Tour guides as place-makers: Emotional labor, plantation aesthetics, and interpretations of slavery in South Carolina

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Emma Walcott-Wilson entitled "Tour guides as place-makers: Emotional labor, plantation aesthetics, and interpretations of slavery in South Carolina." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Geography.

Derek Alderman, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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Accepted for the Council:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
Tour Guides as Place-makers:
Emotional Labor, Plantation Aesthetics, and
Interpretations of Slavery at Southern
House Museums

A Dissertation Presented for the
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This dissertation is dedicated to my recently dead cat, Dotty the Cat. She was the best cat, according to results from numerous informal polls and me. I hope cat heaven has all the socks and pizza crusts she desires.
Abstract

Plantation house museums have come under increased scrutiny for obscuring or excluding altogether histories of enslaved laborers. Plantation sites have by-and-large re-cast the characters of the plantation, transforming spaces of Black labor into spaces of White leisure. However, changing tourist interests/demographics and increased research on representations of slavery have challenged the tradition of Lost Cause ideology as a centerpiece of interpretation at sites of slavery and the effective whitewashing of these formerly majority-Black spaces. Recently there has been a movement to find and implement more-complete interpretations of slavery at historic sites, evidenced by the opening of numerous museums and historic sites that have an interpretive focus on slavery. Tour guides are powerful place-making agents at plantation house museums. The ways tour guides experience place—their physical and emotional labor, development of tours, and engagement with the landscape—contribute to the (re)creation of historical narratives and plantation atmospheres. This dissertation builds on research in cultural geography, critical tourism, and heritage studies that investigate the function and deployment of narrative at plantation house museums and sites of slavery.
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Introduction
Tourist Plantation Origins and Atmospheres of History

The Southern plantation house is well established in the cultural imaginary as an elegant, imposing structure supported by tall, white columns at the end of a lane of Live Oak trees. The image is iconic, sticky and continues to shape perceptions of race, power, and legacies of slavery in the American South. Plantation house tourism has existed in various forms since before U.S. independence and has gone through several stages of revival and reinterpretation. After the Civil War, the recently rebelling states recast themselves as the “Old South” and northerners flocked to see the novelty of a plantation landscape—the whimsical homes of Southern aristocracy and picturesque fields populated by Black laborers frozen in time. As tourist sites, they were explicitly raced places. Tourism promoters would lure northerners who wanted to experience a reputedly “genuine” South with promised displays of “Black ‘exotics’” (McIntyre, 2011).

In the mid-20th century, explicit racism was succeeded by a conspicuous absence of race at tourist plantations with the rise of what Philip Herrington (2019) calls “plantation revival”. Most plantation museums were founded on traditions of erasure, apologist attitudes, and Lost Cause ideologies; that ideological lineage remains the political undergirding of the plantation tourism industry (Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Small, 2013; West, 1999).

Though plantation museum historical interpretation is rooted in overtly racist place-narratives, these are far from static. Histories sold and told at memory sites grow and change as they are performed by tour guides and consumed by visitors. Navigating space and verbiage of plantation memорyscapes is a dialectic process. Narratives are in a constant state of becoming as they are subverted, adapted, and reified. Interwoven
discourses of history, place, memory, and racism become the material realities with which visitors, tour guides, and plantation owners interact.

Research on memory work at heritage sites can unveil potential (re)inscription of White supremacy ideology and how it may/may not/could be subverted. Investigating how plantation house museums portray the past is critical to unlocking how race relations are remembered and interpreted, past and present. Discussions about representing slavery and race have been a point of contestation since the birth of plantation house museums and continue to churn up political and ideological divides, particularly in the U.S. American South (Alderman, 2010). Recent protests and counter-protests surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments reflect the social and political relevance of these debates and lay bare the violence inherent to White supremacist ideologies. Beyond discrete instances and spaces of memorialization or commemoration, the study of memory is at the heart of coming to terms with the American racial project.

An increasingly studied dimension of narrative-making at plantation museums is the role of tour guides as powerful social actors at such sites. In this dissertation, I explore the fluid, political, aesthetic, and sensorial dimensions of plantation house tourism with a particular focus on the role of tour guides. I pursue the place-making capacities and affective experiences of tour guiding to better understand the role of attachment, anxiety, love, disgust, and beauty in the generation of narratives and how those narratives serve as major points of intervention (or deflection) in story-telling about slavery and the enslaved. Tour guides at historic sites possess a power over story and place that bridges realms of the official and vernacular. In their work, guides construct
visitor experience, personal memory and identity, and historical narratives that will (re)inscribe themselves on the landscape. Tour guides, aesthetics, and the politics of language all occupy types of middle-spaces, mediating the relationships between seemingly concrete elements of place and history. This dissertation explores several affective dimensions of interpreting slavery from the position of guides themselves but is situated in a broader framework of affective co-constitution of museum “atmospheres.”

Atmospheres emerge among and between engineered and spontaneous elements of a museum assemblage and are actively co-produced by various social actors in a space as well as their material surroundings—“the co-presence of subjects and objects” (Bohme in Borch, 2014). An expanded understanding of atmosphere, an amorphous and intangible connective tissue, can provide insight into the formation of historical subjectivities (Anderson, 2009). Increasingly, scholars of heritage and heritage tourism are studying atmospheres to unlock meanings and affect generated from museum elements to reach beyond materiality, performance, sociality, and technology (Turner & Peters, 2015) into the realm of relationality and in-betweenness (Inwood & Alderman, 2017). The interactions between plantation house museum elements such as architectural features, official interpretive guidelines, alternate histories, tourist expectations and perceptions, hoop skirts, spatial organization of narratives, disgruntled trolley drivers, and countless others form the plantation museum assemblage. The phantasmic and ephemeral atmospheres that emerge from the junctures of those elements are vague, but not weak. They are phenomena that can be “staged, culturally informed, and manipulated to achieve social, political, and economic goals by tapping into people’s emotions and affect” (Bille, Bjerregaard, & Sørensen, 2015). This project
explores those phenomena by examining tour guides as powerful place-makers, elemental to plantation atmospheres. To bring plantation atmospheres into greater focus, I look specifically at the embodied practices/labor of guides and the function of aesthetics at one particular plantation house museum in Chapters 2 and 3.

**Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of this study is to expand the conceptualization of tour guides as social and emotional beings that interact with and contribute to the atmosphere and the place-ness of the plantation site. Atmosphere emanates from the interaction of the material and non-material or, in the terminology of historical interpretation, the tangible and the intangible. In everyday vernacular, atmosphere is often understood as the *feel* of a place or the mood evoked by that place. In the case of plantation museums, their atmospheres can never be divorced from the racialization of people, narrative, and place that has occurred there, both during the days of enslavement and now through tourist interpretation. Atmosphere evades a fixed perception and the study of atmospheres in the social sciences has the potential to disrupt notions of fixity and multiplicity by “forcing us to deal with the conceptually and experientially ambiguous” (Bille et al., 2015). Because of the slippery nature of atmosphere as a phenomenon, I can only explore a few of its formative component parts in the following chapters; however, studying tour guides presents an exciting opportunity to excavate atmosphere because a) guides’ explicit role is to engage, inspire, and mediate visitor experiences by connecting tangibles and intangibles, b) guides exist as both subject and object in the sense that they carry their identity and perspective with them as well as representing a
consumable element of museums, and c) their position as insiders and embedded place-makers grants them a rich and nuanced long-view of plantation house museums.

Research Questions
My overarching research question concerns how narratives of slavery are created in the daily, affective practice of historical interpretation at sites of slavery. How are histories created on the ground and who are the people who create them? I chose to focus on the role of guides because they are known as historical interpreters because they draw from numerous textual, physical, and interpersonal sources to create a story that is supposed to interest visitors and inspire them to learn more. There are innumerable elements that contribute to plantation house narratives and in the following chapters I triangulate a few of them by asking the following questions:

RQ1: How do historical arguments, personal histories, interpersonal exchanges, and vernacular narratives about enslavement connect and manifest in the stories told and sold at sites of slavery?

RQ2: How do tour guides’ intimate, bodily interaction with place and emotional labor influence their relationship with material and immaterial elements of the plantation museum assemblage?

RQ3: In what way are nonhuman elements and aesthetic encounters used by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of “lost cause” narratives; and how are trees—as some of the most popular more-than-human elements of plantation atmospheres—operationalized by guides and visitors on guided tours as ways to deflect, reflect, or learn?
Significance and Context
This work contributes to a growing body of research that examines memorials, monuments, and other historically preserved sites as important places of memory construction and contestation that have important social justice implications for including or excluding certain narratives and identities from public acknowledgment and responsibility (Alderman & Campbell, 2008; Blight, 2009, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2013). In the last few decades, the study of public memory has exploded across academic disciplines. Predictably, geographers have turned their lens to the spatial elements of memory and the production of place. This “memory turn” was a natural outcropping of earlier examinations of landscape symbolism and has extended across the human geography sub-fields (Cosgrove, 1984; Harvey, 2001; Lowenthal, 1975, 1985; Tuan, 1974, 1979). The politics of commemoration, national identity and patriotism, and heritage tourism are paths to core theoretical questions about violence, capitalism, racism, and heteronormativity (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007; McKittrick, 2013; Tyner, Inwood, & Alderman, 2014). Much of this work is predicated on the premise that memory is manufactured in the domain of interactions, utterances, and various literatures.

The plantation museum has emerged as an important site for understanding the politics of narrating and performing socially and racially charged ideas about the past and who matters and belongs socially and politically (Adams, 2012; Alderman et al., 2016; Buzinde & Santos, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Eichstedt & Small, 2002). In much of the work conducted at plantation house museums, researchers have focused on received narratives and the role of site management in creating that content. Researchers limited their examination to content and discourse analysis based on the
assumption that “official” versions of narrative determine what is said on tour and how visitors perceive it. The study of guides as place-makers unmask different set of assumptions about power relationships at historic sites, opening possibilities for understanding the process of meaning-making as well as content.

Affect, atmosphere, aura, and assemblage are all theoretical approaches to understanding the cohesion and construction of places and build upon one another to create a nuanced view of place-meaning and place-making. Guides at historic sites play a role in generating atmospheres and connecting human and beyond-human geographies. Examining the mundane, procedural, and emotional elements of making history sites will advance our understanding of the metaphysical practice of guiding as well as the tangible results of tales told on tour.

This work also addresses the potentials for studying trees as essential more-than-human geographies at heritage sites. While there has been recent growth in the study of trees as powerful nonhuman agents of memory and meaning-making, it is often in the context of contemporary memorials (Heath-Kelly, 2018). In the third chapter, I argue that visitor, tour guide, and management’s aesthetic engagement with trees at plantation house sites open up or close down opportunities for learning about the legacy of slavery and the role of beauty as an expression of power and (re)claiming power.

The theoretical and empirical contributions of this work, however, are a means to a more practical end: to improve interpretive techniques for the sake of advancing equity and inclusion in tourism by helping tour guides become more comfortable discussing difficult topics. This involves developing flexible strategies for teaching visitors and coping with the emotional toll of dealing with distressing topics on a daily basis. Each
chapter includes practical interpretive strategies at different levels of development. In
Chapter 1, I propose a schema for reflexive interpretation based on both results and
practice in the field; in Chapter 2, I make an argument for differentiated guide training
that I am developing further with the help of two study participants; and in Chapter 3, I
demonstrate ways aesthetic interpretation acts as a powerful tool for problematizing
romanticized notions of the antebellum South.

Positionality and Methodological Framework
My position as researcher, former historical interpreter, and place-attached person, and
the integration of personal reflections in my results, necessitate an expanded
investigation into my own role and the influence it has. In the following chapters, I
establish a relational context for my identity and perspective in order to foster a more
complete view of my interactions with participants. My personal history and experiences
are important context and data in this work as I am operating with my own set of
assumptions, described briefly here.

Ultimately, I want my scholarship to advance critical and anti-racist work at historic
sites of slavery. As a tour guide at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield (WICR) in
southwest Missouri, I conducted tours of a house owned by yeoman slave-owners from
the 1850s to the 1870s. When I started, I was very young and not well-versed in Civil
War history (let alone histories of slavery). I uncritically accepted what my mentors
taught me and what I heard on tours and then parroted those narratives. As I took more
history classes, asked more questions, and spent time at a local African American
history museum I learned that those narratives I was taught—and was teaching—could
be deeply damaging in their tacit dismissal of the horrors of slavery. For the first time I
had to feel really, properly uncomfortable with discussing race and addressing my own Whiteness at a time where I held a huge amount of power to shape narratives of race and violence. I felt shame and anger that there were people who believed the version of history I presented. That is what led me to this research. I got better at interpreting difficult subjects but the way I see those histories has continued to change and my tour now would be light years away from what it was. History is made constantly, on the ground, in tours and visitor interactions and by guides learning and realizing new things. I could see how stories changed and varied as each guide told them and how those stories embedded themselves into my fellow guides’ identities. A lot of brilliant researchers have studied the flexibility of narratives at historic sites but the daily grind can get lost and that research is often inaccessible or unavailable to interpreters. My practical objective with this research is to daylight the process of guides-making-place and place-making-guides so people at historic sites can talk about it more openly with the public.

While I was still a tour guide at WICR, I interviewed volunteer guides about their place-attachment and found that their personal connections to the site were central to how they interpreted history (Chapter 1). Those findings about empathy, identity, and interpreting slavery led me to do further work at plantation house museums as part of a broader NSF grant project on the ever-transforming landscapes of heritage sites and narratives of slavery and then with a smaller group of guides at a plantation museum site that focuses primarily on the interpretation of slavery (Chapters 2 and 3).

My position as a former tour guide and connection to the people I interviewed in my research helped open new pathways for understanding guide experiences but my
position as researcher is distinct and I have very different experiences from many of the guides because of my identities and how people perceive me. Certainly, being a tour guide or a visitor at a site of slavery can be a dramatically different experience for African Americans than Whites. This difference is illustrated in the questions people ask on tour, their interactions with others at the site, and how they view slavery in the context of plantation houses. As a White researcher, I am often privileged a different kind of entry or comfort in historic spaces with largely White visitorship and in my interviews with WICR volunteers, it was made clear that several of the participants were simply uncomfortable talking to Black people about slavery in general. I suspect they would not have been as honest were I non-White. My racial identity and markers shapes how I can do research. I cannot fully understand the experience of interpreting slavery while Black and I strive to be reflective of that experiential difference in my analyses of guide interviews. Historic sites can be hostile environments, especially if you are teaching “difficult histories” and intersecting marginalities can make tour guiding an even more difficult task. Being a young, neurodivergent, queer woman working at a Civil War battlefield was, frankly, hellish, but I was able to keep two of those attributes in the closet for years, while many people of color working at historic sites can encounter a great deal of friction due to how they are perceived outwardly by visitors and coworkers. Because of the vast differences in experience, I avoid over-generalizing and prioritize the voices and experiences of guides themselves. As in qualitative research, exploring positionality in public history is vital because the way a tour guides sees, consumes, and feels the atmosphere of their workplace influences their contribution to that atmosphere and ultimately, to consequential narratives about slavery and race.
In the course of this research I have used a potpourri of methods to try and understand those experiences, but the bulk of my data are ethnographic interviews and observations of tour guides. Chapter 1 details some of my findings from interviews and observations at WICR and the data used in Chapters 2 and 3 are drawn from a series of interviews and observations I conducted at “Linford Plantation Historic Site” in the summer and fall of 2018.

Site Selection and Ethical Considerations
Two very different sites are explored in the following chapters, the Ray House at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield (WICR) and “Linford” Plantation museum. I include them both because they are part of a broader arc of investigation into the lived experiences of guides at sites of slavery and build on one another to illustrate the interface of affect and narrative formation. My methodological framework is similar for projects at both sites but I approach them differently because of my personal connections. Findings presented in the first chapter were drawn from data collected prior to the start of my PhD program when I was employed at Wilson’s Creek and working on my master’s at University of Missouri. That work had an autoethnographic component where my own experiences as a guide were used as an axis of analysis and as part of the data.

It is important to note why I am using the real name of WICR and not a pseudonym like I am for the plantation house site, Linford, in order to protect the site and the identities of the people who work there (though I obtained explicit consent to use the real place names from management of both sites). I chose not to de-identify WICR because I cannot separate my experiences from the results and its geographic location
Sharing almost any context would make the site easily identifiable even if I were to use a pseudonym because it is the only large Civil War battlefield in Missouri and a quick Google search will reveal that I used to work there. Linford has a unique approach to interpreting slavery, but it is one of hundreds of plantation house museums across the south. Additionally, the participants from Linford are employees of a larger organization as opposed to the unpaid volunteer guides at WICR, so they are a more vulnerable population. My reasons for choosing Wilson’s Creek as a study site are probably clear—I had access having worked there for a couple years before starting this research and an interest in an insider perspective. I chose Linford because I had connected with their interpretive director through previous research and because it functions essentially as a counter-narrative site. It is dissimilar from most house museum sites because the guides lead tours around the grounds, avoid the “big house” entirely, and prioritize narratives of the people enslaved, freed people, reconstruction, and descendant communities.

Structure of the Dissertation
This dissertation is organized into three distinct papers formatted for individual publication. In this section I describe each chapter in the context of my three research questions and conclude with a brief summary of my objectives.

Chapter 1, “The Empathy Gap: An Ethnography of Volunteer Tour Guides and the Language of Affective Interpretation,” as mentioned above, is a study of volunteer guides at Wilson’s Creek, a Civil War battlefield and historic house site (the Ray House) in southwest Missouri. In it I draw from interviews and observations I conducted when I was a guide there in 2015 to investigate the role of empathy and place-attachment in
the interpretation of slavery. It addresses Research Question 1: How do historical arguments, personal histories, interpersonal exchanges, and vernacular narratives about enslavement connect and manifest in the stories told and sold at sites of slavery? The Ray House is not a “traditional,” romanticized plantation house site but I am including these results because it is a) a great illustration of the connection between personal bias and attachment and what stories are told on tours and b) it was the foundational study for the research I did with guides at Linford Plantation in Chapters 2 and 3. An abbreviated version of this chapter was published during my doctoral degree program in the *International Journal on the Inclusive Museum* (2017). That paper and the larger chapter presented here, while pulled from thesis work before joining the University of Tennessee, builds directly upon the theoretical training for the PhD.

Chapter 2, “Toward a Sensory Ethnography of Plantation Museums: Emotional Labor, Affect, and Place-Making At Linford Plantation Historic Site” addresses Research Question 2: How do tour guides’ intimate, bodily interaction with place and emotional labor influence their relationship with material and immaterial elements of the plantation museum assemblage? Focusing almost exclusively on guides, I share results from my ethnographic study with tour guides at Linford Plantation Historic Site with an eye to the sensual dimensions of place and labor. I explore tour guides’ (and incidentally my own) stories about the emotional labor they perform as interpreters of “difficult histories,” with a particular focus on visitor engagement, embodied memory through mundane work, and gendered practices of space/body management. I plan to submit an abridged version of this paper to the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. 
Chapter 3, “Live Oaks and ‘Living’ Memory: Tour guides and interpreting aesthetics at Linford Plantation Historic Site” brings narrative, representation, and embodied experiences of place into closer contact and addresses Research Question 3: In what way are nonhuman elements and aesthetic encounters used by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of “lost cause” narratives; and how are trees operationalized by guides and visitors on guided tours as ways to deflect, reflect, or learn? I highlight guides’ use of aesthetics and affect to educate visitors and problematize notions of beauty. Building from their place of primacy in the imagined aesthetics of plantations, I tease out the function of live oak trees as points of aesthetic engagement as well as more-than-human elements of the plantation landscape where meaning is (re)negotiated. I plan to submit this paper to Annals of Tourism Research.

In summary, this dissertation builds on previous work on public memory and heritage tourism across a range of disciplines by foregrounding the labor of doing public history. I explore the co-constitution of actions, bodies, function, feelings, identities, and stories of the plantation house museum assemblage using field methods that prioritize affective and sensorial elements of research. Ultimately, I hope to further communication and collaboration between people doing the front line work of history and the scholars who study tourism. The way to accomplish this objective is to engage with tour guiding and tour guides as powerful place-makers.
Works Cited


Chapter 1: The Empathy Gap: An Ethnography of Volunteer Tour Guides and the Language of Affective Interpretation
Abstract

Tour guides at historic sites are increasingly recognized by heritage and place studies as important agents of place creation and re-creation. Guides at Civil War sites repeatedly perform official and vernacular historical narratives for school groups, military staff-rdes, and general visitors. At Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield in Southwest Missouri, the interpretive division relies on a reciprocal relationship with dozens of volunteer educators who make it possible to keep the Ray House, a homestead site used as a field hospital during the Battle of Wilson’s Creek, open for visitor tours. Using the analysis of surveys, in-depth interviews, and tour observations, this study seeks to illustrate that volunteers act as important conduits for channeling and reinforcing certain cultural heritage identities and promulgating certain national values and popular myths. In this paper I will discuss the politics of attachment and discomfort as volunteer guides create narratives that are often far removed from the objects or stories established by the museum and park management. I will focus on the way guides create the stories designed to make an impression on visitors and why those stories regularly exclude difficult histories of enslavement and violence against women.
Introduction

The role of tour guides as powerful social actors at historic sites is an increasingly investigated dimension of tourism and memory studies in the field of geography. Guides at historic sites are mediators and interpreters of histories that are themselves being constantly reimagined and negotiated. Extant literature on the role of tour guides in shaping historic home tours explore affect and empathy in docent-tourist interaction (Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011), lack of regulatory practices on the part of tourist sites (Black and Weiler 2005), and performative aspects of tour guide experience and story creation (Potter 2015). Conspicuously absent from this body of literature is the examination of volunteer guides that work at these sites. Not only do volunteers have a significant presence on the interpretive staffs at many historic sites public and private, their experience of leading tours and learning about the place differs substantially from paid guides because their labor is not explicitly transactional. The few studies published on volunteer guides have focused on visitor interaction with volunteer guides (Lamont, Kennelly, and Weiler 2015) and motivation of guides that volunteer (Morgan 2009a). These are both valuable elements of volunteer experience but beg a more comprehensive approach to flesh out phenomenologies of narrative creation.

Volunteers’ motivations, attachments, and positions have an effect on the stories told at historic sites. To fully understand the construction of public memory at historic sites like battlefields, plantation homes, and monuments we need to examine the role of volunteers in the creation of those places from their own perspectives. With this paper I aim to build a better understanding of how volunteer educators become agents of place creation through their attachments to the places they interpret. The complexity of the
tour guide/site/visitor relationship necessitates an in-depth analysis of the guides themselves, the formation of their love for a place, and how that attachment reverberates through the stories they create. Affective interpretation, the relationships formed between guide, visitor, and place, is not only as important as addressing the content of a tour but is formative of that content. This can be particularly problematic when guides struggle with interpreting histories of slavery and race. In my results, I examine the erasure of slavery in historical narratives and how that erasure is inexorably tied to guides’ education, place connection, and reliance on empathy as an axis of interpretation.

This paper focuses on the experiences of nine volunteer tour guides at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield in Southwest Missouri. More than 100,000 locals, tourists, and schoolchildren visit Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield every year. The site is a nexus of Civil War history for visitors to Southwest Missouri. A unit of the National Park Service with limited full-time staff and no full-time tour guide employees, Wilson’s Creek relies on volunteers to provide interpretive services year-round as well as employing interpretive staff seasonally. At the center of historical interpretation at Wilson’s Creek is the Ray House, a Civil War-era household that is used as a conduit for telling a wide range of shared histories at the Battlefield, such as Civil War medicine, yeomanry, and slavery. I use data collected from a series of in-depth interviews to analyze tour guide place-attachment, specifically place-identity, and how place attachment impacts the processes and politics of representing slavery at the Ray House. Those representations have implications for the broader narrative economies of the slavery in Missouri and the role of the Civil War in American public memory (Carter, Butler, and Alderman 2014).
As a historic interpreter at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield from 2011 to 2015, I am intimately familiar with the role of tour guides in the creation of story. I draw from my experiences as a paid guide at Wilson’s Creek to access and address the role played by volunteer guides. As an employee, my relationship with the site was different from my participants because of different training requirements, operational responsibilities, and because it was my livelihood. However, the common experiences of guiding became a source of data as well as being central to my methodology. My familiarity with the place, the people who interpret it, and the stories we weave create the context for interpreting the attachment and experiences of volunteer tour guides. Autoethnographic elements of the larger study from which I draw my data are an essential part of my collection measures and analytic processes. As someone with enthusiastic and deep attachment to my site of inquiry, I am interested in how place-attachment influences the creation of place. A guide is not simply a conveyer of past times and past places, but someone whose identity becomes intertwined with the identity of a place.

An abbreviated version of this chapter was published during my doctoral degree program in the *International Journal on the Inclusive Museum* (2017). For the purpose of this dissertation, all sections of this paper have been substantially revised and expanded with the exception of the introductory paragraphs. The presented data was drawn from thesis research before joining the University of Tennessee but was published with me as the sole author during my PhD program and builds directly upon the theoretical training for the PhD.
Background

Geographies of memory and sites of slavery
Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield has a privileged position in the national conversation because it is a unit of the National Park Service and therefore is designated to have memorial significance “in perpetuity.” Its preservation was made possible by local initiatives designed to bolster community bonds and encourage tourism but is now defined by its contribution to a “national narrative” (Roudometof 2002). Essentially, public memory work at nationally preserved battlefields can have an outsized impact. Foote and Azayahu (2007) describe public memory as a matrix in which “time and space are used separately and in combination to embed shared historical experiences and a sense of a shared past in the public life of a community.” Significant places such as battlefields allow memory to be rendered material and visual. Static elements that represent larger abstractions of meaning, faith, and patriotism are borne of power negotiations and selective rememberings by site administrators, community members, and lawmakers (Utley 1992).

In the last couple of decades, a large volume of literature has examined the politics of remembering and telling histories of slavery at historic sites, particularly at plantation homes. Most notably, Eichstedt and Small’s *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (2002), established a framework for analyzing content in plantation home tours that emphasizes the presence and absence of themes and stories related to slavery. This has expanded to analyses of representations in websites and historic markers (Alderman 2012; Dwyer 2004), in tour guide-visitor interactions (Dwyer, Butler, and Carter 2013; Modlin 2008), and the
development of broader narrative economies (Carter, Butler, and Alderman 2014).

There has been an important turn from the content to process of memorialization in the geography literature. Potter (2015) writes that tour guides do not merely follow a script but play a more active role in the creation of narratives than previously understood. Tour guides are regularly in the position to define difficult histories based on their own biases and experiences and it has a significant impact on the way slavery, race, and violence are portrayed to visitors, often under the guise of “official narratives.” The deconstruction of those official or standing histories has been the focus of many scholars studying memory and historic sites, but scholars are increasingly recognizing the elastic and dynamic process of narrative creation as a social process in which tour guides play an important role (E. Arnold Modlin et al., 2011; Potter, 2015; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). While the Ray House is not a “traditional” plantation house, the techniques for researching the interpretation of slavery are very similar and it is a particularly good place to learn about the interface of Lost Cause narratives and enslavement, the domestic slave trade, and debates over pro-slavery ideologies.

Sites of enslavement are widely acknowledged to be racialized spaces. However, at many antebellum house museums a dialogue about race is conspicuously absent (Adams, 2012). Even when interpretations of those sites by tour guides, films, and signage include slavery and enslavement as central elements, they typically omit a discussion of race or racialization. Given the material consequences of racist discourse in the nineteenth century (and today), a continued erasure of legally enforced racial hierarchy compromises contemporary anti-racist work. The practice of deracializing enslavement effectively colorblinds historical memory, thereby fostering notions of a
“post-racial” society—which presupposes a “post-racism” society (Omi & Winant, 2014). Integrating conversations about race at historic sites has been difficult as it has been resisted by visitors, considered “too-sensitive” by management, and troubling for guides. This chapter addresses the third of these challenges.

Place attachment and volunteer guides
Similar to studies of public memory, the field of place attachment is similarly interdisciplinary and has been approached from many theoretical frameworks. Place attachment can be understood as a meeting point of affect and numerous material and immaterial elements of place. The emotional ties of people and places arise from intricately woven landscapes that are at the same time ecological, built, social, and symbolic (Hummon 1992). Bonds can be formed with places imagined, that someone has never set foot in, or places that have literal bonds, land ownership or occupation that symbolically encode social and experiential meaning. Both qualitative and quantitative measures of place attachment have been critical to building the volume of literature and practical application. The field of outdoor recreation has produced a slew of studies about visitor perception of place and place attachment as tourism has become ever-more important at the local, state, and national level (Davenport et al. 2010; Jorgensen and Stedman 2001; Morgan 2009b; Smaldone et al. 2005; Suckall et al. 2009).

Place attachment serves a number of practical and tangible purposes for historic sites. The National Park Service and Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield rely on place-attached individuals to achieve their mission. That mission involves not only educating visitors about a place, but cultivating emotional connection between visitors and a site,
between the tangible and intangible. Volunteers make up roughly five times Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield’s full time staff and some dedicate as many hours as full-time employees. Keeping the Ray House open daily for visitors requires maintaining a such large volunteer staff. Despite their importance, few volunteers are well trained in history or historical interpretation and resources for in-house training are limited.

Methods

Positionality statement and methodological framework
This is an exploration in subjectivities and affect in historical interpretation as well as emotion and perception in the research process itself. At the start of this study, I had been working alongside all my participants for at least two years and our interactions are shaped by familiarity and affection for one another. My position encouraged an ease of participant reflexivity in which the dialogue between myself and a volunteer tended to be more conversational, and I was actively reflecting back to them about my understanding of their thoughts (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995). This approach is inspired by feminist epistemologies and methodologies used by researchers such as Jones, Nast, and Roberts (1997) and Gibson-Graham (1994) that seek to “level the field” between researcher and researched to disrupt the traditional hierarchy of social science that places the “scientist” above her “subject.”

The results are not only a product of established methods, but of years of participation, love, and curiosity from working at Wilson’s Creek. My role as a researcher, interpreter, and place-attached person, and the integration of elements of autoethnography in my results, necessitates explicitly addressing my own role and the influence it has. My ascribed status (as a White, middle-class woman in her early 20s)
and achieved status (as a park guide and college student) are positions central to the way I approached my subjects, the relevant literature, and how I collected and processed data.

I came to this topic as a place-attached person first, with implications for the processes of data collection and analysis. This project was the result of ruminating in my own frustrations about writing and teaching history and my conversations with fellow students, mentors, and employers. Unlike many of the participants in this study, I began my life at WICR as an outsider to the world of “Civil War buffery” but was interested in new ways to teach local history to different audiences. I was 20, and I felt very sure of my perspective but very unsure about my knowledge. I read a few books and watched several tours before I found myself interpreting the history of the Ray House for visitors. My stories changed dramatically in that first summer as I would work with different rangers and volunteers, each of whom had their own take on meanings of war, loss, and duty. This rapid evolution of narrative from my own mouth was shocking. To me, histories at national parks seemed unshakable. As a visitor, these stories seemed true. As a guide, I learned that I had a lot of power over narratives and that those narratives were flexible. As I learned more about the history of the park and slavery in Missouri, I became concerned with the stories told at the Ray House, the stories I had been telling. This created a conflict between wanting to condemn problematic and harmful narratives and realizing how changeable my own interpretations of the site were over time. This led me to studying changes in historical interpretations of local landmarks and features when I started my
master’s degree, but I eventually landed back where I started, on the porch of the Ray House talking to fellow tour guides.

Participants and methods
To develop an understanding of volunteer guide contributions to the place narrative, I chose participants who expressed a strong connection to place and put in hours of research outside their volunteer time. This is in accordance with most grounded theory sampling techniques. I employed grounded theory techniques for sampling because of the emphasis on the inductive process. Additionally, Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005) use grounded theory as a way to explore the role of the researcher and deconstruct the “positivist underpinnings” of Strauss and Corbin’s systematic grounded theory framework (1998). Both of these grounded theory approaches influenced how I collected and processed my data.

I recruited participants who had been in their roles as tour guides for at least two years and volunteered regularly (daily, weekly, or monthly). It was likely that these participants would be rooted in place to a greater degree than volunteers new to the job. This selection still yielded a wide range of experience so I could determine if there were drastic differences between volunteers that had worked for many years versus those who had worked for few years.

Everyone who worked at the park at the time of this study, 30+ volunteers and paid staff were White, including myself. The other two student-hires and I were the only people working there who were younger than 40. Most of the participants in this study are older than 60, married or formerly married to someone of the opposite sex, and retired. Many of them are veterans or from military families and all but one of the women
in the study are current or former professional educators. The average age of the participants was 62 at the time of this study and their average time working at the park was 7 years. Five women and four men participated, all of them identified as White. Their levels of education ranged from the completion of some high school to completion of a doctoral degree but the majority (five out of nine) held an advanced degree.

In general, WICR is not an ideal site for a geographer interested in difference (either in visitor or guide populations). Though visitors come from all over the world, typically as part of a trip down Route 66, that population is also remarkably homogeneous. I was unable to keep a systematic record while I was working during the summer of this study, but from my informal observation, I estimated that of the 200-500 weekly visitors to the Ray House, more than 95% were White. This reflects the surrounding demographics of Republic, Missouri, in which 94.6% of residents identify as White according to the 2017 American Community Survey. Visitor and local demographics are relevant to how volunteer guides interpret race and slavery, as detailed in the results.

Collection procedures
At the heart of this project were semi-structured, in-depth interviews about each volunteer’s experiences of learning and teaching at Wilson’s Creek. I conducted interviews that ranged from 35 to 90 minutes and followed each guide on a tour of the Ray House. I also had extensive interaction with the respondents outside the interview process as a coworker. I spent the summer of 2014 collecting data as well as working at Wilson’s Creek. In my capacity as a researcher I was an observer on their tours and a recorder of their stories; in my capacity as a tour guide, I was leading tours alongside them and swapping stories in the lunchroom. Many more hours were spent with some of
the participants as we sat on the porch of the Ray House waiting for the next tour and I could follow up on interviews, work out some of my ideas, and benefit from the experience and knowledge of the Wilson’s Creek volunteers.

Emergent themes in interviews and observation
A several-stage coding process of interview data, observations, and field notes revealed an elaborate matrix of knowing and experience. Since the goal of this paper is to demonstrate the outsized impact of affect and place attachment on the creation of place narrative, I chose to focus on slavery, the most variable and emotional issue in the guiding careers of Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield volunteers. Analyzing discomfort and its effect on the place-narrative allows me to draw a clearer link between elements of place attachment and the generation of institutionalized histories.

Results and Discussion
For volunteer guides at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield, involvement in the life of the park is an extension of themselves. They volunteer because they connect to it emotionally and intellectually, can pursue their interests, and be social with others. This section is divided into two parts that explore those personal connections and their impact on histories told on tour. Using emergent themes from the interview data and a critical analysis of tour content, I discuss the role of identity and attachment as foundational to the construction of narrative economies of memory.

Elements of identity formation
Identity may be the most studied dimension of place attachment, largely because it is difficult to separate dimensions of attachment from identity itself. It has been interpreted
as rootedness or insideness, a symbolic and emotional linkage to place (Taylor 2010). For Tammy (44), working as an interpreter is her outlet for telling stories and relaxing away from her high-stress job as a school counselor, but the primary reason she keeps volunteering is her sense of attachment, “I kind of feel like I'm part of the story because I get to tell it all the time.”

Memory’s routes
Working at the Battlefield plays an important role in the lives of the study participants. It is tied into the imagination of their own family histories. Working at the park is an interaction with their own memories and the memory WICR aims to preserve. Rebecca (73) grew up hearing the story of her two grandmothers that were born on August 10th, 1861, the day of the battle, just one county over. Julie (64), also known as “the Sarge,” has ancestors that fought on both sides in the Civil War and that’s what got her “hooked.” Harold (63) and Barbara (67) are the two longest-serving volunteers in this study and both have memories of coming to the battlefield as children, with their own children, and with their aging parents. Harold’s relationship with the park, emotional and economically, began as an elementary school student.

In the late 50s they had a program in the schools called the “penny brigade,” where students gave spare change to help purchase the original 37 acres of Bloody Hill—I was a member of the penny brigade. I was here the centennial of the battle of Wilson’s Creek, the centennial celebrations in 1961, so I’ve always felt a connection around here. I’m a local boy. (Harold)

He says the longer he volunteers at the park, the more connected he becomes, and the more connected he becomes, the more he pursues those connections. Barbara expresses a similar sense of “fit” into the story of the park as part of its importance to her.
I actually feel that I’m part of the park…I feel like I really am part of the people out there. I know everyone out there and have a good relationship with everyone out there. I feel very close the park. It really is close to my heart to be out there doing things and working. (Barbara)

_The peopled house and the empathy gap_

For interpreters at Wilson’s Creek, the creation of a human past and future is not just an interpretive objective. Just as volunteers find enhanced attachment to the park through the stories of their own families or childhood, they identify with the people who lived and died in the area. This interaction with past voices makes it easier to throw themselves into the story and improve their tours. This puts them in a position of performing these far-away lives and forming a relationship through affective history. The foundation for those performances and for the growth of these relationships is independent discovery. Identifying with the historical characters in the story was cited by every participant as a primary source of inspiration for their talks.

Several participants described themselves as conduits to the past. That through their interpretation, a visitor could form those same emotional bonds that interpreters have formed. Those threads could be drawn through like emotional time travel from the experiences of individuals experiencing the battle and life at the Ray House. Harold echoed the position of every one of the participants when he said, “my connection is with the people.”

You really have to know your people. And, like I say, the more you know these people, the more you realize they’re not heroes in the sense we think of soldiers, you see, they’re just common, ordinary people, like we [are]. They were scared, they laughed, they loved, they had a great family life and it’s really nice to be able to relate that to people. (Harold)

Being able to imagine oneself in the shoes of someone in the past is the most valued skills by the volunteers. Joan (56) started coming to the park to do genealogical
research in the library and not long after she was giving tours of the Ray House and guiding school groups.

I just thoroughly enjoy the researching part of it. It’s just very interesting and it puts flesh on names when you can see that a young man was wounded so many times or he was left for dead and I think about: Whoa. What was he thinking? What was he feeling? Did he make it home? Did his family ever know what happened to him? And just things like that. If I hadn’t had the opportunity to look at those roles through my Volunteering, I would never have thought about those people, so it… it makes them human. I like that. (Joan)

Robert is a “63 years young” retired police officer who started volunteering two years ago. He initially started because he was interested in portraying soldiers as part of the “common soldier” talk, during which a volunteer talks about the life of a typical infantryman during the Civil War and demonstrates firing a musket. He says this performance as a soldier bolsters his understanding of their experiences and encourages him to learn more about their lives.

The more you learned about the everyday regular soldier that fought out here, you find out that those guys are just like we are today - they loved, they hated, they laughed, they cried, they did a lot of different things, and you start feeling more of a relationship with them. And then you can understand the courage that it took to do what these men did here, on both sides. So it has greatly increased my appreciation for what this has done here. (Robert)

Cultivating emotional closeness to historical figures can become problematic when confronted with atrocities they committed. To attach modern moralities to past personalities is inherently anachronistic and can become tenuous when it comes to imagining a person’s rationale in its historical context. The Ray family owned another family, an enslaved woman, Rhoda, and her four daughters. At the time, slavery was central to the economic system of Missouri. The ownership of enslaved persons
contributed to John Ray’s clout in the community and was a position many yeoman farmers in the region aspired to.

Not all interpretations include moral ascriptions and many interpreters successfully draw emotional connections with the past without obscuring or skating over practices that are considered morally reprehensible, but seven of the nine volunteers interviewed spoke explicitly of their discomfort interpreting slavery. Some found it difficult to connect to African American visitors or the experiences of Black people in mid-19th century Missouri; others believed the Park Service focused too much on slavery as a cause of the American Civil war; everyone agreed it was a tricky story to tell, especially in Missouri. I asked Harold if there was anything—after twenty years volunteering at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield—that made him uncomfortable to interpret.

There are things come up, slavery [is] one thing that bothers me, especially if there’s African Americans in the group. I use the term ‘woman of color’ for Rhoda, which is a proper term for the time but I always ask them after I’m done, ‘I hope you didn’t find that offensive, if so I won’t use it again.’ I had a gentleman last year up at the Ray House, used the N word about Rhoda. I was dressed in period clothing and I drew myself up and said ‘Roxanna and the children are not here today but I do not allow that word to be spoken in my house. If you cannot speak in a civil manner, I’m going to have to ask you to leave my home.’ I pulled a John Ray on him, I went 1860s ballistic. I don’t—there are certain things though, slavery bothers me. Because I know it’s a sensitive issue, I know we have to interpret it, but I sometimes worry I’m going to say the wrong thing, that I’m going to offend someone and I don’t intend to. (Harold)

Harold often works at the Ray House while portraying John Ray as a “first person interpreter.” He is the only volunteer in the group that does first-person storytelling at the Ray house, but many of the issues are the same with other volunteers that use emotional or moral anachronisms to cultivate emotional connections with historical subjects. Joan also found it particularly difficult to talk about slavery to Black visitors.
I’m still dealing with the slavery. I was not raised with African Americans. The little county where I was raised, had no African Americans at that time. We do now and I think that’s fine, I think that’s wonderful. Then, I didn’t know when I had African American students in the Ray house, how to approach slavery without offending. I did not in any way want to offend any of those children... It is an opportunity to teach about injustices as well as... the mindset was so different, the point of view was so different in the 1800s than what it is today and how we have evolved. So, teaching about slavery, talking about it has been difficult, but as I learn more, I become more comfortable with it. (Joan)

Gil (66) is a retired professor who volunteers at the Ray House and expressed a similar position.

The only thing that gets, that is I think a little, not confusing, but you have to be sensitive, is when you have African Americans, and God knows there’s not very many, I mean there’s not very many in this part of Missouri, and there’s sure not very many come out to this park. And I think that’s true, that’s true of National Park Services, I mean there’s not very many African Americans who go to Gettysburg, or any of the parks, not in relation to their percentage of the U.S. Population. (Gil)

There is no simple way to hypothesize about victimization, resistance, and agency of the enslaved women and girls who lived there; we have very few records of the lives of those women during their enslavement, and the same could be said about the personal life of John and Roxanna Ray and their daughters and sons. What we do have is a great deal of recent work that challenges the commonly held myth of benign slavery in Missouri, which holds that because slaveholders in Missouri owned few slaves, they were emotionally closer with and therefore kinder to the people they held enslaved. There were several examples of this narrative during the observations and a couple volunteers mentioned it explicitly in their interviews.

But I do try to explain there is a difference between slaves in Alabama, Mississippi; basically the field hands, and Aunt Rhoda. I mean Aunt Rhoda was, she worked alongside Roxanna, I say hey it wasn't like she could go out on Saturday night, I mean she didn't have her freedom, but it seemed to be... slaves
in this part of southwest Missouri were more like, were more like helping hands than chow. I'm not trying to soften, I'm just trying to say there are different kinds of situations in slavery. So when you have, particularly when you have African American students, you might get one or two out of a class of 20 or 25, and I wanna be sensitive to them, but I want to make sure that I don't want to gloss over the year. I don't want to pretend that Aunt Rhoda wasn't, you know, wasn't property - she was property. But, for everything I've read, she and Roxanna had a pretty special bond, and she actually came back when Roxanna was ailing and helped take care of her in her final days, which I thought was, that's special, for anybody. (Gil)

Gymph, in Out of a House of Bondage (2008), posits that household slaves, particularly enslaved women, faced more intense physical and emotional violence than their male counterparts in the field. In On Slavery’s Border (2010), Mutti-Burke builds on this argument in the state of Missouri, where many households only owned a few slaves and that intimacy cultivated a culture of violence different from that at a large plantation, but no less violent. Even when volunteers describe the violence of slavery, they often teach a vector of White experience as a point of comparison.

And then what I also do, is when we talk about Aunt Rhoda, the race slave, I also point out that you have to take a look at uh...Roxanna. Her first husband dies. She didn't inherent anything because she couldn't. So what kind of slave was she? Her husband worked, he owned the farm, he dies, she can't inherit anything, she can't get anything. So there's different forms of slavery back then and you can actually say Roxanna was a slave, to the times and to the meaning of the women stuff such as that there, and I guess that's just a modern-day guy talking now... But there are some controversial things that you can talk about up there, but if you do you better know what you're talking about. Because again, strong opinions. But as far as not wanting to talk about them, I do, I talk about them all day long. (Robert)

This is a creative way to draw a thread of context through the lives of residents at the house, but also reinforces the idea that Black experience can only be understood through the lens of White experience, or that the audience will be able to identify more
with those characters because of their own embeddedness in White-dominated historical narrative. As many volunteers describe it, “it is a two-way street.” If the visiting population is largely White and has a similar inclination to identify with White historical characters, it further fortifies entrenched narratives of White hegemony. That is why interpreters see these narratives of the other as controversial, because there is a general local understanding that “we” do not discuss issues of racial violence in polite company, and interpreting a house where enslaved people lived and worked forces interpreters to ride that line. Many interpreters reflected on the problem of drawing these types of comparisons, both between contemporary experience and past experience and enslaved experience and free experience. As Robert says, this is “a modern-day guy talking now,” and that creates problems of performative history for volunteer interpreters. It puts volunteers in a position to “work in the gray areas” in the moment.

The stories are both preformed and performed, institutionalized and malleable, anchored by personal identity and institutional history but continue to evolve in the practice of telling.

Our conversations made clear that the performance of historical narratives and personal interest in history is grounded in empathy. Volunteers appear confident in their ability to relate to people in the past and present, they are people persons, after all. They draw on their own experiences as mothers, soldiers, medics, and teachers to create a human past for the visitors to the park. But it is evident that the most comfortable stories are also White stories.

I’m still dealing with the slavery. I was not raised with African Americans. The little county where I was raised, had no African Americans at that time. We do now and I think that’s fine, I think that’s wonderful. Then, I didn’t know when I had African American students in the Ray house, how to approach slavery
without offending. I did not in any way want to offend any of those children. I'm becoming more comfortable as I read and learn more about Rhoda and the role of slavery in this part of the state, I feel more informed and more comfortable. I had some of the African American students ask me questions about slavery: “Well, why was John Ray a Unionist but he had slaves?” which is an excellent question. One young man wanted to know how many children did she have, was she married? It is an opportunity to teach about injustices as well as...the mindset was so different, the point of view was so different in the 1800s than what it is today and how we have evolved. So, teaching about slavery, talking about it has been difficult, but as I learn more, I become more comfortable with it. (Gigi)

Ted also expressed discomfort with talking to African Americans about slavery.

The only thing that gets, that is I think a little, not confusing, but you have to be sensitive, is when you have African Americans, and God knows there's not very many, I mean there's not very many in this part of Missouri, and there's sure not very many come out to this park. (Ted)

Gigi and Ted share a lack of familiarity with African American people in their lives or interactions at the Battlefield. Volunteers become more at ease with talking about race as they learn more about histories of enslavement. Their knowledge base equipped them better to relate to the histories of White families at Wilson’s Creek. I had a similar experience. Public school and survey-level history courses gave me a firm grounding in White American history. I had a milieu of knowledge to draw from that could easily take shape into these new stories; this new family that I was in the position to interpret. From a baseline of unspoken Whiteness, the stories of this other family became the Other by virtue of their non-Whiteness. It was another piece of the story rather than central to it. As George Litsitz (1998) writes, “Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.” Whiteness is the invisible phenomenon undergirding performance and interpretation of the histories at the Ray House. Whiteness and White history can be taught without
reference to the histories of the other, in this case enslaved Blacks; whereas the histories of the other cannot be taught outside of the framework of White American history. Practicing hegemonic White identity is performative and reinforces itself, this is evinced by the difficulty of incorporating non-dominant narratives as central to “the big picture” (Hoelscher, 2003). That is, volunteer guide avoidance of slavery bolsters the historical whitewash. I was fortunate enough to be taking classes on the subject, but many volunteers do not have the opportunity, resources, time, or education necessary to wade through numerous historiographies of slavery to incorporate on their tours. Most only give tours of the house a few times a month and training is hard to organize. They want to feel confident in their interpretation and present themselves as an authority, so it is unsurprising that they fall back on what they know. However, those guides who expressed discomfort with interpreting slavery were more likely to address it on their tours.

Touring the Ray House
What emerged from the interview and observation data is a clear gulf between public and academic history at Wilson’s Creek when it comes to narratives of slavery and racial politics in the region. The nickname “the Lily White Ozarks,” was earned by a violent past in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. The subjugation, murder, torture, enslavement, and exclusion of Black Americans and original inhabitants are inseparable from the landscapes of my home county, but those stories often remain under the surface of more palatable histories. As volunteer educators use empathy and interest in historical figures to draw connections to people in the past, many experience an “empathy gap,” meaning they have a harder time relating to non-White people in the
past and present. This manifests in a couple of ways in the narrative itself. Three volunteers did not mention slavery at all in the tours I observed. This means that the institutional narratives as well as those agreed upon by historians are being left out entirely. Two volunteers mentioned it as part of the story but did not attempt to draw the emotional links that are commonly used to humanize the members of the White family at the house. The remaining four volunteers talked about the life of Rhoda, the woman enslaved by the Rays, and her daughters but promulgated problematic narratives to various degrees of inaccuracy.

These fall into three categories. The first is more of a tendency than a myth, which is to refer to Black experiences though a vector of White experiences. For instance, an interpreter may describe the horrors of slavery, but attempt a comparison to another type of experience, like coverture (wherein a wife is not granted rights as a separate person from her husband and therefore has very little “freedom”). These are false parallels for many reasons, chief among them that no one could sell the husband or children of Roxanna Ray and this was not the case for Rhoda. The second of these false narratives is the “myth of benign slavery,” which holds that slavery was somehow kinder in Missouri because of its small scale. This is often accompanied by the story of Rhoda returning to visit her former mistress on her deathbed. This is used as evidence that Rhoda was not treated unkindly but rather as a friend or companion. This is something uncorroborated and it is typically used to prop up the “benign” myth. There was one volunteer during my observations that described the relationships of slaves

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1 Rhoda and Wiley were children when they were given to Roxanna as a human dowry to take from Georgia to Missouri. It is unknown if Wiley fathered any of her four daughters, but they would have been living in the same space for more than 20 years. He was sold two years before the Battle of Wilson’s Creek for $827 dollars (Piston and Hatcher 2000).
and their owners in terms of “loyalty.” They used the example of Rhoda’s return to define her as being a “loyal slave” and compared that to Wiley, who was a “disloyal slave” because he repeatedly attempted to escape his enslavers. The last of these was the most shocking of my observation results because it strips the narrative of slavery of its inherent violence. It is tenuous, at best, to apply contemporary morality to an 1860s economic system, but teaching visitors that slaves were “loyal” or “disloyal” removes the reality of ownership and the violence necessary to maintain that ownership.

The histories promulgated at the Ray House often contradict or ignore the institutionalized narratives as outlined in National Park Service interpretive objectives and plans but have the appearance of being equally official. Because of the autonomy and informality of volunteer work, the tours of a Civil War household are more difficult to control and curate than they would be at a private tourist site.

Conclusions and Recommendations
In the space between academic history, grassroots movements, and federally sanctioned messages are the individuals that engage in storytelling and place creation as part of their daily lives. Landscapes of memory have political power and exist as sites of conflict over “right” histories. Volunteer tour guides at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield in Republic, Missouri reinforce, recreate, and subvert the dominant narratives of place through their performance of the place itself. As social identity is constituted through performance of place, those social identities are transcribed on the landscape. As players in the narrative development at the Ray House, tour guides undergo a process of identity formation as they work to cultivate empathetic and lasting connections between visitors and the place they love. This relationship and the reliance
on emotional connection as an interpretive technique becomes problematic as
volunteers struggle to interpret complex and nuanced histories of race, gender, and the
violence of slavery.

Narratives cannot be changed by an inflexible adherence to any new interpretation of
reality. Rigid retellings of history grounded in outdated historical scholarship are often
the cause of mythic stickiness. That is, if a guide learned something was “absolutely the
truth” from a textbook in 1978 but hasn’t been thought to think flexibly about evolving
historical narratives, problematic myths such as “benign slavery” in Missouri will be
retold without guides or visitors being asked to think about them critically. Therefore, to
make interpretation better and more inclusive, guides must be trained to understand
historical elasticity. Additionally, if guides talk with visitors about the changeable nature
of the past, they may be less fearful of delivering “untruths” because it daylights the their
own process and evolution as storytellers. On the ground, this is essentially a
historiographic and reflexive approach to history-telling and can be put into practice by
educating visitors about different versions of the same history.

This already happens quite a lot on the level of “factual” additions to knowledge. For
example, tour guide Jim may say something along the lines of, “we used to believe they
stored only roots in the springhouse but we found a record from 1859 saying they sold
500 pounds of butter that year, so they probably stored it in the springhouse.”
Interpreting historiography is similar when guides incorporate changes in historical
thinking. They might say, for example, “historians used to think slavery in Missouri was
not as bad as in other places, but historians recently have found that was not the case.”
These are two important ways of demonstrating to visitors that history is always
changing based on the available records and ways of doing research, the second of which is rarely used but easily taught.

Based on the findings about empathy and discomfort as well as what I have found successful in practice, I propose reflexive guiding practices as a third way that can unsettle the rigid and potentially problematic narratives told at sites of slavery. This involves “breaking the fourth wall of interpretation.” That means that reflection on the creation and subjectivity of history becomes part of tours rather than an individual pursuit. For example, a guide could share a personal story of learning such as: “When I first started giving tours, I told this story differently but then I read a book about gender and the Civil War and it changed how I thought about the role of women.” In theater and film, the fourth wall is the invisible barrier between the audience and the performer. If the actor addresses the audience, she breaks down the lines between fiction and reality. Many guides already understand history as ever-shifting, ever-evolving, or, at least, infinite and undiscoverable but continue to present the past as static. The barrier between history workers and visitors obscures the complexities and power dynamics behind the story, and disrupting that barrier encourages guides to think critically and helps them feel more comfortable interpreting difficult histories.

Studying how tour guides understand their own interpretation has implications for both public and private historic sites as they reckon with the organic nature of their narratives as shaped by various social actors past and present. The daily making and remaking of stories at house museums influences the broader narrative of slavery regionally and nationally. Tour guides are on the front lines of making history and have diverse approaches to constructing the past for visitors, they are the connectors
between the formal and vernacular visions of history, the past and present, and visitors and management. Guides are also deliberately or inadvertently making arguments about systems of oppression and power every time they lead a tour group. Narratives can be sticky, biases invisible, and knowledge gaps unavoidable. Understanding guide perspectives can lead to more nuanced interpretive methodologies and teachable techniques that we can use to bridge “the empathy gap.”
Works Cited


Chapter 2: Toward a Sensory Ethnography of Plantation Museums: Emotional Labor, Affect, and Place-Making at Linford Plantation Historic Site
Abstract

Tour guide experiences are important both because they influence how people understand history and because tour guides are a large and under-researched population of laborers in a tourist economy. One way to unlock these experiences is with a closer examination of their embodied and emplaced roles at the site where they work. For guides at Linford Plantation historic site, both the banal experience of work and exceptional encounters with broader narratives of history are inseparable elements of daily life. Guides’ memories dovetail with the memory embedded in the objects and narratives of the site. A guide’s sense of belonging and/or alienation is integral to the construction of the stories they tell to visitors. In turn, the way they express these stories is shaped by their daily encounters with other objects, bodies, and auras of place. In this paper, I explore the daily, lived experiences of guides at Linford, how they perceive their labor, and its affective consequences.
Introduction

Riding in the golf cart at Linford Plantation Historic Site, I could hear the rocks crunch under the wheels and the cicadas chorusing in the bushes as we rumbled down to the waterfront. Wiping down interpretive wayside signs is part of Leah’s opening routine; as I looked across the river ahead of us, she hopped out and got to work. Guides describe the time when they open the site as “quiet” but with the woosh of the traffic on the main road nearby, the bugs, the birds, and the crunchy gravel, it seems you can hear more in the morning than any other time of day. “Quiet” is the time before visitors, a time of peace and reflection for the historical interpreters at Linford. “Quiet” is the absence of voices, visitors’ and their own. It is described as a period where they “re-acquaint themselves with the site” or reflect on the stories they’re about to tell about the people who lived here and what their experiences were. For some, the thoughts, sights, and sounds of the past become part of a present in which guides interpret the transition to freedom for enslaved and freedpeople.

As part of my dissertation fieldwork in the summer and fall of 2018, I followed tour guides at Linford as they performed daily work tasks, led tours of the plantation, and attended staff meetings. Drawing from that participant observation data and in-depth interviews with guides, I examine three facets of emotional labor in the daily work of guides with a focus on sensorial and emplaced experiences of work: 1) connecting to the past through the performance of mundane tasks, 2) the emotional toll of visitor interactions, and 3) the gender disparity in managing space and bodies on tours. These build on one another to create a clearer view of how the plantation museum is constituted in and by bodily experiences of guides and how those experiences shape knowledge production and a sense of belonging. This extends the large body of
research on plantation house museums—that largely focuses on text and representation at these sites—by employing the expansive method of sensory ethnography to illuminate individual and shared patterns of experience that are formative of both self and place.

In this chapter, I frame plantation museums as “assemblages”—open and dynamic systems of heterogeneous elements that are continually co-constituted and restructured. Museum-as-assemblage is an analytical frame wherein affect is produced through the “enrolment of the unique human bodies of visitors alongside other discursive and material elements” (Waterton & Dittmer, 2014). Increasingly, tourism researchers have studied affect to understand relationships between and among bodies and their interactions with physical space and place. (Carter 2019) describes affect as an adhesive that “bind[s] subjects to objects and places.” It is inseparable from the making of place, the “connective tissue” that forms the character of a place by drawing together its various assembled parts. It is both creator and what is created. When tourists seek encounters with “meaningful” and “authentic” objects; they are both seeking and creating affect. This has also been interpreted as museum “atmospheres” in the field of architecture and museum studies as “affect, sensations, materialities, emotions, and meanings” coalesce to form a unique museum atmosphere (Edensor & Sumartojo, 2015).

While affect and agency have been explored in plantation house tourism to some degree, seldom are tour guides the sole focus of work designed to explore the dimensions of the museum assemblage. Even studies that focus on tour guides largely maintain a central objective of understanding visitor experience and treat the guides as
a sort of means-to-an-end rather than a population deserving of study in and of itself. Guide experience is intimately linked to visitor experience and the broader goal of this project at the outset was to know more about guides’ influence over museum narratives. However, my priority with this chapter is knowing guides; to examine their visceral, abstract, and embodied connection to the site where they work in order to understand their agency and lack thereof as laborers in the tourist economy. The remainder of this chapter is structured as followed. First, I review select literature that informs this work: studies on plantation house museums and theorizations of the role of tour guides’ emotional labor. Second, I will describe my methods of data collection and analysis and some key methodological and theoretical elements of sensory ethnography. Third, I discuss the results of my analysis, using quotes from tour guides my own experiences. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on my findings, limitations, and directions for future research.

Background

Plantation tourism and interpreting histories of enslavement

Tourism to former slave plantations in has long been an economic driver in cities throughout the South. The ubiquity of heritage tourism sites, in general, fosters an illusion that such sites are innocuous and disconnected from contemporary social and political conditions. The portrayal of many sites as a “frozen moment” in time is a method of concealing, intentionally or not, the act of developing historic sites and their lineage of institutionalizing a specific version of history (Modlin, 2008). Plantation house sites have traditionally concealed the brutality of slavery behind the veneer of a romanticized past but there has been a shift toward more inclusive histories with
increasing heritage tourism among minority populations as well as more White tourists interested in subaltern histories (Benjamin, Kline, Alderman, & Hoggard, 2016). Control over narratives told at historic sites is multifaceted and fluid, subject to individual interpretations of a site, organizational hierarchies, and local (and national) politics. In their seminal study of 122 plantation tourist sites, Eichstedt & Small (2002) found that inconsistency among docents contributed to the piece-meal and uneven interpretation of slavery, if it was interpreted at all. Management and training of guides differs vastly from site to site and is dependent on factors such as funding for training or availability of guides to be trained. Another common reason cited for the exclusion of minority voices and histories—and slavery in particular—is the unavailability of records and material culture by which to tell specific stories of those groups (Alderman & Campbell, 2008). This despite the common practice of situating plantation owners/enslavers in a broader national or international narrative (Shields, 2017).

However slowly, the landscape of plantation tourism is moving toward more complicated and inclusive stories. In the last decade, popular sites like Boone Hall and Magnolia Plantation have undertaken a restoration of their slave cabins and hold programs about slave life, other sites have started offering slave cemetery and include discussion of slavery on house tours but these narratives remain largely segregated (Cox, 2012). Newer sites, like Linford, have had the opportunity to entirely flip the narrative from the outset and can be seen as “counter-narrative” sites that conduct the memory work of “symbolic excavation” to de-mystify plantation pasts and explore the stories of enslaved laborers (Alderman & Campbell, 2008; Cook, 2016).
For guides, telling stories of slavery can seem like an interpretive minefield. Visitor responses to both the inclusion or exclusion of tough histories can result in confrontation, complaints, or more seriously for the longevity and mission of a site, have the effect of discouraging interest in “difficult histories” in general (Rose, 2016). Dwyer, Butler, and Carter (2013) describe the potentials and challenges of “commemorative surrogation,” where the attempt to fill a void left by selective forgetting can be excessive or insufficient, resulting in negative visitor reactions. First-person interpretation such as the re-enactment of a slave auction (Horton & Horton, 2006) or portrayal of an enslaved laborer at Mount Vernon can be an effective interpretive tool or method of surrogation, but can just as easily promulgate “benevolent slave owner” narratives if not carefully calibrated to tell the stories of the enslaved from “their perspective” (Seymour in Balgooy, 2014). Gallas and DeWolf-Perry (2014) cite a 2012 survey of historic site workers by the Tracing Center on Histories and Legacies of Slavery to capture the array of institutional and individual challenges to interpreting slavery:

- “telling a story in a way that fulfills our mission”
- “getting people who are skittish about slavery and ‘Black museums’ in the door”
- “lack of extant built environment”
- “multiple claimants to the ‘truth’ of the enslaved experience”
- “getting volunteers and staff to discuss slavery on public tours”
- “being sensitive about the issue without sugar coating it”
- “difficult to keep African American Interpreters”
- “White resistance”
- “fear of locals”
- “lack of broader interest”
- “the board”

I heard similar responses from guides at plantation house museum sites in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Virginia, as well as reports of outright hostility by visitors in response to interpretations of slavery. At Linford, where interpreters engage directly in a
conversation about slavery and race during every tour, visitor aggression and
dissatisfaction are par for the course and those interactions have a profound effect on
guides’ tour planning and emotional state.

Tour guides and emotional labor
Emotional labor is the practice of selectively mediating the invocation of emotional
responses in oneself and others (Hochschild, 2012). People perform emotional labor
across all professions, but it is especially visible in public-facing jobs like customer
service. The emotional labor of tour guides, especially those interpreting “difficult
histories,” is multi-tiered as they research and plan their tours, manage the emotions of
large groups of people, and create spaces to protect themselves. Several guides at
Linford said that they sometimes felt like they had to be a therapist for 40 people at
once. This is part of their role as “mediator”—managing relationships between people
and place and stories (Cohen, 1985). Tour guides have been theorized as “middlemen”
(Berghe, 1987) who bridge the divide between manufacturing stories and consuming
them (Jennings & Weiler, 2006), replicate dominant narratives or subvert them in formal
and informal visitor contacts (Vagnone & Ryan, 2016), and serve as an interface
between visitors and management (Melish in Horton & Horton, 2006).

The unique form of emotional labor performed by tour guides has garnered
increasing interest in the last decade and has been explored in research on routine
labor and unpredictable job conditions (Chen & Chang, 2019), emotional display rules
for group package tour leaders (Wong, 2013), gender difference in emotional labor
strategies (Yim, Cheung, & Baum, 2018), and the emotional tolls and benefits of
working as a costumed interpreter (Tyson, 2013). As guides interact with visitors,
respond to their needs, and reckon with multiple narratives and ways of remembering, they navigate a workplace where they are responsible for creating the visitor experience yet remain at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy. Further exploration of emotional tolls and benefits of this service-work in the context of smaller sites elucidates the contribution of guides as history-makers and mediators of visitor experience.

The effect of emotional labor can be seen in Modlin, Alderman, & Gentry’s (2011) study of plantation tour guides’ capacity to cultivate empathetic engagement, as their choices (or ability) to evoke certain emotions in visitors can result in further marginalization of the enslaved in the museum narrative. I found much the same when I interviewed volunteer guides at a Civil War battlefield and house museum during which guides discussed their discomfort with interpreting slavery and used an entirely different tenor of interpretation when they got to the “slavery parts” that did not incorporate the same kind of call to empathy they used when teaching about soldiers or White members of the household (Walcott-Wilson, 2017). Guides think deeply about the stories they tell and use affective techniques to form emotional connections between visitor and site. This can result in uneven interpretation because the pressure to get stories of slavery “right” is intense and telling those stories can put the guide in a tough spot if a visitor has a negative reaction. The emotional labor undertaken by visitors and tour guides at sites of difficult histories can be transformative, productive, and gratifying, but it can be as exhausting as physical labor.

Notes on the Site: Linford Plantation Museum
Linford is unique among plantation museums in many respects. It is publicly owned and managed and opened recently (in the last 6 years). Whereas many sites have struggled
with change over the course of decades and had to reckon with legacies and expectations of their owners, patrons, and board members, Linford has been able to start relatively fresh. Robert, a long-time interpreter at Linford always starts his tours by saying, “Here at Linford we do things a little differently.” All the guides I observed kicked off their tours in a similar fashion. The thematic core of Linford is the transition from slavery to freedom, and they focus on interpreting the 1850s to present-day. It is set apart from most plantation house sites because of its focus on the histories of the enslaved people that lived at the site, the process of Reconstruction, and the descendant communities that lived on the site up until the 1990s. Its most notable unusual feature is the lack of a tour of “the big house,” which is the primary element of tours at other plantations in the area. The tours vary from guide to guide, but typically they lead visitors through a chronology of the site, beginning at the visitor center, moving through the property with several tour stops, and ending at the cabins once lived in by enslaved residents, freedpeople, and their descendants.

I am referring to the site with a pseudonym, “Linford Plantation,” to protect the identities of the people who work there rather than call it “a plantation house museum in the southeast” in order to keep it anchored to one place. The way narrative is used at “Linford” is very much grounded in how the site is organized spatially, it is very site-specific, and I am only using interviews I conducted at that site. There is not, to my knowledge, a tourist plantation called Linford.

Titles and terminology
At Linford the official title of guides is “Cultural Interpretive Aids.” In fact, one participant requested at the end of the interview—during which I repeatedly used the terms
“guiding” and “tour guide” in my questions—that I stop referring to him as a “tour guide.” He said that in the surrounding area, “tour guide” has a different implication, that tour guides have a directive to entertain rather than educate whereas interpretive aids are the “ones who conduct the research and interpret history.”

Both terms are flexible within the tourism industry and frequently those with the title “tour guide” also engage in historical research to formulate their tours. Here I use tour guide, interpreter, and interpretive aid relatively interchangeably. The title of “tour guide” is well established in the literature and the tourism industry as the short-hand for anyone who shows visitors around a site. Not all tour guides are historical interpreters and not all historical interpreters are tour guides, but in the case of Linford, they are technically both since they are guiding tours and have relative control over the histories they interpret and how they do so.

Methodology and Study Procedures
Examining the role of tour guides in narrative-building and place-creation from their own points of view is an extension of fieldwork and analyses I conducted as part of a broader project about racialized landscapes of Southern Heritage tourism and my master’s thesis study of volunteer guides at a battlefield and house museum. I interviewed six guides at one plantation museum (Linford) to understand in greater depth how they embody their various roles as guides and how that contributes to the manufacture of place-narrative. In this section I briefly explain my positionality and rationale for my chosen methodologies and outline the study procedures I undertook as part of my fieldwork in the summer and fall of 2018.
Positionality statement
My relationship to this work goes back to the summer of 2011 when I was hired as a tour guide at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield in southwest Missouri. As a guide I performed regular visitor center operations, gave tours of a mid-19th century house, and experienced a considerable amount of inner turmoil about my role as a “front line” interpreter performing the grunt work of public history. I became fascinated by the changing narratives and individual interpretive approaches which led me to get my master’s degree with a thesis about volunteer guides, place attachment, and historical empathy. That work continued as I started my PhD and I had the opportunity to work on an NSF grant interviewing and surveying hundreds of visitors and tour guides at tourist plantations. Suffice it to say, I have been on a lot of plantation house tours and talked to a lot of people about plantation house tours. But I never shook the feeling of familiarity or camaraderie I felt with tour guides or my interest in the intensity of tour guiding as a job. We have read many of the same books and training material, speak a common language, and have similar experiences very specific to interpreting sites of slavery. My closeness to the guides in this project broke down the researcher/subject boundary in some ways and at points lulled me into a sense of knowledge-confidence that I do not actually possess. However, this closeness simultaneously resulted in some very rich and emotional interviews as we swapped stories and gossip. This was particularly true of the three women who participated, as our experiences were almost eerily similar when it came to visitor and co-worker interactions. There was laughing, crying, and sharing pictures of our cats.

As with any project, my interests, experience, and identities affected the questions I asked and the way I related to people. In this case, my quasi-insider status complicated
and enriched the interview space. Exercising reflexivity in all stages of this project has been an essential way to work through the anxiety of being an insider-outsider. I have also endeavored to be critical and cognizant of my perspective based on my status and background. I am a White, 29-year-old, neurodivergent, queer woman raised in a liberal, middle-class household in southern Missouri which let to and influence my acquired identities as a tour guide and researcher. Particularly salient to conducting research at plantation house museums is, as a White researcher, I am often privileged a different kind of entry or comfort in historic spaces with largely White visitorship. In interviews with White participants I conducted prior to this project, it was made clear that several of the participants were simply uncomfortable talking to Black people about slavery, in general. I suspect they would not have been as honest were I non-white. My racial identity and markers shapes how I can do research. I cannot fully understand the experience of interpreting slavery while Black and I strove to be reflective of that experiential difference in my analyses of guide interviews. Historic sites can be hostile environments, especially while teaching “difficult histories” and intersecting marginalities can make tour guiding an even more difficult task. Many people of color working at historic sites encounter a great deal of friction due to how they are perceived outwardly by visitors and coworkers. Because of the vast differences in experience, I avoid over-generalizing and prioritize the voices and experiences of guides themselves. As in qualitative research, exploring positionality in public history is vital because the way a tour guides sees, consumes, and feels the atmosphere of their workplace influences their contribution to that atmosphere and ultimately, to consequential narratives about slavery and race and those reflections during interviews influenced the resultant data.
Sensory ethnography and visual methods

Following the turn toward embodied ways of knowing and researching, I employed a sensory ethnographic approach inspired by the work of Sarah Pink (2008, 2015). What is appealing about sensory ethnography is that it is more than an “approach,” but a reworking of the dimensions of observability, constituting a new sensual epistemology. Instead of changing what I was doing, this approach changed the way I conceived of my methodology. I was more keenly aware of my embodied experience of researching and my engagement with the site and the participants.

Ethnography has been used in countless studies of museums and heritage sites, as well as in research on plantation house tourism but the renewed interest in materiality and more-than-human geographies has led to increased studies that pay special attention to the senses, particularly in the fields of human geography and anthropology. Embodied research practices and a focus on the body-as-subject/agent, recognize that the body is a “highly complex, dynamic, and interpretive filter on experience,” and that our understanding of our surroundings, ourselves, and others are always interpreted through the “medium of the body” (original emphasis Pink, 2008; Sunderland, Bristed, Gudes, Boddy, & Da Silva, 2012). We are also “emplaced” individuals, meaning that we are embedded in our daily experiences and way of being in the world (Pink, 2009). In sensory ethnographies, the body is used as a sort of axis for interpreting human experience. It is not that the researcher is paying attention to discrete (western-defined) senses like smell, touch, and sound, but that they try to define the multisensoriality of an experience by accessing or interpreting that experience with a focus on bodily experience (Suderland et al, 2012). Engaging (with) the senses shoots through the
research process, following from its lineage in highly reflexive feminist and critical ethnographic methodology (Pink, 2015).

Sensory ethnography lends itself to the study of museum spaces because of their multimodality and the deliberate creation of spaces designed to engage visitors on many levels of sensory experience. Additionally, attending to the senses in museum research has the potential to help museums and historic sites make spaces more accessible to people with different sensory modalities or capacities to perceive complicated elements of place. Vaike Fors’s work with teenagers’ multisensory engagement with digital exhibits demonstrated the practical applications and implications of sensory ethnography in the design of museum exhibits and installation. She found that to effectively move beyond representational pedagogies it is necessary to find how exhibits and programming “relates and assembles with the bodies of its users” (Fors, 2013).

Sensory ethnography advances the practice of explicitly recognizing the method of knowledge production as situated and subjective. Highly reflexive methods employed in qualitative research have the effect of daylighting the research process and its underlying structures. The acknowledgement and embrace of situated knowledge(s) unburdens qualitative researchers of “hiding behind ‘scientific’ modes of writing” and generate deeper insight into the phenomena of study (Hay, 2005:257). Sandra Harding (1993) argues that the rejection of value neutrality (or objectivism) opens possibilities for “strong objectivity” achievable through “strong reflexivity” wherein the pursuit of objectivity necessitates recognizing “beliefs function as evidence at every stage of scientific inquiry” [emphasis mine]. This addresses the weakness of empiricism as an
unavoidably incomplete picture of reality. Rigorous inclusion of multiple perspectives expands standards of rigor to include a “wider array of questions, interpretations, different perspectives, and inclusion of researchers and subjects from marginalized groups to strengthen the claims of ‘truth’” (Cope in Moss, 2002:48).

To ensure rigor in my own work, I employed reflexive methods and used various checking procedures as part of the “hermeneutic cycle” described by Bradshaw and Stratford (Hay, 2005:74) as a primary form of triangulation. This involved establishing 1) trustworthiness by way of “checking,” reflexivity, and data saturation, 2) transferability by providing rich description and addressing extents and limits of methods, 3) dependability by reflexively documenting research procedures and seeking peer review from a colleague, and 4) confirmability (by using member checking and auditing procedures) (Crang & Cook, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Visual methodology and the senses
Aesthetic value is often perceived and interpreted visually. Because there has been a longstanding emphasis on the visual in museum spaces and the study of museums, visual methodologies like photo-elicitation are a powerful tool for evoking memories of bodily performance and experience in a space (Dorrian, 2014). Using volunteer-employed photography and photo elicitation unlocks the sensorial experiences of guides as they react to visuals to prompt/trigger memories of work at the site (Sampson et al., 2017). Employing visual methods in the examination of sensory experience moves beyond visual representation by recognizing that creating visuals is contextualized in the body. That is, visuals serve to both evoke memories of other senses and to create them as a practice of the entire body, reflecting one element of an ethnographer’s or
participant’s general emplacement. They can be understood as “corporeal images” that are made both by the body behind the camera as well as the ones captured by it (MacDougall, 2005). It is likewise a place-making exercise as the creation of personal interpretations through the visual are imprinted on one’s cultural understanding of that place as these are replicated to represent research outcomes. The images created by the tour guides at Linford and the photos I took there have three important consequences: 1) they reflect what we each found important/interesting/relevant about the site, 2) they influence our phenomenological reality with the very attempt at capturing it, and 3) they contribute to the public perception of a place by way of sharing research and being integrated into how guides understand themselves-in-place. For this project, I used visuals simply as a prompt during interviews and visual data is not present in my results. However, it was elemental to discussing guides’ bodily and aesthetic encounters with their material and immaterial surroundings.

Study procedures
In order to understand how the embodied experiences of guides shape how they do tours, I employed ethnographic methods that were a blend of participant-observation and semi-structured interviews using photos taken by participants to elicit responses (or my own photos if they did not take pictures during the collection period). I also accompanied participants as they did mundane tasks like cleaning and opening buildings (helping when possible), sat in their workroom between tours and participated in workplace chatter about serious things and not-serious things, followed along for a site-operation training, and attended a staff meeting that involved debriefing/processing difficult visitor interactions or struggles on tour, a safety protocol refresher (and some
very delicious cookies). This could be defined as a blend of traditional ethnographic methods and “messy methods” that are well suited for accessing more-than-human geographies and by enacting embodied/emplaced research (Dowling et al., 2017).

**Participants**
In addition to the rationale outlined above for choosing Linford Plantation as a study site, I selected it based on personal relationships developed with potential participants. I met the interpretation director, Matt, at a public history conference I attended in 2017 and he expressed interest in my research and being involved in future studies. Subsequent recruitment happened via email and in-person conversations with tour guides when I visited the following summer. Each potential participant was given a digital and printed copy of a project summary and objectives as well as a document detailing their role in the study and what their participation entailed. Included in the information I gave them verbally and in text, was a promise to conduct research and represent their views as ethically as possible and keep them informed about how I was using their data.

My goal continues to be to advance this as a participatory project where the respondents are involved with the production of knowledge based on their experiences. So-called “member-checking” has been important to both keep them involved in the project and lend additional validity to my findings (Crang & Cook, 2007). This involved offering to share any data I collected and sending each of them a copy of my conclusions and findings to assure that I am representing them accurately. I also invited them to co-publish on papers using the resultant data and am currently working on a paper about emotional labor with two of the women who participated in this study. More
informally, member-checking is also part of the interview process as I reflected back to participants during our conversations to make sure I was interpreting their statements correctly (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

All but one of the seven guides working at Linford during my data collection period participated in this study, including three women (Samantha, Anna, and Leah) and three men (Matt, David, and Robert), ranging in age from 23 to 73. Notably, all three women are in their 20s and in graduate school, two of the men are in their 70s and retired from their previous careers, and one is in his late 40s. Four of the guides identified as White and two identified as African American (see Table 2 for individual demographic information). It is important to note that these are very unusual demographics for history workers at plantation house sites that typically skew older and White. There is not a comprehensive study of tour guide demographics at plantation museums, but in the dozen or so other house museum sites where I have been involved in research, I have met only a handful of young women interpreters and only one African American interpreter. You can see in Table 2 that two of the guides had only been working at the site for a few months so they didn’t have the breadth of experience the others did, but since they had recently developed their tours, I was able to learn a great deal about the process of tour-making.
Table 1: Emotional labor study participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Duration of employment at Linford</th>
<th>Days worked per week</th>
<th>Educational/professional background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.A., Recently finished her M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B.S. and some graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B.A., M.A., PhD candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.A., has worked in interpretation in the area for 20 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some college, has led tours in the area for 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B.A., finishing M.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Matt is the interpretation coordinator and was involved since before the site opened. Matt and Anna both work in the office, as well, and do not lead tours full-time.
Data collection

My choice of methods and analysis was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do historical arguments, personal histories, interpersonal exchanges, and vernacular narratives about enslavement connect and manifest in the stories told and sold at sites of slavery?

RQ2: How do tour guides’ intimate, bodily interaction with place and emotional labor influence their relationship with material and immaterial elements of the plantation museum assemblage?

RQ3: In what way are nonhuman elements and aesthetic encounters used by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of “lost cause” narratives; and how are trees operationalized by guides and visitors on guided tours as ways to deflect, reflect, or learn?

These questions developed as I visited numerous plantation museum sites and spent time at Linford Plantation Historic Site. This paper primarily addresses the second of these questions, but they are certainly not mutually exclusive.

This project involved a series of interviews and participant observation over the course of two visits in the summer and fall of 2018. Our semi-structured interviews consisted of questions about personal backgrounds and more pointed questions about their role as guides, interactions with visitors, and teaching emotionally challenging topics such as slavery and war. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Before the interviews, I requested that tour guides use their phones or cameras to capture images of their workplace between my visits to talk about during the interviews. In order to limit my influence on the participant’s photographic gaze, I avoided setting
limits on their photo assignments, but they were aware that I was interested in their daily
tasks and interests. My attempt to use volunteer-employed photography worked exactly
halfway. That is, only three of the participants remembered to do it. In the other three
interviews I asked them about pictures I had taken at the site on one of my visits. Each
of the three who took photos interpreted what I meant by ordinary or everyday
experiences differently: Leah took photos of things she was doing (driving the golf cart,
crossing the river on her bike); Anna took pictures of what she was seeing (view from
the window, pedals of a flower), and Robert took photos of things that are important to
him (a symbolic tree, an artifact from an archaeological dig). That was interesting in and
of itself but I did not include analysis of visual data in the results because it was
incomplete and inconsistent.

I also conducted participant observation, which involved going on several tours with
each guide, accompanying them while doing routine tasks like opening the site for
visitors and cleaning, spending unstructured time with guides in-between tours, and just
generally wandering around the site. I was fortunate because my first visit coincided
with a staff meeting and training session for new tour guides so I was able to follow
along as new employees learned how to operate different parts of the facility and talk
out their tour development with the whole team. I took fieldnotes of my observations in
notebooks and on my audio recorder and selectively transcribed parts to include in
analytic memos

Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, I worked through that data by ascribing codes
various at levels of abstraction moving from descriptive to thematic (Saldana, 2015).
First, I conducted open coding during which I assigned descriptive and in-vivo codes followed by eclectic coding to connect them to each other. During this process I wrote analytic “memos,” wherein I reflected on how those codes may lead to more emergent themes, connected them with data collected during fieldwork, and unpacked my reasoning and thoughts about why I was coding the way I was (Creswell, 2014). The second cycle of coding included focused coding and analytic coding which connected the emergent themes to other important elements of the project such as my research questions, extant literature, and observations (Saldana, 2015: 213, Cope in Hay, 2005).

In the next section I will discuss three themes that emerged from the interview data and my experiences and observations. My goal here is not to develop a theory or make concrete recommendations, but to allow the guides to speak for themselves. Their words and their work contribute more to the knowledge of the plantation house museum assemblage than I can with theorizing it. I have made selections of quotations that prioritize their experience as the most valuable result. I am not trying to prove or make conclusions about how their experiences are reflected or integrated or perceived by visitors, just that their experiences and their relationship to the site is an important and integral component. That is to say, this will not be an analysis of causality as in “this person is most interested in x, y, and z and therefore interprets a subject in a particular way”, but rather, a demonstration of their attachment and relationship with the place where they work.
Results: Memory at Work

The “feeling rules” described by Hochschild in *The Managed Heart* (1983) grease the wheels of most social interactions. Emotional labor is part of life. In this paper I focus primarily on the negative effects of a particularly emotionally challenging profession, but emotional labor cannot be defined as “good” or “bad.” It is part of how we define ourselves and shape the world around us. Better-defined emotional display rules are imposed by service industry organizations, implicitly or explicitly, since most of the labor is interpersonal; emotional labor is just as much a part of that role as physical labor (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Here I explore three types of emotional labor described by the guides at Linford: interpreters’ engagement with historical memory during daily, non-tour workplace tasks; the emotional impact of interacting with visitors at a site dedicated to interpreting slavery; and how the management of space and bodies during tours is both elemental to guiding and a highly gendered (and uneven) practice.

Sensorial experiences of the everyday: memory at work

Cemeteries in general, I don't typically like. But when I'm down there, it's an even bigger heaviness than when I'm at the cabins. Just because it's like, some of those graves date to the 1700s, which means that they could've been African. And their last memories were being brutalized on that plantation, and on that site. So that is just, that's really hard, when you're down at the cabins to think the people buried there probably had so much hope that things would change, and for them, it didn't. (Anna)

Anna (23) had been a guide at Linford for two years at the time of our interview, one of the longest-serving interpretive aids at the site and the manager of the volunteer program. Here, she is talking about her discomfort with the task of cleaning the interpretive signs adjacent to the river and the Linford cemetery. As with most service-
industry jobs, tour guiding involves a significant amount of grunt work—opening doors, cleaning signs and buildings, checking function of things like wheelchair lifts—unlike these processes at places like a restaurant or shop, these tasks are often loaded with the cultural and historical significance of the site. Simple tasks can elicit strong emotions. In contrast to Anna’s avoidance of the river shore, Leah finds it to be one of the most peaceful places on the site,

And this is probably my favorite spot because you see the water, and I've spotted dolphins out there occasionally in the morning, which is so delightful. It’s a pretty powerful wayside too because it's talking about connections [with] the wider world. And you can really feel it when you're there because when you're on the site it's kind of enclosed, there’s trees everywhere, and then you get to the river and it just kind of opens up.(Leah)

Despite the stark contrast between their feelings about the same physical space, they both describe the interpretive significance of the waysides and the power of that particular place. Throughout our conversations, Linford guides described their daily tasks as having an importance beyond just the functions of the site as a destination. In this section I will explore various dimensions of physical and emotional labor undertaken by employees at Linford and how those activities are tied to place.

Tourists visit historic sites to interact with place, to seek out an affective encounter with a space “where history happened” often because these places are emotional, meaningful, tragic, exciting, or sacred. The central facet of interpretation pedagogy is cultivating an emotional connection between people and place. For people who work/interpret in those places every day, their exposure to emotionally charged spaces is a large component of their emotional labor.

I feel, when I'm opening the cabins, like I'm doing a service to the people who once lived and worked in the cabins. And just kind of being ... It's
almost like going through and kind of reaffirming, I am telling your story. I'm not ignoring it. (Anna)

In our conversations, guides were continually connecting their labor with labor in the past.

The office and workroom where the guides spend their time while not leading tours is on the second floor of the Linford main house. A large White building that looks very much like the stereotypical image of a neoclassical-style plantation “big house,” with large pillars and a sweeping porch that were added in the 1920s to create a plantation house image that would appeal to tourists visiting the area. One of the photographs Anna took was a view of the oak alley and line of small cabins framed by the northeast window of the house. Guides look out these windows to check on their colleagues ("it's just kind of an unconscious thing we do" -Anna) and count tour group numbers. Matt has a routine of walking around to look out of the second-floor windows.

When I do that, I do it today for safety reasons, often times. Sometimes it's so that I can count the number of people that happen to be on a walking tour. What it tells me, though, is that this idea of placement of the house in the center, its architecture speaks to power, and wealth, white power, and white wealth. It also speaks to white fear and white control. It seems to be no accident that I can in less than 30 seconds, walk around this entire house and basically see everything that I need to see that could be a potential threat to my security. (Matt)

You can see most of the plantation from the house because it was designed as the center of the plantation economy, where the plantation owner could monitor and manage the labor of people enslaved there.

But looking out those windows, it was just, there was no one there…which was kind of weird. Probably one of our really slow days. But then just kind of thinking everything that's happening out there can be seen from the main house. Even though we think of our house as this private space. But
then, from the main house, you can see what's happening down at the slave quarters. It's not, then, really this private space for the people who lived there. (Anna)

The absence of people—the emptiness of the site prompted Anna's imagination to populate it with people from the past. This was a common experience for several of the guides—using silent moments to remember, reflect, and feel the past they are interpreting. These are moments of discovery that deepen guides’ connections to a site and they feel important, they reaffirm their feeling that they are doing important work. These are often described as peaceful moments. They are not actively performing their main role of educating visitors, but they are performing memory work. Creating place happens in the in-betweenness. Samantha talked about the panopticon-esque view from the house in greater detail.

Sometimes I'll stop, especially when I'm opening in the mornings, whether it's in the cabins or it's downstairs and just ... when I open the backdoor to vacuum, I'll think about, like, "Wow, this was used to keep an eye on all these field hands," and then I'll look out the window and be like, "Wow, so this was their view and this is how you couldn't really escape the eyes anywhere," because you could look from any window in this house and see everything that's happening outside. So I always try to put myself in an enslaved person's shoes and be like, how I would feel if I was opening this door as a house slave in 1850 or when I'm in the cabins and you know, we used to sweep out the cabins when the leaves start to fall. I think about how women would feel when they had to get up every morning and do that, except after that, they had to go work in the fields and things. So working here has helped me put myself in their shoes almost, by doing some of the similar things, it's allowed me to kind of go there, if that makes sense. (Samantha)

This is an example of embodied affect (Carter, 2019). Samantha uses moments of movement to prepare to talk about the enslaved experience at Linford and to connect empathetic threads to the past. This type of emotional investment is both motivating and
a particular type of emotional labor undertaken by tour guides as they shape the stories told at the site. She immediately followed this up by connecting it to how she gets questions about what it is like being an African-American interpreter at the site, which comes with a certain expectation of empathy or connection to the past. She says that the time before visitors arrive is the most peaceful and grounding and she can have experiences that are unique to people who work as tour guides to connect with the site and reflect. When there are visitors, the job of the guide is, in many ways, to manage the emotions of the visitor, which can be exhausting.

Leah also talked a great deal about her decompression time and enjoyment of the site in those quiet moments before opening. Her photos were mostly taken in the mornings before visitors arrived and of her commute on her bicycle. Leah had been working at Linford for a month or so at the time of our conversation and only worked two days a week. Her morning routine of driving around in the golf cart to clean signs and open the cabins helps her reacquaint herself with the grounds and structures.

You're literally experiencing the site at the best time of the day, it's cooler, it's quiet, you're hearing all the nature sounds, and for me, it is the process of going around the whole site and getting the lay of the land. Especially if I haven't given a tour in a while, kind of reacquainting myself with the property, and just being like, "Hey, there you are. Right where I left you. I'm here for two days, then I leave again." As we were talking I think I keep coming back to that just because it so much does dictate my experience at that site, the fact that I'm there for two days, and then I'm gone for five, and then I come back, and I'm there for two days. (Leah)

Reflecting on a photo she took of the early morning sun shining through the canopy of live oaks near the cabins, she described it as a “totally different soundscape when you’re there in the morning. A totally different experience.” It helped her get in the right mindset and it was an important part of her experience of getting into Linford-mode. Her
physical transition was also part of her emotional transition. That is, she felt that she could leave and not take her work with her. She used her bicycle ride as a sort of metaphor for this, describing how she crossed a physical bridge to get into the correct state of mind.

There’s literally a transition, right? Where it’s like, "I was at Linford and now I’m not." Very much so. And I feel every bit of that. It's three miles I think, and I feel every bit of it, 'cause I'm literally experiencing the landscape as I move across it. So there’s a very clear dividing line. Literally, a river’s in the way. (Leah)

Linford is a space that is designed to challenge and teach people about difficult things. A place that is visited because it is unfamiliar--by people who are interested in the novelty of a southern plantation or people who want to see a site that is unique among plantation museums in an area saturated with them. For guides, the becoming of the site as a place of work and as part of their daily lives affects the way they understand the history there and how they teach it. They experience an entirely different range of affection, revulsion, and interest than a casual visitor. This is the unique effect of daily, routine things -- things that seem banal and tedious, like wiping off signs or making sure the wheelchair lift works every day. These are not experiences most visitors will have, but it has a profound effect on the making and remaking of Linford.

Those moments of peace, decompression, and reflection that are part of daily tasks are set counterpoint to the most taxing and essential part of guides’ daily labor--interacting with visitors.

Engaging tourists: guiding as the “Emotional Vampire”

It can be emotionally exhausting, too. Because we talk about the things that we talk about here, there’s nothing that we shy away from when it comes to slavery and its legacy. Talking about things that are ... some things that are so traumatic and upsetting, that doesn’t necessarily get any
Those things don't get easier to talk about. These are the things that we talk about here. You know, most white American's don't want to talk about, haven't wanted to talk about because it is hard to talk about. Over time, doing this work, what we're doing, I think probably the thing that has the most profound impact is the emotional toll. I think that's the most difficult thing. (Matt)

The site’s focus on the history of enslavement and the struggle of formerly enslaved people and their descendants make guiding there uniquely challenging. The ruminations on history and place guides described were among their favorite parts of the job, but actively processing, learning, and teaching histories of slavery builds constantly and takes an emotional toll. Leading tours about slavery is not the kind of job that gets easier with time -- according to most of the Linford guides, it only gets more difficult the more you learn. It certainly gets more difficult with each uncomfortable visitor encounter.

The plantation house museum industry was not created to interpret “difficult histories,” but to obscure them. The political birth of the plantation house museum makes telling their stories an even more complicated, tense, emotional, and sometimes dangerous task. Many plantation house tourists are going for the romantic imagination of the plantation house, or as Matt put it, “the Gone With the Wind kind of crap.” Visitors may be unprepared to learn about something outside the realm of their expectations and their reactions to difficult histories can be particularly frustrating to interpreters.

When I worked at Wilson’s Creek, I often encountered an attitude like that of one visitor who told me, “I came here to learn about the Civil War, not about slavery.” Judging a visitor’s facial expression, body language, how far they stood from me, what they were wearing, what company they were keeping was not just part of doing a job well (anyone in the service industry has to pick up on similar cues), it was a way to establish my authority, keep myself safe, and minimize the chances someone would get aggressive
in an open question-and-answer. My experiences are pertinent here because they came up in many of our conversations involving visitor interactions and sharing our respective stories often led to more interesting questions and answers.

Three primary forms of emotional labor involving visitors emerged from the interview data: 1) managing visitor emotions, 2) coping with difficult interactions, and 3) maintaining a sense of duty and responsibility. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Rather, guides regularly describe these elements as three parts of a whole. To paraphrase this sentiment: it is exhausting engaging emotionally with many people at once and sometimes it is particularly draining, unpleasant, or traumatic but it is worth it because this story needs to be told and guides have the responsibility to tell it. The first of these forms is part of every tour conducted by guides, managing a tour group with a diverse set of emotional needs and interests.

In the following quote, Anna describes the breadth of interactions that can happen on just one tour.

Especially if you're dealing with a group of 40 people, you've got 40 different emotions going on in a tour. You've got people who are uncomfortable, you've got people who are resistant, who are challenging what you're talking about, who are saying, "Well, that's not true. That's not a right source." And then you've got people who are emotionally affected, they're crying, they're upset. And then you've got people responding to each other on tours, which is a whole other dynamic that you have to deal with, and people not agreeing, and people yelling at each other, and I've had that happen. So it's very much, when you get off of a tour, mentally trying to prepare yourself for that next tour. And at the end of the day, it's really trying to just bring yourself back into focus. (Anna)

While guides are leading a group, they serve as caretaker, communicator, mentor, entertainer, and “temporary therapist.” Burnout among guides at historic sites can be extreme and there is a high turnover rate. Tyson (2013) writes about how Historic Fort
Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota actually builds-in a 30%-40% turnover rate because guides get burnt out in just a few years. Matt says that burnout is a big concern because managing visitors emotions in tandem with interpreting the violence of slavery acts as “an emotional vampire.”

Samantha had recently taken a job at a nearby museum dedicated to educating visitors about the brutality of the slave trade in order to have a respite from the emotional exhaustion she experiences at Linford, which says a lot about how tiring guiding work can be at a plantation site. She says that it is different because people visit OSM expecting to hear the history of slavery and she liked the work so far because she had “not been attacked yet.” She is one of two African American guides and she feels constantly under siege because of accumulated negative visitor interactions and the intensity of the stories they tell every day.

I never foresaw this. I never foresaw going home every day and just being just stuck for like, an hour, because it happens. It happens a lot. Like, I went home...This was about a month or two ago, and just cried. I just sat on my floor and just cried. I was so overwhelmed. I left work early that day actually, because I told Anna. Like, I could barely keep it together talking with her. "I need to go home. I cannot be here right now." And I just cried, and just couldn't move. I didn't know why I was crying. I didn't know what was wrong. I couldn't even eat, like, nothing. And just sat there and my cat ... You know cats. They're so wonderful. He came and curled up beside me. It was rough. And that was just in the last couple months. Once that happened ... It happened again a few weeks ago. I didn't eat. Over, like, a two-day period, I think I had two meals. I don't even know how to begin telling people that. You know, because it's like, "you're a historian. You love this. Why wouldn't you just enjoy it?" And I'm like, "there's so much." (Samantha)

Samantha is the only African American woman working at Linford and her emotional labor is compounded by her intersecting identities and the way people perceive her (Evans, 2013). Being young, female, and African American makes her a minority in the extreme in the larger population of tour guides that tends to skew older, white, and
male. Plantation visitorship also skews older and white. Her experience of guiding is markedly different, and she gets asked different questions than her white colleagues. She recounted a story of a few days before when an older white woman approached her afterward and asked if “her generation was angry,” as in young Black people, basically “wanting [Samantha] to be a spokesperson for all African Americans, which happens a lot.”

And I said, "I think we're not angry. We're aware." And I think that's why you have people like me. Or at Whitney in New Orleans. I actually met a girl who was just a couple years older than me who's doing what I'm doing. It's like, no. We need to do this, and we need to be the ones who are telling this history, because we're the ones who live it. And I think that's why a lot more people my age are being the voices and the activists and the archivists. We need people my age and people of color doing this. Because I feel like we're the ones. We're the voice. We're the next ones to make a difference. (Samantha)

Making that difference and being that voice requires an incredible amount of emotional energy and dedication alongside the huge and diverse set of roles guides are already asked to fill.

And I think that's something I learned about [public] historians. We wear a lot of hats. We're not just a historian…We are counselors. We are cuddlers. We are people who console people. We are researchers. We're architects. We're curators. We run social media. But we also have this responsibility…Historians have a responsibility on what people learn, what people remember, and this is our responsibility. But I don't ever want to seem ungrateful, because, you know, there are many historians who are waitresses, or who work as car salesmen...I'm fortunate to be in my field at such a young age. (Samantha)

Despite her frustration and exhaustion, Samantha is glad to be working in her chosen field and said again and again how important their work is. A sense of duty to the story and to the site was the core motivation for every guide at Linford.
Freeman Tilden recommends that an interpreter be “constantly checking and rechecking himself with the blunt question: ‘Just what is it I am trying to do? What is the place of this institution, of which I am a part, in the scheme of American life?”’ ([1947] 2009). I have never seen a historic site or interpreter’s bookshelf without Tilden’s seminal text, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which treats interpretation as an almost religious experience, an art form that turns the regular into the extraordinary. Guiding is the height of responsibility and devotion to place and people, it is often portrayed and perceived as a type of passion project, its own reward. Guides are taught to see their contribution as an almost sacred duty to the past and present. When sharing “difficult histories,” there is the added weight of interpretation-as-social justice, not to mention the burden of constant engagement with disturbing content and resistant visitors.

The conversations that are really going to trigger change in this country are going to be happening at sites like Linford. Or not happening depending at what plantation you’re at, right? So these kinds of places like Linford are really important, are doing their important work, so it’s a good place to be for me. [It is] a situation where I can learn how to talk about this stuff with expressing dignity both towards the people I’m talking about, and the histories of these people that don't look like me, but also, with dignity and empathy for the people I'm talking to. Which has been stop and start a little bit, but it's overall been really positive. So that's kind of what brought me there. I needed to get out of the restaurant and this was something that was a place where I could grow and learn, while also making that paycheck. (Leah)

Interpreting important histories is incredibly rewarding, which can buffer and justify why it is so emotionally draining otherwise. But considering the conditions of tour guide labor at a site that primarily interprets the history of slavery, it is unsurprising that sites have been slower to adopt interpretive schemes that center slavery and race. Additionally, tour guiding is a relatively low-wage job. In the region where Linford is, average guide wages are comparable to the hourly wage of working in a department store ($11-14/hr).
But unlike working in a department store, guides are expected to become an expert on all things site-related, go through rigorous training, and, at some sites, have at least one college degree in the subject matter they are interpreting. That is not to say that tour guiding is inherently more important than a retail position, but to illustrate that it is treated similarly to other front-line service industry jobs in terms of pay but not in terms of expected emotional and intellectual labor. Emotional labor and burnout in retail work is well-documented, but seldom are retail associates expected to constantly consider their contributions to a larger national historical narrative or write interpretive programs from scratch while tour guides at many historic work in the gift shop in addition to leading tours.

Tour guides at historic sites are often asked to accept experience, intellectual enrichment, and a sense of purpose as compensation for their labor. And sometimes it really does pay out--Samantha started working in other museums, Anna moved into a more managerial position, I am able to pursue interesting research projects--but it is not a job most people can do full time for a long time. Especially with sites telling difficult histories, visitors tend to react strongly. While strong positive (and negative) interactions can bolster guides’ feeling of purpose, it can be exhausting. The emotional toll of visitor interactions was a central theme of five of the six interviews, but it became clear that the women who work at Linford encounter aggressive or disrespectful visitors more frequently, which is an added emotional burden. When the measure of a good day is not getting into a shouting match about slavery, it is easy to understand the high degree of burnout and level of frustration when it comes to interacting with visitors.
Managing bodies, gendered space

I've been yelled at quite a few times. And the most recent time, I'll never forget this as long as I live. The man was standing right here. Like, right, this far away from me, finger in my face, screaming, yelling. And that has negatively impacted me more than I think I could ever say. And you know, I've told people about it, and everybody who knows me, knows what happened. But it's something that I don't think I'll ever get over. Like, I've masked it well. It's over. That happened in like, February, but it impacts me 100% every day that I'm here. Like, I don't want people standing too close to me. I don't want to open any doors, or be screamed at, yelled at, called racist, whatever they choose to that day.

And since that happened, I changed as a person, but I've also—my tour has changed, too. I've gotten a little, almost afraid, because I understand what we're doing here is important, but there are things that Robert and Matt and Adam can do and say that I can't, and won't, because I'm just, I'm afraid. (Samantha)

The way tour guides use their bodies and space around them is as important to interpretation as the stories they tell on tour. As mobile storytellers, they shape the 'spatial narratives' of the site. Spatial narratives in historic sites and museums have garnered extra attention from geographers who study memory and tourism, finding that narrative structure is physical as well as textual (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008; Smith & Foote, 2017) and mapping narrative pathways can reveal the subversion or reification of dominant narratives (Hanna et al., 2019). Affect and the corporeal dimensions of narrative space have likewise been increasingly explored by museum scholars as formative of museum spaces and visitors’ perspectives on the past (Carter, 2019; Waterton & Dittmer, 2014). In this section I touch briefly on the general bodily performance of guides as part of their interpretive methods and then discuss issues of proximity, authority, and the gendered strategies of space-management.

Bodily performance of guides is determined by many elements of the human and non-human environment. As guides move through space, they create mobile
‘workspaces’ that they assemble and disassemble as they move from one point of interest to another (Best & Hindmarsh, 2019). These spaces are co-produced by guides and the people being guided. The interaction in social space and its intercorporeality are formative of both tour movement and narrative. As an interpretive tool, guides communicate (deliberately or not) with their body language and performance. For instance, Robert (who has a background in theater) stands on the benches at two of his tour stops so he can project his voice to the crowd and uses a lot of gestures to illustrate the story. On his tours, he describes the arduous task of loading massive, heavy sacks of cotton onto the boats that would take it to be sold exported with his whole body, miming the process. He does this for several forms of work enslaved laborers were forced to do (dredging soil, picking cotton, operating machinery). He invites his audience to stand close around him, seemingly captivated by his energy and bodily performance as he punches each word when he says, “This was a *Slave Labor Camp*” (which he says at several points in his tour). Matt and another male guide (who declined to be interviewed but let me observe his tours) both invited visitors to stand close to them, as well, and extensively used visual and tactile aids (like IPads, laminated photos, and bolls of cotton). On David’s tours, he organizes a general preferred spatial assembly but largely leaves the proximity up to the visitors.

The semicircle is always very good to me because of the props I present to them. It’s easier to do that, rather than trying to bring around, but I prefer the semicircle and they can place their distance as whatever distance they feel comfortable with...It doesn’t matter for me. They have to feel comfortable. I feel comfortable whatever decision or whatever distance they take. (David)

There is a very different story for the women who work at Linford. They all described their “bubble” they maintain to stay comfortable while interacting with visitors. As you
can see from Samantha’s story, being deliberate about space-management is a safety and comfort tactic more than an interpretive one. She builds in a buffer in hopes that, “people won’t feel as inclined to verbally attack [her] if they’re a long distance away” because it means they have to be louder and consequently more likely to draw the ire of other visitors or the attention of her colleagues.

During her tours, Anna adjusts her proximity to visitors based on group size, how engaged or interactive a group is, and how she is feeling that day. I went on three of her tours during my visit in October 2018 and while it varied somewhat, she still maintained a much larger “bubble” than any of the male guides. When she opens it up for questions at the end, she is deliberate about maintaining distance.

Now after tours, when people want to have conversations, there’s a clear distance because I don’t like being hugged, I don’t like people touching me. So, after tour conversations, there’s a very clear distance. I make sure there’s ... I do have a bubble, and please don’t get inside it because it’s not comfortable. [It hasn’t happened] much lately. I don't get it as much as other coworkers. But I have had people hug me. Sometimes, I don't mind. I've had a couple African American women hug me and that's a much different experience than having an elderly white woman hug me. A lot of people like to shake hands, I appreciate that more. I have had one guy put his hand on my leg, which was just a whole other issue. And being female, I like just that clear separation. Typically, it's women who want hugs. But I have had the occasional man who's been a little more touchy feely than I'm comfortable with. (Anna)

Women interpreters experience space and touch differently because of how visitors approach them/perceive them. In all my conversations with women, visitors seeking hugs at the end of tours came up as a largely unpleasant, unwelcome, and frequent occurrence. I interviewed Matt and Robert first (just for scheduling reasons) and since the issue of touching and hugging did not become a clear theme until I interviewed Leah, I did not have the chance to ask them about it. David, however, described it as a
frequent occurrence, “no doubt about that.” He said he reciprocates, and it does not
bother him too much. It is hard to judge frequency without a longer period of
observation, but from what I pieced together from the interviews it seems that David and
Samantha are most likely to get approached for hugs. As the only two African American
interpreters at Linford this suggests one dimension of visitor interaction mediated by
perceptions and expectations of race. Mine is a bit of an extrapolation but this would be
a fascinating avenue for future study and, more importantly, could inform guiding and
management practices.

I was also unable to confirm that Samantha, Anna, and Leah are more likely to get
visitors who want to hug them than the male interpreters, but they have all thought
carefully about how to prevent in most cases by establishing a perimeter if they feel that
it could get too uncomfortably cozy. Hugging is not always a bad experience, but it is a
taxing one. Samantha framed her experience to touch and comfort in terms of emotional
labor.

I realized the closer you stand to people, the more comfortable they feel
getting close to you, if that makes sense. Because I've had people hug
me. I’ve had people cry on me. I've had people reach literally, reach out to
me to you know, kind of be close to me. And sometimes, I've been
uncomfortable just off the sheer fact I don't know what to say or do... Having to console people. That is emotional labor. It's an emotional labor I
don't mind doing most times. But sometimes, it's hard. It's a lot. Consoling
somebody that you know you can't really do much for, especially after
you're the one who did it, is very difficult. But people want to embrace you,
and they want to cry on your shoulder, and they want to thank you over
and over again, which is great, because you moved them, and you got to
them, and you can see the processing literally happening. (Samantha)

All of them chalked their discomfort up to just generally disliking touch or people
standing too close. I certainly cannot make generalizations about women guides in
general, but how and why they manage their space is helpful for understanding how guides use and create space, place, and atmosphere. This could also be instructive for teaching guides how to make visitor interactions more comfortable, possibly lessening the likelihood of exhaustion and burnout. There are certainly resources for guides about how to create safe spaces (for examples, see *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* by Julia Rose, 2016) but by and large they emphasize how to create a safe environment for *visitors* or provide general recommendations of de-escalation tactics. Guides often have to learn these tactics from other guides or other work they have done.

Leah has experience teaching in a university and her technique is to establish a clear expectation of distance by asserting her professionalism as an academic.

I say right off the bat I'm a Ph.D. candidate, I carry myself like an academic would, so people tend to keep their space, and treat me in a professional manner. I don't get hugged, which I know other female interpreters have had to deal with, which I'm just like, "No, don't touch me." No, I haven't had that. And I do attribute that a lot to how I carry myself. You wouldn't walk up and hug a professor after a lecture. So it gets people in that mindset.

I was actually talking to some of the other interpreters recently, where I was explaining why I do that, and how it's been kind of positive on that front, and they were thinking about incorporating that a little bit just to set some boundaries. Because on this site in particular people can get touchy-feely. They're feeling things. A lot of people, when they're emotionally processing, they're like, "I wanna hug you." I haven't experienced it, again, because I don't come off as, especially when I'm on tours, a huggable person. I'm an academic. Don't touch me. But I know other female interpreters will get that a lot. (Leah)

It is important to recognize the way guides learn from each other many of the techniques in addition to formal training—and they get a lot more at Linford than other sites I have visited. But Anna and Samantha were not taught ways to establish their
authority in their initial training but by a fellow interpreter who was new to the job. For young women, expertise is often not enough. Even at a site like Linford with thorough training that is intentional about making a safe space for people to talk about discomfort, training may not be differentiated enough to prepare young women interpreters for difficult visitor interactions that affect them the most.

Tour guides are often not considered “professional” in the traditional sense. Guiding is often perceived as a “labor of love” or something someone might do for fun. This is not always a wrong assumption because for a lot of guides and docents, it is. For many it is a hobby or a second career after retirement or a part time job. In many guide interviews, especially those with volunteer guides, participants said it was a fun and rewarding thing to do a couple of times a month or on the weekends. Many historic sites rely heavily on part time and volunteer guide labor because of limited budgets. But for public history professionals early in their career, and especially young women, the perception of guides as “amateur historians” leads to a lot of challenging interactions with visitors. Exerting extra time and effort establishing their authority is another form of emotional labor undertaken by women at Linford but is a way to prevent bad visitor encounters. As Samantha says in the quotation at the beginning of this section, it feels impossible to express how much of an effect a negative visitor interaction can have on every subsequent workday. Anna and Leah had similar negative experiences that changed the way they did tours and approached visitors.

Conclusions

To conclude, I return to my primary goal of understanding how tour guides’ intimate, bodily interactions with place influence their relationship with the larger plantation
museum assemblage. In this chapter I have identified three parts of the guide-site relationship that I defined in terms of emotional labor:

First, the daily, mundane practices of working at a plantation museum sites are not ancillary to the way guides see their role, but anchor place-connection and interpretation of history. Small acts are generative and connect guides to their interpretation of that place. For example, the process of opening cabins for Leah is a *making* process. She likes the sound of the keys jangling and the smells of the cabins, and those atmospheric elements are central to her moments preparing to teach visitors about the lives of the cabins’ inhabitants. For Samantha, sweeping out the house to prepare for the day is both a moment of peace and a reflection on the past and an exercise in empathy and connection with the enslaved women who worked in the house 160 years ago. Matt loves listening to the cicadas and it makes him feel a sense of home, as well as stirring up memories of warm evening entertainment at the site where there was a poetry reading and music that made him cry. As participants and researcher, zoning in on these sensorial elements helped unlock elements phenomenological, institutional, and processual.

Second, the most emotionally laborious part of tour guiding is navigating visitor interactions. This is not a surprising finding in and of itself, but the multi-tiered complexity of this type of emotional labor is, so far, absent from the literature. As counselors, coddlers, researchers, architects, curators, and social media managers (in the words of Samantha) tour guides perform a lot of roles. Three connected facets of visitor-interaction labor that stood out are 1) managing unpredictable visitor responses and emotions on tour, 2) coping with difficult visitor encounters, and 3) maintaining a
sense of duty and responsibility to educate visitors. Race and visitors’ perception of race at a plantation museum site shoots through all these interactions and makes for an additional emotional burden for African American interpreters giving tours to largely white audiences.

Third, guides’ physical labor is a highly gendered affective process. While determining space and movement is part of all tour planning, women guides at Linford develop additional strategies to ensure their own safety and comfort on tours. This finding is important because it reveals a gap in guide training and resources that could be easily addressed. Guide training is by no means standardized, but many of the available resources on guiding practices are “one size fits all”—that is to say, written for white male interpreters. Greater differentiation in addressing guides’ needs based on their experiences and identities could help make history work safer and more enjoyable for people from marginalized or underrepresented groups.

The above findings are limited by the scale of this project and obviously are not generalizable due to the unique nature of the site and small number of participants, but this rich data is a great starting point for further investigation of guide labor. I am most excited for the potential practical implications and applications of this research for educating, training, and providing new resources for guides who interpret race and histories of slavery at historic sites. The answers for how to prevent burnout and negative health effects wrought by emotional vampires can be found in guides’ reflections. My next phase of this research is a collaboration with two participants on an article geared toward tour guides and historic sites (possibly to submit to the Journal of Interpretation research). We hope to develop a set of suggestions for sites and
interpreters that can mitigate ill-effects due to the outsized emotional labor of interpreting sites of slavery for a smaller guide that could be submitted to History News (AASLH) or Legacy Journal (NAI).

This work also advances an understanding of tour guides as powerful agents in the plantation assemblage from their own perspectives, but this is a small study. Future tourism researchers would benefit from closer collaboration with front-line history workers. Tour guides are recognized as playing an important role on the tourist experience yet remain at the bottom of workplace hierarchies and under-valued as research participants and collaborators. Their subjectivities are often erased in discussions about the culture and social structure of museums and heritage tourism sites. Most extant tour guide literature focuses on modeling guide behavior with the objective of enhancing guides’ and management’s ability to serve tourists and most plantation museum literature focuses on the process and consequences of received narratives and how sites could make them more inclusive or accessible. The labor of guides often gets lost in the middle and they are frequently saddled with carrying out new site directives or interpretive strategies with little support. This study contributes to a needed turn toward a deeper understanding of the complex roles tour guides play.
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Chapter 3: Live Oaks and “Living” Memory: tour
guides and interpreting aesthetics at Linford
Plantation Historic Site
Abstract

Aesthetics are more than beauty but also an expression of the political, past and present. The ways in which historic sites deploy aesthetics has the power to change or reinforce visitors’ perceptions, and to develop a sense of atmosphere that mediates their experience when they visit and when they leave. Historical site aesthetics include elements of the built and natural environments. In particular, the material and imagined landscapes of historic plantations in the American South are dominated by long avenues of idyllic Live Oak trees. Certain trees, such as a “Witness Tree” at Linford Plantation Historic Site serve as axis points for interpreting the past as well as a sort of aesthetic anchor. The Witness Tree is central to the site’s overarching narrative because it informs the way that guides themselves view and interpret the site. This paper focuses on tour guides and how their experience of place—their physical and emotional labor, development of tours, and engagement with the landscape—contributes to the (re)creation of historical narratives and plantation atmospheres. Drawing on extensive participant-observation and in-depth interviews with tour guides, I will discuss guides’ aesthetic experience and the production of narrative with a particular focus on the role of trees.
Introduction

The whole point behind interpretation is to take our past and provide meaning to it, and relevant meaning to it. The tree is a way for that to happen. It’s a vehicle for that to happen. You know, there’s a lot of things that that tree will speak to for people that other things won’t. I think one important part of that is the fact that it is alive. It is living, just like the ancestors were living. I think that it creates an unbroken line back to that because that tree is just as living as you or I. (Matt, director of interpretation talking about Linford’s Witness Tree)

Adjacent to the large white house at the center of Linford Plantation Historic Site grows an enormous southern live oak. Its branches sweep low to the ground and its trunk is massive and gnarled. Immense, the tree is both whimsical and timeless, like it was ripped from the pages of a storybook. Stretching north and west from the house, much younger (though still giant) live oaks line two broad paths, one down to a river to the north and the other to the main road. Along the western allée stand six small wooden cabins, four of which were home to (multiple) enslaved families and, later, tenant farmers. Looking south from the river, the main house makes a striking image of the romantic plantation aesthetic. The two avenues of oaks tell two different stories about the function and history of beauty at plantations in the American South; one is the story of deliberately building pro-slavery White supremacist ideologies into the physical landscape, the other is of concealment and revisionism to attract tourism.

At many American historic sites, beauty is inseparable from violence, a dynamic particularly salient in the study and interpretation of Southern plantations. The beauty of these sites cannot be detached from more pragmatic or “real” interpretations of history; the way beauty is interpreted and perceived at sites can shape how visitors learn about all elements of the plantation site. However, that beauty has more often than not been
used to mask the violence inherent to the landscape and creates a focal point of aesthetic appreciation that can distract and decontextualize, leading visitors to focus on and appreciate the 'beauty' without engaging with the harsh, murky, and complicated histories underneath.

In this paper, I argue that the affective power of more-than-human elements of a plantation landscape can be, and is, employed by history workers to complicate notions of beauty. To demonstrate this, I look to the trees. Tourists often refer to the trees as integral to the plantation aesthetic, and they are a recurring topic in guided tours of plantation sites. Trees are far from inert, whether used as an axis of historic interpretation or as an element of the physical landscape. Trees are sites of meaning and meaning-making—aesthetic convergence points, where diverse notions of beauty and violence grind against each other. The appearance of the plantation landscape is intrinsically tied to its meaning, historically and contemporarily. Tourists’ interest in trees, and the primacy of trees on the plantation landscape, mean that tour guides, whether they want to or not, have to interpret trees in one way or another.

Drawing from interviews with tour guides and participant observation I conducted at Linford Plantation in the American Southeast, I investigate the function and deployment of aesthetic interpretive pedagogies at sites of slavery and ask the following questions: in what way are nonhuman elements and aesthetic encounters used by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of “lost cause” narratives; and how are trees operationalized by guides and visitors on guided tours as ways to deflect, reflect, or learn? To answer these questions, I first draw from previous research on tour guide function, the history of plantation aesthetics, and engagement with more-than-human
geographies to contextualize the critical role guides play as “aesthetic ambassadors” at heritage sites, followed by an analysis of data collected at Linford to demonstrate the function of trees as interpretive axes and their agency as nonhuman elements actively making places of memory.

Background

Plantation aesthetics and tourism
While I am not going to delve too deeply into the myriad philosophical interpretations of aesthetics, I do need to establish what I mean by aesthetics in its most general sense—as a bodily engagement with place. This passage from Terry Eagleton’s The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1991) is a helpful context for understanding and interpreting heritage site aesthetics as the entanglement of bodies (human and non-human), politics, stories, trees, spirituality, and so on.

Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek aesthesis would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought. The distinction which the term “aesthetic” initially enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not one between “art” and “life,” but between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind...That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together—the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes roots in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world...It is thus the first stirrings of a primitive materialism—of the body’s long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical. (emphasis mine, Eagleton, 1991)
As Eagleton says, aesthetic experience is an interface of the material and the immaterial, making it an especially appropriate way to frame the practice of tour guiding as well as the overall history and context of plantation house tourism.

Plantation tourism in one form or another has existed as long as there have been extravagant plantation houses. Built to demonstrate abundance and power to visitors, these houses are a material representation of social order and control. Even houses that do not appear opulent (when compared to famous sites like Oak Alley in Louisiana or Jefferson’s Monticello) were designed to reinforce the social and economic structure of the South, with White “planters” at the top and enslaved workers at the bottom. The buildings, fence lines, and landscaping were an active and deliberate project of social control in order to maintain an economy reliant on slave labor and strictly enforced gender roles (McCurry & MacLean, 1995). Defining beauty and order on a plantation in the antebellum south was a deliberate implementation of pro-slavery ideology on the landscape. The physical and aesthetic division of classes of people was essential to the project of producing a paternalistic political and economic culture. Creating standards of beauty and bodily experiences that conformed to a social hierarchy was important for keeping people in their social classes and, most importantly, maintaining a division between enslaved and enslavers through an active construction of race (Johnson, 2001).

The creation of these spaces and atmospheres differed by region, crop, population of enslaved people, and other factors; it was in no way uniform. However, the idea of plantation aesthetics—in a colloquial sense—was flattened during the push for plantation tourism in the 19-teens through the 1940s to reflect a neoclassical version of
the plantation house with big white columns, porticos, and long allèes of oaks. The resurgence of neoclassicism was a good opportunity for plantation house owners who wanted to transform their properties into tourist destinations. Many sites, like Linford Plantation, added columns and porches to appeal to this potential visitorship and often designed their sites intentionally to rework memories of slavery and the South as part of a lost-cause narrative of the Civil War (Blight, 2009). The replication of beauty from a re-imagined past led to the substantial industry of plantation house tourism we see today. Much tour time and site interpretation is still dedicated to architecture and gardens, and this emphasis has been slow to change despite growing interest among visitors in labor history and enslavement on plantation house sites (Carter, Butler, & Alderman, 2014). Sites also typically reinforce the spatial/historical/social hierarchy by making the “big house” the focus of tours, or the only tour. If told at all, the stories of the enslaved are relegated to the original or rebuilt dependencies, like out-buildings or cabins (Eichstedt & Small, 2002). In a recent radio interview, architectural historian Philip Herrington described the recreation of the plantation aesthetic as the “Plantation Revival” period, central to which is the redefinition of the plantation from a place of work to a place of rest.

The last thing that you need on a plantation to make a plantation run is a fancy white-columned house for White people to live in. What you need are workers, and you need places for those workers to live. Plantation houses included slave quarters, so plantations are Black-majority spaces. Plantation revival are White-majority spaces, so they are plantations without their agricultural buildings, agricultural trappings. They’re buildings without their slave quarters, but are still suggestive of being at the center of power. (Herrington, 2019)
At many sites, this also serves to time-freeze a site firmly in the past, ignoring the 160 years that have passed since—a crucial period of time, which, of course, includes the very creation of the industry and the reimagining of these sites.

Plantations and plantation house museums are increasingly recognized as “raced places” where the complete history cannot be told without the inclusion (or dominance) of the history of enslaved Africans and African-Americans; many present-day scholars have turned their attention to these museums as sites where race is (re)negotiated (Carter et al., 2014). Historians widely recognize that slavery is not only a condition justified by racism, but that American slavery and race were co-constituted, enshrining race and racism into economic and cultural landscape (Blight, 2009). In this light, sites of slavery are not only sites where race is important to telling history, but also those sites are integral to a broader “racial project”. With this in mind, the potential of these sites as transformational space is tremendous as they are a stage for reevaluating the construct of race. In recent years, changing tourist interests/demographics and increased research on representations of slavery have challenged the tradition of Lost Cause ideology as a centerpiece of interpretation at sites of slavery and the effective whitewashing of these formerly majority-Black spaces. There has been a movement to find and implement more-complete interpretations of slavery at historic sites, evidenced by the opening of sites such as Whitney Plantation in Louisiana in 2014 and the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in 2016, as well as the publication of new guidelines for interpretation like the “Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites” rubric published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (2019). However, these
resources are very new; historic sites tend to be slow to change, and reworking interpretation is difficult for sites due to fear of pushback, funding, and managerial stodginess (Bright, Alderman, & Butler, 2016).

Today, most plantation house museums attempt to blend a romanticized, imagined past with a portrayal of the grim, grimy, and violent nature of chattel slavery. This dissonant binary is common in both the study and portrayal of the history of American antebellum slavery. As described by Smith (2018),

> A temptation exists to freeze the plantation tour experience into either an unrelentingly grim meditation on the violence of chattel slavery or a historically irresponsible reveling in the splendor of wealthy planters’ homes and lifestyles.

However, these are both reductive approaches that fail to explore the complexity of Southern plantation spaces historically and contemporarily. Rather, these sites are convergence points, assemblages, places of beauty, violence, and contestation continually (re)formed by the bodies that inhabit them.

**Tour guides and aesthetic interpretation**

Tour guides play the role of mentor, communicator, and entertainer, and are responsible for addressing the physical and psychological needs of tourists, including emergency response management and conflict resolution (Tsaur & Teng, 2017). At any site, it is a complicated job that requires significant skilled emotional labor (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Tyson, 2013; J.-Y. Wong & Wang, 2009; Yim, Cheung, & Baum, 2018). At sites that interpret histories of violence, it can be particularly intense and have significant consequences for the affective experiences of visitors as guides employ (or fail to employ) interpretive techniques to elicit empathy (E. Arnold Modlin, Alderman, & Gentry,
Guides have a lot of power over space and story as they lead their groups through a landscape saturated with contentious, difficult, and evolving histories.

The element of guides’ authority I am most interested in exploring here is their power to mediate authenticity and aesthetics. Recently, researchers have suggested that aesthetics—notions of beauty—are not intrinsic, unproblematic characteristics of historic sites but actively produced and consumed as part of the heritage atmosphere (Levi & Kocher, 2013). Importantly, the politics of aesthetics recognizes that creating, promoting, and seeking out beauty as an authentic experience can be connected to larger social practices and relations that open up or close down certain ideologies or ways of thinking about places and people. Tourists often visit sites in search of an authentic experience and the deliberate construction of authenticity has been used as an effective strategy to “create different brands” of tourist destinations (Chen & Chen, 2017; see also: Dwyer & Alderman, 2008; Horton & Horton, 2006; Lowenthal, 1985, 1998; Waterton, 2014, among countless others). In short, tourists seek out “authenticity” and they understand it through the lens of aesthetic encounters and the ever-evolving meaning of beauty influences the perception of authenticity.

Authenticity can be understood as an experience contingent on culturally conditioned aesthetic judgement (Parno, 2013). Aesthetics are central to the evolution of heritage tourism in general, as old things and places of memory become imbued with notions of inherent value as well as monetary value as historic places are commodified, packaged, and sold—not only in the case of privately owned or profit-driven sites, but also as justifications for public protections that hinge on tourism as an economic driver.
(Gapps, 2009; Lowenthal, 1998). With that in mind, guides play the role of mediator —
not only of the meaning of history, but also as ambassadors of aesthetics and
gatekeepers of beauty. An emphasis on authenticity and uniqueness (and therefore
existential value) lends the experience of the beautiful in at a historic site such as a
plantation home “universal validity”, meaning that beauty in said place transcends
personal preferences and enters the realm of the sacred (Figal, 2015).

Simply, the aim of engendering a sense of intrinsic value is an aesthetic practice,
and the objective of guides at historic sites is to cultivate an emotional connection
between visitors and their material surroundings, thus encouraging them to come into
the fold, take ownership, become members of a club that finds a place valuable (and
therefore beautiful). This practice takes place even as notions of beauty evolve to
include things previously recognized as ugly, including difficult histories and ruination.
Particularly at sites where the division between guides and visitors resembles that
between actors and audiences, visitors often interpret authenticity through the lens of
aesthetics from the other side of the proscenium arch—accepting it at face value. Parno
(2013) writes that visitors understand authenticity through perceived “past-ness” in the
patina and aura in referring to encounters with material culture.

Tour guides manage the expectations and emotions of visitors and bridge the
distance between the material and ephemeral, which is both an aesthetic practice and a
place-making one. Understanding the politics of aesthetics and the evolving notions of
beauty at heritage sites advances the study of guides as powerful players in the
creation of authenticity and meaning. As guides re-make the representations of
meaning on their tours, they are shaping visitors’ aesthetic subjectivity by forming new
connections between representations of beauty and violence, fundamentally altering aesthetic engagement for some visitors.

Further engagement with aesthetics and new materialism(s) by academics and history workers benefits both historical and contemporary geographies of southern plantations and plantation house tourism as a whole. Geographers and other social scientists have started researching the phenomena of embodied learning and affective spaces but engaging those phenomena has been the epistemic core of site interpretation and tour guiding since Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage*, first published in 1957. That text is probably the most influential of any work on interpretation written for guides and talks at length about connecting guide and visitor emotions with the aesthetics of a site.

On beauty, Tilden wrote that beautiful places interpret themselves. A place, such as a botanical garden, that is almost universally accepted as beautiful does not need an interpreter telling visitors, “This is beautiful.” In contrast, a place like Craters of the Moon National Park may need an interpreter to “unveil” the beauty of the place. Interpreting beauty at plantation house sites requires a reworking of this basic premise; beauty at sites like Linford is the culmination of several hundred years of (re)negotiating power and the politics of aesthetics. In the quotation I used at the start of this chapter, a study participant describes the tactile nature of historical understanding. Guides unveil the complexity of beauty at plantation sites through intentional interpretation; by refusing to let that beauty “interpret itself”, the work of guiding has the potential to reshape, subvert, and challenge visitors’ notions of culture, politics, history, and identity.
Frederick Law Olmsted is, arguably, the most famous and influential landscape architect in American history and his designs have been regarded as both democratizing and socially equalizing (Kosnoski, 2011). Before he became well known for his design and administration of Central Park or for writing the Yosemite Report that led to massive preservation efforts in the West, he traveled to the South as a journalist looking to write about the economic landscape in the slave states. *A Journey to the Seaboard States* (1861), is an account of the first of three trips to the South, reporting for the *New-York Daily Times* (now the *New York Times*). In this passage, he describes a plantation he encountered on his way from Charleston to a plantation he was visiting on one of the Sea Islands. He had stopped to ask for directions and was struck by the beauty of the lane leading up to the “proprietor’s mansion.”

On either side, at fifty feet distant, were rows of old live oak trees, their branches and twigs slightly hung with a delicate fringe of gray moss, and their dark, shining, green foliage, meeting and intermingling naturally but densely overhead. The sunlight streamed through and played aslant the lustrous leaves, and fluttering, pendulous moss; the arch was low and broad; the trunks were huge and gnarled, and there was a heavy groaning of strong, rough, knotty branches. I stopped my horse and held my breath; for I have hardly in all my life seen anything so impressively grand and beautiful. I thought of old Kit North’s rhapsody on trees; and it was no rhapsody—it was all here and real: "Light, shade, shelter, coolness, freshness, music, dew, and dreams dropping through their umbrageous twilight—dropping direct, soft, sweet, soothing, and restorative from heaven." (pg 418)

Olmsted’s portrayal of this beautiful scene is grounded by those who populate this “heaven:”

Alas! No angels; only little Black babies, toddling about with an older child or two to watch them, occupied the aisle. At the upper end was the
owner’s mansion, with a circular court-yard around it, and an irregular plantation of great trees; one of the oaks, as I afterwards learned, seven feet in diameter of trunk, and covering with its branches a circle of one hundred and twenty feet in diameter. As I approached it, a smart servant came out to take my horse. I obtained from him a direction to the residence of the gentleman I was searching for, and rode away, glad that I had stumbled into so charming a place. (pg. 419)

In her analysis of Olmsted’s reports on the slave South, Cathrine Armstrong (2017) argues that even though historians of slavery have mixed reviews, these accounts reveal a cultural geography of slavery by identifying spaces of resistance. In the context of this project, Olmsted’s rich descriptions of plantation atmospheres and aesthetics woven through his reflections on slavery and economy illustrate the nature of these sites, then and now, as convergence points where manifestations of beauty are inextricably linked to, and made possible by exploitation of Black bodies. Moreover, and most importantly, they provide insight into the active and changeable co-production of these spaces by human and nonhuman agents. I include this here to show the lineage of (northern) visitor perception of plantation beauty, and as a good example of the primacy of trees. Trees, slaves, big house, and crops are the four elements he describes again and again when he visits large plantations. Most notably, enslaved people are often lumped in with the physical landscape, an emphasis which connects to the process of building a plantation tourism industry in which the brutalities of slavery were obscured by rendering slaves as inert landscape elements (Adams, 2009; Eichstedt & Small 2002). Though, as Armstrong (2017) shows, there are many opportunities to excavate expressions of agency by reading his conversations with enslaved people. Travelogues, personal accounts, and surveying documents can
likewise be used to identify aesthetic creation in the tangle of material and immaterial interactions by applying the lens of more-than-human geographies.

Over the last few decades in geography, there has been a renewed interest in materiality and entanglements with non-human elements of the landscape. New frameworks and methodologies for studying these entanglements, such as assemblage and complexity theories by using traditional methods in new ways (Dittmer, 2014) and atmosphere and affect using unconventional techniques such as “messy methods” (Malone, 2016), are widening the scope of human geography to account for non-human agency and corporeal/intercorporeal spaces (Dowling, Lloyd, & Suchet-Pearson, 2017). Whatmore’s (2006) “more-than-human” approach to understanding the formation of space and place through the interaction and connection of bodies and other elements of the physical world has been particularly influential and is increasingly reflected in works on heritage tourism.

Despite this renewed interest in materiality, trees-as-subject have largely fallen through the cracks. There is a perplexing lack of literature regarding trees as historical conduits or sites of meaning at heritage tourism sites despite the veneration, conservation, and interpretation of “witness trees.” The U.S. National Park Service co-runs “The Witness Tree Project” with the Rhode Island School of Design which is developing a “collaborative model for teaching and learning centered on witness trees...that were present for key moments in American history” (“Witness Tree Project”). To tie back to Olmsted’s influence and connection to trees: the NPS even ran an exhibit called “Echos of the Olmstead Elm” at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in
The witness tree at Linford Plantation is an object of fascination for visitors and a anchor point of interpretation for guides. The tree is the thing.

While there has been little scholarly research about witness trees or tree-related interpretation at heritage sites, there has been a recent surge of interesting work on trees as important, living makers-of-memory at sites of more-recent violence, particularly 9/11 memorials and other sites of terrorist attacks (Heath-Kelly, 2018; McMillen, Campbell, & Svendsen, 2017; Micieli-Voutsinas & Cavicchi, 2019; Svendsen & Campbell, 2010). Practices of “green commemoration” such as planting memorial trees has a long history, but it has been a cornerstone of commemorating the attack on the World Trade center. Micieli-Voutsinas and Cavicchi (2019) describe the extreme lengths to preserve “survivor trees” and “survivor” saplings as well as cloning the Callery pear Survivor Tree to propagate identical copies, imprinting the very DNA of surviving flora with the weight of bearing witness and turning it into “a kind of prosthesis, eugenically primed for optimal affective consumption.” The interpretation of witness trees at historic sites is very different, but this recent more-than human approach to trees demonstrates how they are formative of memory and memorial, not simply the unwitting vehicles for human suffering.

Much like the history of trees at plantation house sites in general, the interpretation of trees at Linford Plantation Historic site is a mélange of different types of aesthetic and representational memory work. Their diverse tree-related interpretation is a result of those representations and aesthetics as well as the utterances and bodily interactions of visitors with the guide and the nonhuman elements they encounter as they move around the site.
Notes on the Site: Linford Plantation Museum

Looking at the Linford main house from the site entrance, you see a big white house at the end of a lane of live oak trees. The front porch, with its tall white columns, is framed by the sweeping branches of the oaks dripping with Spanish moss. A visitor I met the summer previous to my dissertation fieldwork described the scene as the “authentic, classic appearance” of a plantation. It looks like one of the brochures or postcards that you see in so many gift shops and hotel lobbies, meant to drum up plantation tourism by advertising their “classic” beauty. That is exactly why it looks the way it does today.

Originally a fairly plain-looking four-by-four farmhouse, it was renovated in the 1920s in the colonial revival style as a way of drawing in tourists when raising crops became less profitable after the boll weevil effectively destroyed the cotton economy.

Linford uses space and aesthetics differently from most plantation sites that prioritize tours of the “big house” and relegate the stories of “dependents” to the dependencies or neglect them altogether. Linford’s core interpretive theme is the transition to freedom for enslaved and formerly enslaved people who lived and worked there. This emphasis essentially inverts the traditional spatial narrative by foregoing the main house tour altogether and leading tours of the grounds and structures where the majority of enslaved laborers would have worked and lived. It could therefore be described as a “counter-narrative” site because it centers Black spaces as interpretive nexuses rather than focusing on spaces occupied by the White planters. Telling the story of Reconstruction and the birth of the Lost Cause ideology likewise departs from the narratives that other sites that keep their interpretation in the antebellum period or time-skip to the present.
I chose to conduct research at Linford for three main reasons: 1) I was interested in learning about guide experiences unique to working at a plantation that focused almost exclusively on the history of slavery; 2) I learned from previous fieldwork that visitors left the site with a different “take-away message” related to plantation aesthetics as socially constructed and historically contingent; 3) it was an opportunity to learn more about their interpretation theme/method development as such a new site (it opened in the last six years); 3.5) I was tired of going on tour after tour at plantation houses that spend most of their time and resources interpreting furnishings and White family histories ad nauseam.

I am referring to the site with a pseudonym, “Linford Plantation,” to protect the identities of the people who work there rather than call it “a plantation house museum in the southeast” in order to keep it anchored to one place. The way trees and aesthetics are used at “Linford” is very much grounded in how the site is organized spatially, it is very site-specific, and I am only using interviews I conducted at that site but there is not, to my knowledge, a tourist plantation called Linford.

Titles and terminology
At Linford the official title of guides is “Cultural Interpretive Aids.” In fact, one participant requested at the end of the interview—during which I repeatedly used the terms “guiding” and “tour guide” in my questions—that I stop referring to him as a “tour guide.” He said that in the surrounding area, “tour guide” has a different implication, that tour guides have a directive to entertain rather than educate whereas interpretive aids are the “ones who conduct the research and interpret history.”
Both terms are flexible within the tourism industry and frequently those with the title “tour guide” also engage in historical research to formulate their tours. Here I use tour guide, interpreter, and interpretive aid relatively interchangeably. The title of “tour guide” is well established in the literature and the tourism industry as the short-hand for anyone who shows visitors around a site. Not all tour guides are historical interpreters and not all historical interpreters are tour guides, but in the case of Linford, they are technically both since they are guiding tours and have relative control over the histories they interpret and how they do so.

Methodology and Study Procedures
Examining the role of tour guides in narrative-building and place-creation from their own points of view is an extension of fieldwork and analyses I conducted as part of a broader project about racialized landscapes of Southern Heritage tourism and my master’s thesis study of volunteer guides at a battlefield and house museum. I interviewed six guides at one plantation museum (Linford) to understand in greater depth how they embody their various roles as guides and how that contributes to the manufacture of place-narrative. In this section I briefly explain my positionality and rationale for my chosen methodologies and outline the study procedures I undertook as part of my fieldwork in the summer and fall of 2018.

Positionality statement
My relationship to this work goes back to the summer of 2011 when I was hired as a tour guide at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield in southwest Missouri. As a guide I performed regular visitor center operations, gave tours of a mid-19th century house, and
experienced a considerable amount of inner turmoil about my role as a “front line” interpreter performing the grunt work of public history. I became fascinated by the changing narratives and individual interpretive approaches which led me to get my master’s degree with a thesis about volunteer guides, place attachment, and historical empathy. That work continued as I started my PhD and I had the opportunity to work on an NSF grant interviewing and surveying hundreds of visitors and tour guides at tourist plantations. Suffice it to say, I have been on a lot of plantation house tours and talked to a lot of people about plantation house tours. But I never shook the feeling of familiarity or camaraderie I felt with tour guides or my interest in the intensity of tour guiding as a job. We have read many of the same books and training material, speak a common language, and have similar experiences very specific to interpreting sites of slavery. My closeness to the guides in this project broke down the researcher/subject boundary in some ways and at points lulled me into a sense of knowledge-confidence that I do not actually possess. However, this closeness simultaneously resulted in some very rich and emotional interviews as we swapped stories and gossip. This was particularly true of the three women who participated, as our experiences were almost eerily similar when it came to visitor and co-worker interactions. There was laughing, crying, and sharing pictures of our cats.

As with any project, my interests, experience, and identities affected the questions I asked and the way I related to people. In this case, my quasi-insider status complicated and enriched the interview space. Exercising reflexivity in all stages of this project has been an essential way to work through the anxiety of being an insider-outsider. I have also endeavored to be critical and cognizant of my perspective based on my status and
background. I am a White, 29-year-old, neurodivergent, queer woman raised in a liberal, middle-class household in southern Missouri which let to and influence my acquired identities as a tour guide and researcher. Particularly salient to conducting research at plantation house museums is, as a White researcher, I am often privileged a different kind of entry or comfort in historic spaces with largely White visitorship. In interviews with White participants I conducted prior to this project, it was made clear that several of the participants were simply uncomfortable talking to Black people about slavery, in general. I suspect they would not have been as honest were I non-White. My racial identity and markers shapes how I can do research. I cannot fully understand the experience of interpreting slavery while Black and I strove to be reflective of that experiential difference in my analyses of guide interviews. Historic sites can be hostile environments, especially if you are teaching “difficult histories” and intersecting marginalities can make tour guiding an even more difficult task. Many people of color working at historic sites encounter a great deal of friction due to how they are perceived outwardly by visitors and coworkers. Because of the vast differences in experience, I avoid over-generalizing and prioritize the voices and experiences of guides themselves. As in qualitative research, exploring positionality in public history is vital because the way a tour guides sees, consumes, and feels the atmosphere of their workplace influences their contribution to that atmosphere and ultimately, to consequential narratives about slavery and race and those reflections during interviews influenced the resultant data.
Sensory ethnography and visual methods
Following the turn toward embodied ways of knowing and researching, I employed a sensory ethnographic approach inspired by the work of Sarah Pink (2008, 2015). What is appealing about sensory ethnography is that it is more than an “approach,” but a reworking of the dimensions of observability, constituting a new sensual epistemology. Instead of changing what I was doing, this approach changed the way I conceived of my methodology. I was more keenly aware of my embodied experience of researching and my engagement with the site and the participants.

Ethnography has been used in countless studies of museums and heritage sites, as well as in research on plantation house tourism but the renewed interest in materiality and more-than-human geographies has led to increased studies that pay special attention to the senses, particularly in the fields of human geography and anthropology. Embodied research practices and a focus on the body-as-subject/agent, recognize that the body is a “highly complex, dynamic, and interpretive filter on experience,” and that our understanding of our surroundings, ourselves, and others are always interpreted through the “medium of the body” (original emphasis Pink, 2008; Sunderland, Bristed, Gudes, Boddy, & Da Silva, 2012). We are also “emplaced” individuals, meaning that we are embedded in our daily experiences and way of being in the world (Pink, 2009). In sensory ethnographies, the body is used as a sort of axis for interpreting human experience. It is not that the researcher is paying attention to discrete (western-defined) senses like smell, touch, and sound, but that they try to define the multisensoriality of an experience by accessing or interpreting that experience with a focus on bodily experience (Suderland et al, 2012). Engaging (with) the senses shoots through the
research process, following from its lineage in highly reflexive feminist and critical ethnographic methodology (Pink, 2015).

Sensory ethnography lends itself to the study of museum spaces because of their multimodality and the deliberate creation of spaces designed to engage visitors on many levels of sensory experience. Additionally, attending to the senses in museum research has the potential to help museums and historic sites make spaces more accessible to people with different sensory modalities or capacities to perceive complicated elements of place. Vaike Fors’s work with teenagers’ multisensory engagement with digital exhibits demonstrated the practical applications and implications of sensory ethnography in the design of museum exhibits and installation. She found that to effectively move beyond representational pedagogies it is necessary to find how exhibits and programming “relates and assembles with the bodies of its users” (Fors, 2013).

Sensory ethnography advances the practice of explicitly recognizing the method of knowledge production as situated and subjective. Highly reflexive methods employed in qualitative research have the effect of daylighting the research process and its underlying structures. The acknowledgement and embrace of situated knowledge(s) unburdens qualitative researchers of “hiding behind ‘scientific’ modes of writing” and generate deeper insight into the phenomena of study (Hay, 2005:257). Sandra Harding (1993) argues that the rejection of value neutrality (or objectivism) opens possibilities for “strong objectivity” achievable through “strong reflexivity” wherein the pursuit of objectivity necessitates recognizing “beliefs function as evidence at every stage of scientific inquiry” [emphasis mine]. This addresses the weakness of empiricism as an
unavoidably incomplete picture of reality. Rigorous inclusion of multiple perspectives expands standards of rigor to include a “wider array of questions, interpretations, different perspectives, and inclusion of researchers and subjects from marginalized groups to strengthen the claims of ‘truth’” (Cope in Moss, 2002:48).

To ensure rigor in my own work, I employed reflexive methods and used various checking procedures as part of the “hermeneutic cycle” described by Bradshaw and Stratford (Hay, 2005:74) as a primary form of triangulation. This involved establishing 1) trustworthiness by way of “checking,” reflexivity, and data saturation, 2) transferability by providing rich description and addressing extents and limits of methods, 3) dependability by reflexively documenting research procedures and seeking peer review from a colleague, and 4) confirmability (by using member checking and auditing procedures) (Crang & Cook, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Visual methodology and the senses
Aesthetic value is often perceived and interpreted visually. Because there has been a longstanding emphasis on the visual in museum spaces and the study of museums, visual methodologies like photo-elicitation are a powerful tool for evoking memories of bodily performance and experience in a space (Dorrian, 2014). Using volunteer-employed photography and photo elicitation unlocks the sensorial experiences of guides as they react to visuals to prompt/trigger memories of work at the site (Sampson et al., 2017). Employing visual methods in the examination of sensory experience moves beyond visual representation by recognizing that creating visuals is contextualized in the body. That is, visuals serve to both evoke memories of other senses and to create them as a practice of the entire body, reflecting one element of an ethnographer’s or
participant’s general emplacement. They can be understood as “corporeal images” that are made both by the body behind the camera as well as the ones captured by it (MacDougall, 2005). It is likewise a place-making exercise as the creation of personal interpretations through the visual are imprinted on one’s cultural understanding of that place as these are replicated to represent research outcomes. The images created by the tour guides at Linford and the photos I took there have three important consequences: 1) they reflect what we each found important/interesting/relevant about the site, 2) they influence our phenomenological reality with the very attempt at capturing it, and 3) they contribute to the public perception of a place by way of sharing research and being integrated into how guides understand themselves-in-place. For this project, I used visuals simply as a prompt during interviews and visual data is not present in my results. However, it was elemental to discussing guides’ bodily and aesthetic encounters with their material and immaterial surroundings.

Study Procedures

In order to understand how the embodied experiences of guides shape how they do tours, I employed ethnographic methods that were a blend of participant-observation and semi-structured interviews using photos taken by participants to elicit responses (or my own photos if they did not take pictures during the collection period). I also accompanied participants as they did mundane tasks like cleaning and opening buildings (helping when possible), sat in their workroom between tours and participated in workplace chatter about serious things and not-serious things, followed along for a site-operation training, and attended a staff meeting that involved debriefing/processing difficult visitor interactions or struggles on tour, a safety protocol refresher (and some
very delicious cookies). This could be defined as a blend of traditional ethnographic methods and “messy methods” that are well suited for accessing more-than-human geographies and by enacting embodied/emplaced research (Dowling et al., 2017).

Participants
In addition to the rationale outlined above for choosing Linford Plantation as a study site, I selected it based on personal relationships developed with potential participants. I met the interpretation director, Matt, at a public history conference I attended in 2017 and he expressed interest in my research and being involved in future studies. Subsequent recruitment happened via email and in-person conversations with tour guides when I visited the following summer. Each potential participant was given a digital and printed copy of a project summary and objectives as well as a document detailing their role in the study and what their participation entailed. Included in the information I gave them verbally and in text, was a promise to conduct research and represent their views as ethically as possible and keep them informed about how I was using their data.

My goal continues to be to advance this as a participatory project where the respondents are involved with the production of knowledge based on their experiences. So-called “member-checking” has been important to both keep them involved in the project and lend additional validity to my findings (Crang & Cook, 2007). This involved offering to share any data I collected and sending each of them a copy of my conclusions and findings to assure that I am representing them accurately. I also invited them to co-publish on papers using the resultant data and am currently working on a paper about emotional labor with two of the women who participated in this study. More
informally, member-checking is also part of the interview process as I reflected back to participants during our conversations to make sure I was interpreting their statements correctly (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

All but one of the seven guides working at Linford during my data collection period participated in this study, including three women (Samantha, Anna, and Leah) and three men (Matt, David, and Robert), ranging in age from 23 to 73. Notably, all three women are in their 20s and in graduate school, two of the men are in their 70s and retired from their previous careers, and one is in his late 40s. Four of the guides identified as White and two identified as African American (see Figure 3 for individual demographic information). It is important to note that these are very unusual demographics for history workers at plantation house sites that typically skew older and White. There is not a comprehensive study of tour guide demographics at plantation museums, but in the dozen or so other house museum sites where I have been involved in research, I have met only a handful of young women interpreters and only one African American interpreter. You can see in Figure 3 that two of the guides had only been working at the site for a few months so they didn't have the breadth of experience the others did, but since they had recently developed their tours, I was able to learn a great deal about the process of tour-making.
Table 2: Aesthetics and trees study participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Duration of employment at Linford</th>
<th>Days worked per week</th>
<th>Educational/ professional background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.A., Recently finished her M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B.S. and some graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B.A., M.A., PhD candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.A., has worked in interpretation in the area for 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some college, has led tours in the area for 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B.A., finishing M.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Matt is the interpretation coordinator and was involved since before the site opened, Matt and Anna both work in the office, as well, and do not lead tours full-time.
Data collection

My choice of methods and analysis was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do historical arguments, personal histories, interpersonal exchanges, and vernacular narratives about enslavement connect and manifest in the stories told and sold at sites of slavery?

RQ2: How do tour guides' intimate, bodily interaction with place and emotional labor influence their relationship with material and immaterial elements of the plantation museum assemblage?

RQ3: In what way are nonhuman elements and aesthetic encounters used by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of "lost cause" narratives; and how are trees operationalized by guides and visitors on guided tours as ways to deflect, reflect, or learn?

These questions developed as I visited numerous plantation museum sites and spent time at Linford Plantation Historic Site. This paper primarily addresses the third of these questions, but they are certainly not mutually exclusive.

This project involved a series of interviews and participant observation over the course of two visits in the summer and fall of 2018. Our semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours and consisted of questions about personal backgrounds and more pointed questions about their role as guides, interactions with visitors, and teaching emotionally challenging topics such as slavery and war. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Before the interviews, I requested that tour guides use their phones or cameras to capture images of their workplace between my visits to talk about during the interviews.
In order to limit my influence on the participant’s photographic gaze, I avoided setting limits on their photo assignments, but they were aware that I was interested in their daily tasks and interests. My attempt to use volunteer-employed photography worked exactly halfway. That is, only three of the participants remembered to do it. In the other three interviews I asked them about pictures I had taken at the site on one of my visits. Each of the three who took photos interpreted what I meant by ordinary or everyday experiences differently: Leah took photos of things she was doing (driving the golf cart, crossing the river on her bike); Anna took pictures of what she was seeing (view from the window, pedals of a flower), and Robert took photos of things that are important to him (a symbolic tree, an artifact from an archaeological dig). That was interesting in and of itself but I did not include analysis of visual data in the results because it was incomplete and inconsistent.

I also conducted participant observation, which involved going on several tours with each guide, accompanying them while doing routine tasks like opening the site for visitors and cleaning, spending unstructured time with guides in-between tours, and just generally wandering around the site. I was fortunate because my first visit coincided with a staff meeting and training session for new tour guides so I was able to follow along as new employees learned how to operate different parts of the facility and talk out their tour development with the whole team. I took fieldnotes of my observations in notebooks and on my audio recorder and selectively transcribed parts to include in analytic memos.
Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, I worked through that data by ascribing codes various at levels of abstraction moving from descriptive to thematic (Saldana, 2015). First, I conducted open coding during which I assigned descriptive and in-vivo codes followed by eclectic coding to connect them to each other. During this process I wrote analytic “memos,” wherein I reflected on how those codes may lead to more emergent themes, connected them with data collected during fieldwork, and unpacked my reasoning and thoughts about why I was coding the way I was (Creswell, 2014). The second cycle of coding included focused coding and analytic coding which connected the emergent themes to other important elements of the project such as my research questions, extant literature, and observations (Saldana, 2015: 213, Cope in Hay, 2005). The amount of information trees and aesthetics gleaned from our conversations could make for several more papers expanding on the arguments I make here. For the purpose of this paper, I am using selected quotes that illustrate the overarching themes drawn from the sum-total of my experiences working with guides, following along with visitors, and engaging with the aesthetics of the site.

Titles and terminology
At Linford the official title of guides is “Cultural Interpretive Aids.” In fact, one participant requested at the end of the interview—during which I repeatedly used the terms “guiding” and “tour guide” in my questions—that I stop describing him as a “tour guide.” He said that in the surrounding area, “tour guide” has a different implication, that tour guides have a directive to entertain rather than educate whereas interpretive aids are the “ones who conduct the research and interpret history.”
Both terms are flexible within the tourism industry and frequently those with the title “tour guide” also engage in historical research to formulate their tours. Here I use tour guide, interpreter, and interpretive aid relatively interchangeably. The title of “tour guide” is well established in the literature and the tourism industry as the short-hand for anyone who shows visitors around a site. Not all tour guides are historical interpreters and not all historical interpreters are tour guides, but in the case of Linford, they are technically both since they are guiding tours and have relative control over the histories they interpret and how they do so.

Tour Roots

In the following sections, I share guides’ accounts of their interpretive work, focusing on the role of trees and aesthetics in the making of meaning. Guides use a number of visual and tactile aids as part of their tours; they may carry a boll of sea cotton, an iPad to show various images and maps, or laminated images they can pass around to visitors. Those are varied ways to augment the most effective (and affective) aesthetic encounters with the tactile and visual elements of the site.

Aesthetic interpretation: reading trees

The foundational architecture—both literal and metaphorical—of the United States was built by slaves and pro-slavery ideology to reinscribe the paternalism and patriarchal structures on the landscape. The white columns supporting portico roofs continue to be a symbol of permanence and authority. However, deliberate use of aesthetics in interpretation has the potential to shake those pillars from their sacred place in the American imagination. Deconstructing paternalistic architecture through narrative has
the potential to daylight the political nature of plantation aesthetics and educates visitors about the power of place to tell its own stories and wield its own authority.

While only one guide I followed described the socio-spatial hierarchy of the built plantation environment established in the antebellum period, all of them addressed White supremacy ideology and/or the myth of the Lost Cause as foundational to the current appearance. For Robert, “puncturing the myth” of the romantic plantation is a core theme. In fact, a discussion of the re-making of Linford as a tourist destination (often very early in the tour), was part of all the guides’ interpretations. According to guides, it works to throw visitors’ assumptions or expectations of “authentic” plantation houses off-balance and complicate the notion of authenticity at historic sites in general.

So usually when people are like, "Well what's original?" I say, "Okay, well what do you mean by original?" I have to define that. Do you mean what's original to construction? Or what's original to the Linford period of this house? Because changes were made, 1850s when it's built. You've got 1920s, a lot of changes going on. And then '90s and 2000s, you've got a lot of changes going on as well. When you ask people, "Well what do you mean by original?" Then they just look at you like, "What?" (Anna)

Five of the seven guides stop first at the tip of a teardrop-shaped expanse of grass surrounded by a gravel pathway that stretches from the north entrance of the house along the younger of the two oak allées and ends in a point where the paths converge and lead down to the river. The five who stopped at the “top of the teardrop” used the visual of the house and trees to describe the changes made in the 1920s. Leah employs a different spatial and temporal strategy for talking about renovation, bypassing the front view of the house entirely and asking the visitors to ruminate on the appearance through her tour before they leave the visitor’s center.

I say, “We're walking right past it.” And that's because I kind of build towards the end of my tour, talking about why that portico is there, what
sort of meanings that portico could have. That’s a real central focal point in my tour. So I say, "Okay, we’re gonna walk right past it, but I want you to really look hard at this landscape and think about it. What are you noticing about it, what it makes you feel, what are the memories that come to the surface? Or the associations your brain makes?" [At the end] a lot of people talk about, "Oh, it's Gone With the Wind, it's Steel Magnolias." And then you kind of build to the point where you’re like, "Yep, that was all manufactured in the 1920s, that was a feeling that was deliberately created." (Leah)

The way Leah moves through space and uses her body to direct visitors’ attention encourages them to engage with her interpretation physically. Like most of the guides, she stops at the Witness Tree to tell the story of the Freedman's Bureau using the Linford house as their headquarters for the area. As she finishes, she turns and gestures to the top of the tree, giving visitors a moment to readjust so she can bring them back to the re-worked aesthetics. She is more concerned with things being original to the time than Anna.

And then it has that fucking bell up in the branch, which I love to point out to people, "It's not up there for the reason you think it is. It's actually up there because someone thought a plantation should have a bell." I don’t think all of them ever really pick up on that...I spend most of my time talking about slavery and the experience of enslavement. But for me, it’s this lost cause narrative that's physically inscribed on this place. That's what to me is like, "Whoa!" That's the power of this place. That was a tangent. But trees! They're so cool.

And now that you point it out, I've been thinking about those live oaks an awful lot just by virtue, because the guests ask about them all the fucking time. But also because you can read them in a way. (Leah)

Leah was not enthusiastic at first about the constant tree-related questions but has integrated them as a sort of call-to-action for visitors to continue a critical reading of the landscape after her tour, telling visitors how to see the history of that space by standing in certain places or looking in certain directions.
Visitors and trees: the ginger of history
Moving from guides' uses of non-human elements in their interpretation, I turn to the visitors and how they operationalize trees specifically. Visitors constantly ask about trees. Of the 16 tours I took at Linford, the only times there were no visitor questions about trees was when the guide headed off the question. The guides have noticed a clear pattern in the timing and context of questions and the sorts of visitors who ask them.

Anna: How old are the trees? What types of trees? What's that hanging on the trees? People love the trees.
Emma: What parts of the tour do they typically ... When do they ask those questions?
Anna: When you don't want them to ask those questions. Once you've talked about something really difficult, that's when you get those types of questions, typically.
Emma: Why do you think that is?
Anna: People are uncomfortable and they're deflecting and they're trying to find something a little lighter. So they're thinking, well I've always wondered what types of trees these are, this seems like a great time. It's a way for them to kind of deflect that emotion onto something else, I think. (Emphasis mine)

Deflection techniques have often been framed in terms of management and tour guides avoiding the subject of slavery. In their (2008) paper on “symbolic excavation” of histories of enslavement, Alderman and Campbell describe the tactics of deflection used by tour guides and management to avoid talking about slavery by engaging in “artifact politics.” That is, they use material to obscure the supposedly inaccessible (im)material records of enslavement. Buzinde and Santos (2008) found that selective use of active language moored visitor attention to the “active” relatable White family while deflecting questions and engagement in the lives of those enslaved. Descriptions of deflection by management have come up repeatedly in the literature since. Guides at
Linford, especially Samantha—an African American woman—find that White visitors frequently engage in similar material deflection when they feel uncomfortable.

We'll go through a whole spiel of real difficult history, this and that. And you go through 10 minutes of that. [And then] people are, "How old are these trees?" And I think people use it as a way to comfort their internal feelings, to be like, "Wow. She just unloaded a lot of heavy stuff on us. Let me actually dowse that in some positivity by talking about how beautiful these trees are." Because if I'm getting asked about the trees, it's usually after I talk about the history of slavery. (Samantha)

Guides are keenly aware of the emotional intensity of the stories they tell on their tour and how it affects visitors and, for the most part, said that they could understand why visitors wanted to take a step back.

Samantha: Kind of like, okay this is a good buffer. This is going to help. Kind of like when you cleanse your palate when you're eating sushi. It's kind of like that. I think people are like, "Whoa. Okay. Now I can go on to the next."

Emma: You mean trees are the ginger of history?!

Samantha: Yes, exactly. Exactly! So yeah, that's interesting. I never thought about that until right now. But trees come up a lot. And you know, you don't think about trees being that important when it comes to history, but I guess they are. They help people understand [history] better, whether it's a lynching tree, or whether it's used for shade when the family would sit on the porch.

Samantha and Anna said that they could understand needing a break or buffer, even though it is frustrating and disruptive. They have their own ways to cleanse their palates after a long day of interpreting the brutality of slavery and managing the emotions of one gaggle of visitors after another. Robert watches Andy Griffith, Leah rides her bike, Anna looks at funny pictures of llamas, and Samantha curls up with her cat. But as part of the social-cultural expectations of service-worker behavior, they commit considerable
resources to keeping their emotions and reactions under wraps in frustrating situations, such as when visitors ask about the ages of the trees at inappropriate moments. Robert got tired of being asked about how old the trees are right after his tour wrap-up/crescendo when he talks about the 2015 shooting at Mother Emanuel, the continued dangers of White supremacy ideology, and its connection to plantation legacies as demonstrated by Dylan Roof (who, incidentally, included a picture of himself at Linford as part of his manifesto). He ended up rearranging his tour so he talks about trees at the beginning and asks visitors not to ask questions about them unless they really must.

Who asks, when, and in what context, depends on the visitor. Most notably, White and Black visitors ask different questions about the trees. Race is a big factor in questions and interactions people have on tour, in general, but it becomes especially evident in the extreme differences between the ways particular visitors ask about trees. Three topics that came up again and again in visitor questions are: age (of the trees), beauty (of the landscape), and death (of Black people).

I've learned that trees mean things to so many different people. Black people will ask me all the time if people were lynched in these trees. The White people, mostly, will ask me, “How old are these? These are gorgeous.” So it's interesting how they can be seen as really tragic, or really beautiful. (Samantha)

The primacy of and seemingly-universal interest in trees expressed by visitors along with the wide range of affective experiences and interests, means that the guides have to anticipate and prepare for potentially uncomfortable, adversarial, or emotionally taxing interactions at aesthetic convergence points, where diverse notions of beauty and violence grind against each other. These disparate aesthetic engagements with a central feature of the plantation landscape reflect and contribute to ways in which
beauty and aesthetic judgement are in a state of continual co-constitution by visitors, guides, trees, and the whole milieu.

I've noticed that depending on the demographics of the visitor, the emotion raised by the tree is very different. So for White visitors, it's a beautiful tree. It's an old tree, it's gorgeous, all the trees are beautiful. But then for African American visitors, and not all. But for a lot, it's were people hanged in those trees? It's a very different kind of emotion and different symbol for people. Which is something I always have to remind myself. That just because I might see something as really neat, other people will have different emotions and reflections. (Anna)

The near-universality of tree interest among visitors and the rich insights guides have from daily visitor/site interaction makes tour guides the best people to investigate the phenomena of visitor deflection and aesthetic interests as they are expressed on tour. Since trees are such a significant part of tour interactions and tourist interests, this opens a solid avenue for collaboration with guides and heritage sites.

Ode to the “Witness tree”
On my second visit to Linford Plantation, their Witness Tree2 was encircled by a rope barrier. Two weeks earlier, a massive limb--almost a quarter of the tree -- split from its 400+ year old trunk. It was on the mind of many of the guides; some felt like they were going through a kind of confused mourning, while some felt like the split made some sort of cosmic sense. Unpacking the manifold meanings of the Witness Tree begs its own paper and I cannot do it justice here. Matt, the director of interpretation at Linford, illustrates the centrality of the Witness Tree:

What I've been thinking about recently since [the limb fell], is not only is that tree itself a witness to history, it is history. It is itself ... it itself has an

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2 “Witness tree” is the general term for a tree that has been present for an important event but it also functions as a proper noun in the case of Linford’s witness tree
evolving history. I hadn’t really thought about that too awfully much. I’ve been giving that more thought, you know? As to that tree as history itself, not just a silent witness to it. I’d love to know more about that tree. A lot of people would love to know more about that tree. That’s one of the coolest things about it. To me, one of the coolest things about it is that it’s one of those things that will always remain unknown. So often, we have to have answers. We have answers, but what that tree, we’re not going to have answers. That’s cool. I like that. (Matt)

Here he describes the agency of the witness tree as a maker of history, “not just a silent witness.” He talks again about touch and how touch can connect the material and immaterial. Touching a tree in the context of ambiguity, without attaching anthropomorphistic characteristics like “witness,” could open new possibilities for beyond-representational interpretive practices.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I addressed the intersections of material and immaterial elements of plantation museums by outlining a history of plantation aesthetics, situating tour guides as powerful ambassadors to beauty and authenticity, and unpacked some of the nuts and bolts of interpreting aesthetics at Linford. I discussed how non human elements and aesthetic encounters are “used” by guides to teach the legacy of slavery and consequences of Lost Cause in three ways: 1) to unsettle visitor’s assumptions about the “real” plantation aesthetic by positioning their tour groups in view of certain parts of the site, 2) to encourage an emotional connection with the past through touch, 3) and indirectly as points of personal connection and reflection on site histories.

Trees were established as an axis of interpretation both for guides and visitors. The different types of questions Black and White people ask about trees and how trees are operationalized by some (White) visitors as a palate cleanser after learning difficult
histories, demonstrates the active contestation of sites of slavery as raced placed. The use of trees as a tool of deflection was an unexpected result and opens up interesting possibilities for future study. It also re-affirms that trees are rooted firmly at the center of evolving practices of learning and remembering at former slave plantations.

This paper contributes to the small but growing body of literature on of trees as sites of memory. My findings about aesthetic interpretation and trees generate more questions than they answer, and I encourage future heritage tourism researchers to look to the trees. This study was limited by size and time but, refocusing solely on trees, this could easily be scaled up to make a more-generalizable result. More broadly, engaging with the aesthetics of plantation landscapes provides access points for both guides and researchers interested in improving interpretation of racism, politics, and the legacy of slavery in the American South.
Works cited


Conclusion
Introduction
This dissertation started with a search for the sensorial and atmospheric linkages that bind historic sites together (Anderson, 2009). I wanted to open the cracks in between museum elements and scoop out the minutiae that form those middle spaces, thinking I would hold them to the light until I found some thread or gold nugget that would help me weave a story of the elusive hidden arguments I found. Instead, I pried open a crack and released a torrent of stories and bodies and noise. Tour guiding is loud. It is a din of voices and cicadas and traffic, internal conflict and exhaustion and frustration. Each new thread of plantation house museum complicates the story. While noise and messiness ended up being valuable, I organized my chapters around points of convergence. Essentially, each chapter is centered on a different type of convergence point: the dialogic, the intimate, and the aesthetic.

In the remainder of this chapter, I conclude by revisiting each of my research questions and summarizing my conclusions and contributions from Chapters 1, 2, and 3. I also return to my discussion of atmosphere and suggest further avenues of research for work in the field of heritage tourism and tour guide studies.

Objectives and Intellectual Merit
As a whole, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of knowledge and literature about the role of tour guides as powerful social actors at historic sites, particularly sites that interpret histories of slavery. Most importantly, this work prioritizes the experience of guides from their own perspective and as a population deserving of study in and of itself. The majority of extant tour guide literature focuses on modeling guide behavior with the objective of enhancing guides’ and management’s ability to serve tourists.
and most plantation museum literature focuses on the process and consequences of received narratives and how sites could make them more inclusive or accessible (Modlin et al., 2011; Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Modlin, 2008; Wong, 2013). The labor, emotionality, and affects of guides often get lost in the middle and, in practice, they are frequently saddled with carrying out new site directives or interpretive strategies with little support. Individually, the chapters contribute to three under-researched dimensions of heritage tourism: volunteer tour guides, emotional labor of interpreters at sites of slavery, and trees as important sites of memory.

Volunteer tour guides and empathy
In Chapter 1, I used results from in-depth interviews and tour observations to show that volunteer guides reinforce certain (White) cultural heritage identities and promulgate popular myths that downplay the brutality of slavery in Missouri; and that the tendency to do so is tied to their sense of identity and place-attachment. It addressed my first research question about ways in which historical arguments, personal histories, interpersonal exchanges, and vernacular narratives about enslavement connect and manifest in the stories told at sites of slavery by focusing on empathy as an axis of interpretation. It also outlined a set of strategies for interpreting difficult histories by engaging with historiographies of slavery and exercising reflexivity in visitor interaction. The findings from interviewing volunteer guides at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield are the foundation of my overarching argument that guides are powerful agents in both deliberate and organic creation of memory spaces and that creation process is inseparable from their phenomenological experiences.
Despite the unique challenges of relying on volunteer labor at historic sites—such as inconsistent training and irregular work schedules—there are only a handful of articles that focus on volunteer guides specifically and they tend to follow the trend of prioritizing visitor perspectives (Lamont et al., 2018; Newcomen, 1997). Studying volunteer guides is important because they represent a large portion of staff at many historic sites, have different motivations from paid guides, and can be less consistent because of difficulty implementing training programs. Furthermore, since sites rely on free guide labor, they have an incentive to prioritize volunteer comfort over incorporating difficult histories. As discussed in Chapter 1, a guide’s personal relationship with a subject is a determining factor of how it is interpreted using empathetic strategies. Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry (2011) found that empathy as an interpretive technique is employed unevenly, with consequences for visitors’ relationships to past historical figures. My work with guides expands on those findings by demonstrating why tour guides communicate (or fail to communicate) empathy when talking about the enslaved.

**Emotional labor and sensory ethnography**

Chapter 2 also addresses guide affect by exploring emotional labor at Linford Plantation Historic Site. The guides at Linford actively form their own influential convergence points where they create meaning for themselves as interpreters of slavery, operate in an otherwise-typical service job, and develop mobile workspace strategies for telling stories-in-place. Tour guides’ intimate, bodily interaction with place and emotional labor influence their relationship with material and immaterial elements of the plantation museum assemblage through mundane tasks, formal and informal visitor contacts, and developing spatial tactics. Guide labor (physical and emotional) is further complicated
by guides’ intersecting marginalities as sexist and racist assumptions about authority and appropriateness compound difficult visitor interactions. The mediation of those interactions using spatial techniques leads to more interesting corporeal and intercorporeal convergences with non-human members of the plantation assemblage.

Emotional labor in service work has been extensively researched since Arlie Russel Hochschild first published *The Managed Heart* in 1983. Chapter 2 builds on a large foundation of research about emotional labor that investigates dimensions of race gender in the service industry in general and in tour guide work specifically (Evans, 2013; McQueeney & Lavelle, 2017; Tyson, 2013; J.-Y. Wong & Wang, 2009; Yim et al., 2018). My goal with the project at Linford was to understand emotional labor unique to guides at sites that focus primarily on interpreting slavery, which is missing from the literature (Tyson [2013] describes the labor of teaching about slavery but at a site where it is not the central interpretive theme). This chapter also contributes to the new, but rapidly growing, body of work on the sensorial elements of museums and the use of “sensory ethnography” to understand those elements (Fors, 2015; Nakamura, 2013; Pink, 2009).

Aesthetic interpretation and trees as memory sites
Aesthetic tension at plantation museum sites exists between different representations of history and different ways of interpreting beauty. In Chapter 3, I discuss the role of trees as an easily definable interface deliberately used by guides to encourage aesthetic engagement and learning about slavery and as a material element operationalized by visitors—both as a way to ask about violence or as a “palate cleanser” when learning about violence. Live oaks are striking and pivotal convergence points which unite the
aesthetic/embodied processes of learning, the emotional labor of guiding, and the vital role interpreters play in creating places. They are also ecological convergence points. It is perhaps all too convenient that live oak trees operate much like the evolving narratives shared at plantation house sites. With the exception of their witness tree, the oaks at Linford were planted to inscribe a specific narrative on the landscape. Ideologies of the pro-slave South are manifest in those orderly rows of trees; and the “revival” of the romantic Old South reinscribed that aesthetic, unmoored from the troublesome histories of slavery which undermined a new southern aristocracy aesthetic.

Trees at plantation sites represent both the political and social production of plantation ecologies and the culturally productive role of long-lived plantation flora. Their aesthetic dominance, symbolic significance, and regular veneration as historical “witnesses” makes it surprising that there is so little literature about trees at historic sites. Chapter 3 contributes to the smattering of publications on the role of trees as sites of memory that have heretofore focused on contemporary memorial practices (Heath-Kelly, 2018; Micieli-Voutsinas & Cavicchi, 2019). More broadly, it builds on the renewed interest in materialism and push to study “more-than-human” geographies (Dowling et al., 2017; Whatmore, 2006).

Limitations and Horizons

The findings shared in these chapters were constrained by access, time, and resources. While I was able to achieve great depth with such rich data, this research would benefit from a wider scope and larger groups of participants. It would also benefit from more
diverse researcher perspectives from both outsider- and insider-(tour guide) investigators. I plan to continue the work started here by pursuing the following projects.

My first next step is already in the works. I am collaborating with two of the tour guides from Linford who participated in this project, Samantha and Leah, to write a paper that includes an expanded analysis of emotional labor with the objective of finding primary causes of burnout and negative health effects of tour guiding in an emotionally intense and often hostile environment. Second, building on those findings and the reflexive interpretive practices I proposed in Chapter 1, we intend to develop a practical guide for teaching guides how to exercise flexible interpretation, self-care, and strategies for reducing negative visitor interactions. Third, I would like to expand the investigation into tree-visitor relationships to more plantation house museum sites. This would involve another round of interviews with guides and possible participant observations but with such a narrow subject-focus I could cover a lot of ground as compared to the in-depth and narrative driven interviews conducted in previous research.

Revisiting Plantation Atmospheres
To conclude, I want to briefly return to my broader frameworks and their relationship to my collected findings. Over the course of this project, I explored the relationships between aesthetic, assemblage, and atmosphere. Each have been used to describe museums as being in constant states of ‘becoming’ and incorporate tangible and intangible properties of place. Atmosphere is a nested property of the plantation assemblage, but also as a concept which encompasses each facet of the assemblage as those heterogeneous elements breathe the air, literally and metaphorically.
Atmosphere is fleeting and ephemeral; it presses upon your senses while remaining imperceptible, it is materially ambiguous, but salient to human experience (Bille, Bjerregaard, & Sørensen, 2015). The emotional labor of guides is effectively harnessed for the purpose of manufacturing aura or atmosphere and their affective experiences and development of tour narratives are mediated by that same atmosphere (Benjamin, 2010; Dorrian, 2014). Recognizing the emotional lives and subjectivities of tour guides in their own right opens possibilities for researchers of visitor experience at plantation museum sites by filling in gaps in our understanding of the plantation as assemblage. If the objective is to educate about plantations as places of work in the past, it is imperative that we study how they are places of work in the present. Plantation house museums are not simply where history is told, it is where history is made on a daily basis as it is interpreted and reinterpreted by workers on history's front lines.
Works cited


Vita

Emma J. Walcott-Wilson was born Chicago, Illinois and grew up in Springfield, Missouri. She completed her B.S. in Geography at Missouri State University in 2013 with a concentration in history and geographies of the Ozarks. Her research on heritage tourism got rolling during her M.A. program at the University of Missouri and she continued her focus on tour guide experiences and narrative when she started studying at University of Tennessee in 2015. During her time as a research assistant and RESET fellow under the guidance of Dr. Derek Alderman, she conducted extensive qualitative fieldwork at historic house museums and tourist plantations. Before she began her doctorate, she worked as a museum professional for five years and has conducted research that prioritizes practical application in historical interpretation. Upon completion of this dissertation, Emma will have completed all requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and plans to pursue a career in museum management and interpretive training for guides and docents.