’t work here.” For her, they are a major part of the fun of the work itself. Annette, too, enjoyed historic costuming and had extensive experience in hand-sewing and modeling Regency-era wear.



Figure 3.15: Selfie of the author in 1830s reproduction period dress, including a blue flower-patterned cotton day dress, a white lace pelerine around the collar, a cameo brooch, and a day cap.

I wore my costume to work to save time on dressing when I arrived, but often changed clothes before heading home at the end of the day. On my way to work one September morning, I got into a fender bender less than a mile from my home. I was wearing most of my costume (the day dress and petticoat) and got out of the car. It ended up being a hit and run (much longer story than is relevant here), but when a passerby, a Black woman in her late forties, asked if I was okay, I thanked her and said, “I was on my way to work. I’m in my costume and everything.” “Oh!” she said, her eyes lighting up. “I bet you thought I was an Amish woman trying to drive for the first time!” I realized jokingly, and she laughed. “I have the rest of my costume in the car. I could put my bonnet on!” I joked. The woman roared with laughter and said, “That would be even more distressing.” In the case of the hit and run, I actually changed out of my costume in a port-a-potty at a construction site across the street before I called the police.

However, although the staff’s costumes reflect life at the plantation in the 1830s, their demographics don’t. The interpretation staff is almost exclusively white, with only one person of color (who often passes as white) on the interpretive staff during my observation period. Ticket office, garden, and grounds staff are also nearly exclusively white. During Jackson’s time, enslaved Black residents of the Hermitage outnumbered white residents by a ratio of at

least 10 to 1. With an almost exclusively white staff in historic dress, it becomes difficult for guests to interact with and understand a history that does not center white experiences.

Challenges and Efforts at Representing Enslaved People through Living History

At the time of this writing, The Hermitage as an institution has begun actively recruiting Black historic interpreters, but no Black interpreters worked at The Hermitage during the course of my fieldwork¹¹. Several Black interpreters had worked at the site previously, and I learned from current white interpreters that guests often questioned or challenged Black interpreters. Historic interpreters wore the same costumes, regardless of race, and guests would say to Black interpreters, “You wouldn’t be wearing that back then.” Amy, a middle-aged security guard, recounted a time when she heard a guest remark about a Black interpreter returning to the break room, “Look at the slave going back to the slave cabin!” Although The Hermitage as an organization has historically sought to “whiten” visitors and staff alike, there is no guarantee that visitors will do the same. This renders Black historic interpreters vulnerable to racist treatment by guests.

Members of the Slave Dwelling Project, a collective of experienced Black historic interpreters, were invited to The Hermitage to commemorate Juneteenth in 2019 with living history demonstrations, a conversation about slavery and contemporary America, and also for a sleepover in a slave dwelling. Megan, a Black Slave Dwelling Project member with Gullah Geechee ancestry, shared during her visit that she had left her previous job as an interpreter at a plantation site after the trauma of absorbing racist comments from guests.

¹¹ With the exception of Shauna, a graduate student who worked at The Hermitage during my first summer there. She was Black and Native American, but often passed for white among both staff and visitors.

As The Hermitage seeks out Black interpreters and considers introducing first-person interpretation of Black history, Robert mentioned the concern of hiring the “right person” to depict an enslaved person. Robert wanted to ensure an authentic representation of the time period and to incorporate diverse narratives, but also feared that, with the wrong interpreter, a living history program on the enslaved might veer into caricature of slave dialect and mannerism. In the meantime, Robert has focused his efforts on recruiting third-person Black interpreters at career fairs at local historically black colleges and universities. During a panel presentation on representations of slavery at plantations, he admitted that these efforts have been challenging, as many attendees see the name “Hermitage,” scoff, and walk away. “I can’t blame them,” Robert sympathized, and continued saying he felt it was a duty and obligation to recruit a more diverse staff.



Figure 3.16: Slave Dwelling Project interpreter Rachel demonstrates cooking beans and chicken over a hearth, as enslaved people would have done for themselves and their enslavers during Jackson’s time.

In the meantime, living history programs are performed by white interpreters like Carrie, who makes the caveat during her demonstration of 19th-century laundry that this “would have been done by an enslaved person on the property” and that “I’m just showing you and we’re talking about the techniques.” Visitors occasionally note the discrepancy, with one white man asking me on the back porch, “Where are all of the Black staff here?” Similarly, interpreter

Kimberly recounted a story she joked she should include in a book titled, *Weird Things People Have Said to Me at the Hermitage*. In this instance, she was walking through the garden with a basket, picking flowers in her red day dress and straw poke bonnet, when a white man passing her remarked, “Shouldn’t you be black?” “What?” Kimberly inquired, bewildered, to which he replied, “A slave. Shouldn’t only slaves be in the garden?” Although Rachel Jackson and other white family members would have enjoyed the garden and done some light work, it is true that the majority of the work was done by enslaved African-Americans.

PRESENCE AND CONSPICUOUS ABSENCE IN PRODUCING INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY

As alluded to above, despite evidence of the presence of 19th-century life, there is a conspicuous absence of visual, living history representations of the enslaved, when compared to representations of white plantation residents (largely through costuming and staff demographics). Here, I will discuss instances of the tension between the presence of evidence of plantation site labor and the conspicuous absence of representations of those who would have done the labor in Jackson’s time.

Evidence of Agriculture and the Absence of Representations of Enslaved Workers

The Hermitage museum has present-day features that reflect its agricultural and horticultural past, including Rachel’s Garden and a two-acre field of cotton that visitors are free to pick. Hay is grown and harvested at the adjoining Tulip Grove property. A plant sale is held annually, and guests can purchase irises, fig trees, and other plants grown in Rachel’s Garden. “It’s the novelty of it!” lead interpreter Rosie said as she went to the front of the mansion to pick

up a fig tree, to which interpreter Rachel agreed, “Who wouldn’t want something from the Hermitage?”

A herd of eight to ten Belted Galloways, a breed of cattle used for meat production, grazes in a field beyond the garden and, as lead interpreter June told me with a sad smile, “They sell them.” Interpreter Andrew frequently ventured up to the fence separating the lawn from the cattle field, and observed the cows during breaks or quiet moments in the garden. Lead interpreter Robert previously worked at a museum with an expansive living history program, complete with animal husbandry and traditional plowing technique demos, and has made it a personal goal to expand living history at The Hermitage. Carriage Rides Through Time hosts a wagon tour, in which guests take a 19th-century form of transportation around the property as they learn about the lives of enslaved people at The Hermitage.



Figure 3.17: A plowing and planting demonstration at the educational cotton field on site. Photo by Elizabeth Barna (from a very far distance, since I was working and stationed on the back porch).



Figure 3.18: Visitor TripAdvisor photo, posted in September of 2018, of a view from the wagon on a carriage ride with Carriage Rides Through Time, which contracts with the Hermitage and provides wagon tours discussing the experiences of the enslaved. Screenshoted November 19, 2019.



Figure 3.19: I stepped in some “evidence of agriculture” (or rather, of 19th-century transportation) on the mile-loop trail near the field quarters. This is the route for the wagon tour, led by an uncostumed staff member from Carriage Rides Through Time, with two Percheron horses pulling a wagon of up to twelve people. Photo by Elizabeth Barna, November 15, 2019.

Although there is evidence of agricultural labor and production on the property, however, there is no regular living history representation of the brutality and racial inequity that made Jackson’s plantation so profitable in the 19th century. On the day of the plowing demonstration, which I watched from a far distance, a guest on the back porch asked me candidly of the staff, “Where are all the Black people here?” I admitted that it was a problem and a frustration and gesturing toward the demonstration, said offhandedly, “I bet everyone doing the plowing demonstration is white.” Indeed, I later learned it was the white staff members of Carriage Rides Through Time who gave the plowing and planting demonstration with two of the

Percheron horses they owned. Similarly, new living history programs in the garden are presented by exclusively white interpreters.



Figure 3.20: Last summer, The Hermitage began having a historic interpreter who not only engages with guests in the garden, but also performs gardening duties on-site in costume. This screenshot is of a Facebook post in anticipation of a Giving Tuesday garden fundraiser, encouraging followers to learn more about herbs for cooking and medicine in the 19th century. Screenshotted December 5, 2019.



Figure 3.21: Harvested hay rolled into round bales at Tulip Grove, a property adjacent to The Hermitage that has been absorbed into the historic site's purview. No living history demonstrations related to hay production are offered. Photo by Elizabeth Barna, November 15, 2019.



Figure 3.22: Visitor photo of other visitors (who appear to be white) picking cotton in a two-acre plot, posted on TripAdvisor by a visitor in January of 2019. The First Hermitage, which was used as a kitchen and slave cabin before the mansion was complete and solely as a slave cabin after the mansion's construction, stands in the background. Screencapped November 19, 2019

Reproductions and “Then” and “Now,” and the Absence of Representations of Enslaved Workers

In addition to the preservation of original artifacts in the mansion and the maintenance of park-like grounds, the preservation and interpretation staff's use of plastic reproduction food and other items generates a sense that one is looking into a “still life” of a nostalgic past. Guests can use reproduction cotton cards to straighten out a cotton sample on the back porch, hold the duelists' reproduction dueling pistols out on the lawn, and gaze at reproduction fruits, vegetables, breads, ham hocks, and even a cracked egg on the floor of the Hermitage kitchen. Where original artifacts are not available, The Hermitage provides realistic reproductions in an effort to make it feel as though visitors are walking into Jackson's home as it was in 1837.



Figure 3.23: A Hermitage visitor's TripAdvisor photo from June 2018, featuring a costumed interpreter leading The Duel demonstration. A visitor watches in the background (benches are positioned in front of the interpreter, so most of the audience is not pictured.) Note the reproduction dueling pistols on the stump in the bottom left corner. Screencapped November 19, 2019.

Despite the presence of reproductions that provide a view into 19th-century life, traces of the enslaved who cooked the food, sewed the clothing by hand, and kept the mansion’s eleven fireplaces running are conspicuously absent. Interpreters can choose to pass around a photo of an enslaved woman named Hannah and her husband Aaron, and are encouraged to “mention an enslaved person *by name* in each room of the house,” as interpretive manager Robert exhorted us, there is no visual representation of the enslaved doing the work that kept the mansion and plantation running.



Figure 3.24: Post-emancipation photos of Hannah (left) and of Hannah and her husband Aaron (right), kept in a basket at the entry hall station to be shown to visitors. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.

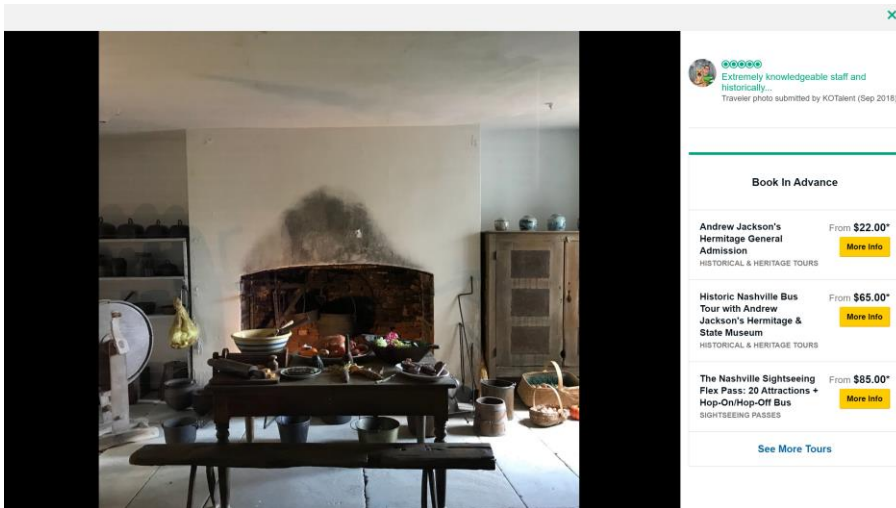


Figure 3.25: A visitor photo of the Hermitage kitchen, which is outfitted with a faux ham hock and faux fruits and vegetables, as well as a 19th-century commercial butter churner (to the left of the hearth). Posted on TripAdvisor in September of 2018. Screencapped November 19, 2019.

VISITOR AGENCY IN EVALUATING AESTHETICS, PRESENCE, ABSENCE, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ENSLAVED LIFE

One day, when I observed at The Hermitage as a visitor (in plainclothes), I stepped into Alfred's Cabin and overheard a guest huff to his companion, "There's no way that pot and those bowls were that full when he was alive!" as he gestured toward the overflowing baskets of faux food near the hearth in the slave dwelling. Indeed, although The Hermitage presents guests with a variety of images of 19th century life through its maintenance of the site's aesthetics, visitors frequently exercise agency in accepting, rejecting, or qualifying the images presented.

Visitor Recognition (or Lack Thereof) of Historical Presence of the Enslaved

Although the enslaved are no longer alive and present on the property, signage and photos of members of the enslaved community, as well as staff's references to enslaved African-Americans, seek to ensure that visitors recognize the historical presence of enslaved workers on the property. However, visitors' previous conceptions of slavery and of race often make it difficult for them to recognize the presence of the enslaved or the harsh realities of slavery as an institution. The presence of pristine grounds contributes to the reinforcement of visitors' misconceptions in the latter, and the appearance of enslaved workers in historic photos often leaves visitors with confusion regarding racialization and chattel slavery, as opposed to indentured servitude.

For example, the interpreter presenting in the entry hall often displays a photo of an enslaved housekeeper named Hannah, and her husband, Aaron, a blacksmith enslaved on the property. Visitors frequently look puzzled as they scan the photo, as Hannah and Aaron have light skin and, to some visitors, pass as white. One day while I presented in the entry hall, I

noticed a woman mouth, “Doesn’t look black,” to her companion, and on other occasions, I have been asked regarding Hannah and Aaron, “What race are they?” Similarly, a visitor asked, “Were they indentured servants or slaves?” and in response to my answer, they divulged, “I asked because I wasn’t sure what race they were.”

Visitors rightly understand that enslaved people in the United States were African-American (with the exception of indigenous slavery, which is another topic in itself), yet the image of Hannah and Aaron conflicts with their understanding of Blackness. When visitors asked, I explained the one-drop rule, that many African-Americans have light skin, and that the rape of Black enslaved women by white slaveowners was common. However, I can’t help but wonder how many times visitors ask themselves, “Are Hannah and Aaron black?” without expressing this out loud.

Visitor Nostalgia for Slavery as an Unintended Use of the Space

The Hermitage’s efforts at presenting information about slavery and members of the site’s enslaved community, coupled with the aesthetics of the site and the optics of its historic costuming and staff demographics, may have an unintended consequence of fulfilling a sense of nostalgia not only for a “simpler time” or for “hospitality,” but explicitly for slavery. In a particularly extreme example, a group of young white supremacists in their early twenties came into the mansion for a tour while I was presenting in the side hall. One tall man with reddish hair in a Richard Spencer-esque style and a celtic cross around his neck snickered when I mentioned an enslaved seamstress named Gracy, and his companions followed suit. They cast sidelong glances at one another, as though they knew something I didn’t.

When I mentioned that Jackson exploited enslaved people for everything he did on the property, from growing corn, cotton, wheat, oats, hemp, and tobacco, and for carpentry blacksmithing, and other skilled trades, he remarked with interest and irreverence, “They had enough land for all that?” When I mentioned that there was once a Confederate soldier’s home on the property and a cemetery for those soldiers, he grinned and asked, “Can we still go see that?” The group was visibly disappointed when I stated that the soldier’s home is no longer standing, but that the cemetery is still at the back of the property. As I quickly wrapped up my presentation in the side hall, the leader of the group proclaimed as he stood on the staircase, “It’s just amazing to be at the place where it all happened.” Similarly, my fellow interpreter who worked in the entry hall noted that they seemed “almost too interested when I showed them the picture of Hannah.” I will return to the white supremacists’ visit later, in my discussion of a customer service orientation as a contributor to institutionalized polysemy.

MAINTAINING THE AESTHETICS OF THE SITE

Allow me to depart from the issue of aesthetics and institutionalized polysemy for a moment to discuss the ways that aesthetics are maintained on-site, since this, in turn, contributes to institutionalized polysemy. The Hermitage as an organization takes great pride in the polished appearance of the site and the preservation of artifacts, and goes to great lengths to maintain the site’s aesthetic. A full-time maintenance staff, as well as a part-time garden staff, attends to the grounds, and a small preservation staff cleans the artifacts in the mansion periodically and cleans the carpets in the mansion routinely. If there is a spill or accident in the mansion, then interpreters are to call the preservation team to use specialized equipment and cleaning supplies to address the issue. (When a child threw up in the mansion hallway during a field trip, however,

preservation did not answer lead interpreter Carrie's radio call, so she retrieved the supplies and instructions from the closet under the stairs and undertook the loathsome task.)

Ensuring the site is protected is a key part of every staff member's job, whether they work in preservation, security, maintenance, or education and interpretation. Interpretive staff are trained to ensure visitors follow a series of rules to preserve the mansion, including "No food, drink, or chewing gum" (or chewing tobacco or smoking) inside the mansion, "Stay on the carpet" (to avoid wearing the original tulip poplar floors), and to "Not touch anything" because "over 90 percent of the artifacts in the home are original." As historic interpreter Annette noted, the job entails "preserving the site first and foremost," as well as "customer service" and "then knowing historical facts and information."

Similarly, when a group of children were getting too close to a grave marker in the garden for a garden staff member's liking, he yelled out across the garden, "Do not! Touch! The marker!" and let out a loud whistle. Impressed, I asked him, "Can you whistle like that again?" "No, I shouldn't," he muttered in response. "It should be quiet out here. People are trying to enjoy the garden." He continued on, dismayed that "They [(garden staff)] just raked the gravel. They [(the kids)] just kicked dirt right through it! Kids need to behave; that's what they need to do." In that instance, I found myself thinking, *Asshole*, as I am much gentler (and admittedly, passive) when directing children. However, this instance illustrates that maintaining the integrity and aesthetics of the site is something many staff take seriously, and that the garden is intended to be a place of quiet, solitude, and "retreat." In the past, a junior docent had broken a tombstone in the family cemetery, and in my notes on my rotation in the garden one fall day, I jotted, "Kids. Behaved today."

Although guests often do what they can to bend the rules—rubbing the bust of Levi Woodbury’s bald head, running their fingers along the wallpaper, and in the case of a frustrated toddler, even kicking the 183-year-old wallpaper—many agree that the preservation of the items and the tranquility of the site are important. The question “Is this original?” is a common one, and guests frequently comment that preserving sites like this is preserving history.

During the Highland Games, a Scots-Irish heritage festival at The Hermitage, a rugby team played in the open field adjacent to the garden and tomb. While I spoke with guests in my blue day dress and bonnet near the tomb, a rugby ball suddenly whizzed past my head, nearly hitting me. Another ball flew toward the far end of the garden, and yet another landed in the small fenced-in area surrounding the tomb. One of the visitors observed that a rogue rugby ball “could damage it,” referring to the tomb.

Aesthetic Management in Response to Vandalism

A particularly compelling example of the museum’s efforts to maintain the aesthetics and integrity of the site is its response to vandalism of Jackson’s tomb in April of 2018. The Hermitage hired specialists to use lasers to remove the profanities and anarchy signs spray painted on the Jacksons’ graves, and all traces of the vandalism were lasered clean from the tomb within eleven days of the incident. Immediately after the vandalism and prior to the restoration and celebratory tomb unveiling afterward, The Hermitage placed a black shroud over the tomb. The choice of a black shroud invoked a sense of somberness around the vandalism and blended more seamlessly with the image of a tomb than would white plastic sheeting. When discussing the state of the museum nearly a year later, a staff member noted that the “only way The Hermitage has been attacked has been with spray paint.”



Figure 3.26: Visitor photo of Andrew and Rachel Jackson’s tomb, posted on TripAdvisor in May of 2018. The tomb is shrouded in black after being vandalized with spray paint in the month prior. Screenshoted November 19, 2019.

WEDDINGS, SPECIAL EVENTS, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED POLYSEMY

Another component of aesthetic management in the production of institutionalized polysemy is maintaining an ambiance amenable to hosting weddings and special events. Staff in middle-management positions noted that hosting weddings and special events is crucial to ensuring income flows to the site. This, in turn, helps fund the maintenance of the site’s aesthetic, which, in turn, allows for more weddings and special events to be held there. In addition to the pristine 21st-century preservation of the 19th-century site, the Hermitage’s practice of using the site for weddings and special events reinforces notions of nostalgia and, combined with its increased effort to acknowledge and educate about slavery and Indian Removal, contributes to institutionalized polysemy.

On the page “Event Rentals at The Hermitage,” the site announces that it is “proud to host weddings and events year round” and has been “voted the #1 wedding venue in Nashville” (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2019). It advertises four venues on-site: The Cabin by the Spring, the Hermitage Church, Tulip Grove, and Gardens and Grounds. The Hermitage entices potential wedding and event clients with the Cabin’s view and adjacency to history “overlooking a

wooded glen with the Jackson family’s original stone Spring House,” set within eyeshot of the “dramatic Hermitage mansion, its lush gardens, original log farmhouse and expansive grounds.” Note that the First Hermitage, which served as both Jackson’s home and a slave quarter, is described as an “original log farmhouse” rather than an intact slave dwelling.

References to slavery are erased on the museum’s event rental page, while references to aesthetically pleasing surroundings and historic buildings connected to the Jacksons are emphasized instead. The Hermitage highlights Tulip Grove’s “exquisite architecture both inside and out” and presents would-be clients with the image of “stroll[ing] down the boxwood path and onto the grounds.” The section pitching a wedding or event in Rachel’s Garden notes that “Rachel, Andrew Jackson’s beloved wife, took special interest in the gardens” and that the present-day grounds crew maintains the garden year-round “in respect to her.” It guarantees that guests will be “enchanted with flowing Weeping Willows, magnificent Magnolia trees, and a wide variety of beautiful, blossoming flowers in each quadrant of this historic garden.” Despite noting that the garden is historic, Hermitage Events fails to note the presence of original bricks fired by enslaved workers or of Alfred’s Grave—or Jackson’s tomb and the family cemetery, for that matter—in the garden.

The Hermitage Church is a particularly interesting case because its use for a variety of events impacts the role of aesthetics and visitor understandings of slavery as atrocity. The Event Rentals page advertises the Hermitage Church as a “highly sought venue for couples that seek an intimate and historic site in which to exchange their vows.” The Hermitage Events page notes that the church was “constructed in 1823 from funds donated by Andrew Jackson and others,” but does not mention that some members of the enslaved community attended the church.

The presence of the enslaved at the Hermitage and their membership in the church is noted, however, at the annual Memorial Service to the Enslaved, held in the very same Hermitage Church. The Memorial to the Enslaved, a physical memorial located just outside the church, is not mentioned on the Events Rentals page, and the adjacent Confederate and Donelson family cemeteries are also omitted. In this key instance of institutionalized polysemy, the event venue and education/public programming departments highlight and suppress differing aspects of the site to generate divergent meanings for their given audiences. The stark white walls and absence of artwork in the Hermitage Church itself renders it a blank canvas, easily transformed for the purpose of white celebration or Black grief and commemoration.



Figure 3.27: Photos from The Hermitage’s Wedding and Event Rentals site, of the four venues: Cabin by the Spring (top left), Tulip Grove (top right), and Hermitage Church (bottom left), and the Hermitage grounds (bottom right).

CONCLUSION

During my time working and observing as a historic interpreter, our staff took several field trips to other local historic house museums. One such house was the Belmont Mansion, the antebellum vacation home of Adelia Acklen, who became wealthy through her first marriage to slave trader Isaac Franklin. During the tour, I found myself enchanted by the intense colors of the wallpaper and velvet furniture, the ornateness of the mouldings, and the multitude of paintings and red-stained glass panels throughout the mansion captivated my imagination—and helped me channel my fantasy of filling my own home with antiques. Yet I felt a tug of rage, terror, and guilt as I acknowledged that Adelia Acklen’s money was “human trafficking money,” as I called it during a conversation fellow interpreters Gwen and Robert. “I find myself amazed by all of the beauty but horrified by where it came from,” I admitted to Robert, struggling internally as I fawned over two sleeping lion statues set outside the mansion’s front steps and thought of the reproduction pallet on the floor of the children’s room and the photo of an enslaved woman hanging in the hallway.



Figure 3.28: The author exploring the kitchen of the Tulip Grove Mansion, owned by Andrew Jackson Donelson and his wife Emily, who served as the White House hostess at the beginning of Jackson’s presidency.

Through an interplay between presence and absence, the aesthetics and optics of Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage contribute to the production of a barrage of competing representations of

“the People’s President” and of 19th-century life as it relates to slavery. The preservation of the site’s original artifacts, the impeccable maintenance of a park-like setting, semblances of its previous agricultural life, and the conspicuous absence of representations of enslaved people amidst the prevalence of white historic interpreters in costume contribute to institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage. The use of the site for seasonal and celebratory events, when contrasted with the site’s efforts at educating visitors about slavery, also generates the potential for both nostalgic and traumatic images. The tension between the aesthetic beauty of the site and the brutal realities of life as an enslaved person, as well as between past and present uses of the site, contributes to the opportunity for conflicting impressions of 19th-century life as well.

Both aesthetic labor and aesthetic management by curatorial and frontline staff are key to generating varied sensory experiences for visitors seasonally and recreating a 19th-century aesthetic consistent across the landscape, the mansion, and the interpreters themselves. Curatorial and maintenance staff weigh tension between historical accuracy and visitor expectations of the site, and front-line interpreters generate nostalgia in their historic costuming, their marking of original objects in the mansion, and their performance of Southern hospitality. Visitors co-produce this institutionalized polysemy by forming their own conclusions about slavery, Jackson, or the antebellum South, either by relying on the aesthetics of the site or by noting contradictions between visual cues and the educational content provided. The use of the site for weddings and special events reinforces nostalgic notions of the Southern plantation, and the prohibition of using slave dwellings for weddings or celebratory events serves to simultaneously acknowledge and mask slavery on the property. This tension between acknowledging and masking further contributes to institutionalized polysemy on-site.

In the chapter that follows, I will move beyond aesthetic factors to discuss the manner in which The Hermitage's institutional identity as both a historic house museum and as a presidential museum generates competing images of Jackson, and in which The Hermitage's overlapping geographic identification with Nashville, the South and West, and America as a whole produces conflicting representations as well. It is not only what the visitor sees in the moment, but also the site's legacy of using objects to tell regional and national stories, that shapes representations of slavery, genocide, democracy, and Jackson himself.

CHAPTER IV. THE IMPACT OF DUAL MUSEUM GENRES AND COMPETING GEOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

“This week, the [storm] downed a number of limbs and trees, some old and steely, at The Hermitage...While we are saddened to lose any part of our beautiful landscape, we are thankful that the mansion was not harmed and that none of the trees were planted in the Jacksonian era.”

-President and CEO, from “Storm Updates from The Hermitage” e-mail to Hermitage members, 2020

“For 131 years, across 23 presidential administrations and through world wars, severe weather, economic growth and recession, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage has persevered. Today is no different.”

-Andrew Jackson Foundation, “Don’t Miss the Big Payback!” fundraising e-mail, 2020

“See to it that no modern enterprise breaks in upon the hallowed spot and changes it...As the home of Gen. Andrew Jackson, in which he lived and died, future generations will desire to see it as it was when he lived and lingered there. Let there be one spot in all our State dedicated to patriotism.”

-Mrs. Mary C. Dorris, founding member of the Ladies’ Hermitage Association, 1915

Aesthetics are a critical reason for institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage, as the disconnect between aesthetics of the site and discourse surrounding chattel slavery. Yet both aesthetics and discourse are deeply rooted in genre—in this case, the overlapping and sometimes competing genres of historic house museum and presidential museum. The e-mail excerpts above illustrate the dual institutional identity of The Hermitage as a historic house museum whose landscape is part of its originality and authenticity (as emphasized in first) and as a presidential museum with a national scope (as in the second). Mary Dorris’ exhortation to current and future stewards of the Hermitage property illustrates the manner in which the lines

between historic house museum and presidential site are blurred¹². Overlap and tension between the two genres, and between local, regional, and national geographic scope of the museum's narratives, generate a multitude of images of Jackson and 19th-century America, including legacies of slavery and Indian Removal.

In this chapter, I do not provide an exhaustive history of the Andrew Jackson Foundation (originally the Ladies' Hermitage Association) as an organization or of The Hermitage as a tourist site, but rather identify the manner in which its 131-year history of straddling genres and geographies contributes to institutionalized polysemy. In some cases, threads of narrative have persisted from the museum's founding to the period in which I worked as a historic interpreter, and in other cases, the narrative has shifted dramatically—particularly with regard to difficult histories. In both cases, I discuss the way The Hermitage's lengthy institutional memory, dual institutional legacy, and overlapping geographic coverage produce a bricolage of competing narratives.

I also introduce the concept of bifurcation to describe the way conversation around Jackson is often starkly divided at The Hermitage, with conversation about the man and his career dominating in the museum and discussion of domestic life and the property in the mansion. Within this pattern of bifurcation, the Andrew Jackson Foundation generally categorizes Indian Removal as a subsection of Jackson's career and presidency and chattel slavery as a subsection of his domestic life and property.

¹² Dorris' use of the title "General" for Jackson may appear to detract from the presidential image, but it is in fact essential to it. Even in his retirement, Jackson preferred to be called General rather than President, as he felt "general" was a title he had earned as opposed to having it bestowed upon him. Ironically, calling him General Jackson contributes deeply to his presidential image as "the People's President."

INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY AND DUAL GENRES: HISTORIC PLANTATION HOUSE AND PRESIDENTIAL MUSEUM

Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage straddles the world of historic plantation house museums and presidential museums, with a recent shift toward prioritizing presidential history rather than the “home of a dead white man filled with his brown furniture,” as administrator Roger Edwards put it. During a “Briefing with the Bosses” Q&A session with him this spring, I asked if The Hermitage as an organization identifies primarily as a presidential museum, a plantation museum, or both, and how this may have shifted over the site’s history. Edwards replied, “I think first and foremost it is a presidential museum. And it’s the reason I took the job. I don’t think I would have made the move to Nashville to go work at a plantation.”

Edwards, who has a graduate degree in architectural history and historic preservation, came to work at The Hermitage twelve years ago, after fifteen years as an executive director at two historic sites in the Eastern United States and experience interning at an early presidential site. In 2014, The Hermitage underwent a massive rebranding, changing the directing organization’s name from the Ladies Hermitage Association to the Andrew Jackson Foundation and, based on a detailed report from a consulting firm, decided to redirect the site to a focus on presidential history. In 2018, The Hermitage also hired a chief of museum operations with eleven years of experience as a deputy director at a presidential library¹³ in the Midwest. For Edwards, the main mission of The Hermitage is “to focus on Jackson, Jacksonian America, and Jackson’s presidency.”

¹³ The Hermitage is not a part of the presidential library system, which is run through the Office of Presidential Libraries, which is part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). However, historic interpreters will often joke that Jackson’s study is “the closest thing we have to a presidential library.”

At the same time, however, The Hermitage has a 131-year legacy as a historic house museum and plantation site. Edwards believes The Hermitage's role as a plantation museum "is also important and cannot be discounted." He volunteered that "the institution has evolved as our country in our social thinking has evolved," and that that includes discussion of slavery. Museums are particularly "sensitive to ideological and aesthetic fashions" (Becker 2008, p. 286), and The Hermitage is no exception.

The Landscape of U.S. Presidential Museums and Association with Historic House Museums

In the United States, the National Park Service oversees two dozen national monuments and national historic sites associated with presidents, and the Office of Presidential Libraries (in the National Archives and Records Administration) governs a system of fourteen presidential libraries (Federal Depository Library Program 2020)¹⁴. The American landscape is also dotted with privately run historic sites and organizations dedicated to presidential legacies, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.

In her seminal work *Domesticating History* (1999), public historian Patricia West outlines the history and politics of presidential museums in the United States. The first presidential museums in the United States were privately run by ladies' organizations who preserved early presidents' former plantation sites. In 1853, Ann Pamela Cunningham founded the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA), thereby launching the genre of historic presidential house museums in the United States (West 1999, MVLA 2020). The MVLA was

¹⁴ The presidential libraries system was created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1939, when he donated his presidential and personal papers to the federal government. This system was expanded under the Presidential Libraries Act in 1955, during Harry S. Truman's presidency. Presidential libraries are "privately erected and federally maintained" (National Archives 2020), while Andrew Jackson's Hermitage is privately run and funded.

the LHA's inspiration, and Mount Vernon served as an example as a "recreated domestic environment memorializing a mythologized white male political figure" (West 1999, p. 5). These museums serve to buttress the domestic realm of women while also instilling national pride (West 1999).

The significance of authentic items to historic house museums continues into the present. When issuing the preservation requests on the line, historic interpreter Edith announces to the group, "We're the best preserved early presidential mansion in the country," with over 90 percent of the artifacts being original. Other interpreters explicitly boast about the authenticity of the mansion's artifacts compared to its competitors, noting that The Hermitage has more artifacts original to the family than Mount Vernon and Monticello combined. I, too, emphasized the originality of the items in the mansion, "not only to the time period, but also to the family."

As national histories evolve, public perceptions of past leadership figures evolve as well (Schwartz 2000). Some presidential legacies are marked by controversies that the public did not allow to be ignored. The Richard Nixon Library & Museum, for example, opened to the public in the summer of 1990 and installed a gallery on Watergate in 2011. Monticello began acknowledging Thomas Jefferson's fathering of Sally Hemings' children after DNA evidence from descendants and public pressure placed pressure to begin that conversation.

The Hermitage's administrators appear to view the site's peers not as local plantation museums, but as Mount Vernon, Monticello, and other early presidential house museums that *happen to have been plantations*. In this instance of *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), the Andrew Jackson Foundation seeks "to achieve rationality" amidst "uncertainty and constraint" by emulating the content of similarly situated institutions, thereby contributing to a "homogeneity of structure" across institutions. Professionalization within a field (*normative*

pressures) and uncertainty of one's status as an institution (*mimetic processes*) are two potential mechanisms for isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) between museums.

As each of these sites began to discuss slavery in more detail, The Hermitage followed suit, ensuring that, as Howard Becker might say, the site's "existing aesthetic [was] kept up to date" and would continue to "validate logically what audiences experience as important [museum] work" (Becker 2008, p. 138). The Hermitage's adjustment of its interpretation of slavery to keep pace with peer institutions is consistent with Becker's institutional theory of aesthetics. Its failure to innovate, as Mark complained during our interview, is also consistent, as making dramatic changes to a given aesthetic form comes with risk in how consumers receive it and also requires a "logical and defensible legitimation of what [museum professionals] are doing" and also for how they are perceived by peer institutions (Becker 2008, p. 162).

The names of tour options reflect and highlight key parts of Jackson's career trajectory and the focus on Jackson as a national figure. The General's Tour, which is the general admission tour offered, includes access to the visitor center museum exhibits, a mansion tour, and a self-guided audio tour of the grounds. The President's Tour is an option for visitors who want the addition of an upgraded multimedia device "with period images, maps, and an exclusive interactive timeline" and a 10% discount at the Museum Store.

Local and National Pride, Valuing Domesticity, and a "Shrine" To Jackson

As outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage became a historic house museum in 1889, when the Ladies Hermitage Association (LHA) formed to preserve Jackson's estate as a "shrine" for future generations. In her 106-page history titled

Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, LHA member Mary French Caldwell deems The Hermitage “one of the most priceless treasures of Tennessee and the nation” (Caldwell 1933, p. iv) and dedicates the book to “patriotic women whose untiring labors made possible the preservation, in its entirety, of Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage” (Caldwell 1933, p. iv) and to those who continue to protect the site in the future.

John DeWitt, the president of the Tennessee Historical Society at the time of the book’s publication, concurred that the history presented in Caldwell’s history “should be eagerly obtained and carefully studied by tourists as well as by all other Americans” and that “[t]hey will profit by it in culture and in patriotism” (Caldwell 1933, p. v). In this manner, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage was preserved as a museum in large part as part of American civil religion (Bellah 1967, Durkheim 1912), with “iconography of ‘God, home, and country’” (West 1999, p. 3). Today, The Hermitage’s mission statement includes not only preserving Jackson’s home and providing education, but also “inspir[ing] citizenship through learning about his life and unique American history” (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2018).

The persistence of some narratives surrounding Jackson over 130 years is rooted in the museum’s long-reaching institutional memory and the power of institutional identity and genre. For example, in 1915, Mary Dorris described Jackson’s bedroom as “the room in which ‘Old Hickory’ died” and continued noting objects in the room: “...the bedstead on which he rested, the washstand, the bureau—all were there. Over the mantel was the portrait of his beloved wife, of whom he said, ‘heaven would be no heaven to me were she not there,’ and on which his dying gaze rested” (Dorris 1915, p. 29).

During his tours of the mansion when the museum first opened, Alfred Jackson also mentioned the portrait of Rachel and its relation to Jackson’s death, presented here as Mary

Dorris, one of the founders of the Ladies' Hermitage Association, chose to record it: "Dat's de picture o' Mis' Jackson over de mantelpiece dar. Dat was de las' thing he looked at 'fore he died" (Dorris 1915, p. 140). 105 years later, during a *Virtual Visit* posted on The Hermitage's Facebook page in the spring of 2020, director of interpretation Robert stood in the side hall of the mansion. He encouraged the camera to focus in on Jackson's bedroom and the objects within it:

Inside this room, you see the very bed that the man slept and died in in 1845...That portrait up there is a portrait of Rachel herself...He would say that that portrait needs to be in a place of honor so it's the first thing he sees in the morning and the last thing he sees at night. Still the same here at home in his retirement.

The parallels between early narratives surrounding the Jacksons, the mansion, and the objects within it are striking. The centrality of original artifacts as a vehicle for storytelling is a key feature of historic house museums (West 1999), and The Hermitage is no exception¹⁵ (Dorris 1915). The valuation of domesticity (West 1999), (white) women's labor and cultural contributions (West 1999), and "cordial hospitality" (Dorris 1915, p. 210) are central to the Ladies' Hermitage Foundation's legacy and continue to shape contemporary mansion tours.



¹⁵ Dorris (1915) recounts Alfred's use of objects to tell stories about Jackson—and his frustration when those objects had been moved: "As soon as Uncle Alfred entered the hall he missed the pictures. To his defective vision they were nothing more than dark blurs upon the wall, but he had missed the blur. He had incorporated them in his story and did not approve of their change of position" (p. 147).

Figure 4.1: The Smokehouse, circa 2019 (left, photo by author) and 1970 (right, as pictured in cookbook *Hermitage Hospitality*). The importance of the original buildings and of reproduction food items to create a “diorama” of 19th-century life remains constant. Representations of the role of the enslaved in 19th-century life has changed dramatically. In the 1970 cookbook, Rachel Jackson is presented as teaching the enslaved how to cook certain dishes, and the enslaved are artifacts of the time period rather than free agents. In the present, The Hermitage emphasizes the agency and personhood of the enslaved, often at the expense of highlighting details of the reality of being human chattel.

In this manner, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage has a dual identification with the historic house museum and presidential museum genres, in many ways returning to the roots of early presidential museums as historic homes run by ladies’ associations. With this blend of genres, The Hermitage strives to meet the standards of presidential house museums by recounting a president’s biography in a way that generates 1) national pride with relation to his career and 2) nostalgia and the valuation of domesticity with relation to the home itself. This generates institutionalized polysemy by encouraging competing representations of a single figure. The section that follows addresses the way genre shapes institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage through an organizational strategy I term *bifurcation*.

BIFURCATION OF MUSEUM AND MANSION, OF CAREER AND DOMESTIC LIFE, AND OF MAN AND PROPERTY

This tension between historic plantation site and presidential museum genres contributes to *bifurcation*, or the intentional division of representations of Jackson into career and domestic life, and of man and property. The museum and its “Born for a Storm” exhibit focus primarily on Jackson’s career and on the man himself, while the mansion serves as a space for the discussion of Jackson’s domestic life and property. This also entails the division of discussion of Indian Removal into conversation around Jackson’s presidency, slavery into discussion of the property and domestic life, and Jackson’s fostering of Lyncoya into a blend of both realms

(related to the Creek War in which he was orphaned, and to The Hermitage property where he was raised). Here, I outline manifestations of this bifurcation, and later in the chapter, I return to the impact of bifurcation on representations of difficult histories.

One distillation of this bifurcation is the Andrew Jackson Foundation's publication of two separate guidebooks: *Andrew Jackson: The People's President* in 2016 and *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Official Guidebook* in 2018. *Andrew Jackson* serves as a guide to Jackson himself and "highlights a complex, dynamic man" who brought "both controversy and lasting change to the country's fabric." The guide lists Jackson's accomplishments of becoming "an attorney, major general of the US Army, and finally, the seventh president of the United States" on the back cover and proclaims that Jackson "defin[ed] an entire era of American history." Section headings capture stages in Jackson's storied career, including "Becoming Old Hickory," "A National Hero," "The People's President," and "A Devastating Decision" (a chapter on Indian Removal).

This stands in stark contrast to *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage*, which provides a guide to the property and the museum itself. Although the back cover features the title "Home of the People's President," the guidebook's points of emphasis are the "sites and exhibits, captivating images, and fascinating historic facts." *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage* frames the site as "one of the country's oldest and most visited *presidential* museums" (emphasis added) and provides a brief account of Jackson's career, but focuses primarily on Jackson's domestic life and on the property itself. Main section headings include "Welcome to The Hermitage," "Home of the People's President," "The Mansion," "Landscapes," "The Plantation," "Other Buildings and Sites," and "Preserving the Past."

Events held on-site also illustrate the *bifurcation* between man and property, and between political and domestic life—as well as efforts to merge them together to integrate elements of both historic house and presidential museum genres into its marketing and identity. The Hermitage’s annual Easter egg hunt, for example, is officially called a Presidential Easter Egg Hunt. Activities for the 2019 hunt included a “Cards for the Troops” table and a photo op with an Easter bunny dressed in War of 1812 attire, who education staff member Anna affectionately dubbed “Colonel Easter.” This integrates presidential themes and Jackson’s biography into an event that would otherwise be largely focused on nostalgic imagery and the property itself.

Similarly, a list of upcoming programs listed in a Hermitage membership e-mail included the following: Life in Jackson’s Tennessee, which reflects a focus on Tennessee (and the West/South in Jackson’s time); Dog Days at The Hermitage, which provides an opportunity to explore the property and grounds themselves; and Road to the White House, which reflects the national reach of the Jackson story. The listing of presidency-related events Tennessee Presidential Trail Trivia, President Andrew Jackson Trivia, and Monroe Exhibition Trivia, alongside property-related autumn events for “Family Fun” demonstrates The Hermitage’s presentation of both presidential and domestic images of Jackson, and signals the representation of man and property as separate. I will return to the concept of bifurcation later in this chapter when discussing institutionalized polysemy related to slavery and genocide at The Hermitage.

NESTING GEOGRAPHIES

In addition to spanning genres that sometimes compete and sometimes complement one another, The Hermitage lays claim to nesting geographies as well. There are multiple “layers” of history presented at The Hermitage, across time and space: Nashville, Tennessee, the South, the

West, and the United States as a whole. The site on which The Hermitage stands is presented as the West (as it was considered during Jackson’s lifetime), the South (as it was considered from the Civil War into the present), and as the nation itself (particularly when discussing Jackson’s experiences in the Revolutionary War and his presidency).



Figure 4.2:

Left: Jackson statue outside of the Tennessee State Capitol. Identical statues stand at Jackson Square in New Orleans and in Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C., signaling a linking of Jackson’s biography to state, southern, and national politics. (Note: An enslaved apprentice named Phillip Reid contributed profoundly to the sculptor, Clark Mills’ work.) Photo by author.

Middle: An image of the statue also appears on the cover of LHA member Mary French Caldwell’s 1915 history of The Hermitage.

Right: Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage’s website has used a silhouette of this statue as an icon on the browser tab. Screenshot taken April 26, 2020.

This array of nesting geographies was part of the organization’s identity from its inception. Mary Dorris, one of the founders of the Ladies’ Hermitage Association, wrote in 1915 that the site is “the one spot that all visitors to the city [of Nashville] are shown by their hosts,” especially with the rise of the automobile (p. 101). She also described the brick mansion as “a perfect and handsome type of the old Southern homestead” and the First Hermitage as “at once a reminder of pioneer days as well as a reminder of Andrew Jackson” (Dorris 1915, p. 67).

With regard to The Hermitage's claims to national identity, a meeting report quoted in a local newspaper around the time of the museum's founding suggested that the organization overseeing the site "be a national association, not to be confined by any geographical limit, as his great name knew no such boundaries" (Dorris 1915, p. 23). In its Appeal to the Public to garner support for the preservation effort, the Ladies' Hermitage Association proclaimed that The Hermitage "will be a national museum, inviting pilgrims from the North, the South, the East, and the West, who will delight to honor the memory of him who said: 'The Federal Union must and shall be preserved'" (Dorris 1915, p. 52). Dr. C.D. Elliot also perceived Andrew Jackson's Hermitage as a site with national significance, stating that the site is a "natural Mecca, a shrine where only 'I am an American citizen' gives the right to worship" (Dorris 1915, p. 40).

Tension between Geographies

Tension between regional and national identity has been a part of The Hermitage's status as a museum from its inception. The Hermitage interprets not only Jackson's life and legacy, but also the history of the site itself. A confederate soldiers' home was built on the property after the Civil War, and a cemetery for those retired soldiers still exists on the property. In her discussion of the establishment of The Hermitage as a museum, Dorris (1915) noted the challenges of garnering support for a presidential site during a time in which Confederate veterans were aging and struggling after the Civil War, lamenting that the public often wanted "everything for charity, nothing for monuments" (Dorris 1915, p. 23). In her discussion of the LHA's compromise with the State of Tennessee, which included an agreement to build a confederate soldiers' home on a part of the property not owned by the museum, Dorris noted that "Colonel Jackson [(Andrew Jackson III)] was a Confederate soldier" (Dorris 1915, p. 23).

Both of Jackson's grandsons fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War, and discussion of this is part of the interpretive script for the grandchildren's bedrooms upstairs. To a large degree, this legitimizes the presence of seemingly out-of-place souvenirs associated with the Confederacy, including a bobblehead of Robert E. Lee and a placemat featuring Confederate generals. These fit with the situating of Tennessee as a former Confederate state and of Jackson's grandsons as Confederate soldiers.

Yet in 1830, long before rumblings of the Civil War, Jackson was reported to have said, "Our federal union, it must be preserved!" and The Hermitage carries on this tradition. This identification of Jackson as Southerner and as a supporter of the Union generates uncertainty as to where Jackson would have stood if he had lived to see the Civil War. Visitors frequently ask what side Jackson would have allied with—the "Union" (United States) or the Confederacy. Interpreters' responses vary, ranging from a matter-of-fact, "He was a Unionist!" or "He tried to keep South Carolina from nullifying federal law," to the more nuanced reply that Jackson supported the Union but also supported the system of slavery and that it is difficult to know for sure. The complexities of geographic identity contribute deeply to institutionalized polysemy on-site.

Case-in-Point of Nesting Geographies: Marketing Collaboration with Local and State Partners

With a massive tourism boom in Nashville as it became known as an "it city," collaborations between The Hermitage and other local and regional companies and sites have emerged. The debut of Andy's Candy in 2019 marked a partnership between Andrew Jackson's Hermitage and two Nashville-based companies—Goo Goo Cluster and Old Hickory Bourbon—to produce an Andrew Jackson-inspired candy. The Andrew Jackson Foundation President and

C.E.O. noted that “this candy brings together a unique flavor combination and serves as a nod to a few Tennessee legends” (Standard Candy Company 2020).



Figure 4.3: Andy’s Candy displayed by a cardboard cutout of Andrew Jackson in the museum store. The candy was developed in partnership with Goo Goo Cluster candy company and Old Hickory Bourbon, both based in Nashville.

Similarly, the introduction of the Tennessee Presidential Trail on Presidents Day of 2020 illustrates the marketing of The Hermitage as a site of local, state, and national significance. The trail links three presidential sites in Tennessee: Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage, President James K. Polk Home & Museum (in Columbia), and President Cemetery (associated with President Andrew Johnson, in Greenville). Through this combination of marketing and local and state partnerships, the Andrew Jackson Foundation positions The Hermitage as a site for local, state, and national memory.



Figure 4.4: The Tennessee Presidential Trail logo features three stars at the bottom, which is reminiscent of the Tennessee state flag, as well as the profiles of U.S. Presidents Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Andrew Johnson, all hailing from Tennessee. The color scheme signals American identity (and it could be argued, Tennessee identity, as the Tennessee State flag is also red, white, and blue).

Case-in-Point of Nesting Geographies and Overlapping Genres: The Museum Store

The museum store is one place where the narratives of national and local significance, of Jackson and southern nostalgia, meet. A large sign on either side of the museum store entrance advertises an opportunity to “Bring History Home With You”; the one on the left features a photo of the cover of the “Official Hermitage Guidebook” featuring a photo of the front of the mansion framed by Eastern red cedar trees, and the one on the right displays images of the cases for the two “Official Hermitage DVDs.” Both DVDs feature images of Jackson, with one titled *Andrew Jackson: Perspectives*, and the other *Jackson: The Introductory Film*.

Postcards of Nashville illustrate The Hermitage’s place in the local tourism economy; the presence of blackberry jam, apple cinnamon jelly, peach cobbler syrup, and books dedicated to ham, pecans, and other “Southern” ingredients reflects nostalgic images of the South; the old-timey Jacob’s ladders and simple toys reflect 19th-century frontier life in the West; and the bobbleheads of Jackson alongside other U.S. presidents reflect the national scope of The Hermitage as a presidential site. In this manner, nesting geographic coverage by the Andrew Jackson Foundation contributes to the barrage of competing images of Jackson and the time—and place—in which he lived.

The Museum Store also brings institutionalized polysemy of a dual plantation and presidential site beyond the site itself. This allows visitors to take a multitude of representations of Jackson and his era home with them to “supplement the museum’s educational priorities” while “return[ing] to the everyday world of familiar objects” (Shao et al. 2019). In this manner, Museum Store customers “enhance and spread intangible values of cultural resources”—in this case, a polysemous collection of values (Palu et al. 2018). This includes a polysemous collection of books, with lionizing Jackson biographies and nostalgic novels on Andrew and Rachel’s romance coexisting on the shelf with books on Native American history and the history of slavery. This tension between romantic, presidential, and traumatic realities and between local, regional, and national histories is distilled and reproduced in the Museum Store.



Figure 4.5: Museum store offerings allow visitors to “make your memories last” with items associated with the presidency, with Southern nostalgia and the Western frontier, and with Nashville.

REPRESENTING SLAVERY AT A BIFURCATED SITE OVER TIME

At a bifurcated site like The Hermitage, museum professionals must decide whether to discuss slavery in terms of Jackson’s character and career or in terms of his property and home life. Early in Ladies’ Hermitage Association’s history, N.E. Alloway¹⁶ categorized the enslaved as part of Jackson’s property, citing that The Hermitage had “one hundred negroes, besides stock of all kinds” (Dorris 1915, p. 41).



Figure 4.6: Options under the “LEARN” section of The Hermitage’s website. Note the division into “Andrew Jackson” and “Mansion & Grounds.” Slavery falls under Mansion & Grounds, and discussion of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Trail of Tears can be found within the “President” section on Andrew Jackson. Screenshot taken April 7, 2020.

Links to the Enslaved and Romanticizing the “Old Plantation Days”

Mary Dorris noted that “those old plantation days were not so bad” (Dorris 1915, p. 123) and that a formerly enslaved man named Alfred’s Jackson was “of great assistance” in helping the Ladies’ Hermitage Association replace furniture in the house and to provide accounts of Jackson’s life during his own tours. Alfred Jackson became the first tour guide when The

¹⁶ Dorris does not mention Alloway’s relationship to Jackson, and I have not found that information elsewhere. It does appear, however, that Alloway felt it was important to protect Jackson’s image. In the same note published in the *American*, Alloway contended that “General Jackson was not in debt when he died,” in response to claims that he was.

Hermitage opened to the public as a museum in 1889 and remained in this guide and caretaker role until his death in 1901. Alfred served as a living link between Andrew Jackson and visitors, as he had been enslaved by Jackson and knew him personally. He exercised great agency during his tours, telling the stories of the Jackson family as he remembered them and correcting visitors when he believed they were wrong (Dorris 1915).

During the early years of the museum's history, however, Alfred's presence as a tour guide also suggested that "those old plantations were not so bad" and that "genuine affection and esteem" were possible between an enslaved person and their enslaver (Dorris 1915, p. 123). Alfred himself was both an agent and object in the context of an early historic house museum in the American South, with Northern visitors seeing him as "an object of the greatest interest," as "his type and reminiscences of old slave days" were a "novelty" (Dorris 1915 p. 138). This generation of nostalgia for slavery is no longer an institutional goal of the museum, but it is important to note that nostalgia for slavery and romanticizing the institution was acceptable to, if not endorsed by, the early Ladies' Hermitage Association.

Archaeology and the Unearthing of Narratives of the Enslaved

Although contemporary representations of the enslaved emphasize the humanity and agency of the enslaved, discussion of slavery and Jackson's participation in the institution still decidedly falls within the domain of property at the museum. Museum signage and some staff cite the archaeological research in the 1970s as a major catalyst to presenting histories of the enslaved. Near the First Hermitage, a placard entitled "Abandonment and Preservation: Stories Lost, Then Found Again," states that "Since the early 1970s, historical and archaeological research on the farmhouse and nearby kitchen has revealed a wealth of new information" after the First Hermitage had fallen "into ruin" prior to the founding of the Ladies' Hermitage

Association. “This information,” it continues, “tells much about the enslaved African Americans who lived here, as well as the appearance of the house during Jackson’s residency.”

This signage also illuminates the dual focus on Jackson and the property, on the president and the enslaved: “Although restored as slave cabins, we now tell both stories—that of Andrew Jackson’s life here, and that of his enslaved workers.” Note that it does not read, “and that of the people he enslaved,” which implies Jackson’s passivity in perpetuating the system of chattel slavery.

Similarly, Holly, the chief curator who has worked at The Hermitage for over three decades, told me that the archaeological research in the 1970s was a major turning point in talking about slavery at The Hermitage. Yet several founders of the Ladies’ Hermitage Association, including “Little” Rachel Jackson Lawrence and Amy Jackson (Andrew Jackson III’s wife), likely knew much about the enslaved community at The Hermitage. Although the field quarter had been uncovered during archeological excavations¹⁷, it was not labeled on the visitor map in the Hermitage guidebook published by the LHA in 1979. Alfred’s Cabin (then labeled “Uncle Alfred’s Cabin”) is on the map, however, which reflects Alfred’s legacy as the first tour guide and as an artifact of the site in and of himself. The incorporation of enslaved people’s biographies into the mansion tour that acknowledged their status as slaves as opposed to “servants” did not begin until roughly a decade ago, however.

This suggests that a “lack of knowledge” was not the sole (or perhaps even primary) reason for excluding stories of the enslaved. Norms surrounding representations (or lack thereof) of slavery in museums and public discourse alike may be a better explanation. For example, in

¹⁷ It is still not entirely clear to me what the original goal of the archaeology project was, or whether a desire to tell narratives about the enslaved gave rise to the project or vice-versa.

December of 1996, journalist Christine Kreyling illuminated “The Shocking Truth” about Jackson in a *Nashville Scene* article. The subtitle of the article did not allude to slavery or to the Trail of Tears, however, but rather to restoration work done by the Ladies’ Hermitage Association and the “unexpected pairings” of colors present in the restored mansion. Kreyling did mention “difficult marking out for hero worship the guy who more or less invented the Trail of Tears” and having a “problem with the public figure Andrew Jackson carved for himself on the frontier,” but neglects to mention slavery. She described him as being a “self-taught agrarian” and as someone who “stood for ‘the people’ as he knew them, the white Anglo-Saxons who were trying to get ahead” before encouraging Jackson to “Rock on.” It appears that, even though extensive archaeological research had been conducted at the site of slave quarters at The Hermitage, slavery was not a dominant part of public or organizational conversations surrounding Jackson.

A Cultural Shift in Presidential and Plantation Museums and Reworking Narratives of Slavery

If it feels as though contemporary narratives about slavery on-site are simply being “tacked on” to narratives about Jackson’s family, career, and the items in the mansion and their authenticity, this is true—at least in part. Broad erasure of histories of slavery—at plantation and presidential museums and in the wider (white) public consciousness—ultimately shifted in roughly the past decade and a half, leaving the dilemma of how to incorporate these new narratives into preexisting stories of domestic bliss and public heroism. As presidential plantation museums began to interpret slavery in a more sustained fashion, The Hermitage kept pace. In 2006, an archaeological discovery combined with an institutional commitment to representing slavery resulted in the establishment of an Enslaved Memorial on the Hermitage property in 2009.

Prior to the coronavirus-induced shutdown in March of 2020, The Hermitage was poised to launch a new 90-minute walking tour offered three days a week, called “In Their Footsteps: Lives of the Hermitage Enslaved Tour” that focuses on the lives of the enslaved at The Hermitage. It complements Carriage Rides Through Time’s Wagon Tour while providing different content that does not render the wagon tour obsolete, per lead interpreter and former Carriage Rides Through Time Guide, Mark. On the tour, “experienced guides” share with visitors “how vital the lives of the enslaved were to the operation of the farm,” in addition to “the harsh reality of the enslaved system” and the ways “these men and women endured until gaining their freedom” (Andrew Jackson Foundation 2020). The design of the tour was in its infancy during my time as an interpreter, and I remember interpretive manager Robert mentioning that they are going to specially train interpreters for this tour and that they must receive additional training on how to discuss slavery with visitors.

Depictions of the enslaved at The Hermitage highlight their individuality and agency. Interpretation manager Robert exhorted us during a morning staff meeting to “mention an enslaved person *by name*” (emphasis original) in every part of the house. In doing so, they emphasize the humanity of enslaved people and emphasize that they are people, first and foremost, and that “slave” is not their identity, as Edith shared with a woman who asked why interpreters use the term “enslaved person.” However, in emphasizing the personhood of the enslaved without simultaneously highlighting slavery as a racialized system of inequality, Jackson is not painted as a perpetrator of atrocity. Hannah, for example, is often framed as someone who has quite a bit of “power” or “authority” in the mansion in her role as head housekeeper. She is presented most often as a person first and foremost, with little discussion of the system of racial oppression she lived under, with the exception of referring to her as

“enslaved.” During the Black History Month Memorial Service, the presenters discuss the hardships of the enslaved, but do not name Jackson as the person who chose to participate in this system of racial domination.

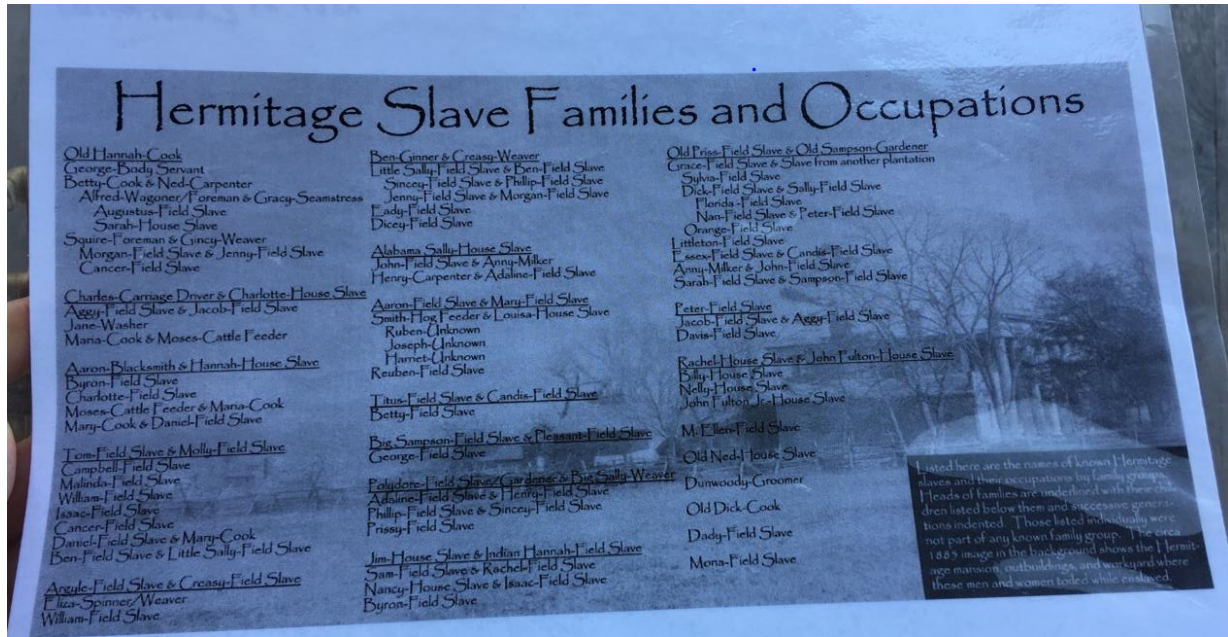


Figure 4.7: Current interpretation of slavery at The Hermitage centers around the humanity, skills, and individuality of the enslaved and their presence on the property as a community. This laminated guide to “Hermitage Slave Families and Occupations” is kept in a cloth bag on the back porch for the interpreter stationed there to show to interested visitors. Photo by Elizabeth Barna.

Slavery in Presidential Terms

Although discussion of slavery is generally associated with the plantation itself, i.e. within the genre of plantation museum, the emphasis on Jackson’s presidency creeps in and some staff members frame slavery in presidential terms. Administrator Roger Edwards, for example, noted that prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, owning slaves provided early presidents with “the revenue that they needed or the wealth that they needed” to “free...them up to serve the sort of public life.” Similarly, lead interpreter June argued in a conversation with me

that not all slaves were “beaten and raped,” and that the public needs to consider all that Jackson “had to do” to become president. Implicitly, slavery fell into this category of “have to” for both Edwards and June.

In a similar vein, administrators consider slavery to be an important part of Jackson’s legacy in its own right. Edwards explained that “aspects of [presidents’] lives...shaped their thinking and their policies to a degree,” and gave the example of Franklin D. Roosevelt:

I would say if you’re looking at Roosevelt as president, you can’t really disassociate him from the Depression, or you can’t disassociate Roosevelt from World War II, or the Japanese internment camps. ‘Cause there’s so much woven into the story of that individualized president that it’s part and parcel of the same story. And the same is true with Jackson and owning a plantation and owning slaves. It’s an aspect of their lives, but it’s really quite important.

In this manner, Edwards frames enslavement in relation to the presidency rather than to the Hermitage property itself. As the Andrew Jackson Foundation solidifies its multifaceted institutional identity as a presidential as a historic house, plantation site, and presidential museum, I predict that this framing may become more common.

REPRESENTING NATIVE AMERICAN RELATIONS AND THE TRAIL OF TEARS AT A BIFURCATED SITE

Discussion of Indian Removal is limited in the mansion, and to a large degree minimal in the museum. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 is considered part of Jackson’s role as president, not of his individual character. Some interpreters do reference Jackson “fighting Indians” during the Creek Wars to illustrate his ruggedness and to provide imagery of frontier life, but generally do not mention the Indian Removal Act of 1830. His raising of three Native American

children—Lyncoya, Theodore, and Charley—on the Hermitage property, however, are considered part of his domestic life and of the story of the Hermitage property. The story of Lyncoya was a prominent narrative in the mansion in the 1970s, most likely inspired by the popularity of Margery Evernden’s 1973 fictionalized historical novel *Lyncoya*, which tells the story of Lyncoya’s “adoption” by the Jacksons from Andrew Jackson Jr.’s perspective.

The centrality of Lyncoya to mansion tours has faded with the rise of dominant public images of Jackson as responsible for the Trail of Tears, but interpreters of all political orientations mention Lyncoya today—either emphasizing his role as “part of the family” or emphasizing the context in which Lyncoya came to the Hermitage. As Gwen put it, Jackson and his troops had killed his entire family, which is the reason he was orphaned in the first place. Older white visitors frequently ask about Lyncoya unprompted, generally phrasing it as some derivative of, “Didn’t he adopt an...Indian boy?” Public knowledge of Lyncoya and his residence at The Hermitage cements him as a regular point of conversation in the mansion, and the framing of that conversation by interpreters serves to project an image of Jackson as either paternal and sentimental or ruthless and self-deluded.

In spite of the rise in public recognition of the Trail of Tears, discussion of the Trail of Tears is generally reserved for the museum and also for classroom presentations by the education department. When I asked the education director Anna why the Trail of Tears is not discussed in detail in the mansion, she posed the absence of artifacts related to Native American history as a possible reason. Jackson had been gifted items by members of the various Southeastern Tribes earlier in his career, but that these items had not been preserved by the Ladies’ Hermitage Association. This explanation fits within understandings of the historic house museum genre as

one that relies on stories of domestic life, as told by recounting family histories and by pointing out objects.

The Andrew Jackson Foundation's increased alignment with the presidential museum genre, combined with the public's widespread association of Jackson with the Trail of Tears, suggests that Indian Removal may become a more dominant conversation. Per conversations with mid-level managers, increased interpretation of the Trail of Tears and Native American history is a current organizational goal. In 2019, The Hermitage hired a recent graduate of an archaeology Master's program to work as a lead interpreter, and through a conversation with a part-time interpreter, I learned that the candidate's experience working alongside Native American tribal representatives was a major appeal of her application.

I predict that, as historic sites increasingly acknowledge difficult histories and as The Hermitage turns to a presidential focus and a national scale, coverage of Jackson's role in the genocide of the Five Southeastern Tribes will feature more prominently in the site's programming. Although displaced Native Americans did not cross the Hermitage grounds on their painful and deadly journey West, the Northern Route of the Trail of Tears cut through what is now downtown Nashville. By capitalizing on its geographic claims to Nashville and of the Southeast, The Hermitage can discuss the Trail of Tears without needing to use the property itself as a vehicle for interpreting the history.

TOWARD INTEGRATION OF NARRATIVES?

At the time of this writing, there is preliminary evidence of an emerging trend toward integrating genres and geographies into cohesive narratives that tie elements of each into a

coherent representation in which institutional polysemy is still present but more intentionally integrated. The Hermitage’s new “Wager to Win: Art of the Southern Gentleman” program is one such example of this. This living history program covers the process of placing bets, Jackson’s intense interest in thoroughbred racing, and enslaved jockeys’ role in defining the sport. The subtitle “Art of the Southern Gentleman” suggests that this is part of the same series as the established duel program.

A Facebook post in March of 2020 encourages visitors to come to see “our new and improved Wager to Win,” which covers “Jackson’s role in the most popular sport of his day and the men, women, gamblers, and enslaved jockeys who made horse racing history.”



Figure 4.8: An online poster advertising The Hermitage’s new “Wager to Win” program on the process of placing bets, Jackson’s intense interest in thoroughbred racing, and enslaved jockeys’ role in the sport.

The confines of an existing institutional standard “are not total” (Becker 2008, p. 33) and can be changed. With “increased effort” or the willingness to risk “decreased circulation of your work” (Becker 2008, p. 33), organizations can develop new content that breaks its previous mold and step outside protective strategies of mimetic institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio 1983).

Although Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage has begun to generate coherent narratives that are

consistent in spite of competing genres and overlapping geographies, it has not generated regular programming that extends beyond the boundaries of existing genres of presidential museum or historic plantation site.

CONCLUSION

The Hermitage's tendency toward preservation, impeccable maintenance, aesthetic management, and a nearly exclusively white staff have deep roots in site's 131-year history as a museum and the Andrew Jackson Foundation's history as an organization. As a historic house museum, plantation site, and presidential museum, it is simultaneously a site of local memory, regional pride, and national identity—all while emerging as a space for reflection on histories of human rights violations.

This constellation of overlapping institutional classifications generates a tension between illuminating the realities of slavery while also instilling national pride and affirming the myth of the American Dream, and discussing Indian Removal in a way that follows the conventions of historic house museums' focus on physical artifacts and presidential museums' emphasis on the leader's biography. This tension sometimes contributes to omission and outright erasure of sustained discussion of racial inequality and genocide in America, both in Jackson's time and in the present day. More often, however, representations of these histories are more nuanced. In the case of slavery, there is a sustained effort at presenting enslaved African-Americans as agentic individuals. This humanizes the enslaved, but in doing so, often diverts conversation away from systemic issues of racial inequality.

With regard to Indian Removal and genocide, the site's museum signage presents Indian Removal as a blemish on Jackson's presidency, and on the mansion tour, interpreters generally provide information on Lyncoya in connection with the property rather than with Jackson's brutality during the Creek Wars. As The Hermitage solidifies its narratives on slavery and continues its transition toward an emphasis on the presidential, it is possible that the genocide of indigenous peoples will feature more prominently as the Andrew Jackson Foundation's institutional identity evolves.

In the next chapter, I discuss the ways the interpretive staff themselves shape representations of Andrew Jackson during the Trump presidency, and the ways the site and staff's orientation toward customer service colors those representations in sometimes conflicting and counterintuitive ways.

CHAPTER V. THE IMPACT OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRIANGLE, COMPETING ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS, AND THE TIME CLOCK

“I don’t care that Hannah was the lady who answered the door...I didn’t come here to learn about the slaves. I came here to learn about the president.”

-White woman visitor, as relayed to me by historic interpreters Ellen and Gwen

“I’m not seeing much on slavery here. Why aren’t you talking about it more?”

-White male visitor, as he approached me on the line

After yet another busy rotation through the mansion, I rushed my way to the break room to clock out temporarily and heat up my lunch. Annette sat at the break room table in her day dress and layers of petticoats and observed, “Our job is preserving the site first and foremost. It’s customer service. Then knowing historical facts and information.” The emphasis on customer service was a theme I had noticed during my months in the field, but Annette distilled it in a way that led me to think about the competing goals and mandates of The Hermitage as a historic site, tourist attraction, and educational center. Friction between historic interpreters and guests was another related theme I noticed frequently, and I began wondering how the nature of the customer service relationship shaped representations of Jackson and issues of slavery, genocide, and democracy.

The Hermitage’s existence within multiple museum genres across nested geographies is further complicated by guests’ expectations for what the site is, or should be. Visitors to The Hermitage have an array of responses to the site’s presentation of the history of slavery and of Jackson’s relationship with Native Americans. Visitor demand for particular narratives and representations—both in online reviews and in person—shapes the site’s representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy in the Jacksonian Era. In this chapter, I address the question:

How do interactions between interpreters and visitors, as shaped by the constraints of the time clock and conflicting organizational logics, affect representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy at The Hermitage? In other words, how does the nature of historic interpretation as customer service generate institutional polysemy?

Previous work on representations of slavery in historic house museums does not focus on individual workers or the dynamics between them and the customer or management, but rather examines the presentations of organizations as a whole. In their seminal book, *Representations of Slavery*, Eichstedt and Small (2002) look at the manner in which private southern plantation museums present the history of slavery to visitors. Based on observation of tours at over one hundred plantation sites in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana, they develop a typology of “primary representational/discursive strategies used to discuss slavery and the enslaved.” My work expands on this by exploring the manner in which representations at a single site may vary based on a variety of factors, with a major contributor being the individual staff and their relationship to various groups of guests. Rather than arguing that The Hermitage as an institution falls within a single representational/discursive strategy, I contend that representations of slavery shift at this single site due to the nature of the customer service relationship.

Organizations like The Hermitage are not monolithic actors projecting a static image of difficult histories, but rather a constellation of staff, volunteers, board members, and others who adapt their presentation based on a combination of organizational demands and guest preferences. Even if staff and the organization enter into interaction with guests with a particular set of narratives and values in mind, the nature of the customer service relationship shapes the narratives presented to the public in the moment.

THE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRIANGLE, EMOTIONAL LABOR, AND ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS

Dynamics within the customer service triangle (Subramanian and Suquet 2018) affect historic interpreters' presentation of history at The Hermitage. Definitions of service work vary, but Leidner's provides a basic and inclusive definition of service work as occupations that "require workers to interact directly with customers or clients" (Leidner 1993, p. 1). Some definitions include professionals (as in O'Riaian 2010), while others restrict the category to "front line" service workers. I use Leidner and O'Riaian's broader definitions, because historic interpreters, lead interpreters, interpretive managers, and education staff all incorporate front line aspects, with some falling into the category of "professional."

Service work, regardless of the level of professionalization, is ultimately characterized by the "customer service triangle": a set of interdependent, power-laden interactions between three key parties: 1) the employer, 2) the worker, and 3) the client or customer (Frenkel et al 1999; Leidner 1996; Macdonald and Sirianni 1996). The interactive service triangle is characterized by continuous tension between cooperation and conflict among management, service workers, and their customers. In fact, in their review of the rising study of interactive service work, McCammon and Griffin (2000) deem this triangle—which they term the "interactive service triangle" to be the distinguishing characteristic that sets service work apart from industrial or manufacturing occupations.

Within the constraints of the service triangle, frontline staff members at The Hermitage must choose between conflicting organizational logics in their efforts to please both the visitor and management. Thornton and Ocasio (1999: 804) define organizational¹⁸ logics as "the

¹⁸ They use the term "institutional logics."

socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.” In this chapter, I identify seven dominant organizational logics at The Hermitage: 1) Preservation and Security, 2) High-Quality Education, 3) High Attendance (and Revenue), 4) Highlighting Jackson’s Character, 5) Introducing Difficult Histories, 6) Fostering Positive American Identity, and 7) Positive Guest Experience.

The Hermitage is a non-profit organization governed by the Andrew Jackson Foundation and does not receive regular funding from the state or federal government. Online reviews and other visitor feedback have great influence over the organization’s decision making, and administrators, managers, and frontline service staff alike seek to please the customer. As an educational setting with a consumer in mind, the organization has competing organizational logics, and staff must navigate them in their daily tasks.

This entails a heavy amount of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), which is made more complex at a site where one guest may be seeking a different emotional and learning outcome than another guest. In a text to my partner at 11:23pm after a day in the field as a historic interpreter, I vented, “I give like 110% of my emotional energy and like 95% of my physical energy at work.” Being a historic interpreter generally entails a day of being engaging, gesturing toward things, walking up and down stairs, anticipating and answering guest questions, and deciding how to respond to guests’ (often racist) misconceptions and it is just so much work.¹⁹

¹⁹ Indeed, staff members occasionally had dreams about work. Rose said that one night, she sat up straight up in bed talking about Jackson’s “invalid’s chair” in the middle of the night. This was after Fall Fest, when over 2,000 people were on the property. I, too, had a dream about work, in which we had switched from a rotation system to single-guided tours and we had a group wait outside for over an hour. Interpretive manager Robert dreamed about “being late or trying to get somewhere” on the property, and

During breaks, Laura, Edith, and I all admitted to one another that we are introverts and that working in historic interpretation takes a lot of energy on our part. One of Laura's days off is Monday, which she spends quietly at home by herself, free of the social obligations of her husband or her young son. I often saved energy in the morning by sitting down as much as possible, or opting for a quiet station such as the garden. Sitting down in front of guests was generally prohibited, but leads and the interpretive manager encouraged us to sit down whenever we had the chance (i.e. no one was around). During peak tourist season at The Hermitage, my legs, feet, back, and abdominal muscles were sore at the end of each shift—as were my arms, since I gestured widely with my hands when I presented, and my vocal cords, for that matter. My face, too, felt tight and strained from holding a “customer service smile” throughout the day. I was completely exhausted at the end of a day that Annette described as “insane,” and she lamented that she was staying to give a ghost tour that night. Similarly, Gwen said she would be “working today and tomorrow and doing the campfire tour tomorrow night.” “You’re a saint,” I replied empathetically. During my fieldwork, I frequently told friends and colleagues that it takes me two days to recover from one day at The Hermitage. One day I asked Dana if it gets any easier, and she paused, laughed, and said matter-of-factly, “No!”

In addition to the Hermitage's role as a tourist attraction and its staff's role as service workers performing taxing emotional labor in choosing between competing organizational logics, the structuring of the staff's responsibilities along a time clock with half-hour rotations at stations has an impact on representations of Jackson and key issues of his era. I argue that conflicting organizational logics (Thornton and Ocasio 1999; Thornton et al. 2012), combined

about “being slow.” Lead interpreter Carrie said she dreamed about work “sometimes” as well, as did interpreter Leon.

with the nature of historic interpretation as shift work on a tight rotational timetable, generate a shifting constellation of representations of history, even within a single interpreter on a single day.

DOMINANT ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS AT ANDREW JACKSON’S HERMITAGE

Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage’s mission statement is to “preserve the home place of Andrew Jackson, to create learning opportunities and to inspire citizenship through experiencing the life and unique impact of Jackson” (Hermitage 2020). The shorter version staff often reference is simply, “Preserve, Educate, Inspire.” This mission lays the foundation for several organizational logics that govern the site’s operations, and these logics often conflict with one another. Organizational logics at The Hermitage include 1) Preservation and security, 2) High-quality education, 3) Introduction of difficult histories (namely of slavery and Indian removal), 4) Highlighting of Jackson’s character, 5) High attendance (and revenue), 6) Positive American identity, and 7) Positive guest experience. (Readers should note that these are emergent categories of analysis, not official categories of the organization.) Here, I describe each in turn, and in the section that follows, I will discuss the manner in which a customer service orientation contributes to staff decision-making in navigating these competing logics.

Organizational Logic 1: Preservation and Security

Preservation is at the top of The Hermitage’s priorities list, with security as a necessary corollary. The first words heard over the walkie talkies in the morning are generally, “Mansion

to security,” as the lead interpreter checks in with security to disarm the alarms in the mansion before she unlocks the doors to the historic home. “Closing” the mansion at the end of the day includes turning off all lights, locking doors, and walking around the mansion to test the doors from the outside, prior to radioing security.

The mansion opened to the public as a museum in 1889, and founding members of the Ladies Hermitage Association strove to return auctioned family possessions to the mansion. Even during Alfred Jackson’s time, there was great concern about guests taking things from the mansion as a souvenir. Alfred managed this by holding guests “on their honor not to deface, mutilate, or destroy anything on the place” or “surreptitiously appropriate a souvenir,” Mary Dorris shared in *Preservation of the Hermitage* (1915, p. 119). During the early history of the museum, iron guards over the doorway blocked access to Jackson’s bedroom “to keep ‘de second class’ from taking things,” Dorris (1915) reported Alfred saying (p. 139).

Today, over 90 percent of the non-textile items in the mansion are original, “not only to the time period, but to Jackson and his family,” as I often told guests prior to launching into what the museum calls, “preservation requests.” Preservation requests, or a “list of do’s and don’ts” as some interpreters call it when introducing them to guests, include:

- staying on the carpet
- not taking photos inside the mansion (unless on a VIP tour)
- not eating, drinking, or chewing gum or tobacco in the mansion
- not touching any of the artifacts, “including the original 183-year-old wallpaper”
- leaving umbrellas and wet jackets outside when it rains
- being careful not to bump one’s head on the glass panels that protect the rooms.

After Jackson's tomb was vandalized in April of 2018, protecting the tomb with intensified security and with cameras in nearby trees were responses in line with this logic of preservation. During the unveiling ceremony, the president and CEO described the manner in which a team of specialists removed the spray paint "with lasers" in only eleven days, and that The Hermitage would now have "three times the security" around the tomb and would prosecute the vandals "to the fullest extent" if they found them.

For the six months or so following the vandalism, there were round-the-clock "eyes on the tomb," whether it was a contracted security guard overnight or a historic interpreter during the day. A "Garden" station was added to the interpreters' rotation largely out of security concerns, and staying near the tomb was of utmost importance. One summer morning, I wandered through the garden, found a ripe fig, and ate it. I began leaning over to look for others, but realized I was straying from the tomb and returned to my post.

Organizational Logic 2: High-Quality Education

"Educate" is clearly listed in The Hermitage's mission statement, and educating the public about Jackson and his time is a central logic that guides the site's operations. Since the summer of 2018, new historic interpreters have undergone an intensive two- to three-week training that includes shadowing of current interpreters, hours-long seminars on key aspects of Jackson's biography and legacy, including The Bank War, The War of 1812, Jackson's Presidency, Slavery at The Hermitage, and the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As a noted Jacksonian Era historian shared with me during a conversation at an unrelated symposium, The Hermitage has really "stepped up their game." When he visited decades ago, the site was staffed

by “very nice ladies who didn’t know anything,” presumably about the history of the time period.

Today, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage provides educational programs to over 20,000 elementary school children per year (GuideStar 2020), hosting the classroom presentations (see Chapter 2), tours of the property, and a Junior Docents program for fourth graders learning Tennessee history. A commitment to historical accuracy is critical to interpreters’ presentations, and staff are encouraged to “not just make something up” when they don’t know the answer, but to refer to a resource guide in the mansion’s closets or to ask a fellow interpreter.

Organizational Logic 3: High Attendance (and Revenue)

With an annual attendance of 250,000 to 300,000 people per year in the past few years, Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage is one of the most-visited American presidential sites. From its inception in 1889, the Andrew Jackson Foundation (then the Ladies Hermitage Association) has not received regular federal funding, but instead rely on grants, corporate donations, revenue from hosting events, and of course, guest ticket sales. In 2017, program services accounted for 66.5 percent of the Andrew Jackson Foundation’s total revenue of \$5.3 million, followed by contributions at 28.5 percent (ProPublica 2020). At an all-staff meeting, the president and CEO boasted The Hermitage’s massive multi-billion-dollar contribution to the local economy. Weddings and special events are held on-site year-round as part of these revenue-generating efforts, and annual Spring Outings and galas are major fundraising events.

Organizational Logic 4: Highlighting Jackson's Character

Since leadership of The Hermitage site transitioned in 2011 from the Ladies Hermitage Association to the rebranded Andrew Jackson Foundation, Jackson's cult of personality (rather than the features of his mansion) has become a central priority at The Hermitage. The rationale for this rebranding was that "both the legacy of Andrew Jackson and his home, The Hermitage, held tremendous but unrealized potential to educate and inspire" (GuideStar 2020; see Appendix C). A speaker at a Women's History Month event on the Ladies' Hermitage Association in 2019 explained that The Hermitage wanted to expand its reach and rise as a site of national significance in addition to local significance. Prospective board members would be much more eager to join the Andrew Jackson Foundation than the Ladies' Hermitage Association, they reasoned.

With this shift, large banners line the brick pillars leading to the ticket office, with larger-than-life images of Jackson, one deeming him "General," another "Statesman," another "President," and still another "Legend." The primary exhibit in the Andrew Jackson Center is called "Born for a Storm" and details Jackson's biography while displaying artifacts from the War of 1812 and life-sized white statues of Jackson and his wife, Rachel, in reproductions of their inaugural finery.

Organizational Logic 5: Introduction of Difficult Histories²⁰

One of interpretive manager Robert's major priorities for historic interpreters was to "mention an enslaved person by name in each part of the house" during the mansion tour, as he often reminded us during morning meetings. Trainings for incoming staff in my cohort and beyond included sessions on Slavery and Indian Removal, and discussion of either topic with guests is strongly encouraged by the interpretive manager and education director. Many of the audio tour stops mention slavery or an individual enslaved person, and The First Hermitage includes interpretive signage distinguishing the experiences of the enslaved from those of the Jacksons.

Amidst the barrage of information about Jackson's biography, politics, career, and legacy at the "Andrew Jackson: Born for a Storm" exhibit is a panel with a timeline discussing the Trail of Tears. Although highlighting Jackson's character and biography are arguably more dominant in the exhibit, these difficult and diverse histories are introduced briefly. Educational offerings for children include "Slavery at The Hermitage" and "Trail of Tears" classes. In fact, the Trail of Tears presentation is the one most often requested by teachers, said education director Anna, during a conversation about the classes available.

Organizational Logic 6: Fostering Positive American Identity

Fostering a Positive American Identity is implied in The Hermitage's mission to "inspire citizenship" and is reflected in its national scope and organizational identity as a presidential

²⁰ I was torn between calling them "diverse" versus "difficult" histories. I didn't want to use "diverse" or "difficult" as euphemisms for the other, and it seems that the discussion of people of color and of painful histories are both key dimensions. (and are both things that upset visitors who want a good, "white" time).

museum in addition to a historic plantation site. This aspect of The Hermitage's mission was present to a large degree from the beginning, with charter member of the Ladies' Hermitage Association Mary Dorris calling the property "the political center of the United States" from the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 until Andrew Jackson's death in 1845 (Dorris 1915, p. 141). In the last chapter, I discussed The Hermitage's contribution to national identity in detail, from the Ladies' Hermitage Association's founding to the present, and will therefore refrain from doing so here.

Organizational Logic 7: Positive Guest Experience

Positive Guest Experience is one of the most dominant organizational logics at The Hermitage, perhaps second to Preservation and Security. Here, I define "Positive Guest Experience" not in terms of guests making meaning about history, racial equality, or Jackson, but simply that they feel immersed in the history and "have a good tour,"²¹ as I often told visitors as I ushered them into the mansion and handed them off to the interpreter in the entry hall. Although learning is important, there is a balance between education and the creation of a sense of relaxation, nostalgia, and "family fun," as ads for The Hermitage frequently note during school holidays.

Good customer service is critical to ensuring this Positive Guest Experience. Costumed interpreters taking photos of and with visitors is common, including at slave cabins when staff happen to be stationed there. A wedding proposal was captured on camera by a historic

²¹ I view Positive Guest Experience as distinct from visitor satisfaction with the content. For some visitors, a trip to The Hermitage is only good if slavery and/or Indian Removal are mentioned, and for others, it is just the opposite. Positive Guest Experience is consistent with the site's desire for visitors to have a good time while touring the property, and visitor satisfaction with the content is captured under High-Quality Education and Introduction of Difficult Histories.

interpreter, who with permission from the couple, submitted the photos of the couple and ring behind the mansion to The Hermitage’s Facebook page. Making guests in line for the mansion comfortable and “feel like they aren’t waiting in line,” as lead interpreter Janet told us, is key, especially on busy days. On a particularly busy and particularly hot summer day when the line nearly reached the fence (which indicates an hour wait), a middle-aged woman in a blue shirt with flowers printed on it and dark shoulder-length hair emphatically reassured me that the wait was “fine.” I thanked her and said, “People get mad in summer” when it’s hot and they have to wait.



Figure 5.1: During my time at The Hermitage, interpreter Gwen and other interpretive staff mentioned the need for benches for visitors waiting in line to visit the mansion. When I returned the fall after completing my participant-observation there, these benches had been added to the path in front of the mansion. Photo by Elizabeth Barna, November 15, 2019.



Figure 5.2: Advertisement for a “Family Fun Day!” at The Hermitage, posted on the site’s Facebook page in June of 2019. Screenshot taken January 29, 2020.

Creating a sense of southern hospitality, as older long-time interpreters Richard and Leanne noted in our interview, is critical to creating a Positive Guest Experience. Similarly, immersion in 19th-century Tennessee aligns with The Hermitage’s 130-year legacy as a historic house museum. For Robert and Lewis, interpreters in their thirties who both perform the duel presentation, costuming is a key part of this. For Lewis, in fact, costuming is “just as important as slavery” in terms of the inclusion of content. Audrey and Janet, too, share a passion for historic costuming and make historic clothing for the site. The production of positive emotions through on-site through aesthetics and the generation of nostalgia through the genre of historic house museum reflect this logic of Positive Guest Experience through immersion.

ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS IN HARMONY

In many cases, the organizational logics of the institution scaffold one another, and there is no conflict in ensuring that multiple goals of the institution are met. Providing a Positive

Guest Experience aligned with Preservation, for example, when a woman with silver and black hair and wire-rimmed glasses sheepishly told me in the mansion, “I forgot to get rid of my gum,” and extended a folded tissue toward my hand. I smiled, took it, and thanked her. Providing a Positive Guest Experience similarly aligns with High Quality Education and High Attendance (and Revenue) when a Guest Services manager shows historic interpreters how to reboot guests’ handheld visitor audio tour systems by pressing “pound/ volume up/ 3.”

The audio tours allow for larger numbers of visitors to access a greater amount of content across a 1,120 acre property without a staff member present (except to fix the equipment!), with less pressure on staff to relay that content. Similarly, packets of guides to the mansion for non-English speakers allow for a greater number of visitors to have a positive experience and learn more about the mansion²².

CONFLICTING ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF SLAVERY, GENOCIDE, AND DEMOCRACY

As one might imagine, however, conflict between organizational logics is often unavoidable. As front-line staff (namely interpreters, lead interpreters, and guest services staff) interact with members of the public, they must often decide between conflicting logics during a given day at the site. The logics of Preservation and Security and of High-Quality Education often conflict with High Attendance (and Revenue), for example. Visitors often come to The Hermitage on vacation and anticipate a relaxing, fun visit, and the organization wrestles with the

²² The language in the packets is “outdated,” however, as Edith, who has studied a fair bit of French, noted when perusing the French version between groups. She said that she would want to revise it, but not if The Hermitage is not paying her to do so.

tension between Introducing Difficult Histories and providing a Positive Guest Experience. Here, I will discuss the manner in which conflicting organizational logics lead interpreters to make (often difficult) choices when interacting with visitors.

Table 5.1 below lists the dominant organizational logics I identified, as well as other logics that frequently conflict with them. In the section that follows, I present examples of the tensions between organizational logics that frequently occur, and the dilemmas they present to staff. Although staff are guided by their individual values, beliefs, and areas of expertise, the dominant logics of the organization—and conflicts between them—can at times produce counterintuitive results.

Table 5.1: Competing Organizational Logics at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage

| Competing Organizational Logics | |
|--|---|
| 1. Preservation and Security | 3. High Attendance (and Revenue) 7. Positive Guest Experience |
| 2. High-Quality Education | 3. High Attendance (and Revenue) 7. Positive Guest Experience |
| 3. High Attendance (and Revenue) | 1. Preservation and Security 2. High-Quality Education 5. Introduction of Difficult Histories 7. Positive Guest Experience |
| 4. Highlighting of Jackson’s Character | 5. Introduction of Difficult Histories |
| 5. Introduction of Difficult Histories | 3. High Attendance (and Revenue) 4. Highlighting of Jackson’s Character |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Fostering Positive American Identity 7. Positive Guest Experience |
| 6. Fostering Positive American Identity | 5. Introduction of Difficult Histories |
| 7. Positive Guest Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preservation and Security 2. High-Quality Education 3. High Attendance (and Revenue) 5. Introduction of Difficult Histories |

In the sections that follow, I first highlight logics that generally conflict with Positive Guest Experience and High Attendance (and Revenue) to provide a picture of what day-to-day emotional labor by interpretive staff looks like, before the issue of difficult histories even enters the equation. Then I will discuss the conflict between Introduction of Difficult Histories and Highlighting of Jackson’s Character, Fostering Positive American Identity, High Attendance (and Revenue), and Positive Guest Experience. I will describe each conflict and then provide examples of the ways staff and the organization as a whole seek to bridge or resolve conflict between each pair of logics. Later in the chapter, I will address the ways that the time clock, the rotation structure of the work day, and visitor agency further complicate staff’s efforts, ultimately contributing to an ever-changing constellation of polysemous representations of Jackson, slavery, genocide, and democracy.

Logics Conflicting with Positive Guest Experiences and High Attendance (and Revenue)

Working as a historic interpreter requires heavy emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), particularly when navigating between providing a Positive Guest Experience and other organizational logics. One such conflicting logic is Preservation and Security, as historic interpreters strive to make visitors feel “at home” in the historic mansion while also protecting its delicate artifacts. Historic interpreters have developed strategies to protect the artifacts in the mansion in ways that are either nonverbal (e.g., Edith presenting on stairways, to discourage guests from leaning on the guardrails, or staring at guests’ feet until they realize they are standing on the hardwood floor and move to the carpet); do not single out a given visitor (e.g., me reminding all guests to “please stay on the carpet” if I notice one guest standing on the original wood floors); or address a visitor politely and formally when correcting them (e.g., Stephen gesturing to a guest’s feet and gently imploring, “Sir, if you could stay on the carpet?”). In this manner, historic interpreters provide a Positive Guest Experience while also maintaining the integrity of the historic home.



Figure 5.3: The “Eighth of January” mantel in the mansion dining room, decorated with fruit and garland for the Christmas season of 2020. The Battle of New Orleans was said to be the height of Alfred Jackson’s tour at the time of the museum’s founding in 1889. He used this mantelpiece to talk about the battle with visitors.

Today the dining room is protected behind glass and off limits to visitors (except for special “Behind the Glass” tours), and Alfred was careful to keep visitors from stealing pieces of the mantel as souvenirs during his time as the first tour guide 130 years ago.

The strain between Positive Visitor Experience and achieving High Attendance (and Revenue) while providing a High-Quality Education to the public is also challenging. “No groups today”²³ was one thing that interpreters were often visibly relieved to hear during morning meetings, as it reduces this strain significantly. One morning, Gwen told me there were “two big groups coming in right at 9.” “How big?” I asked cautiously. “One group of 40 and one group of 50,” she answered. “Oh boy,” I said sarcastically. Sometimes to reduce the wait time (or the perception of wait time!) on busy days, lead interpreters and ticket office staff directed visitors to spend time in the garden, explore the grounds, or watch The Duel or Horse Race presentation before heading to the mansion. One such morning, I was in the garden when I heard over the radio, “Breezeway to mansion” and the announcement that a “group of 53” was “making a leisurely walk” to the mansion and “some are going to the garden.” Shit, I thought to

²³ By groups, I am referring to formal groups on chartered tour buses.

myself as I braced myself for the barrage of guests so early in the day. June chimed in over the radio, “Lead to garden.” “This is the garden,” I chirped pleasantly. “Did you hear that message?” “Yep, I did,” I said as cheerily as I could. “10-4,” she replied.

Because groups need to be managed efficiently, sometime a reprieve from a group can be met with frustration if it will produce bottlenecks later. For example, one particularly busy afternoon, I was stationed in the Entry Hall and Susan was working the Line. I had sent my group onward into the Side Hall, and as was customary, I opened the front door and popped the lock loudly to indicate to Susan that I was ready for her group. She kept her back to me and toward the guests, drawling on, and I found myself “simultaneously annoyed and confused” that she had not gotten my signal. I also recorded in my notes feeling “relieved [the] group wasn’t coming in.” This tension between my relief at having a short reprieve and my frustration that Susan was not “keeping things moving” illustrates the pervasiveness of the High Attendance (and Revenue) logic.

Staff often work preemptively to bridge conflicting organizational logics. For example, High Attendance and the efficiency of tours often makes it challenging to incorporate time for visitors to ask questions or engage in in-depth conversation with interpreters in the mansion. During my training, historic interpreter Dana encouraged me to incorporate commonly asked questions into my presentation, to save time and preempt visitor questions. Rather than hearing visitors ask, “Why are the beds so high?” or “Who are the busts of?” I can weave the statements, “The beds are high for air flow,” and “That bust is of Levi Woodbury, the secretary of the Navy in Jackson’s second cabinet. That bust is of Lewis Cass, the secretary of war and the first territorial governor of Michigan.”

Correcting visitor misconceptions before they voice them is a key strategy as well. As I presented Andrew and Rachel's bedroom and Junior and Sarah's bedroom in the Side Hall, a guest commented on the "little tiny beds." "Ah, I was just about to get into that!" I said cheerily, adding that "The beds might look super tiny, but they're actually 6 foot 9 long and about the width of a queen size bed. Jackson was 6'1" and would have fit in that bed comfortably."

Similarly, June encouraged me to not conclude my presentation in the entry hall with, "Does anyone have any questions?" Rather than drawing questions out of visitors, I should nonverbally create the sense that I am open to questions, while encouraging visitors to move on to the next part of the house. This contrasts sharply with my practices in college classrooms, as I ask, "What questions do you all have?" and wait at least six seconds before moving on, to encourage student engagement and to normalize asking questions during lectures and class discussions.

On mansion tours, there is a delicate balance between "keeping it movin'," as lead interpreter Janet put it, making guests feel welcome, and being "very thorough" as an older white woman visitor from the U.K. complimented me at the end of my tour. June gave us newer interpreters advice on how to accomplish this during the Christmas season, when seasonal artifacts were on display in the mansion: "Just mention one or two things. Don't stress yourself out over it," but instead, "incorporate it into the narrative." For example, "the aquamarine necklace belonged to Sarah. We think it was passed down from Rachel to Sarah after her death, through Junior," and it "makes sense she would have a March birthstone." Janet said that the key was to choose a few key pieces of information to present to each group and to relay that information in a calm, confident voice at a comfortable speed, noting that if the interpreter seems rushed, the group will sense that and feel rushed as well.

Logics Conflicting with Introduction of Difficult Histories

In addition to managing conflicts between organizational logics to ensure a Positive Guest Experience, historic interpreters must also manage a constellation of logics that conflict with the Introduction of Difficult Histories. Here, I discuss conflict between discussing slavery and Indian Removal and 1) High Attendance (and Revenue), 2) Positive Guest Experiences, 3) Highlighting Jackson's Character, and 4) Fostering Positive American Identity. The last two are closely related, and both address notions of democracy in 19th-century America.

High Attendance (and Revenue) versus Introduction of Difficult Histories

High attendance often discourages in-depth discussion of fraught topics on-site. During busy times when mansion tours are condensed to reduce hour-long wait times, "slavery is the first thing to go," per historic interpreter Anna. Anna is quite progressive on present-day social issues, so I was surprised to hear this. I asked, "Why do you think that is?" and she replied that she finds it better to omit the subject of slavery rather than to insufficiently cover it. It takes time and energy to discuss slavery in a manner that is respectful and captures its gravity. Correcting visitor misconceptions about the way wallpaper was made or about the beds being small or people being "shorter back then" is much quicker and easier than dispelling deeply held misconceptions about the history of slavery, genocide, and racial oppression in the United States. I admitted to Anna that I, too, found myself reducing discussion of it during peak visitorship. "Edith and I were just talking about this," I told her, and realized that this reduced discussion of slavery and genocide during times of peak attendance was more common than I had thought.

Positive Guest Experience versus Introduction of Difficult Histories

Visitor demand and shifts in peer institutions' practices and industry standards, with a boost from archaeological research at the site of several Hermitage slave dwellings, have contributed to further discussion of slavery at the site. As Robert, the interpretive manager, exhorted us during our morning meeting, "The number one complaint we get on TripAdvisor is that we don't talk about slavery enough. Mention an enslaved person by name in each part of the house." At the same time, the museum has a 131-year history, and narratives of the enslaved were introduced to the museum's curriculum only about ten years ago. With a largely middle-aged to senior visitor demographic, many guests familiar with plantation museums wish for nostalgia—not Black and indigenous history.

Interpretation staff often seek to provide a positive guest experience by tailoring their presentation to the group in front of them. During training, I was encouraged to tailor my tour to a given group based on the racial composition of the group. Janet, a lead interpreter, put it simply: "When there are African-Americans in your group, make sure you talk about slavery. When there are Native Americans, make sure you talk about Indian Removal." Upon being hired, I thought I would give the same tour to each and every group, highlighting the human rights violations Jackson committed above all else. White people needed to learn about atrocities just as much, did they not? However, I, too, found myself adapting my presentation depending on the group in front of me. After emphasizing enslaved experiences to a group that included several Black guests more than I had to the all-white group before, I sighed and thought to myself, "White people are the ones who really need to hear about this."

Over time, I had found that negative experiences with white guests, combined with a feeling of vulnerability as a front-line service worker and as a woman, made it difficult to realize

my own ideals. About a month into working at the Hermitage, before I even began to speak to a waiting group, a white woman suddenly declared that “Slavery was good!” and that enslaved people “had food and a place to live.” I debated with her for several minutes, patiently presenting example after example of the brutality of the institution, to which she responded that slavery is “just like the military” and “just like bosses take care of their employees today.” Finally, frustrated, she insisted that “your shoes are too shiny! They’re not historically accurate!” and marched into the mansion. Stunned, I did not know what else to say.

In many instances, I found myself feeling strong and brave enough to correct visitors who commented that an enslaved nanny named Louisa was “loyal” or that “it’s a good thing they had slaves” to clean all the fireplaces. However, soon after my encounter with the woman who aggressively argued that slavery was “good,” I had a man with Confederate flags tattooed on his hands join my tour group, and on another occasion, a man with neo-Nazi symbols on his shirt. Intimidated, I avoided slavery in the former case and touched on it tenderly and briefly in the latter.

Reflecting on these experiences, I asked a carload of fellow interpreters if they “size up a group” before deciding how to approach Jackson’s legacy, and they agreed, “Absolutely!” David, a young interpreter in his early twenties, admitted that when a visitor declared that Alfred demonstrated “loyalty” by being buried next to Andrew Jackson, he sheepishly failed to challenge him. A desire to please and to avoid conflict in a customer service setting, as well as feelings of intimidation in a polarized society, often stifle conversations about slavery and Indian Removal.

Sometimes staff allowed visitors to do some of this challenging for them. For example, when I shared with a group upstairs that an enslaved nanny named Louisa would have slept on

the floor in the hallway where they were standing, a middle-aged white woman quietly observed in admiration that Louisa was “devoted.” A younger woman in the group whispered to her mother in response, “She wasn’t devoted. She was a slave.” Rather than addressing the initial visitor’s misguided comment that Louisa was “devoted,” I allowed her challenger’s comment to stand and to implicitly side with her by telling the story of Tom, a man who was enslaved by the Jacksons and escaped. Jackson had posted a “wanted” ad for Tom’s return, with the promise of compensating his capturer for the number of lashes given to Tom as punishment. By providing an example of the cruelty of chattel slavery without confronting an individual guest²⁴, the offending visitor is allowed to save face while the interpreter presents the entire group with information challenging minimizing of slavery.

Racialized Tailoring of Content

Let us further explore the racialized tailoring of content based on a given tour group’s demographics as a strategy for bridging Positive Guest Experience with Introduction of Difficult Histories. During an afternoon rotation on The Line, I mentioned slavery and said that enslaving over 300 people is “how he [(Jackson)] made his money.” A group of high-school aged Black and Latinx students, as well as a white mother and a younger child in a separate group, sat on the bench before me. Upon concluding my presentation, a teenage girl with brown skin and dark hair said with a smile, “It’s nice that you’re honest about it.” “Of course!” I smiled back, feeling

²⁴ Of course, direct confrontation between historic interpreters and guests does happen, and is likely shaped by gender dynamics on the interaction. Historic interpreter David ventured that male staff are not exposed to nearly the same level or intensity of rebuttals from guests as female staff when they challenge guests. One example is Tony, an interpreter in his early twenties, recounting the story of an enslaved woman named Betty doing laundry for money when the Jacksons moved to Florida briefly. Rachel was very upset about Betty’s laundry enterprise, and Andrew Jackson threatened her with punishment if she should be caught offering paid laundry services again. A white woman guest asked Tony of Betty, “Well, did she mind?” to which Tony replied, “Perhaps the better question is, why would she be in that position [to have to mind] in the first place?”

uplifted and more confident in discussing slavery and “Jackson’s decision to participate in it,” as I often put it. I continued by talking about Alfred and sharing that he is the only enslaved person where we know where he is buried on the property. A Black woman with medium-to-dark skin and naturally curly hair nodded with a hint of a smile as I recounted Alfred’s story.

My own comfort level dropped when groups were overwhelmingly non-white and were visiting as tourists, not as a school group. This tension intensified, I noticed, when I presented in the mansion itself. One day in the mansion, two groups in a row in the entry hall were exclusively African-American. This had not happened before. I felt horribly uncomfortable as I went through the motions, and wasn’t sure if I was talking about slavery too much or too little. Much of this discomfort, in my experience, stems from The Hermitage’s positioning of all guests as white, regardless of their actual race. In a group where Blackness is the exception, this feels more plausible, but in an exclusively Black group, this positioning of “Hermitage guest as white” feels more disingenuous.

Staff often emphasized slavery more heavily when there was at least one Black person in their group, yet not all Black guests expressed a strong interest in learning about slavery during their visit. When The Slave Dwelling Project came to The Hermitage, for example, a Black woman in her thirties approached as the Black guest interpreter announced, “Hey, folks, we’re about to start a storytelling session right here.” I informed the guest that there was more programming on slavery that day and that a Hermitage staff member would be leading a tour around the property to discuss it. “I don’t want to hear about that,” she said, to my surprise. “It’s slavery, it’s cotton...” and walked away. I found it similarly disorienting when a Black woman in her sixties asked me, “How did Rachel die?” which I had heard almost exclusively

from white guests prior. This surprise, of course, stemmed from me assuming the guests' interests based on their race.

Highlighting of Jackson's Character versus Introduction of Difficult Histories

Jackson is certainly a complex figure outside of the ways he is represented at the museum. Interpretive manager Robert characterizes Jackson as “a contradiction in and of himself,” and similarly, lead interpreter Mark quotes Jackson biographer James Parton in saying that Jackson is best characterized as an “atrocious saint.”

Many of the staff discuss this tension between learning and difficult emotions—and between conflicting images of Jackson—quite frankly among themselves. As a cold January day started winding down and visitors to the mansion were scarce, lead interpreter Laura, interpretive manager Robert, and I talked a bit about the ways we teach difficult histories. Robert worked for the Tennessee Holocaust Commission previously and helped put together a university-based Holocaust lecture series, in addition to providing resources on how to teach the Holocaust. He said that, when it comes to Jackson, if you “paint him as a monster, the learning stops.” “I like that,” lead interpreter Laura reflected aloud. “The learning stops.” Robert continued, “Antisemitism didn't start with Hitler,” but existed for “over 1,000 years.” Similarly, “Jackson didn't create that system” and “There were people who were against it.” Robert clarified by saying that it “doesn't excuse it, but it puts it in context” with regard to Jackson, slavery, and Indian Removal.

Another day, historic interpreter Kimberly, lead interpreter Rosie, and I sat on the front porch. Kimberly asked me how my view of Jackson changed since working at The Hermitage. “I have a strange sort of affection for him now,” I replied, surprising myself. Rosie chimed in,

“We have the tendency to paint figures as heroes or villains. It’s more complicated than that.” However, sustained discussion of the nuances and contradictions of Jackson’s character with guests are nearly impossible on busy days, when each station must be presented in roughly three minutes. This ultimately contributes to the “man of his time” platitudes that are roughly equivalent to Sykes and Matza’s (1957) “denial of responsibility” technique of neutralization. In this manner, not only ideology, but the constraints of a busy customer service setting, lead to a reluctance to hold Jackson responsible for his actions.

Fostering Positive American Identity versus Introduction of Difficult Histories

Jackson’s origins as an orphaned son of immigrants who fought in the Revolutionary War and became wealthy and a president firmly buttress American Dream mythology. At the same time, narratives of displacement of Native Americans and enslavement of African-Americans belie the myth and casts doubt on whether Andrew Jackson truly was a “self-made man,” as staff and visitors alike have claimed.

An organizational culture of political “neutrality” and a policy of staff neutrality on present-day politics is one strategy The Hermitage has adopted for balancing the fostering of a positive American identity with discussion of human rights violations of Jackson’s time. In addition to the dynamics inherent in customer service relationships, as well as the aesthetics of the site, the organization’s culture of apolitical “neutrality” plays a role. Robert, an interpretive manager, stated during training that the Hermitage “does not present official views on politics,” and at the same time, “we like that Trump chose Jackson” for the one presidential portrait in the Oval Office since “people started talking about Jackson again.” The resurrection of Jackson as a

key figure in American public consciousness—for better or worse—legitimizes The Hermitage’s position as a space for exploring one’s identity as an American citizen.

When I informed Mark, a fellow interpreter, that I would be presenting on my dissertation work at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, he wanted to ensure it was known that “we try to keep it neutral here” and that, while “we used to do a lot of Jackson worship, [w]e don’t do that anymore,” but rather tell the whole story. In his eyes, it’s a shift toward neutrality and presenting alternative narratives, not toward critique of the foundations of American society, that is notable and praiseworthy. Similarly, Joseph, an administrator, shared with me that “this is [Jackson’s] home, so we try to keep it 51% positive.”

In a memo submitted to its members participating in an upcoming living history War of 1812 Encampment at The Hermitage in the spring of 2019, the War of 1812 Society prohibited “intermixing or comparisons to modern politics or personalities” in a bolded statement that covers half a page:

“THIS IS VITAL:

Absolutely no intermixing or comparisons to modern politics or personalities. Modern political discussions have no place here. Nor will they be tolerated. This is not an attempt to curtail anyone’s free speech. But it is set in stone.

If a visitor attempts to do this with you move on. The Hermitage has advised they want none of it. We will respect their wish.

Also I am discountenancing the same thing AFTER HOURS. I think that is enough said on this subject.”

Similarly, on page 17 of the document, participants are encouraged to limit their presentations in the tavern station of the camp to “first person interpretation” and to “please respect that.” This entails “leav[ing] the modern stuff outside” and limiting political discussions to “the 1812-15

time period ONLY” and restricting oneself to singing and music that is consistent with the time period.

Yet The Hermitage does intervene and speak on current events as they relate to Jackson in particular. For example, The Hermitage took a firm position in favor of keeping Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill when a movement arose to replace his portrait with that of Harriet Tubman. During my time at The Hermitage and at the time of this writing, a cardboard cutout of a \$20 bill sits outside of the Museum Store with a cutout for visitors to press their faces into for a photo op. The space below the giant bill features a logo for Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage and the instructions, “Take a picture and tag yourself with #AJonth20 to win prizes!”



Figure 5.4: The #AJonth20 photo op cutout outside of the Museum Store.

As a historic interpreter, I, too, felt a need to remain “neutral” with regard to political issues, but I often struggled with what neutrality entailed. To call slavery horrible was acceptable, yet to call Indian Removal a genocide was uncommon and not encouraged on an institutional level. During our Trail of Tears training session, I asked the education director whether The Hermitage refers to Indian Removal as a genocide. She replied no, and that

genocide “signals intent.” Jackson himself “did not intend” to annihilate a group of people. This contrasts with Lemkin’s (1944, p. 77) hallmark definition of genocide:

[G]enocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.

Appearing neutral for me often manifested in interweaving narratives of slavery and Native American relations in with stories of Jackson’s force of character or nostalgic images of 19th-century American life. For example, when presenting upstairs, I announced to the guests coming up the stairs, “On the floor where you’re standing is where an enslaved nanny named Louisa would have slept.” People looked down at the floor as they passed through, and I transitioned to talking about the features of the guest bedrooms past that hallway and did not mention slavery again right away. Bouncing from difficult histories back to Jackson’s cult of personality or to nostalgic images of the 1830s generates the sense of “barrage” I describe in Chapter 2, but it also functions to generate a sense among visitors that the staff is “neutral” when discussing Jackson and his legacy.

EMOTIONAL LABOR, THE TIME CLOCK, AND CONFLICTING ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS

The heavy emotional labor required to discuss difficult histories and to keep large numbers of visitors engaged, all while paying attention to a rotation-based schedule (described

below), exacerbates the impact of conflicting organizational logics on representations of Jackson and of difficult histories. The nature of historic interpretation at The Hermitage as shift work with half-hour rotations between stations, as customer service, and as requiring heavy emotional labor contributes to various ways of navigating the conflicting organizational logics outlined above.

The schedule and order of stations are determined by the number of interpreters present each day. Alfred's Cabin, for example, is an optional station that is only available when a full team of eleven is on site that day. The smallest number The Hermitage can operate with is six: Line, Entry, Side, Up, Break stations²⁵, plus the lead. For the mansion stations, one cannot "rotate" to the next station until someone "relieves" them at their current station, as each section of the house needs to be attended by a staff member at all times. This means that one's half-hour lunch break can be greatly reduced if their relief arrives late, which generates a great amount of rushing from station to station if one is conscientious. My lunch breaks were often reduced to 15 to 20 minutes, and making it on time to a meal break was a major priority.

The constraints of a rotation system often contributed to disjointed and superficial discussion of difficult histories. As visitors proceed through the mansion, they are exposed to three different interpreters within a span of 15 to 20 minutes. Some interpreters highlight slavery and mention Indian Removal or the Creek Wars, while others do not, which can contribute further to institutionalized polysemy by presenting a disjointed narrative. Depending on which three interpreters the visitor is met with, each third of their presentations might have completely

²⁵ Here is a brief summary of stations for clarity. "Line" covers the outside of the mansion and includes counting out the next group and issuing preservation requests. "Entry" presents on the entry hall and parlors. "Side" presents within the side hall of the mansion, including Jackson's bedroom, Junior and Sarah's bedroom, Jackson's library, and the farm office. "Up" presents upstairs in the mansion, which includes the grandchildren's bedrooms and guest bedrooms. "Break" indicates that the person is technically on break (although breaks are often cut short if the rotation is late). "Lead" indicates the lead interpreter, who spends much of their time out with the "Line" person but is free to float around the site.

different points of emphasis (e.g., with one interpreter in the Entry Hall referring to Hannah as a “slave lady” and noting that Jackson adopted a Native American child; a second interpreter in the Side Hall highlighting the “fake news” on the floor in Jackson’s study; and a third interpreter Upstairs describing the manner in which Louisa the enslaved nanny was forced to sleep on the floor).

Although the winter season brings lower attendance and allows for interpreters to give single-guided tours, the challenge of delayed and shortened breaks on this modified rotation can still stifle conversations about controversial subjects. One winter day, I gave a tour to a white woman with chin-length black hair and her husband and realized as we walked out to the back porch that I was roughly seven minutes late for lunch. Having not eaten yet that day, I was more than ready to rush to the break room when she ventured, “You know, the Cherokee should really be thanking Andrew Jackson” because “he preserved them” by forcing them West. She explained that she was a Mormon from Utah and that “my people” would not have survived if they had not moved westward, and that the case was the same for the Cherokee. Baffled, frustrated, and also desperately hungry, I avoided conflict with this guest by simply noting matter-of-factly, “That was the justification Andrew Jackson had made for it” and excusing myself to the break room. With the constraints of the time clock exacerbating the strain of emotional labor and competing organizational logics, I erred on the side of Positive Guest Experience over Introduction of Difficult Histories.

CONCLUSION

Representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy at The Hermitage are shaped not only by the lengthy history of the organization; the aesthetics of the site as a plantation museum;

and the values, beliefs, and biographies of individual staff members; but also by the nature of historic interpretation as shift work and service work. Drawing from the concept of organizational logics and examining the structuring of historic interpreters' schedules, I find that tension between these logics, combined with the strains of performing intense emotional labor on a tight timetable, often make it challenging for individual interpreters to present histories as cohesively and thoroughly as they would like.

Regardless of staff representations of Jackson, democracy, slavery, and Indian Removal, however, visitors ultimately have agency in deciding what messages they will take away and what images of Jackson they will accept. Even if the Andrew Jackson Foundation were to take a vociferous stance against human rights violations in the past and to explicitly draw links to the American present, visitors would retain the ability to decide whether or not they accept the argument.

Even with regard to historic events for which there is a broad consensus among academics, there is a great deal of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957) by visitors. These techniques of neutralization include *denial of responsibility* ("If we keep living in the past, we will have no future!"), *denial of victims* ("At least they had accommodations for them."), *appeal to higher loyalties* ("Well, good for him! He was a business man," on Jackson rising from his status as an orphan to being a slaveowner), and *condemnation of condemners* ("Black people owned slaves, too!", "The Indians weren't angels, you know!"). In the following chapter, I will discuss this and its practical implications in further detail, as well as highlight the theoretical contributions of this dissertation project.

CHAPTER VI. A “MAN OF HIS TIME” AND A MAN OF OUR TIME: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TIME OF TRUMP

“He was a man of his time,” visitors frequently ventured when considering Jackson’s legacy as a slaveholder, as a general in campaigns against the Muscogee (Creek), and as the signer and staunch supporter of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Some interpreters pushed back against this, noting that famed frontiersman, soldier, and politician Davy Crockett disagreed with Indian Removal and actually cut ties with Jackson over the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Other interpreters agreed with guests’ sentiment and disagreed with judging Jackson by present-day standards. During our interview, both Maryanne and Cameron suggested that our society views Jackson too harshly, with Cameron suggesting that Hannah was “like a member of the family.”

Labeling Jackson a “man of his time” rather than a perpetrator is in effect a “denial of responsibility” (Sykes and Matza 1957) mediated by time and historical context. It is both literal and symbolic, individual and collective. It is a literal and individual denial of responsibility in rendering Jackson passive. The Hermitage frames Jackson’s decision to enslave 300 people and to push for the forced displacement of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole as his “greatest flaws” rather than human rights violations. It is a symbolic and collective denial of responsibility in rendering *America* as passive to historical forces its long-standing practices of African-American enslavement and Native American genocide.

Much is at stake in deciding how to represent an early national leader to the public. Presidents are representatives of a nation, and a presidential legacy tarnished by slavery and genocide threaten both national pride and American Dream mythology. At a site that strives to “inspire citizenship” and also discuss difficult topics, there is a question of how to—and whether

to—strike a balance. One such strategy The Hermitage has adopted in its signage and scripts is framing enslaved people as agentic members of an “enslaved community” that coexisted with the Jacksons. By highlighting the humanity of individual enslaved people, The Hermitage meets the demand to talk about slavery and to humanize African-Americans, challenging harmful stereotypes about Black intellect, work ethic, and humanity. Sometimes this veers toward erasing the reality of chattel slavery as a system of racial domination, as discussion of the enslaved’s agency eclipses acknowledgement of structural inequality along lines of race. When slavery is framed as an institution, however, it often has the effect of abdicating Jackson of true responsibility. Even when signage indicates the horrors of slavery as a system, The Hermitage appears hesitant to directly state that Jackson is a perpetrator. For many historic interpreters, Jackson is not a perpetrator, but a passive “man of his time” who, helpless to the forces of history, “did what he had to do to be President.”

In contrast, when discussing Jackson’s victory in the Battle of New Orleans, his dismantling of the Bank of the United States, and his willingness to defend his wife’s honor and to duel, however, The Hermitage and its staff present Jackson as a larger-than-life agent. He is no-nonsense and a powerful force to be reckoned with. With regard to his achievements and highlights of his legacy, he is in control and “Born for a Storm,” as the name of the main museum exhibit suggests.

The Hermitage frames the signing the Indian Removal Act as part of Jackson’s presidential legacy rather than his personal one, noting that the Trail of Tears occurred after Jackson left office. In this manner, it is implied that it was the implementation—not the design—of the procedures for forced removal that proved deadly. The inconsistency between raising three Creek children and favoring Indian Removal is another point of tension. This

unfolds at multiple levels. At the individual and interactional level, in which interpreters and guests exercised their own agency and made meaning dialogically (Bruner 2004; Leite et al. 2019), some historic interpreters framed the latter decision in non-racial terms, stating that was a rough-and-tumble, stubborn man who would push “anyone who got in his way.” His fostering of Lyncoya, Theodore, and Charley suggested that he did not “hate the Indians,” as visitors so often complained. This infused conceptions of color-blindness into the historic interpretation of racialized systems of oppression (Bonilla-Silva 2010), which in itself undergirds white supremacy and protects whiteness (DiAngelo 2018). Some interpreters also raise the long-standing story that when Lyncoya’s family was killed, the women in the village “refused” to care for him and were going to leave him to die. This is consistent with Sykes and Matza’s (1957) technique of *condemning the condemners*.

Other interpreters like Gwen cast doubt on the benevolence of the “adoption,” pointing out that “if it weren’t for Jackson” and his campaigns against the Creek, “Lyncoya wouldn’t have been an orphan.” This serves to combat the *denial of injury* (Sykes and Matza 1957) that dominates narratives surrounding Jackson’s relationship with Lyncoya. There is great variation in messages presented about a given part of Jackson’s legacy, because although official museum materials remain static for longer periods of time between updates, conversations between staff and visitors are dynamic on a much shorter temporal scale.

This is further complicated by lengthy institutional precedents and the impact of dual genres, conflicting visitor expectations, and contrast between the site’s built environment and its educators’ words. All of these factors converge to produce a complex, polysemous historic site rather than a unified one. In this conclusion, I highlight the major findings of my fieldwork at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage, discuss the theoretical contributions of my work and possibilities

for future research, and conclude with practical implications and a call to action for public historians and sociologists alike.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In Chapter 2, I introduced the concept of *institutionalized polysemy* to describe the presence of multiple conflicting images of Jackson at The Hermitage. At this historic house and presidential museum, Jackson is simultaneously an orphan, war hero, family man and devoted husband, Westerner, Southerner, foster parent to Native American children, architect of Indian Removal, champion of democracy, and fierce defender of slavery. Institutionalized polysemy manifests in four major domains: 1) uses of the site itself, 2) tour, program, and classroom offerings, 3) the standard presentation itself (in the main museum, the mansion tour, and signage and the audio tour on the grounds), and 4) Museum Store merchandise. This chapter was largely descriptive, and chapters 3, 4, and 5 were analytic; that is, they accounted for the phenomenon I outlined in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, I drew from perspectives in the sociology of culture, tourism, and work, examining The Hermitage from the perspective of the production of place (Bruner 2005). I delved into the role of aesthetics and optics in producing institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage as the beauty of Southern plantation imagery contrasts with staff members' statements about the cruelty of slavery as an institution. This is exacerbated by the presence of evidence of agriculture and of household labor at The Hermitage, combined with the conspicuous absence of pervasive visual cues indicating that enslaved labor was central to this production. Drawing from the concept of aesthetic labor, I introduce the concept of aesthetic management to describe the manner in which curatorial and maintenance staff—as opposed to simply frontline staff—

play a role in co-producing the meaning of the historic site, anticipating and responding to visitor reactions.

Chapter 4 approached The Hermitage as an institution, shaped by its historical legacy and by its positioning in multiple contextual fields. This chapter highlighted the effect of genre and geography on institutionalized polysemy at The Hermitage, including representations of chattel slavery and Indian Removal. I argued that The Hermitage and Andrew Jackson's association with Nashville, the West, the South, and America as a whole generates overlapping and sometimes competing narratives. In addition, tension between the site's dual legacy as a historic house museum and plantation site and as a presidential museum produces a bifurcation between Jackson's career and domestic life, the man and the property, which contributes to a distancing of Jackson's personhood from Indian Removal and from chattel slavery. This integrates existing understandings of the presidential and historic house museum genres as supportive of national identity (West 1999), while also illustrating the utility of individualistic theories of neutralization of crime (Sykes and Matza 1957) in typologizing the abdication of a historic figure's responsibility.

In Chapter 5, I drew from the sociology of work to consider The Hermitage as a service industry workplace whose customer-service orientation contributed to the production of institutionalized polysemy. More specifically, I addressed the influence of competing organizational logics, the pressures of the time clock, and the strain of emotional labor in interpreter-visitor interactions in producing ever-shifting images of Jackson and his legacy. The tension between introducing difficult histories and achieving high attendance, positive visitor experience, and instilling a positive American identity is great, and in many cases, difficult histories are omitted for the sake of competing logics.

When it comes to each of these aesthetic, organizational, geographic, and interactional factors, it is critical to note that *white fragility* (DiAngelo 2018), *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva 2010), and a legacy of white supremacy shape each. Drawing on Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory, I extend this framework beyond their focus on crimes committed by individuals in the present, applying it to human rights violations a given society or historical figure has committed in the past. *Denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victims, appeal to higher loyalties, and condemnation of condemners* all exist across historical contexts and with respect to individuals and societies. Neutralization theory can be applied to human rights violations by historical figures, and can help scholars and human rights advocates to more precisely identify mechanisms by which we refrain from assigning responsibility.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACTS

This dissertation contributes to social memory studies, the sociology of tourism, the sociology of organizations, occupations, and work, and the literature on crime and deviance. I challenge the notion of unified representations of history, suggesting that polysemous representations are not only possible but common. I also challenge the notion that competing ideologies are the primary basis of social memory production, instead calling attention to aesthetic, organizational, historical, and interpersonal factors that generate multifaceted representations of history. Finally, I suggest that neutralization theory (Sykes and Matza 1957) is useful not only in understanding individual crime in the present, but human rights violations in the past—especially when considering the role of colorblind racism and white fragility in contemporary racial discourse.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Culture and Tourism: Aesthetic Management and Nesting Geographies as Contributors to Institutionalized Polysemy

This dissertation challenges the idea that representations are consistent within a single organization, let alone across multiple organizations. I build on Eichstedt and Small's (2002) ethnographic study of representations of slavery at historic house museums by focusing intensely on representations of slavery and genocide by a single organization. Rather than observing a single tour of many sites to examine cross-site variation, I conducted participant-observation at a single site to examine within-site variation. By introducing the concept of *institutionalized polysemy*, I challenge the notion that a given historic site presents a single unified narrative that is the result of ideological battles between opposing groups that each have their own unified narrative. In some cases, sites present fragmented, conflicting narratives—in the case of The Hermitage, within the same physical space in a compressed time frame.

At The Hermitage, I observed great variation in representations of slavery and genocide, from *symbolic annihilation* of each to the *relative incorporation* of both, to borrow Eichstedt and Small's terminology (2002). Representations of slavery at historic sites are not static and unified, but dynamic and fragmented, even within a given site. Tension between the built environment of the site and visitors' preconceived notions of the subject (Bruner 2005) is one contributor to institutionalized polysemy. I introduce the concept of *aesthetic management* to describe efforts by curatorial and maintenance staff in producing the aesthetics of a given site by factoring in both concerns with historical accuracy and with visitor expectations. I also contribute to understandings of the production of "quietly contested" (Bruner 2005) sites by illustrating the ways the aesthetics of plantation sites have the potential to subvert the explicit messages about slavery relayed by staff, as well as signage and museum materials.

In addition, I contribute to the sociology of tourism as it relates to social memory studies by offering nesting geographies as a contributing factor to the representation of complicated pasts. Alliances between tourist sites across cities and regions, and at the national level, are key to the branding of a given site, which in turn, can contribute to polysemous representations due to efforts to tell nesting geographic stories to diverse audiences.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Organizations, Occupations, and Work: The Role of Conflicting Organizational Logics, the Customer Service Triangle, and Genre in Social Memory Production

I also suggest that the tensions between competing genres of historic plantation museum and presidential site play a role in representations of history. A site's marketing and positioning of itself within a genre, amplified by *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio 1989) as institutions seek to emulate similarly situated ones, contributes to institutionalized polysemy. This integrates a key concept in the sociology of organizations and introduces a mechanism for institutional identification into dominant understandings of social memory production by organizations.

In addition, I contribute to the field of social memory studies by considering the role customer service dynamics and organizational logics play in producing polysemous representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy. Drawing from the concept of the customer service triangle (Subramanian and Suquet 2018), I suggest that interactions between individual staff members and customers contribute to institutionalized polysemy as staff members strive to please a diverse array of visitors with differing goals for their visit to the site. Conflicting organizational logics (Thornton et al 2012), as well as the strains of emotional labor (Hochschild 1987) and the time clock, contribute to a shifting constellation of representations of slavery,

genocide, and democracy. By integrating well-established concepts in the sociology of work and organizations into the interdisciplinary study of social memory, I have shown how not only the organization, but also the individual workers, are essential to representations of difficult histories.

Social Memory Studies and the Sociology of Deviance: Revisiting Neutralization Theory and Considering the Impact of Humanization on Human Rights Education

As this dissertation demonstrates, social memory at historic sites is a fierce battleground fueled not by a unified organizational ideology, but by institutional isomorphism rooted in genre, the pressures of customer service, by the aesthetics of the physical space and the optics of its staff's demographics. Artifacts of white supremacy, including notions of *color-blindness* (Bonilla-Silva 2010) when interacting with visitors and the ever-present *white fragility* (DiAngelo 2018) among staff and visitors alike, are infused within each of these factors, as is the use of techniques of neutralization to distance historical figures from atrocities.

Both producers and consumers of difficult histories at heritage sites routinely distance historic figures from atrocities by applying individualistic *techniques of neutralization* (Sykes and Matza 1957)—*denial of responsibility*, *denial of injury*, denial of the victim, appeal to higher loyalties, condemning the condemners—across time and space. I suggest that mindfulness of these techniques is useful not only in criminology proper, but also within the sociology of human rights, social memory studies, and public history.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Questions of representations of controversial histories are critical during this age of right-wing populism, and there is much room for further research. With the election of a right-wing populist president who appeals to white supremacists, the degradation of minority rights, an uptick in racist and anti-Semitic violence, and battles over the role of Confederate monuments (sometimes with deadly consequences, as in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017), the study of social memory is more important than ever.

This dissertation contributes to these conversations by exploring the conflicting ways President Andrew Jackson, perceived by many to be a historical analogue (Savelsberg and King 2011) to President Donald Trump, is represented in polysemous ways. Although this dissertation identifies a multitude of organizational, aesthetic, geographical, and service-oriented factors contributing to institutionalized polysemy, it does not tell the entire story. The role of government and non-profit grants²⁶, corporate donors, the rise of public history as a professionalized field, outside social movements for racial justice, the input of academic experts and corporate consultants, and the makeup of institutions' boards are all possible factors that generate institutionalized polysemy.

The influence of descendant communities of victims as well as perpetrators is also an important factor for future study of social memory production in polarizing times. In the case of The Hermitage, Principal Chief of Cherokee Nation Bill John Baker visited in the summer of 2018 to see if their interpretation of indigenous history had changed since the last time he visited.

²⁶ For example, I would venture that the Hermitage's "prescribed grazing plan" and land conservation program, and the overall establishment of the site as a green space, is in part, tied to government grants or agreements related to land acquisition.

During a conversation I had with him at a Trail of Tears commemoration in East Tennessee that fall, he revealed to my surprise that he was most irked not by the scant coverage of the Trail of Tears, by the lack of recognition of the role of the Cherokee in aligning with Jackson during the Creek Wars. “If the Cherokee hadn’t flanked them,” he explained, there was no chance that Jackson’s troops would have won the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. In a similar vein, some descendants of Hannah’s claim that Jackson fathered one of her children and recounted the family narrative in a book titled *Unholiest Patrimony*. Relationships between descendant communities and historic sites associated with perpetrators is an important avenue of future study, and one that I hope to pursue myself.

In addition to the constraints of conflicting organizational logics within the customer service triangle, further exploration of staff values, meaning-making, and agency are critical. Individual worker perspectives on difficult histories also shape representations of slavery, genocide, and democracy profoundly. Gwen, for example, shared with me that she always makes a point to talk about Alfred Jackson during her tours, because she doesn’t want visitors to walk away thinking, “Oh, he stayed because he loved Andrew Jackson so much.” Gwen mentions the risk of being lynched upon leaving the plantation, and emphasizes slavery-related content further if the other interpreters in the mansion neglect the subject. At the beginning of my fieldwork when I shared that I was a sociologist, Tony asked whether I believed that there was an objective system of morality. His faith in God, his vision of justice, and his belief in an absolute right and wrong, deeply informed his presentation of slavery. During his presentation upstairs, he would state that Andrew Jackson’s wealth is derived from “treating human beings made in the image of God like cattle.”

Some older interpreters, on the other hand, emphasize Jackson's relationship with his family, values of hospitality, or the simple beauty of family meals with no cell phones. The education director, Anna, is concerned with issues of citizenship, and with helping visitors to understand the ways Jackson rationalized his often puzzling policy decisions. Although the demands of visitors shape presentations, it is incorrect to conclude that individual interpreters do not enter their interactions with visitors with educational goals in mind. Occupational activism, or the infusion of activist ideals into workplace tasks (Cornfield et al. 2018), is a key topic to explore with regard to historic interpretation as a profession in particular, and to social memory production more generally. The role of frontline worker agency in producing collective memory raises the question: What working conditions promote agency among staff in expressing their opinions and combating customer misconceptions, and what working conditions stifle it? The sociology of work is critical to social memory studies and to public history.

A FINAL WORD AND A CALL TO ACTION

Over the course of my dissertation research, I asked myself repeatedly: *Why* am I pursuing this work? Why am I an ethnographer? A historic interpreter? What is the *point*? Hosting group after group in the mansion and making jotting after jotting about the events of the day routinely left me feeling deflated, exhausted, and helpless. There were many times I did not live up to my ideals over the course of my fieldwork, both as a sociologist and as a public historian. I wanted to make a difference in the world through my work. Did mentioning an enslaved nanny named Louisa or an orphaned Creek child named Lyncoya during a three-minute tour segment achieve that? And does writing about these efforts and failures and my fellow interpreters' experiences achieve that?

Yet there were discrete moments where I felt a profound connection with visitors that uplifted me. One spring day in the mansion, I stood in my thin blue day dress, hands in my pockets looking out the side window above the stairway, where afternoon light settled in over Rachel's Garden. The next group—a white couple in their mid-thirties with a young, brown-haired child around the age of six—made their way up the stairs to peer into the grandchildren's rooms and the guest bedrooms.

Exhausted from relaying the story of Jackson's grandchildren, of the guests, and of Louisa over and over again at this particular station, I began with my standard presentation, noting the mosquito netting over the beds and mentioning that an enslaved nanny named Louisa would have slept on the floor in this hallway. As we transitioned from the grandchildren's bedrooms over to the linen closets and guest bedrooms, the child looked up at me and asked curiously, matter-of-factly, unassumingly, "Did Andrew Jackson love God?" A question not about Jackson's achievements and career or about the originality of the wallpaper or the rice straw matting on the bedroom floors, but about Jackson's emotions, his faith, and perhaps his morality.

Taken aback, I smiled at the parents cautiously and attempted a neutral answer. "Andrew Jackson became a devout Presbyterian toward the end of his life. He had a church built at the back of the property for his wife, Rachel, when she was alive." The child continued looking at me expectantly, not saying anything, which I interpreted as him waiting for me to continue. *That's not what he's asking*, I thought to myself, reflecting on what the question "Did Andrew Jackson love God?" means to me—not as a representative of an organization, not as a "neutral" voice, but as a person who knows Jackson's legacy and knows herself. Louisa and other members of the enslaved community were at the forefront of my mind, so I continued, "Andrew

Jackson owned over 150 people at a time. He claimed to love God, but how can someone love God and treat people that way? It's a question that the other interpreters and I ask ourselves all the time. It's a really good question, and I'm glad you asked it."

The parents quietly thanked me as they descended down the spiral cantilever staircase, their bright-eyed child in tow. I stood facing that window again—and the hallway where Louisa routinely was forced to sleep on the floor—and wept. Moments later, the interpreter downstairs finished presenting about the Farm Office, and I knew I would be met with another group. I composed myself, put on a cheery smile, and greeted the next group of late afternoon visitors climbing the stairs.

Education director Anna relayed an impactful connection she felt with a young girl who visited The Hermitage on a field trip. During her time with the students, Anna noticed that the child and her two adult chaperones had all worn colorful, similarly styled floor-length skirts on their visit. Anna immediately recognized these skirts as traditional Native American dress—in this case, Muscogee (Creek) ribbon skirts—and told me that she wondered how to or whether to mention it. She told me that she had decided not to bring it up in front of the class, but rather to ask the child privately. After her "I Spy the Past" classroom presentation, Anna pulled the girl aside and said brightly, "I noticed you're wearing something really special today." The girl replied, "This is what my ancestors would have worn when Andrew Jackson was alive."

Through this work, I have not only developed my skills as a researcher, but also solidified my identity as a scholar and practitioner. I have thought deeply about the nature of truth, the major challenges of doing justice-oriented public history, and the importance of not only facts, but emotions and values, in research and education of all kinds. As a sociologist and

public historian who has wrestled with what the goal of each respective field should be, I would like to use this final section to issue a call to action to scholars and practitioners in both.

First, I firmly believe that museums have a responsibility to the truth and to *all* of the public, including—and especially—the most marginalized. There are not “two sides” when it comes to issues of injustice, and present-day injustices should be treated accordingly by museums and heritage sites. Knowledge and its dissemination are inherently political, and therefore sites of cultural heritage cannot be apolitical, even if they strive to be. By not taking a position on current issues of injustice that serve as “historical analogues” (Savelsberg and King 2011) to the ones covered at the site, museums inadvertently choose “the side of the oppressor” (Tutu). If we are unwilling to risk alienating a dominant audience—in the case of The Hermitage, white American families and older white Americans—we fail to serve the community at large and to serve the cause of justice.

Furthermore, when cultural institutions shy away from drawing connections between historical injustices and present-day ones, we fail to fully meet some visitors’ needs and miss valuable opportunities to foster historical literacy. Visitors to The Hermitage frequently reference current events, asking “What is going *on* in America?” and “Isn’t Jackson a lot like Trump?” During mansion tours, they joke that the stacks of bound newspapers in Jackson’s library are “all that fake news” or that Jackson ousting nearly his entire first cabinet “sounds familiar.” Visitors to the museum scribble commentary about Trump onto Post-It notes for the gallery’s reflection wall, and they ask guest services staff when they will update the exhibit panel on the electoral college to include commentary on Trump’s victory in 2016. In raising these questions, visitors try make sense of the present by looking into the past, and vice-versa. This presents historic sites with an incredible (albeit at times terrifying) opportunity to foster

community and citizenship through dialogue. Similarly situated sites should be not only willing, but eager, to answer this call.

There is great risk in pursuing this, of course—especially in tumultuous times like ours. Concerns of funding preservation and education efforts are very real, and the current coronavirus crisis further compounds this anxiety exponentially. Historic preservation is prohibitively expensive, and in the historic house museum genre, we cannot fully preserve and present history without preserving the site itself. Many of the people who frequent historic sites want nostalgia, want to feel proud of their country’s origins, and want to “have a nice tour,” as I so often told guests. Weddings are a major source of income for many plantation sites, as are major donors. High attendance can be critical to a site’s survival, both in terms of revenue from ticket sales and of providing concrete evidence that the site merits a grant or corporate contribution.

Donors listed on The Hermitage website include conservative backers like Chick-Fil-A and the Core Civic Foundation (a “philanthropic arm” of the largest private prison company in the United States), which I would venture are not particularly keen on discussing Black feminism or the continuity between chattel slavery, convict leasing, and mass incarceration and present-day prison labor. There are also legitimate concerns for museum staff’s emotional (and even physical) safety when engaging in difficult conversations with the public—particularly when staff are people of color. Indeed, when talking with a Black woman interpreter from the Slave Dwelling Project who gave a special presentation at The Hermitage for Juneteenth, I learned that she had left her previous job at a plantation site because of the trauma it caused her to absorb racist comments from white guests.

However, I believe that in this time of intense polarization, there is an even greater risk of not assuming this task. If heritage sites in the United States can unite in collectively discussing

the past to raise difficult questions about the present, they can be an unlikely hero in restorative justice and societal healing. The Whitney Plantation and the Slave Dwelling Project are a testament to this in terms of sparking conversations about slavery-era history and its relevance to today. Similarly, the Historic Franklin Masonic Hall Foundation's inaugural conference focused on intersections between Black and Native American history, bringing together prominent and emerging historians with community members. All three organizations are infants compared to inaugural historic house museums and presidential sites, and therefore have less institutional inertia against them.

Partnerships between established sites and young organizations may be key, both in helping the latter get off the ground and attracting previously alienated audiences to the former. When doing evaluation research, we must not only ask the opinions of those who come to our museum and who fund us, but also those who do not. Who is left out of our audience, and why? While acknowledging major obstacles to change in the world of heritage tourism, I strongly believe that 1) museums have the capacity to foster a safe environment for difficult conversations; 2) the broader community *wants* to have these difficult conversations; and 3) currently untapped funding pools will support museums' efforts to integrate past and present for the cause of justice.

This call for change applies to the milieu of academic sociology as well. Sociology emerged as a discipline seeking to understand the rise and workings of modernity (Durkheim 1893) and to address the problems of modernity, including white supremacy (DuBois 1899, DuBois 1903, DuBois 1935) and the abuse and disaffection of workers (Marx and Engels 1848, Marx 1867, Weber 1905). Sociology's exploration of tension between structure and agency is a

unique and critical one, and has great potential to informing the fight against oppression and inequality.

However, I fear that we have sacrificed many humanistic aspects of our enterprise, as a response to decades of societal devaluing and defunding the humanities and humanistic social sciences, as well as a long-standing masculinist desire to assert that sociologists are scientists, not social workers. We as sociologists have become so intent on battling for our legitimacy—even to go so far as to claim we are a STEM discipline (Hillsman 2013)—that we have lost sight of the heart and the power of sociology: attention to human meaning-making and the potential to alleviate human suffering. To regain ground in the world of academia and public policy, we must demonstrate our commitment not only to protecting the discipline’s status in an ever-shifting academic world, but also to healing and empowering the communities we study.

During this tumultuous time in U.S. history when the very notion of truth is repeatedly called into question by the current presidential administration, we as scholars and practitioners must remain all the more committed to truth. And in a time where compassion and justice are under attack, we must cling to justice and to goodness. Indeed, DuBois’ observation that “if there is anybody in this land who thoroughly believes that the meek shall inherit the earth, they have not often let their presence be known” (1924, p. 339) rings all the truer with the resurgence of white supremacist violence. Whether we are in the realm of public history or sociology—within the academy, the museum, or elsewhere—our responsibility is not to *keep* the peace by appeasing those in power. Rather, it is to *make* peace by unapologetically pursuing justice and truth in our service, teaching, and research.

REFERENCES

- Allison, Natalie. 2018. "Andrew Jackson' Hermitage Tomb Vandalized with Profanities, Police Reports Filed." *The Tennessean*. April 27, 2018.
<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2018/04/27/andrew-jackson-tomb-vandalized-nashville/560046002/>
- Andrew Jackson Foundation. 2020. "About." Andrew Jackson's Hermitage.
<https://thehermitage.com/about/>
- Andrew Jackson Foundation. 2018. *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Official Guidebook*. Beacon Press.
- Andrew Jackson Foundation. 2016. *Andrew Jackson: The People's President*. Beacon Press.
- Becker, Howard. 2008. *Art Worlds: Updated and Expanded*. University of California Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2017. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 5th Edition.
- Brewer, Russell, Melissa de Vel-Palumbo, Alice Hutchings, Thomas Holt, Andrew Goldsmith, and David Maimon. 2019. *Cybercrime Prevention: Theory and Applications*. Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Bruner, Edward M. 2004. *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*. University of Chicago Press.
- Caldwell, Mary. 1933. *Andrew Jackson's Hermitage*. Ladies' Hermitage Association: Nashville, Tennessee.
- Cheng, Lijiao, Wenli Li, Qingguo Zhai, and Russell Smyth. 2014. "Understanding personal use of the Internet at work: An integrated model of neutralization techniques and general deterrence theory." *Computers in Human Behavior*. 38: 220-228.
- Cohen, Stanley. 2001. *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Wiley.
- Cornfield, D.B., Coley, J.S., Isaac, L.W. and Dickerson, D.C. (2018), "Occupational Activism and Racial Desegregation at Work: Activist Careers after the Nonviolent Nashville Civil Rights Movement", *Race, Identity and Work (Research in the Sociology of Work, Vol. 32)*.
- Davis, Fred. 1979. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. Free Press.
- DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Beacon Press.
- DiMaggio, WW and PJ Powell. 1983. "Institutional Isomorphism." *American Sociological Review*.

- Doriana Dal Palù, Beatrice Lerma, Marco Bozzola and Claudia De Giorgi. 2018. "Merchandising as a Strategic Tool to Enhance and Spread Intangible Values of Cultural Resources." *Sustainability*. 10(7), (2122).
- Dorris, Mary. 1915. *Preservation of the Hermitage*. Ladies' Hermitage Association: Nashville, Tennessee.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1899. *The Philadelphia Negro*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. G&D Media.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1935. *Black Reconstruction in America*. Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, New Jersey.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1893. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Eichstedt, Jennifer L. and Stephen Small. 2002. *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. The Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hillsman, Sally. 2013. "Sociology is a STEM Discipline." *ASA Footnotes*.
https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/footnotes/feb13/vp_0213.html
- Hochschild, Arlie. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. University of California Press.
- Jun Shao, Qinlin Ying, Shujin Shu, Alastair M. Morrison and Elizabeth Booth. 2019. "Museum Tourism 2.0: Experiences and Satisfaction with Shopping at the National Gallery in London." *Sustainability*. 10.3390.
- Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. New York University Press.
- Krelying, Christine. 1996. "The Shocking Truth: Old Hickory Gets His Color Back." *Nashville Scene*. December 5, 1996.
- Ladies' Hermitage Association. 1970. *Hermitage Hospitality*. Ladies' Hermitage Association: Nashville, Tennessee.
- Leidner, Robin. 1993. *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.
- Lemkin, Raphael. 1944. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Linethal, E. and T. Engelhardt. 1996. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*.

- MacCannell, Dean. 1976. *The Tourist*. University of California Press.
- MacCannell, Dean. 2011. *The Ethics of Sightseeing*. University of California Press.
- Maruna and Copes (2017) deem “a theory of its time and ahead of its time,”
- Marx, Karl. 1867. *Works of Karl Marx*.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1848. *Collected Works*. Progress Publishers.
- McCammon, Holly and Larry Griffin. 2000. “Workers and their Customers and Clients: An Editorial Introduction.” *Work and Occupations*. 27(3): 278-293.
- Meacham, Jon. 2008. *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*. Penguin Random House.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations*. 26: 7–25.
- Olick, Jeffrey. and Daniel Levy. 1997. “Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics.” *American Sociological Review*, pp.921-936.
- Olick, Jeffrey. 1999. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory* 17(3): 333-348.
- Olick, Jeffrey and Joyce Robbins. 1998. “Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. 24: 105–140.
- Ó Riain, S. 2010. “The Missing Customer and the Ever-Present Market: Software Developers and the Service Economy.” *Work and Occupations*. 37(3), 320–348.
- Pietrykowski, Bruce. 2019. *Work: What is Political Economy?* Wiley.
- Reynolds, Daniel P. 2018. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York University Press.
- Savelsberg, Joachim J. and Ryan D. King. 2011. *American Memories: Atrocities and the Law*. Russell Sage Foundation: New York, New York.
- Schudson, M. 1989. “The Sociology of News Production.” *Media, Culture & Society*, 11(3), 263–282.
- Schwartz, Barry. 1982. “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory.” *Social Forces*. 61(2): 374-402.
- Schwartz, Barry. 1991. “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington.” *American Sociological Review*, pp.221-236.
- Schwartz, Barry and Schuman, H., 2005. “History, commemoration, and belief: Abraham Lincoln in American memory.” 1945-2001. *American Sociological Review*, 70(2), pp.183-203.
- Standard Candy Company. 2020. “Andy’s Candy Premium Goo Goo.” *Goo Goo Cluster*. <https://googoo.com/products/andys-candy-premium-goo-goo>

- Subramanian, Dilip and Jean-Baptiste Suquet. 2018. "Unpacking the Service Triangle: Arranging Power Relations Between Frontline Occupations." *Work and Occupations* 45(1):38–81.
- Sykes, Gresham and David Matza. 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review*. 22(6): 664-670.
- Teeger, C., 2015. "'Both Sides of the Story.' History Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *American Sociological Review*. 80(6): 1175-1200.
- Thornton, Patricia and William Ocasio. 1999. Institutional Logics and the Historical Contingency of Power in Organizations: Executive Succession in the Higher Education Publishing Industry, 1958 to 1990." *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 801–843
- Thornton, Patricia and William Ocasio. 2008. "Institutional Logics." In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (pp. 99–129). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Thornton, Patricia., William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury. 2012. *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure and Process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vinitzky-Seroussi, V. and Teeger, C., 2010. "Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting." *Social Forces*, 88(3), pp.1103-1122.
- Wagner-Pacifi, Robin, 2010. "Theorizing the Restlessness of Events." *American Journal of Sociology*. 115(5), p.1351-1386.
- Wagner-Pacifi, Robin and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology*. 97: 376-420.
- Warhurst, Chris and Dennis Nixon. 2007. "Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality." *Work, Employment, and Society*. 21(1): 103-120.
- Weber, Max. 1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (Trans. Talcott Parsons). New York: Scribners.
- Weber, Max, 1904/1949. "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch (ed. and trans.), New York: Free Press.
- West, Patricia. 1999. *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums*. Smithsonian Books.
- Wilson, Eli. 2016. "Matching Up: Producing Proximal Service in a Los Angeles Restaurant." *Research in the Sociology of Work*. 29: 99-124.
- Wilson, Janelle. 2005. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Winter, Jay. 2006. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2003. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and The Social Shape of the Past*
University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HISTORIC INTERPRETERS

Thanks so much for agreeing to be interviewed! In a minute, I'm going to turn on the tape recorder and ask you some questions about your work here at the Hermitage and about your background more generally. Do you have any questions before we get started? (If interviewee agreed to be recorded, begin taping.)

I. Work

I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about your work.

- 1) What kind of work do you do here at the Hermitage? What is your primary role?
 - a) Describe a typical day at work.
 - b) How would you describe your job to someone who is not familiar with the Hermitage?
- 2) Who or what, if anything, inspired you to do this type of work? To work here?
 - a) How long have you worked at the Hermitage?
- 3) What is your favorite part of this job?
- 4) What is the most challenging part of this job?

II. Interactions with Visitors

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your experiences with visitors.

- 5) What do you want visitors to get out of the experience here?
- 6) What are some questions visitors frequently ask?
- 7) What is your favorite question to answer? Your least favorite question to answer?
- 8) What is your favorite part of the mansion tour? The most challenging part?
- 9) What changes, if any, have you seen in your conversations with visitors since you began working here? (Probe: Obama era versus Trump era)
- 10) Do you find yourself adapting your tour to a given group?
 - a) Give me an example.
- 11) Have visitors ever made you feel uncomfortable? Unsafe?

- a) If so, tell me what happened. How did this experience inform your work?

III. Interactions with the Institution

We've talked a bit about your role at the Hermitage and your interactions with visitors. Now I'm going to ask you more about your relationship with the Hermitage itself.

12) What, if anything, stood out to you as you entered into this position? What advice would you give to incoming interpreters?

13) How, if at all, has the Hermitage changed since you began here?

a) What role, if any, did you have in these changes?

b) How do you feel about these changes?

14) What conversations, if any, have you and fellow staff had about how to frame slavery? Indian Removal?

a) What conversations, if any, have you and fellow staff had about whether to link Jackson and his era to current events?

b) What misconceptions, if any, do people have about Jackson or his era? What role do you play in dispelling myths? How does the Hermitage as an institution decide what is true and what is not?

15) Would you like to see changes in how The Hermitage discusses Jackson?

a) If so, what changes would you like to see?

16) What do you think the Hermitage wants visitors to take away from their experience here?

a) To what extent do their goals align with yours? How much flexibility, if any, do you have in deciding how to approach certain issues?

IV. Meaning-Making and Values

Now I'd like to ask a few questions about what your work means to you.

19) How familiar were you with President Andrew Jackson and his legacy before beginning your work at the Hermitage?

a) Do you have any biographical connections to the Jackson family? To the enslaved population here? To a Native American group?

b) If so, what does that connection mean to you? How, if at all, does it inform your work?

20) At the end of the day, when do you feel that you've done your job well? That visitors are getting? Do you think other staff have the same goals/mission?

21) What feelings, if any, do you have about Andrew Jackson? Do you share these feelings with visitors?

a) If so, how do you decide whether to disclose those feelings?

22) What feelings, if any, do you have about current events? Do you share these feelings with visitors?

a) If so, how do you decide whether to disclose those feelings?

23) What is the relationship between history and the present? Why is it important to teach history?

V. Demographic Characteristics

24) What is your educational background?

25) What is/was your primary occupation prior to working at the Hermitage?

VI. Wrapping Up

26) Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

27) Who else do you think I should talk to?

28) Is it okay if I call you with any follow-up questions I may have?

a) What is your phone number?

b) What is the best time to reach you?

Thank you so much for your time and participation!

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MIDDLE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Thanks so much for agreeing to be interviewed! In a minute, I'm going to turn on the tape recorder and ask you some questions about your work here at the Hermitage and about your background more generally. Do you have any questions before we get started? (If interviewee agreed to be recorded, begin taping.)

I. Work

I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about your work.

- 1) What kind of work do you do here at the Hermitage? What is your primary role?
 - a) Describe a typical day at work.
 - b) How would you describe your job to someone who is not familiar with the Hermitage?
- 2) Who or what, if anything, inspired you to do this type of work? To work here?
 - a) How long have you worked at the Hermitage?
- 3) What is your favorite part of this job?
- 4) What is the most challenging part of this job?

II. Interactions with Visitors

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your experiences with visitors.

- 5) What do you want visitors to get out of the experience here?
- 6) What are some questions visitors frequently ask?
- 7) What is your favorite question to answer? Your least favorite question to answer?
- 8) What is your favorite part of your educational programs? The most challenging part?
 - a) What is your favorite part of your tours? The most challenging part?
- 9) What changes, if any, have you seen in your conversations with visitors since you began working here? (Probe: Obama era versus Trump era)
- 10) Do you find yourself adapting your tour to a given group?
 - a) Give me an example.
- 11) Have visitors ever made you feel uncomfortable? Unsafe?
 - a) If so, tell me what happened. How did this experience inform your work?

III. Interactions with the Institution

We've talked a bit about your role at the Hermitage and your interactions with visitors. Now I'm going to ask you more about your relationship with the Hermitage itself.

12) What, if anything, stood out to you as you entered into this position? What advice would you give to incoming education and interpretation staff?

13) How, if at all, has the Hermitage changed since you began here?

a) What role, if any, did you have in these changes?

b) How do you feel about these changes?

14) What conversations, if any, have you and fellow staff had about how to frame slavery? Indian Removal?

a) What conversations, if any, have you and fellow staff had about whether to link Jackson and his era to current events?

b) What misconceptions, if any, do people have about Jackson or his era? What role do you play in dispelling myths? How does the Hermitage as an institution decide what is true and what is not?

15) Would you like to see changes in how The Hermitage discusses Jackson?

a) If so, what changes would you like to see?

16) What do you think the Hermitage wants visitors to take away from their experience here?

a) To what extent do their goals align with yours? How much flexibility, if any, do you have in deciding how to approach certain issues?

IV. Meaning-Making and Values

Now I'd like to ask a few questions about what your work means to you.

19) How familiar were you with President Andrew Jackson and his legacy before beginning your work at the Hermitage?

a) Do you have any biographical connections to the Jackson family? To the enslaved population here? To a Native American group?

b) If so, what does that connection mean to you? How, if at all, does it inform your work?

20) At the end of the day, when do you feel that you've done your job well? That visitors are getting? Do you think other staff have the same goals/mission?

21) What feelings, if any, do you have about Andrew Jackson? Do you share these feelings with visitors?

a) If so, how do you decide whether to disclose those feelings?

22) What feelings, if any, do you have about current events? Do you share these feelings with visitors?

a) If so, how do you decide whether to disclose those feelings?

23) What is the relationship between history and the present? Why is it important to teach history?

V. Demographic Characteristics

24) What is your educational background?

25) What is/was your primary occupation prior to working at the Hermitage?

VI. Wrapping Up

26) Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

27) Who else do you think I should talk to?

28) Is it okay if I call you with any follow-up questions I may have?

a) What is your phone number?

b) What is the best time to reach you?

Thank you so much for your time and participation!

APPENDIX C: GUIDESTAR PROFILE SUMMARY OF ANDREW JACKSON
FOUNDATION'S FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN (FY15-19)

As outlined in the Andrew Jackson Foundation's Five Year Strategic Plan (FY15-19), the Foundation's strategies for goal achievement are as follows.

1. Elevate the historical significance of Andrew Jackson and The Hermitage to a higher level of national recognition.

Obj 1-A: Place The Hermitage among the top five presidential homes and centers in the country.

Obj 1-B: Formulate a clear vision, mission and compelling purpose for this site.

Obj 1-C: Make The Hermitage a national center for experiencing the life and legacy of Andrew Jackson.

Obj 1-D: Establish best practices in governance, preservation and interpretation.

Obj 1-E: Assess the feasibility of establishing a national center for Jackson studies.

Obj 1-F: Assess the feasibility of a new or expanded education and visitor reception facility.

Obj 1-G: Carefully re-brand Jackson and his legacy and aggressively market.

Obj 1-H: Expand programmatic offerings.

Obj 1-I: Establish partnerships at the local, regional and national level.

Obj 1-J: Ensure all visit aspects are welcoming, accommodating, convenient, safe and enjoyable.

2. Adopt and implement best practices in board governance and executive management.

Obj 2-A: Establish a governing and fundraising board that is national and diverse.

Obj 2-B: Rename the governing institution the Andrew Jackson Foundation.

Obj 2-C: Establish a Strategic Planning Committee responsible for ongoing action plan. 3. Ensure sustainability on all fronts - financial, preservation and management.

Obj 3-A: Ensure financial sustainability by expanding and diversifying revenue streams.

Obj 3-B: Organize a comprehensive national campaign to address capital needs.

Obj 3-C: Enhance revenue from retail, food services, intellectual property, rentals, events, etc.

Obj 3-D: Recruit and retain high quality staff, including a core group of scholars.

Obj 3-E: Ensure the preservation of The Hermitage, its grounds and collections is held to the highest standards.

Obj 3-F: Pursue accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums. 4. Develop best-in-class interpretive, educational and outreach programs.

Obj 4-A: Prepare an all-inclusive interpretive plan with a core commitment to telling compelling stories.

Obj 4-B: Develop a national outreach program that focuses on the life and legacy of Andrew Jackson. Obj

4-C: Provide learning opportunities specific to different audiences.

Obj 4-D: Organize learning opportunities for educators, such as seminars, lectures, travel programs and fellowships.

Obj 4-E: Reach students of all ages with distance learning, a robust website, social media and onsite technology.

Obj 4-F: Partner with local, regional and national universities. Obj 4-G: Work to ensure a collaborative relationship with peer institutions.

Source: GuideStar. 2020. "Programs and Results." *The Hermitage/Andrew Jackson Foundation*.
<https://www.guidestar.org/profile/7983365>

ⁱ The wallpaper's "birthday" is in January, and it was 182 years old when I started my fieldwork and 183 years old when I completed it.