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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Matthew Russell Cook entitled "A Critical Historical Geography of Slavery in the American South." 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 H. Alderman, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Joshua Inwood, Ronald Kalafsky, Maria Stehle

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.)

A Critical Historical Geography of Slavery in the American South

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Matthew Russell Cook
May 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of producing a dissertation, a researcher incurs many debts to colleagues, friends and family. I want to briefly thank the people who assisted with this research and dissertation writing over a period of the last three years.

First and foremost, I want to thank my wife, Karen Cook, for putting me through grad school (and putting *up* with me through grad school!) and for your unending emotional and moral support. I also want to thank my family (Mom, Dad, Rachel, Blair, Noah, Kathrynne, Anita, and Granny & Pop) for their assistance along the way, both financial and emotional. Know that I greatly appreciate you!

Next, I owe a great deal of thanks and gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Derek Alderman, for taking me on as a student, supporting me as an advisor, mentor, and department head, and giving me many opportunities to advance my craft as an academic (both in teaching and in research) throughout my three years of working with him. Thanks for taking me on even when I had no firm ideas on a project and for drawing me into this important research trajectory on critical historical geographies and slavery. Thanks, too, to Mrs. Donna for her unending support of both Derek and his students.

I also thank my committee members, Drs. Inwood, Kalafsky, and Stehle for their willingness to serve on the committee, for their patience with shifting defense dates (twice!), and for the long hours spent reading and offering advice on the dissertation. Your support and opinions are highly valuable to me. Thanks also to Dr. Dallen Timothy, Editor of *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, for his help and acceptance of the dissertation's fourth chapter, published as part of a special issue on the River Road in Louisiana, and to the four anonymous scholars who reviewed the paper. As is true for the entire dissertation, all mistakes are my own.

Lastly, I want to thank my professors, colleagues, and students in the Geography Department and other programs at UT Knoxville and my friends in the greater Knoxville community, particularly in the Knoxville Choral Society, Orison, and at Church Street UMC, for your encouragement and friendship over the six years I have lived in Knoxville. It has been a real pleasure to share life with you.

ABSTRACT

In the more than 150 years since the end of the Civil War, Emancipation Proclamation, and 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution that formally brought an end to chattel slavery, people in the United States have done much to downplay, sanitize, and outright forget both the history of slavery—despite its foundational role in the establishment of the U.S. political economy—and the life-altering damage that powerful white men, predominantly, inflicted upon millions of Africans and African Americans through a brutal system that lasted more than 200 years. Contributing to the process of whitewashing the histories and geographies of slavery have been the large absences of many academic disciplines to engage in critical research on chattel slavery until relatively recently. Since the 1960s, geographers have increasingly grappled with the discipline’s racist and imperialist past, engaging in “critical” studies that have advanced the discipline and added emphases on social justice, drawing upon diverse social theories such as Marxism, feminism, Critical Race Theory, and postmodernism. This dissertation builds upon this scholarship in developing a critical historical geographic understanding of slavery and its legacy in the U.S., paying particular attention to the “Deep South” states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In the case of researching slavery, this dissertation argues that the ways in which people in the contemporary South (mis)remember the United States’ history are serious reflections on how contemporary issues of racism and white privilege operate in America. Taking a critical approach to historical geographic research of slavery is not merely an academic process but is inherently political. The dissertation engages with critical historical geographies of slavery by focusing primarily on counter narratives of slavery—“counter” in the sense that they stand in opposition to and correct whitewashed, dominant narratives that purport slavery was a mostly benign, patriarchal system. Further, it examines social and economic relations that operate to perpetuate these mythic perceptions of the United States’ chattel slavery system. The overarching goal of the dissertation is to study the processes through which people form, operationalize, and can advance counter narratives of slavery.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical historical geographies of slavery

In the more than 150 years since the end of the Civil War, Emancipation Proclamation, and 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution that formally brought an end to chattel slavery, people in the United States have done much to downplay, sanitize, and outright forget both the history of slavery—despite its foundational role in the establishment of the U.S. political economy—and the life-altering damage that powerful white men, predominantly, inflicted upon millions of Africans and African Americans through a brutal system that lasted more than 200 years. Contributing to the process of whitewashing the histories and geographies of slavery—much like broader trends of ignoring most African American histories—has been the large absences of many academic disciplines to engage in critical research on chattel slavery until relatively recently, though some fields such as history, sociology, and African-American studies began to take an interest in studying slavery earlier than others. The pantheon of geographic scholarship is one such discipline that largely ignored the study of chattel slavery until the last couple of decades. Some of the rare early examples of the geographic study of American slavery come from environmental deterministic perspectives such as F.V. Emerson's (1911a: 14; see also 1911b) racist argument that slavery was “primarily economic in its development... Its spread was conditioned largely by the geographic factors of soils, topography, and climate.” Later, Emerson (1911a: 15-16) wrote, “The negro [sic] slave proved far superior to the Indian [sic] or the indentured white. ... On the other hand he has many inherent disadvantages. He was stupid and incapable of little but simple routine labor.” Cleland (1920), in his study of Alabama's Black Belt, provides another early example of an American geographer invoking environmental determinism to describe slavery's spread throughout the U.S. South. Although their connections to slavery were

typically ignored in early scholarship, southern plantations were especially of interest to early geographers studying the South from regional geographic and morphological perspectives.¹

Some of the work of Merle Prunty (1955, 1956, 1963) provides other examples of geographers researching plantations and even discussing slavery, but from spatial perspectives that largely ignore the social aspects of slavery. Thus, for example, Prunty (1955: 459–460, emphasis original) notes, “Most historians and economists treating the plantations have been preoccupied with the institution of slavery; what they apparently have not recognized, or have only partly glimpsed, is that the plantation *landholdings* remained intact through the Civil War and Reconstruction and, indeed, on down to the present.” Prunty (1955) also discusses the spatial arrangement of slave quarters near the “owner’s house” and certain aspects of the everyday lives of the enslaved, but true to the early era of geographic scholarship focused on spatial analysis, this information is presented as fact without comment or social critique.

Similar to Prunty, John Rehder (1999) in his extensive study of Louisiana’s sugar plantations focuses primarily on the history of the sugar industry, the modernization of sugar production over time, and the built environment of historical plantations’ many forms.² Although Rehder covers examples of both French Creole and Anglo-style plantations spatial arrangements,

¹ Aiken (1998) is one notable exception in the attention he paid to the ways that white landowners still controlled majority black populations in the post-Civil War Cotton South.

² Interestingly, Rehder (1999) includes in his research a case study of Whitney Plantation, today one of the counter narrative plantation sites researched as part of this dissertation (see Chapter 4). Rehder’s engagement with the Whitney includes a brief overview of the historical succession of plantation ownership and includes a list of the 57 slaves owned by the Haydel family at Whitney in 1820, based on the research of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. Hall’s work, including the “Louisiana Slave Database,” was also used by the current Whitney Plantation Museum in their creation of the “Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall” memorial comprising 216 granite slabs engraved with the names of enslaved people who lived in Louisiana. Rehder’s description of the Whitney ended, when *Delta Sugar* was published in 1999, with the plantation’s status up in the air after it was sold to the Formosa Chemicals and Fiber Corporation. Little could Rehder have imagined that environmental litigation over the company’s plans to build a Rayon plant and intervention from local activists and academics from Louisiana State University would eventually lead Formosa to abandon its plans to build the plant. The Formosa Corporation then sold the property to current owner John Cummings, who developed the concept of turn the plantation into a museum focusing on slavery.

including their “Big Houses” and slave quarters, he focuses primarily on cultural and historical landscapes rather than the human dimensions involved in the sugar cane production, both under slavery and in the modernized industry. Rehder’s approach to discussing the labor force involved in sugar production, from slavery to present, is largely to describe the number, gender, age, and pay of the workforce.

Fortunately, geographic scholarship has seen some advancement. Since the 1960s, geographers have increasingly grappled with the discipline’s racist and imperialist past, engaging in “critical” studies that have advanced the discipline and added emphases on social justice, drawing upon diverse social theories such as Marxism, feminism, Critical Race Theory, and postmodernism. For example, Carville Earle (1978) provides one early example of retrospectively applying political economic theory (on calculating labor efficiency and the productivity of slave versus free labor) to the early American plantation economy, and he finds that the “economic imperative” logic that was historically used to justify enslaved labor as an alternative to free labor can be disproven. He also suggests that plantation owners’ decisions to hold slaves were causally tied to the labor and growing requirements of *staple* crops like tobacco, cotton, and rice. Earle (1978: 55) points to wheat farming as an example of a non-staple crop whose growth period requires less attention (and thus less labor), so wheat farmers “almost always employed wage labor because the few days of labor required times the daily wage rate usually fell below the cost of slaves.” Although Earle employs some “economically rational man” logic in his argument and may not necessarily fall into the “critical” paradigm, his work is nonetheless an example of non-positivist research on slavery.

Critical scholarship on chattel slavery from geography and sister disciplines like memory studies and tourism studies began in earnest in the late 1990s and 2000s, largely

centered on studies and critiques of plantation sites operated as contemporary tourism operations (Adams 1999, 2007; Butler 2001; Alderman and Modlin 2008, 2015; Modlin 2008; Butler, Carter, and Dwyer 2008; Litvin and Brewer 2008; Buzinde and Santos 2008, 2009; Hanna 2015; Bright and Carter 2015; Potter 2015). Geographers and other scholars have also taken interest in specific historical geographies of the institution of slavery itself, drawing upon extant research from scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois (2013 [1935]) John Hope Franklin (2010 [1947]), Ira Berlin (1974, 1998, 2004), and Edward Baptist (2014). This includes attention to slavery's "traces" on the landscape through hidden trails and sites of resistance (Ginsburg 2007), the symbolic excavation of and power inherent in historic artifacts in remembering slavery (Alderman and Campbell 2008), the relationship between imperial geographic knowledge creation in West Africa and the transatlantic slave trade (Lambert 2009), the study of black women's geographies including the effects of the transatlantic slave trade (McKittrick 2006), the influence of African foodways and ethnobotany on the Atlantic world through and because of the slave trade (Carney 2001, Carney and Rosomoff 2009), and using GIS and viewshed analysis to study how slaveholders on neighboring plantations could shape the landscape and layout of their plantations in order to better visually control the enslaved population (Randle 2011).

My dissertation builds upon the work of these many scholars in developing a critical historical geographic understanding of slavery and its legacy in the U.S., paying particular attention to the "Deep South" states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. As I note later in the dissertation (in Chapter 3), critical historical geography draws heavily upon the field of geographies of memory (the study of how and why societies remember specific histories, and how these commemorative acts shape the geographic landscape). Further, my dissertation

research approach is also “critical” in the sense that it draws upon social theory including Marxism and Critical Race Theory, and I distinguish critical historical geography from other forms of historical geographic scholarship in that its focus should be as much on how people in the present remember, celebrate, ignore, commodify, reify, or obliterate the past as it does on *actual* histories themselves. In the case of researching slavery, I argue that the ways in which people in the contemporary South (mis)remember the United States’ history are serious reflections on how contemporary issues of racism and white privilege operate in America.

Importantly, taking a critical approach to historical geographic research of slavery is not merely an academic process but is inherently political. More than 50 years since key components of the Civil Rights Movement left Americans feeling that the “race issue” was over, we appear to be at the doorstep of both new racial crises and new movements. Loosely organized and not entirely coalesced around one particular set of issues, the “new” movement for civil rights and racial equality is much like the old: voting rights have crumbled; racism still persists—across the U.S., not just in the South—in interpersonal and systemic forms; police, white supremacists, and others deem black lives and black bodies to have little value from Ferguson to Baltimore to Charleston. The historical geographies and narratives of slavery still have much to contribute to the present and the American future. However, to couch the present-day racial situation in the United States as “entirely bad” is not quite right, as some reasons for optimism do exist: the removal of the Rebel flag from the South Carolina statehouse grounds to its rightful place in a museum; new waves of young black protestors and leaders rising up to push (in largely non-violent means) for their rights, joined by people of all stripes, whether white, Latino, Asian, or other ethnic and racial groups—all pushing for political, economic, and social justice and equality. A consistent theme running through these

ongoing events, however, is a need to recover the historical geography of race relations and racial inequality that began in America's chattel slavery system. Such a recovery, I argue, requires the advancement of counter narratives that engage in more nuanced, socially just descriptions of the history of slavery and pay more attention to the lives of the enslaved community.

Given this dissertation's empirical focus in the South, my research also draws upon and contributes to the field of Southern Studies. Bearing in mind that people in the U.S. have long used the South as an "other" to cast blame and shame for undesirable characteristics the entire country faces, including racism, poverty, and violence (Woodward 1971, Jansson 2003), I point out in Chapter 3, for example, that the North benefitted from slavery through financial instruments such as speculation and insurance just as Southern planters benefitted from the enslaved community's labor. However, recognizing that the historical slave-holding South did not exist "in a vacuum" but was part of a larger system of exploitation found in the Transatlantic Slave Trade is not the same thing as absolving the South from its violent past. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, counter narratives of slavery are only located in select parts of the South, and much remains for scholars, educators, anti-racism activists, and then general public to do in order to teach counter narratives of slavery and challenge dominant "Gone with the Wind"-style narratives that are still pervasive throughout the country.

Framing the research: Goals and questions

My dissertation engages with critical historical geographies of slavery by focusing primarily on *counter narratives* of slavery—"counter" in the sense that they stand in opposition

to and correct whitewashed, dominant narratives that purport slavery was a mostly benign, patriarchal system. Further, I examine social and economic relations that operate to perpetuate these mythic perceptions of the United States' chattel slavery system. **The overarching goal of my dissertation is to study the processes through which people form, operationalize, and can advance counter narratives of slavery.** I accomplish this goal by addressing the following three sub-goals.

Goal 1: Identify counter narratives of slavery

As pointed out above and woven throughout each of my main chapters, much of the recent study of the American slavery system in geography and other disciplines has focused on—and indeed, well-critiqued—contemporary plantations tourism operations and other museums that trivialize the history of slavery at their sites and work to normalize white racial dominance, with myriad material consequences for black lives and black bodies. While a handful of scholars have started to research sites that engage with counter narratives of slavery's history (see particularly Alderman and Campbell 2008; Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; and Small 2013), there are many empirical and theoretical gaps in the literature that I address in this dissertation. Further, despite Small (2013: 419) including a couple of counter narrative sites in his broader research on the inclusion/exclusion of slavery at contemporary plantation tourism operations, he ultimately argues: “At present these counter narratives have not targeted or made much inroad into undermining the ideological grip prevalent at plantation museum sites themselves.” On the contrary, my research has found that counter narratives of slavery are increasing (both numerically and in historical nuance) through historical markers giving due attention to slavery, more historically responsible media portrayals of slavery, and plantation sites like Whitney Plantation on Louisiana's River Road

that are challenging some existing plantation tourism operations to gradually change their narratives.

This goal answers the research question: *How do various counter narratives of slavery found in historical markers, media representations, and museum sites challenge mythic understandings of the American chattel slavery system?* The intellectual merit of this goal, as hinted at by this research question, goes beyond the mere “identification” of slavery counter narrative sites to also recognize that, despite the tendency for African American history to be taught and memorialized in relatively simplistic ways, there are people and sites in the South that actively resist dominant narratives of slavery.

Goal 2: Understand and extend the pedagogical and empathetic value of counter narratives of slavery

This research goal moves past the identification of slavery counter narratives to build upon a growing body of literature on historical empathetic and pedagogical possibilities presented by sites of memory and the power of these sites to inform and shape people’s lives (Leib 1998; Yilmaz 2007; Brooks 2009; Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; Arnold-de Semine 2012; Arnold-de Semine 2013; Cook and Alderman 2015). I most directly address pedagogy in Chapter 2, where I outline a teaching framework I call a “memory workspace” that uses media representations of slavery and guided class discussion over several days to help students come to a deeper understanding of the historical slavery system. The need for critically informed pedagogy, as the first aspect of Goal 2, is based on the difficult nature of teaching slavery and comes in response to many history textbooks that are limited in their presentation of slavery. Beyond the classroom, however, this dissertation also highlights the need for *public* pedagogy on the history of slavery. Counter narrative markers, tourism sites,

and media all work to inform the general public that engage with and consume them about many facets of slavery that run counter to dominant narratives and mythic understandings of history.

In terms of understanding the role of empathy, the second part of Goal 2 seeks to find out if counter narratives found in media (Chapter 2) and at sites of memory, such as the museums and plantations researched for Chapters 3 and 4, have the potential for affectively impacting their visitors, and if so, how these affective/empathetic responses operate.

Ultimately, this goal is an effort to analyze *and* extend scholarly understandings of the pedagogical and empathetic value of slavery counter narratives.

Goal 3: Advance new counter narratives of slavery and a social just research agenda

Threaded throughout my research goals, but most explicitly included in Goal 3, I intend to work toward a research agenda that advances discussions of more socially just and theoretically nuanced understandings of the remembrance and historiography of slavery and its importance to the foundation of the United States' political economy and culture. I am also greatly interested in implications that this social justice research has for contemporary race relations and education in the United States. Scholars who study and work to advance social justice projects examine many aspects of human life at a wide variety of scales and geographic settings, and these scholars engage in a variety of literatures in academic fields including geography, sociology, anthropology, law, political economy, and others. My research is situated at the interstices of commemorative justice (fair and balanced public memory) and historical responsibility (compensation—often, but not necessarily, *material*—for past wrongdoings), specifically in the U.S. South. I engage with and seek to add to literature from historical and cultural geography, memory studies, and political economy. By combining these

foci on justice in the realms of commemoration and historical geography with tourism, I also mirror and draw upon the goals of the RESET (Race, Ethnicity, and Social Equity in Tourism) Initiative, housed jointly at the University of Tennessee, University of East Carolina, and University of Southern Mississippi: to identify, study, and challenge social inequalities present in the modern day tourism industry. This goal is answered most directly in the third chapter, in which I ask: What can an historical–materialist understanding of Marx’s theory of ‘dead labor’ reveal about the economic and social relations that make possible and sustain the contemporary plantation tourism industry? In short, I use Marxist theories and more recent research on the productive nature of violence under capitalism to advance counter narratives of slavery’s historical geographies and continued importance to the development of U.S. history, culture, and society. I argue that the chattel slavery system is still a productive force across the American South, which has major implications in light of ongoing calls for reparations and for the ways that people think about race in American society.

Dissertation outline and rationale for “article approach”

In this section, I outline the organizational format I use in the dissertation and discuss my rationale for writing the dissertation using an “article approach” that, while comprising four distinct, publishable (and in one case, already published) chapters, nonetheless is connected as a larger corpus of research that weaves together many theoretical and methodological strands.

Outline

Following this introduction, each of the four stand-alone publishable articles is presented in numbered chapters. The first, *The Textual Politics of Alabama’s Historical Markers*:

Slavery, Emancipation, and Civil Rights, builds upon the work of Alderman (2012), Cook and van Riemsdijk (2014), and other memory studies scholars by paying critical attention to the role of language in creating memorial landscapes. In particular, I look at a major historical marker program in Alabama, borrowing and expanding upon the research methodology that Alderman (2012) and his students used to investigate the “textual politics” of state historical highway markers in North Carolina. I investigate the ways in which three major periods of African American history—slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement—are represented in (or absent from) Alabama’s historical marker memoryscape. In light of the 2015 Charleston massacre and ongoing national political debate surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, this work is incredibly timely because much still remains to be researched and said about symbolic landscapes that glorify the Confederacy. The highway historical marker is a commemorative medium that has proven to be fruitful for scholarship on narratives that communities build as part of the normative order of remembering the past (Gulley 1993, Alderman 2012). Roadside markers and other informational memorials such as plaques give historical events a materiality that is part of the ordinary cultural landscape. And, as Dwyer and Alderman (2008), Doss (2010) and others assert, public commemoration has become more open to debate in the recent past, and a wider swath of the public now has greater agency to add historical experiences of less socially powerful groups to the memorial landscape. This summer, I will submit a version of Chapter 1 to be considered for a multi-volume work on the geographies of language edited by Dr. Stan Brunn at the University of Kentucky.

Of all the chapters I originally put forth in the dissertation proposal, the second chapter, *Classroom as Memory Workspace: The Educational and Empathetic Potentials of* Twelve Years

a Slave *and* Ask A Slave, has gone in the most drastically different way from how I originally conceived it. After being invited to submit to an edited volume called *Teaching Difficult History Through Film*, edited by Jeremy Stoddard, Alan Marcus, and David Hicks, I shifted the focus of my planned media analysis piece into a pedagogical article that provides sample lesson plans for how to teach the difficult history of slavery using two divergent media representations. In the chapter, I highlight the importance of using film in the classroom in a *memory workspace* to delve deeply into a difficult topic, and I address the possibilities of such a workspace to enhance students' understandings of difficult historical geographies and stir empathy and/or solidarity with people who still suffer the effects and legacy left from slavery, Jim Crow, and racism in the present-day. I also narrowed down the article from my original conception as a broad examination of many historical viewpoints that could be addressed using these media to instead emphasize how these two filmic representations of slavery offer educators a strategic opportunity to critique "faithful slave" mythology, particularly the stereotyped "mammy" figure popular since the era of pro-slavery literature and recycled by films such as *Gone with the Wind*. Although the overall character of the chapter is now pedagogical, I do also engage in some of the originally planned media analysis of *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave*. The opportunity for future analysis of media representations of slavery remains wide open, with the renewed interest (ca. 2012-2013) of Hollywood depicting slavery in film now spreading to television series such as AMC Network's *TURN: Washington's Spies*, WGN America's *Underground*, and Black Entertainment Television's slavery-themed, time-travel web series *Send Me*.

The third chapter in this dissertation is an engagement with Marxist theories of dead labor, alienation, commodity fetishism, and primitive accumulation, and contemporary

theories about the productivity of violence. I draw together these bodies of literature and ground them through two empirical examples, tracing the political economy of the historical plantation and chattel slavery system before turning to a critique of the contemporary plantation tourism industry in the South. Unlike the other chapters, this “dead labor” chapter does not yet have a home, but I am considering submitting it to one of a handful of top geography journals (*Antipode*, *Human Geography*, *Social and Cultural Geography*, or *Annals of the AAG*.) Alternately, I have considered using Chapter 3 as part of a manuscript prospectus if I decide to take my future research in the direction of continuing to study the effects of slavery’s historical geographies on contemporary issues of race.

The fourth chapter, already available as an early online publication in the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, is part of a special issue on plantation tourism along and beyond Louisiana’s River Road. This special issue is based on research conducted by members of the RESET Initiative on the National Science Foundation-funded grant “Transformation of American Southern Commemorative Landscapes” (grant #1359780, PIs: Butler, Alderman, Carter, Hanna, and Potter), and it focuses primarily on Laura, Oak Alley, Houmas House, and San Francisco plantations. My contribution to this special issue was to explore counter narrative sites along River Road (particularly Whitney Plantation) and beyond (at Frogmore Cotton Plantation and Gins in Frogmore, Louisiana, and the Natchez, Mississippi, Museum of African-American History and Culture) that prioritize the history of enslaved women and men. I study the potential of these sites to stir and instill empathy among visitors, but ultimately, drawing upon the literature of Critical Race Theory, I argue that the activists and scholars who study these sites and the tourists who visit them should move beyond mere

historical empathy to instead focus on present-day solidarity with the oppressed and poor, particularly African American descendants of the enslaved.

Following the four major chapters is the dissertation conclusion. Although each stand-alone research chapter has its own conclusion, the final concluding section for the dissertation is where I revisit the overarching research goals, summarize the main findings and their intellectual merit, and outline my plans for future research.

Rationale for Article Approach

The decision to write the dissertation as a series of individually publishable articles came out of the process of multiple conversations with Dr. Alderman, my dissertation advisor. While we carefully considered the advantages and corresponding disadvantages of both options currently provided by the UTK Graduate School (the series of articles approach or the more traditional “manuscript” route), I ultimately chose to pursue publishing a series of four separate articles or chapters for three reasons. The first of these is that I felt each of the broad research goals described above deserved its own analysis and space to be fully developed as stand-alone research papers. Although some of the chapters did inevitably end up addressing aspects of more than one goal, by limiting each chapter to one primary research goal and using the most appropriate methods to address the goals in turn, each is conceptually strengthened. This also helps avoid the perils of research design “creep”—the risk of employing more methods and instruments than necessary, often trying to answer too many questions in a single chapter or article, resulting in less focused and less useful research.

Second, using the article approach allows me to study a vast topic—the history and memory of slavery—from multiple angles using a variety of methods. Using the article approach allows me to study counter narratives of the South’s slave-holding history using

content, discourse, and film analysis; observational and photographic fieldwork; and survey and interview data also obtained through fieldwork. I also draw upon several theoretical frameworks from the literature, and the article approach allows me to intersperse these frameworks as they best inform my empirical observations, film analysis, and pedagogical praxis in a concise manner.

The third reason I chose the “article approach” is the practical considerations of getting some of the work already out and published while still finishing the dissertation, as, for example, Chapter 4 is already available in the special issue of *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. The approach also will allow me to disseminate my other research findings relatively quickly upon completion of the dissertation, with Chapter 1 to be submitted for review by June 2016 and Chapter 2 already under review for an edited volume.

In summary, my dissertation investigates one of the United States’ most difficult historical geographies, that of the chattel slavery system, through a focus on sites of memory, textual-political landscapes, and media representations of the enslaved. By concentrating on narratives that tell more historically accurate, humanistic, and socially just sides of this history—as opposed to dominant, mythic narratives—ultimately this research advocates for historical-geographic responsibility, challenges geographies of exclusion vis-à-vis the largely untold or forgotten histories of enslaved communities, and advances new counter narratives that demonstrate that slavery is still a productive force across the U.S. (not merely the South) landscape with legitimate implications for the ways American society discusses reparations and other contemporary conflicts over race.

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CHAPTER I
THE TEXTUAL POLITICS OF ALABAMA'S HISTORICAL
MARKERS: SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION, AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Abstract

In light of recent protests and debates over Confederate symbols, markers, and flags after the 2015 Charleston shooting, the South remains fertile ground for critically reflecting on the role of history in shaping the present. State historical marker programs are a near ubiquitous feature of the United States' commemorative landscape, used to retell history at important sites. However, geographers and other memory studies scholars have not devoted much time or effort in researching historical markers, in part because they are often considered mundane or they are ignored in favor of researching standalone monuments or other memory projects. Engaging with textual politics—the belief that language, words, and narrative are politically active within commemorative landscapes—this chapter presents an analysis of the Alabama Historical Association's marker program and its presentation of African American history. Findings include that historical periods of slavery and emancipation have largely been ignored while the Civil Rights Movement is more widely represented and celebrated as a success story.

Introduction

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Storm Roof, a 21-year-old white male, entered a mid-week prayer service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and allegedly opened fire on the congregation with a handgun, killing nine African Americans. Following the attack, the police investigation and media reporting revealed that Roof had taken photos of himself wearing a jacket with two obsolete flags—those of Apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia—still used as emblems by white supremacists. Other photographs found online showed Roof burning the American flag, brandishing a pistol and Confederate flag, and visiting many Confederate heritage sites and slavery museums. Roof's personal website (lastrhodesian.com—no longer active) contained a manifesto in which he called blacks 'inferior' and said 'someone has to have the bravery to take it [a race war] to the real world, and I guess that has to be me' (quoted in Robles 2015, n.p.). After years of struggle and debate in South Carolina and other southern states over the public display and celebration of Confederate symbols—particularly the Confederate battle flag—in official political iconography and landscapes such as state house grounds, Roof's allegedly murderous actions

finally broke the stalemate in many southern states and cities with growing calls to erase these symbols from the landscape.

Efforts to remove the Confederate symbols have had varying degrees of success at different scales of government. For example, successful legislation at the state level can be seen in the July 2015 law in South Carolina that removed the Confederate battle flag from the statehouse grounds in Columbia after decades of controversy over the flag (Holpuch 2015; for more on the flag controversy's history, see Alderman and Campbell 2008). However, at the time of writing this chapter, other political actions to remove the Confederate Battle Flag and other Confederate symbols and monuments from state flags, license plates, and statehouse grounds in states such as Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi have not yet been successful (Guarino 2015). In contrast to the oft-drawn out processes at the state level, political actions at the local scale in the renewed effort to relegate Confederate symbols to textbooks and museums has tended to occur either swiftly or not at all. For example, several Mississippi cities—including Columbus, Clarksdale, Oxford, Hattiesburg, Grenada, Magnolia, Vicksburg, and the state capital of Jackson—have stopped flying the state flag of Mississippi, which includes a representation of the Confederate battle flag, following city council decisions or mayoral executive order (Guarino 2015). The trend to stop flying the Mississippi state flag continued in October 2015 following student-led resolutions at the University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi. However, in response to these acts to remove the flag from official public life, an estimated 23,000 people have attended at least 173 pro-Confederate rallies and protests that have been held all over the country (documented by the Southern Poverty Law Center, reported in Ingraham 2015). Despite the rhetoric that pro-Confederate rally attendees often cite—namely, that the flag represents “heritage, not hate”—

the involvement of documented hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups in planning and attending rallies tends to undermine those claims.

As demonstrated by pro-flag rallies (and subsequent “counter rallies” by groups supporting racial equality and the removal of Confederate symbols), state legislature decisions, and local ordinances, the American South remains fertile ground for research that critically reflects on the continued ways that history and public memory define the context of contemporary debates over race relations and white supremacy. No where is this more apparent in the United States today than the intersection in time and space of actors such as neo-Confederates and Black Lives Matter protestors—essentially forces for and against the continued privileged position that Confederate history and “Old South” glorification have enjoyed throughout much of the South since the end of Reconstruction. However, in the midst of the aftermath of the Charleston massacre and the swirling debate surrounding the status of the battle flag, Southern states’ historical markers—some of which also glorify the Confederate South, “Lost Cause” mythology, and white supremacy—have largely been left out of the conversation. References to the history of the Confederate States of America, its most celebrated citizens and generals, and the “Lost Cause” portrayal of the Confederacy as heroic fight—against great odds and over states’ rights rather than slavery—dot the southern landscape through monuments (Savage 1998), amusement parks such as Stone Mountain in Georgia (Essex 2002, Zakos 2015), and historical roadside markers (Alderman 2012, Hanna and Hodder 2014). This chapter focuses primarily upon the latter, examining one of the largest and oldest historical marker programs in Alabama, a state—much like South Carolina—that has long found itself embroiled in controversy over Confederate symbols (Webster and Leib 2001, Webster and Leib 2002).

This chapter builds upon the work of Alderman (2012), Cook and van Riemsdijk (2014), Hanna and Hodder (2014) and other memory studies scholars by paying critical attention to the role of language in creating memorial landscapes. The highway historical marker is a commemorative medium that has proven to be fruitful for scholarship on the narratives that communities author as part of the normative order of remembering the past (Gulley 1993, Alderman 2012). Roadside markers and other informational memorials such as plaques give historical events a materiality that seems part of the ordinary cultural landscape. However, as Dwyer and Alderman (2008a) and Doss (2010) assert, public commemoration has become more open to debate in the recent past, and a wider swath of the public now has greater agency to add the history and experiences of less socially powerful groups to the memorial landscape. Borrowing and expanding upon the research methodology that Alderman (2012) and his students used to investigate the “textual politics” of state historical highway markers in North Carolina, I investigate the ways in which three major periods of African American history—slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement—are represented in (or absent from) Alabama’s historical marker memoryscape. In particular, I ask if the findings of Alderman (2012)—namely, that African American history is largely excluded from public memory in North Carolina—holds true across the landscape of markers created by the Alabama Historical Association (AHA) and in what ways Alabama’s memorial landscape may differ. Looking beyond the context of Alabama, however, I also address broader questions in this research on (1) commemorative justice and the relative inclusion or exclusion of African American history inscribed into the cultural landscape as text and (2) about how race and racial history is remembered in the American South.

Alabama's historical markers make for an interesting subject of textual-political investigation for many reasons. First, Alabama is a state steeped in a racialized history like much of the U.S. South, and its history has seen a complex amalgamation of white supremacy, African American resistance, and successes and failures for both sides across many decades. Second, Alabama's historical marker program is organized by a private organization—the Alabama Historical Association—and funded privately by individuals and local groups, in contrast to Alderman's (2012) study of North Carolina's publicly funded program run by the state government (Alabama Historical Association 2015a). Third, the Alabama Historical Association began its marker program to commemorate important historical sites and individuals in 1949, presenting a sufficiently large enough set of markers to evaluate for patterns and change over time. Finally, the AHA is not the only organization in Alabama to install historical markers, which opens the door for comparison between the different organizations' missions and ultimate results in how fairly they represent Alabama history.

The major objectives of this research are twofold. The first objective is to conduct a critical (if selective) reading of the words and language used in the historical marker program to identify presences and absences of African American history in Alabama's public memorial landscape. The second objective is to utilize discourse analysis to investigate whether (and if so, how) African American history is discussed selectively or potentially in unjust ways socially and historically. The remainder of this chapter takes the following structure. First, I discuss the literatures from cultural and historical geography and geographies of public memory and highlight how research on state historical markers is relevant in and to these literatures. Second, I explain my use of content analysis and discourse analysis that informs the research results. Third, I discuss in detail the results of both forms of analysis, organized thematically

by the historical periods of slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, I conclude with some observations of the analytical limitations and continued usefulness of this kind of textual research.

Approaching a textual politics of state historical marker programs

This chapter draws primarily upon three strands of the broader literatures of cultural and historical geography and geographies of public memory: textual politics, historical responsibility, and surrogation. Here I outline these themes and contextualize my research on historic markers within this body of literature.

Textual Politics

Geographers have long been interested in studying how public memory shapes people's understanding of space, place, and the historical events that occurred at particular sites (Harvey 1979, Foote 2003, Dwyer 2004, Dwyer and Alderman 2008a, Doss 2010). However, in spite of the fact that one of the longest standing approaches in cultural geography research involves reading the landscape as “text” (e.g., Duncan 1990) or as a materialized “discourse” (Schein 1997), few geographers conduct research on the texts or discourses actually *manifested* in or on commemorative landscape features such as historical markers, monuments, and street names. Nearly all commemorative media found in memorial landscapes rely on text—language, words, and narratives—as visual and even verbal instruments that retell important historical information. These narratives typically give the appearance of being banal and politically neutral, but as Alderman (2012: 358) argues, words “are deeply implicated in the social construction and contestation of history.” Other scholars

also assert that language is deeply implicated in the power relations inherent over struggles to commemorate past events and claim public space (Schriffin 2001, Tyler-McGraw 2006).

Because historical markers like state highway markers or commemorative plaques tend to be visually less striking than some forms of commemoration, it is perhaps not surprising that geographers and other memory studies scholars have largely overlooked them. Alderman (2012) argues that the relatively plain appearance and frequent presence of historical markers sometimes lull people into believing that markers are ideologically innocent or somehow beyond being socially or politically situated within historical perspectives. However, he and other scholars counter this misconception in their research on the inherently socio-political nature of both public memory and the text used in and on commemorative devices. Legg (2005), for example, argues that public memory always simultaneously occurs with selective forgetting, and the processes by which narratives are selected to remember and forget are fundamentally social and political. Social and political power are also bound up in decisions over who has the agency to commemorate in the first place—be it the state, the general public, select historians, or historical societies (Doss 2010, Alderman and Inwood 2013, Cook and van Riemsdijk 2014).

One major motivating factor for scholars researching textual politics is the fact—as demonstrated in the introductory anecdote of Dylann Roof—that people acquire historical knowledge and perspective from the memorial landscape. Cook and Alderman (2015) argue that the inclusion of certain texts in the commemorative landscape can not only provide historical information to the public, but has the potential to evoke empathetic responses to

the past in those individuals who encounter the text.^{1.1} However, an emphasis on textual politics is also quick to note that many people often consume landscapes of memory uncritically, not questioning *what* and *whose* pasts are present/absent. Berlin (2004) found that a major point of conflict in the struggle to commemorate slavery concerns the use of language in determining how much (or little) to discuss slavery and how to portray enslaved communities and their owners. For example, many antebellum plantation tourism sites in the United States very unevenly narrate the history of slavery through the text and images used in their tours and marketing endeavors. The result has been largely the absence, invisibility, or lack of a full discussion of slavery on plantation tours and in advertisements like brochures and websites (Butler 2001, Eichstedt and Small 2002, Alderman and Modlin 2008, Modlin 2008, Buzinde 2010, Carter et al. 2014).

Further, Azaryahu and Foote (2008) demonstrate that a wide variety of narrative strategies are used to embed complex histories into the memorial landscape across spatial scales. They argue that spatial configurations of historical narratives—how these narratives are arranged and presented spatially— are equally as important to consider as the aesthetics, design, and chronological order used in the portrayal of an historical event. Spatial narratives can be as simple as a single marker (such as a state historical marker) or as complex as a variety of media formats presented over a large geographic space (take, for example, a battlefield or entire city). Hanna and Hodder (2014) argue that systematic commemoration of America's racial history from colonialism through slavery and the Civil War to Emancipation, Jim Crow, and the broader struggle for Civil Rights is needed through monuments, historical

^{1.1} In the case of their research on the *Stolpersteine* Holocaust memorial project, Cook and Alderman (2015) studied text including the names and fates of Holocaust victims embedded in sidewalks across Europe and various responses that the public had when encountering the memorial stones.

markers, performances, and even virtual tours. For example, using qualitative Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to perform content and discourse analysis of commemorative text found throughout the city of Fredericksburg, Virginia, Hanna and Hodder (2014) contend that the textual landscape is the ideal starting point for their work to determine how African American history is integrated into the broader historical narratives of Fredericksburg. Aided by the spatial analysis capabilities of a GIS, Hanna and Hodder (2014) find that the histories of slavery and emancipation are incredibly rare within the city's memorial landscape, despite the fact that many of the markers discussing those themes are located within highly visible and ("visitable") locations in Fredericksburg. Finally, while Hanna and Hodder's (2014) study is specific to the historic landscapes of Fredericksburg, their findings are strongly mirrored throughout many other southern landscapes of memory, including Alabama's historical markers.

Historical Responsibility

The second strand of literature I draw upon is that of historical responsibility, particularly as it pertains to the Southeastern United States. As recent research in geography, history, tourism studies, memory studies, and other related fields demonstrates, many important sites within the southern heritage tourism landscape tend to ignore or resist socially just forms of historical responsibility. For example, scholars have devoted much attention to the role of antebellum plantation tourism destinations—a dominant sector within southern heritage tourism—in largely suppressing African American history and the brutal realities of American chattel slavery. This may take the form of what Connerton (2008: 60) has called "forgetting as repressive erasure," the condemnation of historical events or people to obscurity or oblivion. In the South, selective "forgetting" or historical preservation and public

memory is strategic but also *deeply seated*. On the other hand, not all forms of cultural forgetting are necessarily so malignant as repressive erasures. Cobb (1993) points out that many white Southerners during the Civil Rights Movement were interested in pursuing “moderation” in approaches to the desegregation of schools, businesses, and public services over *economic concerns* rather than as issues of morality or responsibility. In the case of desegregation, Cobb (1993) uses Atlanta as an early model of a city “too busy to hate” and other Southern cities whose business and political elites claimed to still be “segregationists at heart” but nonetheless saw the writing on the economic wall: their cities could not easily attract northern industries to expand or relocate to the south if there were concerns over schools being closed rather than desegregate. Much as Cobb points to the power of economic reasoning in driving Southern leaders’ response to desegregation, economic decisions (whether accurate or moral) may factor into many Southern cities’ approaches to commemorating a painful history like slavery. In the remainder of this section, I outline a few telling examples of slavery’s discursive subservience to white history at plantation tourism sites from the much larger body of tourism literature before turning to examples of how historical responsibility could (and/or should) be addressed.

In their study of plantation tourism semiotics, Buzinde and Osagie (2011) use the lens of cultural citizenship to study the marginalization of African American history, particularly looking at the relative discursive exclusion of slavery’s heritage at plantation museums. They note (2011: 44, emphasis added) that the relative discursive dominance of white cultural citizenship (over, for example, that of the enslaved community) at many southern plantation tourism sites ultimately results in “a social engineering that celebrates dominant value systems while *marginalizing subaltern histories*.” And, as Modlin (2008) demonstrated in his research of

antebellum plantation museums in North Carolina, many plantations not only marginalize the history of slavery but also rely on a series of myths to deflect public attention away from slavery and discourage visitors from seeking more information about the enslaved. These examples, selected from a much larger literature on plantation tourism sites, usefully demonstrate what often results from a lack of attention to historical responsibility. In contrast to these sites, however, there also exist plantations and museums that present more historically accurate and inclusive information about slavery and its aftermath. Focusing on the “Deep South” states of Mississippi and Louisiana, for example, Cook (2015) reports on sites, including two plantations, that employ counter-narratives of slavery to present their histories in more socially just and responsible ways.

Griffin and Hargis (2012: 5) argue that the “southern past ... permeates the everyday lives and deaths of southerners today.” They point out that the U.S. South has much in common with newly democratizing nations, particularly after the major accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement. Griffin and Hargis (2012) argue that prior to the 1960s, most of the South was in no way a true democracy, but much like former dictatorships or authoritarian countries that transition to democratic rule, a number of legal and social changes have been brought about, often painfully, by the end of *de jure* Jim Crow laws and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. In their comparison, however, Griffin and Hargis (2012: 5) rightly point out that just because the contemporary “South” (a term that encompasses both southern states/institutions *and* southern people) has become “more equitable, more humane, more just, and more tolerant” than it was in 1965, it does not have carte blanche rights to forget its past. Instead, Griffin and Hargis point to the need for historical responsibility, particularly in the form of restorative justice and reconciliation

projects. While Griffin and Hargis (2012: 9, emphasis original) highlight that there exists no exact formula for reconciliation and historical responsibility, “each state, each locality, and each generation in the South will have to hew its own path toward redress and restitution, toward repair and redemption... [and] we have a responsibility to exact elemental justice for *all of us*, including our brothers and sisters across the color line.”

Tying historic responsibility to counter-narratives and counter-memory, Legg (2005: 181) argues that “subaltern” groups (i.e., non-dominant classes, races, castes, or nations) establish sites of counter-memory that provide “an alternative form of remembering and identity” and challenge dominant groups that write selective historical narratives. As seen in North Carolina (Alderman 2012) and in Alabama, powerful white elites have historically been the primary group responsible for historical marker programs that embed history into the cultural landscape. While such decision-making processes might seem to be relatively objective or transparent, Alderman (2012: 360) argues that the process does not happen in a vacuum:

In reality, judgments of historical significance are made in dynamic temporal and social contexts. Much more than innocent statements of historical fact, highway markers are culturally relative texts that both reflect and reinforce a certain world view that allows some social actors and groups to be seen and heard more than others.

Thus, as we begin to see, textual landscapes are not neutral purveyors of history; rather, they are inherently determined through political processes that play a key role in the construction of historical responsibility or irresponsibility in the American South, post-1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Methodology

I used content analysis and discourse analysis as the two main methods for this research. Supplementing these desk-bound methods, I photographed a small sample of markers during fieldwork in August 2014 that took me through Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In Alabama, I photographed markers that are part of the Alabama Historical Association's program and other historical markers, focusing primarily on Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, and Montgomery. Although photography is not frequently discussed in the literature in terms of its methodological value, geographers and scholars of tourism and memory assert that photography is an important "vehicle of memory" (Hoelscher 2008) and a useful tool to research the power of *gaze* in tourism (Crang 1997). Further, Rose (2004) argues that while photographs may seemingly appear to be trivial objects, they paradoxically also have the potential to evoke empathy and emotion. Much like a tourist, I used photography to selectively document many markers of importance to African American history, and the photographs included in this chapter are (1) representative of the historical time periods I analyze and (2) visually represent the AHA markers and other marker programs for the reader's benefit.

In terms of textual analysis, one common method used in study of historical markers is content analysis (see, for example, Butler 2001, Modlin 2008, Alderman 2012, and Hanna and Hodder 2014). Content analysis is a relatively simple method of counting the number of times particular words, themes, and people appear within a body of text. To obtain the full text database used on the AHA historical markers, I performed an Internet search for the phrase "Alabama historical markers." Upon discovering that two separate organizations coordinate and sponsor historical markers in Alabama, I decided to focus my content analysis

only on those created by the older Alabama Historical Association rather than those created by the newer Alabama Historical Commission (AHC). Preservationists use the AHC markers to indicate sites, buildings, and objects that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage, or the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register. The AHA markers are more in line with other state highway historical markers, such as those found in North Carolina, Tennessee and other states, and they memorialize significant events and people in addition to locations.

After narrowing down my study to the AHA markers, I compiled a document containing the text from all the historical markers listed on the AHA website because it was not searchable as an electronic database (Alabama Historical Association 2015b). The index of markers revealed that of the 67 counties in Alabama, 63 counties have at least one marker.^{1,2} Unlike North Carolina, which chose to limit their state highway historical markers to a very small amount of text (Alderman 2012), Alabama's historical marker program is less restrictive, and many markers contain very detailed historical accounts. After compiling the texts for each county, the document numbered just under 89,000 words. Because of the document's size, I deemed it impractical to do content analysis by hand, so I used Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Using NVivo11, I ran an automated content analysis (word frequency query) for the 1,000 most commonly used words (with a minimum of three characters to exclude single letters such as N, S, E, W used as abbreviations for the cardinal directions and common two-letter words). The resulting count using NVivo11 combines words with

^{1,2} Those counties without a marker include Cleburne, Geneva, Lamar, and Winston. Coosa County was the most recent to get its first marker in 2014, telling the history of the Socopato community and listing some of its notable citizens.

“stemmed” words such as plurals, possessives, and other verb tenses.^{1.3} The results of the automated content analysis provided interesting findings in and of themselves, as I will discuss in the following section, but they also informed the themes and keywords upon which I focused my discourse analysis.

I conducted my first content analysis of the marker texts in 2013. However, when I revisited the research in 2015, I found that the AHA website has been removed from the state government server to a private website, alabamahistory.net. Since most of the AHA markers created since the 1980s include the year the markers were created, I performed a second search for new markers in October 2015 and updated my database with information and text from 20 new markers from 2013 to 2014.^{1.4} I then re-ran the content analysis to include all the markers from the program’s beginning through 2014 and include only those results here. Reading the 20 newest markers’ text also revealed that they share much in common with my initial findings, but they also give new insights that I incorporate into my discourse analysis, discussed later.

Turning now to my discourse analysis methodology, I begin with Foucault’s (1980: 131) conceptualization that discourse is tightly woven into the fabric of all societies:

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

^{1.3} For example, the query for ‘slave’ returns a count of the number of times ‘slave’ and ‘slaves’ are found in the text.

^{1.4} Seven markers were created in 2013 and 13 were installed in 2014. No text for markers created in 2015 had been posted to the AHA’s website as of October 2015.

Using this definition of discourse, discourse analysis attempts to understand and uncover the mechanisms, power relationships, and ideologies that produce and reproduce shared ways of talking and thinking about the world (Waite 2010; Kopytowska 2012). Discourse analysis is a powerful method for revealing societal structures, power relationships, and identities (Dittmer 2010: 282). Waite (2010: 217) argues that discourse analysis is well established in geography as a method to critically analyze the ideas “used to make sense of the world within particular social and temporal contexts.” Powers (2007) shows that while there are many ways to conduct discourse analysis, all of its variants attempt to understand the effects that discursive power have on different groups of people without claiming to be generalizable outside of the given context. Finally, although discourse flows through many media, text and language operate as key vehicles for both discourse and discourse analysis, as demonstrated by the work of several geographers and memory studies scholars. Examples include Anderson’s (1991) study of historical racial discourses in Vancouver, Marshall’s (2004) study of the changing discourses of war memorials in Britain, Modlin’s (2008) examination of narratives told on historic plantation tours, Alderman’s (2012) analysis of North Carolina historical markers.

My research uses discourse analysis to investigate how three significant periods in African American and the United States’ history—slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement—are presented in ways that are just or unjust vis-à-vis what Dwyer and Jones (2000) have called the dominant white socio-spatial epistemology. The discourse analysis was informed by Price (2002) and Alderman (2012), who argue that state highway historical markers (in North Carolina) present a version of history dominated by events and people most significant to the white community. My research investigates if this pattern of

commemorative exclusion holds true in the AHA's historical markers and in what ways Alabama's memorial landscape may differ.

Delving deeper into the three historical periods of interest to this research, I define the period of 'slavery' as a continuous timeline from early colonization of the U.S. through the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution; I bookend 'Emancipation' from the time of Reconstruction through Jim Crow until the beginning of the 1950s; and finally, I use 'Civil Rights' and 'Civil Rights Movement' interchangeably to refer to the longer history of the Black Freedom Movement beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and continuing to the present.^{1.5} This represents an intentional challenge to the conventional textbook method of bookending the Civil Rights movement using key dates without critically recognizing the longer, ongoing struggle for civil rights. In light of the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement, this research reminds us, too, that *black history matters*.^{1.6}

Content analysis findings

From the content analysis query run with NVivo11, I found that most of the top occurring words were not necessarily surprising in light of past similar work (see Table 1.1^{1.7} for the 25 most used words). From this count, several common categories are readily apparent in the AHA's marker text. The first of these is the importance of religion and, in particular,

^{1.5} However, almost all references to Civil Rights history on the AHA markers generally use 1968, the year of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, as the end of the Civil Rights Movement.

^{1.6} The words of Manning Marable (2015: xv, emphasis added) are extremely relevant here: "For the Black masses to 'return to their own history,' we must begin by *rewriting that history*—but *not in the language, style, or outlook* of the system." If Marable is to be taken seriously, any rewriting of African American history should look beyond or outside of typically white-dominated (and whitewashed) techniques and approaches, which I would argue, include the roadside historical marker.

^{1.7} Note that all Tables and Figures in this dissertation are included in the Appendix, which may be found beginning on Page 166.

marking houses of worship (dominantly Protestant) of historical significance. Frequently occurring words in this category include *church*, *Baptist*, *Methodist*, *congregation(s)*, and *Presbyterian*. The importance of religion is consistent with Alderman's (2012) North Carolina study. General terms with civic or state implications—such as *Alabama*, *county*, *school(s)*, *state(s)*, *serving*, *houses*, and *city*—are used quite frequently, as are additional geographic terms such as *site*, *streets*, *creek* (which may refer to both the water feature and the Native American group), *road*, and *south*. Only two terms that are connected to time and history appear in the Top 25: *First* and *Year*. Other words in the Top 25 include two common male names (*John* and *William*), Alabama's capital city (*Montgomery*), and *war*.

Of greater importance are terms that refer to racial and ethnic groups. Interestingly, the term *Indian* and its plural and possessive forms are used on the historical markers 189 times—so frequently that they appear in the count of 25 most common words. With the exception of *Creek*—which may or may not refer to the ethnic group—*Indian* and its variants show up more than any other racial or ethnic term. Given that so many of Alabama's historical markers were placed before the current age of what has been termed by some as political correctness, it is not all that surprising that *Indian* shows up instead of *Native American*.^{1.8} In fact, only three signs use the term *Native American*, and these three signs have all been erected in recent years: in Tuscumbia in 2008 (Colbert County) and in Socopato (Coosa County) and Huntsville (Madison County) in 2014.

The next most frequent potential racial or ethnic term is *black(s)*—the 88th most used term, with 92 appearances—while *white(s)* is used 62 times. The term *African American* is used

^{1.8} It is also not uncommon to encounter the term *negro*, which is used a total of 16 times, instead of *Black* or *African American* on the older historical markers.

37 times and *Afro-American* only once (and almost entirely on signs created since the 1990s), while the continent of *Africa* is mentioned three times (in reference to the North African front and fighting there in World War II). Content analysis alone is not an insightful enough method to elucidate *why* or *how* these terms are used, but it is important to remember that both *white* and *black* may refer to the color of anything—not just a person’s skin pigmentation. It is also instructive to consider that white racial narratives have been socially constructed as **normative** throughout much of Alabama’s history, and therefore the term *white* may be used less frequently because it is considered to be the societal default or unquestioned norm.

Moving into the historical time periods under consideration, the term *slave* or *slaves* is used 48 times, while *slavery* only appears twice, *enslaved* is used on a single sign, and *bondage*, *chattel*, and *enslavement* are not used at all. (See Figure 1.1 for a map showing the county distribution of the word variations on *slave* found on the AHA markers). The infrequent references to slavery and related terms would seem to indicate wishes on the part of the Alabama Historical Association, its members, and the general public who propose the historical markers to largely avoid discussions of slavery’s more painful aspects or they may be indicative of how politically difficult it can be to find appropriate surrogates for the enslaved. Another example of how the African American historical experience is traditionally underrepresented throughout the markers’ text can be seen in the use of the term *plantation*. *Plantation* or *plantations* is invoked 31 times on 24 AHA historical markers, and only nine of these markers have any mention of slaves or African Americans. Of these nine, none of the markers give any indication of the hardships of slave life on Southern plantations.

Looking at the other time periods of interest in this research, *Emancipation* is used five times (though *abolition* is never referenced), and the phrase *civil rights* appears 19 times. The full

phrase *civil rights movement* occurs just six times and *freedom movement* is not used at all.

Interestingly, the phrase *civil rights* appears on signs in only four counties: once each in Bullock, Calhoun, and Madison counties, and 16 times in Montgomery. For comparison, *Confederacy* is used 28 times and *Confederate* appears 124 times across 37 counties (see Figure 1.2), while the phrase *Civil War* is found 79 times in the complete AHA marker text in 30 counties. As a spatial pattern, it is worth noting that the *Confederacy* is commemorated in more than half of all counties in Alabama (for comparison, *slavery* appears on markers in less than 15 percent of counties), and these markers are concentrated not just in Alabama's major cities (like Montgomery, Birmingham, Mobile, and Huntsville) but also counties with relatively small populations like Baldwin, Pickens, Dallas, Bullock, and Colbert. This would seem to indicate that despite the fact that Alabama was not the site of any major military battles during the Civil War, many individuals' dedication to the Confederacy and the "Lost Cause" is still a major factor in creating Alabama's commemorative landscape.

Finally, the content analysis on Alabama's historical markers supports the hypothesis of many memory scholars that the Civil War dominates the public discourse of memory in the U.S. The keyword *Civil War* is used 79 times, while other wars are mentioned far less often. These include the *Indian Wars* (24), *Spanish-American War* (9), *War of 1812* (16), *World War I* (13), *World War II* (17), *Korean War* (3), and *Vietnam War* (2). In light of the significance Alabamians place on Civil War and Confederate history in their efforts to research, request, pay for, and install AHA markers, it is worth noting that when taken together, *Civil War* and *Confederacy* referents clearly outrank the eras of Slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement, saying much about their relative importance within the state of Alabama. While at first blush the frequency of these mentions may seem like a mere numerical priority, what is so

striking about the frequency of *Civil War* and *Confederacy* mentions is that Alabama's public memory is so skewed toward white hegemonic narratives. Simply painting the AHA marker program's pallid commemoration of African American history as "numerical underrepresentation" is too easy an excuse. The silences found through this content analysis surrounding African American history shows that most of Alabama's memorial landscape tends to ignore or understate the realities of slavery and post-Emancipation African American history while foregrounding—if not outright romanticizing—the antebellum period and Civil War. Further, the disparate numerical and spatial patterns of commemorating white history vis-à-vis black history are reflective of other trends, such as the inconsistent historical preservation of sites important to African Americans.^{1.9} However, as I discuss below, there does exist the possibility for some optimism about the inclusivity of African American history in more recently created markers, and greater nuance can be teased out of a deeper analysis of the AHA markers that do address African American history, to which I turn next.

Discourse analysis findings

Slavery

Moving beyond numeric analysis, racial (in)justice in Alabama's memorial landscape can be more deeply analyzed using discourse analysis. In this section, I discuss the results of a "deeper reading" of historical markers that mention slavery, Emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Beginning with slavery, Alabama's historical markers present an incomplete version of the lives of African Americans in the U.S. South. The two most common spatial reference to *slaves* found on the AHA historical markers are indicators that churches included

^{1.9} Weyeneth (2005) has argued, for example, that racial segregation in the Jim Crow South led to the creation of a distinct architectural form between the 1880s and 1960s that has been largely ignored by academics and deemed undesirable and unworthy of preservation by historic preservation professionals.

slaves or former slaves among their members and markers at cemeteries where slaves were buried. This echoes McCutcheon's (2015, one of the interventions found in Nagel et al. 2015) reminder that African American churches should be understood as an historical institution not only relevant in the context of organizing during the Civil Rights Movement but also having roots as a private body separate from whites during slavery. Nine churches and four cemeteries have an AHA historical marker, but these markers say very little about the conditions of slavery or the lives of the enslaved. This amounts to very passive accounts of the lives, hardships, and contributions of enslaved Africans by simply presenting slaves numerically, perpetuating their objectification.

Somewhat surprisingly, seven markers (almost entirely established in the last decade) mention that some form of enslaved labor was used in the construction of a particular structure being memorialized. These include enslaved carpenters, bricklayers, and artisans at various plantations, canal diggers at the Gaineswood Plantation, and two enslaved bridge builders. This is indicative of how much of the former labor of and products created by the enslaved (what Marx (1992) would call "Dead Labor"^{1.10}) still operate and have value in contemporary society. Given how recently they were established, the markers focusing on enslaved labor indicate at least some degree of a shift in public recognition of slavery in Alabama. In addition, four relatively recent historical markers present biographical sketches of formerly enslaved people who went on to become successful businessmen, politicians, or educators. While this number fails to even come close to adequate representation for the multitude of former slaves who went on to achieve success, it does mark a starting point and

^{1.10} See also Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

improvement over the corpus of text found in older historical markers. These small instances of memorializing slavery are in line with Alderman and Campbell's (2008: 338) findings that sites of slave memory across the U.S. South are undergoing *symbolic excavation*, or "the unearthing of difficult and long suppressed (and repressed) historical narratives...through memory work, the construction and representation of the past." However, while these markers are a much-needed addition to Alabama's memorial landscape, they are still the product of relatively sanitized or whitewashed public memory that chooses to focus on the "exceptional slave" (one of the myths highlighted by Modlin (2008) as a common deflection tactic employed by plantation tourism operations) rather than slavery's more brutal historical facts.

Two markers in Montgomery, Alabama's capital, also stand out as particularly noteworthy for their discussion of slavery. Montgomery's historical marker memoryscape stands out from the rest of the state not only for its sheer number (as might be expected in the capital city), but also for its greater emphasis on African American history. The first marker of note related to slavery, entitled "A Nation Divided," takes steps to counter the oft-repeated Southern narrative on the causes of the Civil War by acknowledging that *slavery*—not merely states' rights—was a major factor leading up to the war. The second marker goes farther than any other to spell out the realities of slavery at the former Montgomery Slave Market, describing how slaves were sold at auction along with property and livestock (see Figure 1.3 for the full marker text).

Finally, in the body of text from the most recent (2013–2014) AHA markers, slavery continues to be a relatively marginalized portion of the state's public memory. Many of the trends observed in the content analysis continued to be seen in these 20 markers, with

churches and other civic structures like schools gaining a majority of the new markers. References to the Civil War also abound in the text, with multiple references to the Confederate States of America/the Confederacy. Two markers give much attention to the lives of former Confederate soldiers and another sign is dedicated to a Union Civil War encampment in Jackson County (the northeastern-most county in Alabama, east of Huntsville and southwest of Chattanooga, Tennessee). In contrast, slavery is only mentioned on a single marker, also in Jackson County. This marker tells the history of Averyville, a “freedmen’s community” established in 1865, but today Averyville is no longer a recognized community and the marker is located on Avery Street in Stevenson, Alabama. The back of the marker goes on to recount the history of a former enslaved man named William Council, Averyville School’s most famous student who went on to be instrumental in establishing the university that would eventually become Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University in Huntsville. This continues the pattern noted above of markers referring to slavery only in passing, choosing to focus instead on the many accomplishments of former slaves.

Emancipation

Turning to the next phase of my analysis, I use the term *Emancipation* to refer to the historical period lasting from the time of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation through Reconstruction to the early 1900s. Both as a time period and social concept, Emancipation is least represented on Alabama’s historical markers in terms of the number of markers, and anything resembling a detailed discussion of African American history during the post-Civil War period is largely absent from the landscape. This is not so surprising, however, in light of how quickly Emancipation and the Reconstruction era gave way to the birth of the Klan and white political backlash to Emancipation through the passage of Jim Crow laws and legalized

segregation all across the South (Du Bois 2013 [1935], Foner 2014). Three historical markers that commemorate events from this period discuss the creation of schools and universities for emancipated slaves and their descendants, including the Sheffield Colored School, Alabama A&M, Selma University, and Alabama State University. A marker created in 2005 commemorates the history of the city of Freetown from its creation by former slaves in 1867 to its population decline following World War II. Two other signs commemorate annual Emancipation Day celebrations, and seven signs reference the Reconstruction period running roughly from 1865 to 1877. Only four signs referencing Reconstruction make mention of events and people important to African American history: Antioch Baptist Church in Mount Meigs, which had both white and black members before and after Reconstruction; South Jackson Street in Montgomery, home to African American John W. Jones, state senator for Lowndes County during Reconstruction; Horace King, a former slave and expert bridge builder (See Figure 1.4); and Hunter's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, known as the "father of Negro education in Tuscaloosa" (See Figure 1.5).

In contrast to the finding that slavery continues to be referenced relatively infrequently in the 20 newest markers created by the AHA in 2013–2014, the Emancipation era—particularly Reconstruction—is a subject covered on several new markers. The first such marker, located in Madison County, displays the history of the "Buffalo Soldier" regiments made up of freed African Americans beginning in 1866. The marker explains how Native Americans on the U.S.'s Western Frontier gave the troops the Buffalo Soldier nickname and includes the history of the famous African American regiments fighting alongside Teddy Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. The other major Emancipation-era theme addressed in the newest markers is that of "freedmen" or early African American education efforts. New

markers in Averyville (in Jackson County, discussed above), Morgan County (a small, relatively rural county south of Huntsville), Pike County (south of Montgomery, home to the city of Troy and Troy University), and Randolph County (a large but relatively rural county on the Georgia border) discuss post-Civil War and early 20th century efforts to educate African Americans. Of these counties, all but Jackson County are relatively small in population (Morgan County is largest with 119,000 people as of the 2010 Census) and African Americans make up relatively high percentages of their populations.

Despite the contributions of these newest markers, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and related terms such as *freed*, *freedmen*, and *freedom* (used 14 times in the context of the end of slavery) make so slight an *overall* appearance in the Alabama Historical Association's body of historical marker text that it is worth speculating on a few reasons for why the Emancipation period is so marginalized. First, the Emancipation era is likely subject to many of the same forms of trivialization, romanticism, and ignorance as its historical predecessor chattel slavery, which scholars have been identifying and calling out for over a decade (Butler 2001, Eichstedt and Small 2002). As Baptist (2014) argues, historians from the late 19th century to the present have minimized the political and economic contributions that slavery made to the early development of the United States. Further, the history of slavery and African Americans from Emancipation to the Civil Rights Movement is often constrained to a single chapter in most elementary and secondary schools' history textbooks, leading to widespread ignorance of African Americans' lives, jobs, and living conditions. If any attention is given to the time from Emancipation to the early 1900s, historians, authors, and teachers alike tend to focus on select heroes and well-known figures such as Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells, and W.E.B. Du Bois. This is similar to what Lee et al. (1998) call the "heroes and holidays" approach to

teaching the Civil Rights Movement—an educational practice that focuses more on teaching basic facts of key Civil Rights events and figureheads at the expense of teaching anti-racism and multicultural values that were key to the movement. It is to the Civil Rights Movement that I now turn.

Civil Rights Movement

Several themes and patterns arose out of the discourse analysis of AHA markers focusing on Civil Rights. The first of these reiterated the content analysis finding that churches are key sites of memory in Alabama. Several markers mention that churches were key sites of organizing and resistance efforts during the Civil Rights Movement. The second pattern apparent after a “deep reading” of the historical markers related to the Civil Rights era is confirmation of the argument made by Alderman, Kingsbury, and Dwyer (2013: 171) that the “Movement’s popular image has congealed into a celebratory collection of names and dates, the sum of which is a vague, nearly mythic retelling.” By focusing almost exclusively on major events and figures of the Civil Rights Movement—the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the march from Selma to Montgomery, Rosa Parks (see Figure 1.6), and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—most of the AHA markers present a narrow understanding of the social complexity, geographic expanse, and everyday individuals’ personal involvement in the Movement. It is useful to consider the early AHA markers in light of Dwyer and Alderman’s (2008b) argument that there are two main ways of remembering the Civil Rights Movement: the “Won Cause” method of focusing prominently on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Southern integration during the well-defined 14-year period from 1954 to 1968 vs. the “One Goal, Many Movements” approach, which recognizes the role of everyday people and multiple organizations that contributed to the broader geographical and historical struggle. According

to these narrative frames, it is safe to say that the early AHA markers tend to fall within the “Won Cause” framework—or, again, what Lee et al. (1998) call the “heroes and holidays” approach to Civil Rights history—because they focus on King and his pastoral ministry at various churches, Rosa Parks, and the successes of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march.

However, as the AHA historical marker program has expanded over the last decade, it *has* started to shift away from the “Won Cause” framework to the “One Goal, Many Movements” method of teaching about the movement. Of the most recent historical markers about the Movement, one presents detailed and almost graphic information about mob violence against Freedom Riders in Anniston, Alabama, and several signs in Montgomery commemorate lesser-known black and white individuals who were active in the movement. These individuals include Georgia Gilmore, Juliette Hampton Morgan, Dr. Vernon Johns, the Honorable Rufus A. Lewis, Rev. M.C. Cleveland, and E.L. and Dorothy Posey (see Figure 1.7). While the newest 20 markers created in 2013–2014 do not refer directly to Civil Rights-related events, two of the signs built at historically black schools (discussed in the Emancipation section), do include the history of their closing because of federally mandated school integration. This important element of the Freedom Movement—mentioned on only four markers—was largely absent from the AHA marker text prior to 2013.

Changes to AHA Marker Program over Time

As I mentioned in the methodology section, not all of the markers listed in the Alabama Historical Association’s index include the date or year that they were created, thus it is not quite possible to conduct a longitudinal or chronological analysis of the entire marker program. However, enough of the markers do include a date, particularly beginning in the

1980s, that when paired with the institutional history of the AHA can yield some insights into how and why the program has changed over time. According to Claire Wilson's (2011) overview of the AHA's history, several Birmingham businessmen began the organization in 1947 for the purpose of better promoting the state's history. Although initially comprising mostly men, the early organization did include some women in prominent roles, including Marie Bankhead Owen (head of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, or ADAH) and Maud McLure Kelly, another ADAH employee who was elected secretary-treasurer for the new association. The early association was a fairly balanced collaboration between professional historians at Alabama's many universities and amateurs with an interest in local history. Combined with the fact that the early organization entirely comprised white membership, other aspects of Wilson's (2011) institutional history hint at reasons why the early marker program was overwhelmingly dominated by its focus on white history told largely through white socio-political lenses. For example, according to Wilson (2011), the first annual AHA meeting in 1948 emphasized Alabama's early statehood (an era dominated by the wealthy planter class) and included tours of the First White House of the Confederacy in Montgomery. Wilson (2011) also mentions that while women were included in the association from the beginning, many board members opposed the appointment of a local historian, Margaret Pace Farmer, to serve as the first female president of the board.

The typical hallmarks of a conservative Southern region continued beyond merely opposing female leadership, however, up to the AHA resisting the integration of African American historians and scholars until 1973. It was not until Auburn history professor Allen Jones pushed the organization to integrate in 1972 that it finally considered membership to African Americans. Despite initially rejecting the membership of Robert D. Reid, one of

Jones's African American colleagues at Auburn, the board relented in 1973 after Jones threatened a lawsuit that would have generated bad publicity.

Other Marker Programs in Alabama

As mentioned above, the Alabama Historical Association is not the only organization with a historical marker program in the state of Alabama. While photographing AHA markers during fieldwork in Montgomery, I noticed and photographed a few markers that also addressed difficult histories including two markers detailing the city's slave trade and another describing the police murder (and subsequent cover-up and fallout) of an African American man named Bernard Whitehurst in 1975 (see Figures 1.8 and 1.9). The Alabama Historical Commission's Black Heritage Council and the City of Montgomery, respectively, were responsible for establishing these markers. These marker programs, while not fully studied or analyzed here, are worth discussing because they represent other organizations outside of the AHA that have shown a willingness to emphasize people, events, and places of importance to African American communities' historical experiences. The Alabama Historical Commission's marker program, for example, only began in 1975 and focuses primarily on properties and individuals with connections to the National Register of Historic Places or the Alabama Register of Landmark and Heritage. Because of its political mandate, the AHC's marker program is smaller in scope and total number of markers than the AHA's program. Further, based on the facts that the AHC was founded after the Civil Rights Movement's gains and its Black Heritage Council (established in 1984) *only* commemorates places with historical significance to African Americans, it is not a stretch to suggest that the AHC's marker program pays relatively greater attention to African American history than the AHA. In line with the findings of Alderman (2000, 2002, 2003) on the contentious politics surrounding the

commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Alabama's multiple marker programs, their institutional histories, and the emphasis of their markers' texts all demonstrate how politically contentious it is to represent African American history in the United States.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented research on the commemoration of African American history as found in the Alabama Historical Association's marker program. Revisiting my objectives for this research, I have conducted a selective, critical reading of AHA historical markers and identified the relative presence and absence of African American history across the periods of slavery, emancipation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Further, using discourse analysis, I have found that African American history is discussed selectively in the AHA marker program and that the commemorative landscape of African American history improved in recent years but still has a long way to go to be on an equal footing with the dominant white Southern narratives of history. I argue that a more socially just version of this memorial landscape could be accomplished if the Alabama Historical Association and other historical marker creators devoted more conscious attention to the history of Alabama's African Americans, from slavery and emancipation to the Civil Rights Movement and the broader freedom struggle that continues even into the present. Through the interventions of individuals and local groups who research, propose, and ultimately pay for the markers, the memory of some aspects of Alabama's racialized past—particularly the Civil Rights Movement—has been inscribed in the landscape in a more comprehensive way for present and future generations. Viewed through the lens of historical responsibility (Griffin and Hargis 2012), the recent increase in Alabama's historical markers that openly and frankly

address slavery and other historical events important to African Americans represent a remarkable challenge to the typically white-dominated control of the commemorative landscape.

Still, there is much work to be done. A quick Internet search for other historical events under the umbrella of the Civil Rights Movement alone revealed that many key events are still missing from Alabama's historical marker landscape. Absent from this memoryscape are: any mention of lynching,^{1.11} the formation of the early Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, or the rich history of the Tuskegee Institute (aside from one marker about a famous World War II fighter pilot). All of these absent time periods and key events share the commonalities of being under-taught sections of African American history that many Americans would prefer to forget or whitewash. Further, my own research presented here only begins to delve into issues of social justice and textual politics in Alabama's memorial landscape, and there are inherent limitations in this research because of the reliance on content and discourse analysis as my primary methods. Future plans for this research are to expand the analysis into other "Deep South" states—particularly Mississippi and Louisiana—to evaluate the textual politics of these former slave states' historical marker landscape, as well as expand the methodology to include qualitative interviews of key players in each state's historic marker program(s) to better understand the political decision-making processes behind these markers. I also plan to study how the material and ideological concept of the plantation has been discussed across different southern state's historical marker programs and examine how the textual politics of these historical markers has changed over time.

^{1.11} According to statistics from the Tuskegee Institute Archives (found on University of Missouri–Kansas City School of Law 2013), Alabama had the fifth highest number of lynchings in the period 1882-1968, with 347 total individuals killed.

At a time when it seems that so many fights for social justice causes are being waged across the U.S. South,^{1,12} one could be forgiven for (mistakenly, in my opinion) thinking that historical markers are a trivial part of these social justice causes. However, as I have argued in here, words and language matter—just as black lives and black history matter. Although historiographers remind us that any retelling of history is necessarily *selective* (White 1973), critical historical geographers and other scholars (e.g., Alderman 2010, Alderman 2012, Alderman and Inwood 2013, Buzinde and Osagie 2011, Hanna and Hodder 2014) argue that the censure or willful forgetfulness of slavery, Jim Crow, and other racially discriminatory projects throughout U.S. history continue to have negative repercussions on efforts to rectify and reverse racial discrimination in the present.

^{1,12} I am thinking here, for example, of the conflicts mentioned in this chapter's introduction over Confederate symbols but also of the Alabama state government's announcement on 30 September 2015 of plans to close nearly half of all its counties' Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) offices. Civil Rights activists have argued that the closures amount to a violation of the Voting Rights Act because the state has a restrictive identification requirement to vote. By passing a law that requires DMV-issued identification such as a driver's license and then shuttering DMV offices in the poorest, most rural counties where African Americans make up high percentages of the population, state officials have effectively disenfranchised eligible black voters, despite claiming this was not their intent (Carasik 2015). In response to widespread criticisms, Alabama Governor Robert Bentley announced the DMV offices would reopen—but only one day each month for the foreseeable future.

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CHAPTER II
CLASSROOM AS MEMORY WORKSPACE: THE EDUCATIONAL
AND EMPATHETIC POTENTIALS OF *TWELVE YEARS A*
SLAVE AND ASK A SLAVE

This article was first-authored by the student with Dr. Derek Alderman as second author. Thus, it is written in first person plural throughout. The text included in this dissertation is based on a version of the article currently under review for the edited volume *Teaching Difficult History Through Film* edited by Jeremy Stoddard, Alan Marcus, and David Hicks.

Abstract

Following the lead of educational scholar John Wills, we advocate for a critical pedagogy that transforms classrooms into a “workspace” for “critically examining and complicating collective memory and privileged traditions of remembering.” In this chapter, we outline a pedagogical practice using filmic representations such as *12 Years a Slave* and the web comedy series *Ask a Slave* to teach about historical–geographical realities of plantation slavery and challenge a tradition of ignoring, trivializing, or romanticizing the struggles of enslaved communities. Both authors have experience using the Academy-award-winning film and the online humor series in higher education settings. We draw upon our experiences in the classroom as geographers of the African American experience to discuss how using both media portrayals of slavery can help students come to a more nuanced and responsible understanding of a historically difficult topic. We find through our pedagogical praxis that using both *12 Years* and *Ask a Slave* enable educators to help students de-stabilize white-centric versions of history that tend to marginalize or write out the enslaved. In this chapter, we focus principally on the use of film to challenge the ‘mammy’ stereotype so frequently ascribed to enslaved women. Ultimately, we find that filmic representations have far-reaching educational potential for challenging various audiences’ perceived conceptions and lack of understandings about the racist and sexist horrors of the U.S. slavery system. We also suggest that *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave* should be investigated for their empathetic potential or the ability to help students to connect emotionally with historical actors, recognizing, of course, that historical empathy is a heavily debated concept in educational circles and some critical race theorists question its political efficacy. Together with other filmic representations of slavery released over the last few years, we are encouraged by the increased willingness of major film companies and lesser known writers, actors, and producers to address slavery in a way that demonstrates how fundamental the inhumane system was to the United States’ political and economic foundations. Collectively, these media challenge racially charged (and sometimes racist-inspired) narratives of slaves as a ubiquitous group without agency, personality, or humanity.

“Film makes it real—it isn’t a myth, it’s a reality. And with that comes one’s own response, and with that comes empathy, and with that comes personal understanding.”
~~Steve McQueen, director of *12 Years a Slave*

Introduction

In this chapter, we outline a pedagogical framework and practice for using filmic representations to teach about historical realities of plantation slavery and challenge a tradition of ignoring, trivializing, or romanticizing the struggles of enslaved communities. We examine the film *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen 2013) and online comedy series *Ask a Slave* (Dungey 2013) as part of the newest chapter in a long history of slavery counter-narratives that challenge what is often a “whitewashed,” sanitized repetition of the U.S.’s past. These filmic counter-narratives draw attention to chattel slavery’s complexity and brutality in their own unique ways, using different representational strategies ranging from the power of violence to humor. Collectively, these media challenge racially charged (and sometimes racist-inspired) narratives of slaves as a ubiquitous group without agency, personality, or humanity. Both authors have experience using the Academy-award-winning film and the online humor series in higher education settings, and we draw upon our classroom experiences as geographers of the African American experience to suggest a pedagogical praxis incorporating film to help students come to a more nuanced understanding of slavery. We find that engaging students with difficult histories and geographies can transform the classroom into a *memory workspace* for “critically examining and complicating collective memory and privileged traditions of remembering” (Wills 2006: 128). We see the usefulness of utilizing the classroom as memory workspace at the college level but equally applicable to suitably mature high school classes such as Advanced Placement® (AP) Human Geography or American History. Ultimately, we believe that using film to teach about slavery can better prepare students to be analytically

minded in their everyday encounters with cultural and historical landscapes and—drawing upon the quote from Steve McQueen above—culturally sensitive, empathetic citizens.

Over the last few years, we have incorporated *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave* into our pedagogical praxis to engage with historical geographies of slavery, specifically our intellectual and political goal of placing, and making central, critical representations of African enslavement within contemporary public understandings of the antebellum plantation landscape. We envision expanding this to include other films to present students with many different perspectives on slavery. As we present these perspectives on slavery, we help students work through a number of binaries that de-stabilize white-centric versions of American history that have tended to marginalize the enslaved. These binaries include: violent vs. humorous depictions; male vs. female perspectives; “Deep South” vs. East Coast geographical settings; antebellum vs. colonial time periods; actual historical narratives (found in *12 Years*) vs. satirical fiction (the premise for *Ask a Slave*); and, finally, the depiction of the ‘faithful slave’ in all its various guises, including the imagery of the desexualized ‘mammy’ character vs. portrayals of the enslaved community as possessing agency and intellect. In her groundbreaking book *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, McElya (2007: 4) argues that although the mammy figure—the stereotyped nanny or basic housekeeper figure found throughout much Southern fiction, lore, and pro-“Lost Cause” mythology—bears “little resemblance to actual enslaved women ... she is the most visible character in the myth of the faithful slave.” McElya goes on to explain that mammy figures were a key part of pro-slavery southerners’ reaction to the publication of slave narratives by former slaves and abolitionists because mammies supposedly demonstrated that slavery was benign, necessary as part of Southern paternalism, and *appreciated* by the enslaved. Mammies

were also “useful” in early, pro-slavery fiction to contrast black and white women’s womanhood (McElya 2007: 7). The mammy archetype is presented as desexualized (usually older women of a “wide girth”), having sharp maternal instincts and “down home” common sense despite little to no formal education. When considered alongside the supposedly “pure image” of the lithe white mistress, pro-slavery authors used the mammy in faithful slave narratives to counter abolitionists’ accusations of slavery involving “sexual depravity and the rape and concubinage of black women by white men” (McElya 2007: 8). The mammy figure has been reproduced in just about every possible medium, from the “Aunt Jemima” trademark to salt and peppershakers to perhaps the most famous examples in film such as Jennie Lee (a white actress in blackface) in D.W. Griffith’s (1915) *The Birth of a Nation* and Hattie McDaniel’s Academy Award-winning portrayal in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1939).

Rather than explicate how each binary could be examined using *12 Years* and *Ask a Slave*, we focus principally on the use of film to challenge this faithful slave ‘mammy’ stereotype. The expected educational outcomes of working through difficult topic are: (1) students will gain nuanced knowledge about the history of slavery (for example, that slavery differed across geographical settings and in different historical periods); (2) students will be equipped to question why there has been a lack of education on slavery in the classroom and at antebellum plantation tourism sites; (3) that students better understand the multiple systems of oppression foundational to slavery, including racism, patriarchy, and sexism; and (4) students will advance their own capacities to engage in historical empathy. We theoretically ground our pedagogy in literature from critical education studies, geographies of memory, and critical race theory.

In this chapter, we first outline the relevant literature and give a brief description of *12 Years* and *Ask a Slave* for readers who may be unfamiliar with them. Next, we begin to explain our pedagogical framework by looking at ways to incorporate *Ask a Slave* and *12 Years* into the classroom. Then, we share our ideas on sample lessons for using these two media to challenge the ‘mammy’ stereotype as a classroom memory workspace. Finally, we conclude with thoughts on how film and educators can play a role in challenging racism and the widespread ignorance of slavery.

Toward an anti-racist pedagogy

Critical Education Studies

As noted above, our pedagogical approach to teaching difficult histories and geographies is inspired by and in response to the work of distinguished education scholar John S. Wills. Wills is noteworthy for his research on how schools—particularly, in Wills (2005), elementary schools—act as institutional sites that promote particular versions of history through various acts of remembrance and forgetting. In particular, Wills (2005) examines curricula and classroom approaches used by two second-grade teachers to teach the annual U.S. holiday celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday and how observances of “MLK Day” (as many people often colloquially call it) are occasions to commemorate many historical events, people, and ideas. Wills notes that classrooms are key spaces of *mnemonic socialization*: the creation and maintenance of social memory. Importantly, he argues that teachers—beginning at the earliest levels of formal education—promote certain historical narratives at the expense of others. Even in the face of their second grade students’ desires and attempts to bring in outside knowledge to better understand MLK’s life, the teachers in Wills’ study went to great lengths to represent King by using selective narratives found in

three illustrated books in a way that *exclusively* fit their school's theme of peaceful conflict resolution. "[T]his provided an interpretive framework with which to represent King as a man who understood that social change could be achieved when people worked together to resolve conflict peacefully" (Wills 2005: 124), rather than, as Wills suggests, a framework that could have addressed why whites carried out violence and racial discrimination against African Americans in the first place. Wills also found that students drew upon everyday cultural resources including film in their formation of social memory regarding King's legacy. This has important implications for bringing film into the classroom where it can be used to either promote or critique different commemorative narratives, as we discuss further in our memory workspace using *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave*.

Wills' (2005) research echoes earlier work by Leib (1998) that also addresses bringing difficult or controversial topics into the classroom. As Leib (1998: 230) argues, "It is not necessarily wrong to make students feel uncomfortable. By making students uncomfortable we challenge them to look at the world around them in new ways." In his undergraduate and graduate classes, Leib used the controversy surrounding debates over flying and displaying the Confederate battle flag in southern states (at that point in his career as an assistant professor at Florida State University) to teach the cultural and political geographic topic of iconography. To address the risks of teaching controversial topic, Leib (1998) acknowledged the potential for discussions to either invigorate or disrupt his classrooms through students' impassioned responses. Although Leib (1998: 230) examines several strategies for how to approach teaching about controversial issues, he ultimately concludes that there is "no perfect solution" for teaching every issue. This is important to bear in mind when teaching about the U.S.

chattel slavery system as well, because students will have different levels of interest in and emotional responses to slavery.

Another major thread of critical education literature that we draw upon is the relatively recent body of research on educators' role in creating and developing students' ability to engage in empathy. Different academic disciplines approach "empathy" with somewhat varied definitions, but we refer to and draw upon the notion of *historical empathy*, which distinguishes between empathy and sympathy. Moyn (2006), in his argument that much historical research confuses the two, clarifies empathy as being more internalized than sympathy, which is more akin to compassion. Empathy requires identification with other people's conditions and being able to engage in historical thinking to see how past peoples perceived society, formed opinions, and acted upon their values and beliefs (Barton 2006). Sympathy, in contrast, involves emotions such as compassion and the desire to aid someone rather than identify with their perspectives (Moyn 2006). Yilmaz (2007: 331) adds that empathy is also a skill students can develop to "re-enact the thought of a historical agent in one's mind."

According to Brooks (2009), elementary and secondary education social studies teachers have taken an intense interest in working to develop students' capacity for historical empathy over the last few decades. In her review of both theoretical and empirical literature on historical empathy, Brooks concurs that there has been little consensus on the definition and use of the term "empathy," and she also finds that there were many questions regarding empathy yet to be addressed in the literature. These gaps include studies on what capacity students—Brooks suggests K-12 students, but we would add college students as well—have in confronting historical empathy, what hinders them from demonstrating empathy, and how teachers determine pedagogical practices to promote empathetic development. Noting,

“without controversy, there is no democracy,” Hess (2011: 69) says that educators must not shy away from introducing controversial and difficult historical topics in social, ideological, religious, and historical realms into the classroom. In her research on teachers who incorporate controversial issues, Hess notes that she has observed students improve interpersonal skills and increase tolerance of other viewpoints, especially in classrooms where teachers establish a climate of respect for all students. In narrowing down what students must develop to engage in historical empathy, Yilmaz (2007) says that empathy is quite demanding: students must know many historical facts, be able to access and analyze historical sources, balance the demands of imaginative thinking and critical investigation of material, suspend their own worldviews, and then examine and (ideally) *appreciate* past peoples’ historical perspectives in an intelligent fashion.

Bridging the literatures of pedagogy, empathy, slavery, and memory, Arnold-de Semine (2012) analyzes the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, UK, and its use of “moving” images (an apt double meaning for both the medium of film and people’s affective response). Arnold-de Semine describes the museum’s large-scale video installations that depict (1) the Middle Passage, including violent and graphic depictions of life on a slave ship; (2) video “testimony” from an enslaved woman (portrayed by an actor in costume) narrating her experiences on a plantation in the Americas; and (3) interviews with academics, professional experts on slavery, and workers who endured and survived modern-day enslavement around the world. Arnold-de Semine (2012: 23) ties museums’ use of film *qua* empathetic resource to the contemporary function of “memorial museums ... designated with the role of society’s conscience... [and] assigned the function to provide a controlled and safe environment in which potentially all members of society can expose themselves to past events that are difficult

to remember.” Arnold-de Semine, drawing upon Landsberg’s (2004) work on “prosthetic” memory, notes that museums’ use of film—usually survivor testimonies—is often employed to make visitors encounter suffering that they themselves did not actually encounter (and thus form “prosthetic” memories). Arnold-de Semine problematizes video installations that try to evoke empathy, noting the propensity of film to turn viewers’ gaze into an unsettling voyeurism that degrades the experiences of the victims. Arnold-de Semine (2012: 35, emphasis added) also calls attention to the fact that museum films typically present fragments of a fuller narrative (“literally *raw* material,” as she puts it) rather than presenting viewers with the knowledge needed to process what they see. Taking Arnold-de Semine’s critiques into consideration—and recognizing that using film in the classroom has its strengths and weaknesses—we designed the pedagogical plan developed in this chapter in such a way as to present students with the information and tools necessary to process and critically examine *Ask a Slave* and *12 Years a Slave* rather than simply include them in lectures for emotive or “shock” value.

Geographies of Memory

As the second component of our approach to incorporating film into the classroom, the geographies of memory literature reminds us that it is important to teach our students that slavery not only had a history but also a geography. Geographers have taken an interest in studying the commemoration and memorialization of historic events since the “cultural turn” in the 1970s, and they study public memory from many angles. Johnson and Pratt (2009: 453) argue that memory is “an inherently geographical activity: places store and evoke personal and collective memories, ... and memories shape imaginative geographies and material geographies of home, neighbourhood, city, nation, and empire.” Much research on public memory

(sometimes also called social memory) addresses material outcomes of commemorative practices, the growth of the heritage industry, and common responses to commemorative landscapes of violence and trauma (e.g., Lowenthal 1996; Foote 2003; Marschall 2012; Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci 2012). Many geographers have taken an interest in commemorative practices—the *actions* and *place-making processes* that lead to the construction of monuments, memorials, and other physical commemorative forms—and the political contestations that nearly always surround public memory processes (Alderman 2002; Dwyer 2002; Forest, Johnson, and Till 2004; Inwood 2009; Alderman 2015). Still other scholars have focused on questions of semiotics and iconography of monuments (Harvey 1979, Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998) and on authenticity and the ways in which geography shapes people’s perceptions of a site’s historical authenticity (DeLyser 1999, King 2006). More recently, geographers have studied power and agency aspects of public memory, for example studying state-sponsored memorial districts (Till 2005) or individuals’ agency to shape memorial landscapes (Cook and van Riemsdijk 2014). More recent work by Till (2012) reminds us that memory is *work* and often difficult. We agree with Till’s (2012: 7, emphasis added) findings that difficult histories are painful to commemorate, but “to make repressed stories more tangible... groups and individuals may establish places of memory at historic sites of cultural trauma to *reclaim national pasts and imagine more just futures*.” However, in light of McDowell and Braniff’s (2014) observations that some commemorative actions can actually amount to *symbolic violence* in situations of conflict—effectively hindering peace or reconciliation processes—we recognize that social memories of difficult histories must be approached carefully and responsibly, particularly in the classroom.

Critical Race Theory

The third strand of literature informing our pedagogical strategy comes from Critical Race Theory (CRT). Although it began in the 1970s in law and critical legal studies, CRT has long been incorporated into a number of academic disciplines whose scholars not only study but also *work to transform* relationships among and between race, power, and liberal concepts such as equality theory, rationalism, and even legal reasoning. CRT also incorporates feminist concepts, most notably that forms of domination—including but not limited to patriarchy and racism—largely hinge upon invisible patterns, habits, and power relationships (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Frederickson (2002) reminds us that racism not only comprises overt hostilities and negative actions against an “Other,” but also often includes the more brutal *antipathy* of one group toward another. Although one might initially expect Critical Race scholars to be adamant in promoting increased empathy, in many ways the reverse is actually true. Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 28), for example, argue that a major fallacy surrounds the belief that an increased sense of empathy will lead to improved race relations or interpersonal understanding, and this “empathic fallacy” occurs whenever people think that a narrative can be changed simply offering a “better” one and relying on “the reader’s or listener’s empathy [to] quickly and reliably take over. Unfortunately, however, empathy is in shorter supply than we think.” Applied to our pedagogy, Delgado and Stefancic’s theory might lead one to believe that there is no point in using film in the classroom to teach difficult histories and geographies. Although we agree with Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) ultimate point about the empathic fallacy—that *solidarity* with oppressed groups is more impactful in the long term—we do still find value in empathy, particularly if working through and teaching about empathetic concepts can lead students to have greater empathetic “supply” than Delgado and

Stefancic find. Further, we believe that solidarity with the experiences of the enslaved is only strengthened if it begins with an empathetic ability to identify with or imagine the experiences of others.

Beyond our consideration of the empathic fallacy, we also draw upon the CRT concepts of revisionist history and the importance of narrative analysis. Revisionist history, one of the earliest themes in Critical Race scholarship, began with Bell's (1979) analysis of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Bell found the results of *Brown*, namely the striking down of segregated schools, to be a product of converging self-interests of elite whites—eager to ‘win hearts and minds’ in the developing world during the Cold War—with the civil rights demands of African Americans in the 1950s. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 20) summarize, “Revisionist history reexamines America’s historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities’ experiences.” Although our work falls outside of *legal* historical revisionism, we find much value in, and indeed draw inspiration from, reviewing U.S history with an eye toward challenging the comfortable historiographies of racism and slavery including the “mammy” stereotype we address in this chapter.

The last CRT concept that we draw heavily upon is the importance of narratives and storytelling. The premise behind CRT scholars’ emphasis on narratives is that any given society’s racial structures make it difficult for the dominant racial group to understand the lived and felt experiences of racial groups— nonwhites, in the American context (Delgado 1989). The ultimate goal, then, is to use narratives and storytelling to “help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 41). Stories can also give voice to voiceless, suppressed minorities and call

attention to or name discriminatory practices, thus helping people to dismantle those practices. We find narratives and storytelling— as they pertain to the filmic representations of slavery in complete fiction (*Ask a Slave*) and based on reality (*12 Years*)—to be extremely useful in our praxis. In the next section, we summarize *Ask a Slave* and *12 Years a Slave* and place them in context of the broader history of film about slavery.

Multi-filmic approach to slavery education

The media we chose to use in this chapter, *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave*, come fairly close on the heels of *Lincoln* (Spielberg 2012), a film that prioritizes slavery through its focus on Lincoln's efforts to pass the 13th Amendment, and *Django Unchained* (Tarantino 2012), which deals fictitiously with more violent and bloody aspects of slavery and racism. With *Lincoln* and *Django* and the two media we address, the period from 2012 to 2013 could be seen as turning a new page in the history of filmic representations of slavery. Of all these films, it has been the powerful drama and achievements of *12 Years a Slave*—including winning Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress (by Lupita Nyong'o), and Best Adapted Screenplay among nine total nominations at the 2014 Academy Awards—that have brought slavery back to the national consciousness in a dramatic fashion. According to online box-office reporting service Box Office Mojo (2015), *12 Years a Slave* cost \$20 million to produce and grossed approximately \$188 million at the box office, though nearly 70 percent of its gross sales came from foreign (non-U.S.) markets, a statistic very telling of the U.S. political environment. The United Nations hailed *12 Years a Slave* and director Steve McQueen as groundbreaking, screening the film as a part of its 2014 commemorative activities on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

12 Years is a somber filmic portrayal of the life of Solomon Northup, based on Northup's autobiographical accounts of his kidnapping in Washington, D.C., and 12 years of labor as a slave in antebellum Louisiana. While slavery has been presented to the American public before in media representations through miniseries like *Roots* (Margulies 1977) and less publicized foreign films like *Sankofa* (Gerima 1993) and *El Otro Francisco* (Giral 1974, produced in Cuba), feature films have rarely talked *about* slavery, though *Glory* (Zwick 1989) and *Amistad* (Spielberg 1997) are notable exceptions. Steve McQueen noted in a panel discussion before his film screening at the United Nations in 2014 that he counted only about 20 films (ever) that have addressed American chattel slavery, not counting films that talk *around* slavery like *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1939). The power of a blockbuster film like *12 Years a Slave* comes through its ability to challenge many myths and narratives that prevail about slavery, such as those parroted by many plantation museums. Many scholars have researched and written extensively about how these myths work to symbolically annihilate or marginalize the enslaved from the plantation (Butler 2001; Eichstedt and Small 2002; Modlin 2008; Alderman and Campbell 2008; Carter, Butler, and Alderman 2014; Hanna 2015; Potter 2015). By presenting historical accounts based on Northup's autobiography—with some Hollywood embellishment—to American and international audiences, *12 Years a Slave* counters a number of myths identified by these scholars. These include beliefs that slavery was only important *vis-à-vis* the Civil War, that it was rare (or did not exist at all) in the Northern U.S., that slavery occurred primarily in rural geographic settings, and that little is known about the enslaved—or conversely, that history points to enslaved “servants” being well treated or considered as family.

In contrast to *12 Years*, the online humor video series *Ask a Slave* is written, directed, and produced by up-and-coming actress Azie Dungey, who worked throughout most of 2010 at Mount Vernon as an interpretive guide portraying a house slave for Martha Washington. Dungey channels this character into “Lizzie Mae” in the show, responding to and critiquing actual questions and comments that Mount Vernon visitors posed to her on tours. The series includes two seasons with six episodes each and a “Christmas Special,” with a total running time just under 57 minutes. Although *Ask a Slave* has not experienced the same degree of fame or widespread consumption as *12 Years* (consider that as of November 2015, the first episode was just shy of 780,000 views), it addresses slavery in unconventional, humorous ways and in short installments (average episode length is 4.5 minutes), making the series relatively easy to incorporate into the classroom. As an online video series and accompanying website, *Ask a Slave* challenges the ignorance expressed by many plantation visitors using humor, sarcasm, and satire. Further, it presents scholars with a challenge to take up Buzinde’s (2010) call for analysis of media forms not typically associated with the plantation. Acting her experiences out in an online humor series provides Dungey with an outlet to respond in a way she would not be able to while “in character” at Mount Vernon.

Our analysis of actual visitors’ comments and questions to Dungey during her work at Mount Vernon and incorporated into *Ask a Slave* revealed three main categories of ignorance and injustice: (1) freedom of choice for slaves on plantations, (2) historical/geographical inaccuracy or confusion, and (3) the kind master/faithful slave trope. The category of visitors falsely thinking slaves had much freedom on the plantation occurs most frequently. Visitor questions in this category include:

“What’s your favorite part of the plantation?”

“Where do slave children go to school?”
“Why not just leave to go to Massachusetts and go to school?” (Lizzie Mae responds,
“How am I going to get to Massachusetts? Sprout wings and fly?”)
“What do you use to make your skin look so good?”
“Do you play chess?”

These questions trivialize slaves’ lived experiences and seem to result from a whitewashed education about the harsh realities of chattel slavery. The second category focuses on inaccuracies and confusion over the historical period, reflecting poorly on visitors’ knowledge of American history and geography. Questions in this category include:

“What if Mary Washington wants a cup of tea in the middle of the night?” (Response: “Well, I don’t know any *Mary* Washington, but *Martha* Washington...”)
“Why don’t you take the Underground Railroad?”
“What does George Washington think of Abraham Lincoln freeing all his slaves?” (“I don’t know an Abraham Lincoln, but he better not try to free another man’s slaves unless he’s tryin’ to get shot in the head.”)

The third category of insulting questions and comments comes from a common motif among whites that slave owners and masters were generally kind and gentle toward slaves, and slaves in return were faithful and dependent upon their owners. These questions and comments include:

“How did you get to be the *housemaid* (note the terminology) for such a distinguished founding father?” (“I responded to the ad in the newspaper...”)
“Didn’t Washington free his slaves after he died?”
“I bet the Washingtons are really nice to you—they seem really nice.” (“They always give me a biscuit on my birthday...”)
“If you really think about it honestly, slavery isn’t *that* bad.” (Lizzie Mae starts cursing in response.)

Dungey challenges these ignorances through her skillful acting and brilliant writing skills, employing a number of humor and narrative techniques to answer questions in such a way as to point out their absurdity, which she would never have been allowed to do in

character at Mount Vernon. She relies heavily upon sarcasm and satire to make her points. For example, take again the question of how she came to be the Washington's housemaid:

Lizzie Mae: Did I read the advertisement in the newspaper? Why *yes*.
[Sarcasm] It said, "WANTED: One house maid. No pay. Preferably mulatto, saucy with breedin' hips. Must work 18 hours a day, seven days a week, no holidays. [Fake excitement] But, you get to wear a pretty dress, and if you're lucky, you just might carry some famous white man's bastard child!" [Satire and exaggeration] So you better believe I read that, and I ran right over and said, "Sign me up!"

Dungey also has a great sense of comedic timing, choosing to answer some questions in short, snippy phrases that pack a quick explanatory punch while answering others in a series of back-and-forth questions with actors portraying the visitors for added emphasis on certain topics. Humor seems to be a natural fit for the way in which Dungey builds her counter-narrative to many Americans' understanding of slavery, though using humor has many advantages and disadvantages. Dungey (n.d.) states in her online biography that her initial foray into acting out historical black women in the D.C. area happened at a time of significant racial tension in the U.S., primarily surrounding Barack Obama's first presidential term. By choosing to produce high quality videos with humor, Dungey is able to diffuse some of that tension while still making a coherent argument about the state of race relations and history education in the U.S. Dungey is also able to vent frustration from her time at Mount Vernon in a productive way—challenging and reflecting on what has and has not changed between the 18th and 21st centuries in American race relations. The biggest potential disadvantage stems from some people's beliefs that humor should not make light of difficult or traumatic situations. This argument is frequently raised in response to Holocaust and Third Reich humor, for example, and the belief usually rests upon critics' sincere desires to set some topics

apart as sacred and therefore “untouchable” for comedic value. Further, humor may alienate some audience members, and potential exists for episodes to make some viewers angry—for example, at the way *Ask a Slave* depicts plantation tourists as naïve or uneducated.

Memory workspace: Challenging the “mammy” figure using film

In this section, we present a sample lesson plan for engaging with these filmic representations of slavery in a classroom memory workspace to teach the difficult histories and geographies of slavery, working to challenge the “faithful slave” narrative and its dominant figure, the mammy. We present here an approach to teaching a weeklong unit on historical geographies of slavery at the college level (approximately three hours of instruction time). The ideas are based on our experiences utilizing *Ask a Slave* and *12 Years a Slave* in classes including introductory, large-lecture geography classes, advanced undergrad courses like Popular Culture of the U.S. and Regional Geography of the U.S. South, and graduate-level seminars. We envision the material outlined here finding a home in more advanced undergraduate classes, but it could be suitably adapted to use in advanced high school/introductory college classes or shifted to the graduate level (e.g., by assigning additional readings).

Challenging the “mammy” figure by using *Ask a Slave* may seem like a fairly clear connection: “Lizzie Mae”—played by the strong, smart, witty Azie Dungey—easily challenges notions of enslaved women as docile, loving caretakers for their white owners. *12 Years a Slave*, on the other hand, might seem to some to be a stretch for this analysis, given that the film’s main protagonist is Chiwetel Ejiofor’s “Solomon.” However, when one considers the portrayal of enslaved women in *12 Years*—most notably Lupita N’yongo’s Academy Award-

winning performance of “Patsey,” but also Adepero Oduye’s “Eliza” and Alfre Woodard’s “Harriet”—the film pays great attention to not just giving an accurate but a more complex and politically and emotionally conflicted portrayal of enslaved women. In the rest of this section, we outline our memory workspace (consisting of 50-minute instructional periods across three days) using film to teach about slavery.

Monday

Bearing in mind the advice from the critical pedagogy literature (Yilmaz 2007), we recommend starting the unit on slavery by providing some knowledge of slavery’s historical and geographic context, defining key concepts such as racism, patriarchy, and sexism (if not previously addressed in the course), and introducing some primary and secondary sources before engaging in deeper study. This could take the form of a 30-minute introductory lecture on the Transatlantic Slave Trade or particular elements of the American chattel slavery system and should introduce students to primary sources such as Solomon Northup’s autobiography, other slave narratives such as *Confessions of Nat Turner* (Styron 1967) and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Douglass 1845), and secondary sources, particularly McElya (2007).^{2.1} Using primary and secondary sources is also important in light of Arnold-de Semine’s (2012) critique of Hollywood blockbuster films’ role as a dominant form of commemoration at the expense of other archival media like oral testimony, letters, and diaries. We recommend assigning reading sections for the class from *12 Years a Slave*^{2.2} and McElya (2007) drawing from her introduction on the “faithful slave” myth and/or chapters 1, 3, and 4, which deal with the

^{2.1} For a basic primer on teaching slavery in the U.S. from a critical perspective, please contact the authors or see Franklin (2010).

^{2.2} Available in its entirety for free online at docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html.

“Aunt Jemima” figure, the mammy’s motherly role, and attempts to commemorate mammies through various monument projects.

For the remainder of class, the teacher should introduce the culmination of the memory workspace: an in-class town-hall-style discussion to be held Friday. Break the class into small groups,^{2,3} and assign each group a character or historical figure whose viewpoint the students will represent during Friday’s discussion. The exact list of characters to assign is up to instructors, but we recommend including several of the following: President Washington and Lizzie Mae from *Ask a Slave*; Solomon, Patsey, Mr. and Mrs. Epps from *12 Years*; and possibly other enslaved characters or historical figures with differing perspectives such as Solomon’s family or characters played by Benedict Cumberbatch (slave owner William Ford) or Brad Pitt (a Canadian abolitionist named Bass). Allow students to use the remaining time to formulate ideas on who their character is, how they relate to other characters, and what positions they take on various issues pertaining to slavery, particularly the role of women and the mammy. Advise students that they will have additional time on Wednesday to develop their group’s position but may need to meet outside of class to be fully prepared.

Wednesday

Building upon Monday’s introductory lecture, Wednesday will be used to delve deeper into the power of filmic representations of slavery. We recommend starting by showing three episodes from the first season of *Ask a Slave*: Episode 1, which introduces Lizzie Mae and the show’s format; Episode 3, which features some of the most outrageous questions in the series;

^{2,3} To better work toward the educational outcomes, especially working on empathy skills and being able to identify with different viewpoints, instructors will likely want to *determine these groups in advance* to ensure that groups are diverse/not self-segregated.

and Episode 6, which features interactions between Lizzie Mae and her son, Jimmy.^{2.4} These clips show many characteristics of enslaved women—some true, some exaggerated for comedic effect—that stand in stark contrast to the mammy figure. Foremost among these is that Lizzie Mae—despite being the “personal house maid” like a mammy would have been—clearly bears no love or affection for President and Lady Washington or their children (she refers to them as “brats”). Azie Dungey *qua* Lizzie Mae is also young (she claims to be 28, making her “116 in slave years!”), smart and eloquent (as opposed to the clichéd folksy or uneducated mammy), and attractive (as opposed to desexualized or exaggeratedly/overtly large in size). Her interactions with her own son in Episode 6 reveal her love, through at times exasperated, for her own children (again, over that of the master’s family), their relationship with indentured servants, and that Jimmy, age 9, has been taught (*by whom* is unspecified) to read despite the fact that he is not supposed to be educated.

To contrast *Ask a Slave* with selections from *12 Years a Slave*, we recommend beginning with the scene in which Mr. Ford buys Solomon and Eliza, an enslaved woman who submitted to her former master’s sexual advances to try to lead a better life for her and her children but nonetheless end up for sale after the master’s death (clip runs from the 29:32 mark through 32:06). This scene shows Eliza being separated from her children during the auction, which might be difficult for some students to watch but reiterates the emotional power of film. Follow up this scene with the interaction between Eliza and Solomon, who is called Platt during his enslavement, in which Eliza continues to mourn the loss of her children (play from the 40:00 mark through 41:50). Conclude the section on Eliza with the flashback

^{2.4} Episodes are available at www.askaslave.com.

scene (begins with a voiceover at 44:00 through 45:04) in which Eliza tells Solomon about her relatively privileged life as her previous master's mistress. These scenes provide a stark contrast to the mammy figure and their relationship to white male owners, giving an example of coercive situations in which many enslaved women were forced to choose between the ever-present risk of rape as a field or house slave vs. being "willing" mistresses for their owners to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle. To contrast the Eliza's experiences as a black mistress, we next turn to the character of Patsey, whom Solomon meets after being given by Mr. Ford to Mr. Epps to repay a debt. The first scene shows Patsey still in her relative innocence as the plantation's most valuable cotton picker, when Epps calls her "the queen of the fields" and turns his lecherous attention toward her (55:42 to 59:34). Immediately thereafter, the film continues to introduce Epps' character as he drunkenly wakes his slaves in the middle of the night and brings them into the Big House to dance for his entertainment while a disturbed Mrs. Epps watches. It is during this scene (through 1:01:46) that Master Epps's lust for Patsey become too much for Mrs. Epps to bear. She reacts by throwing a heavy glass cognac bottle directly into Patsey's face before commanding Epps to sell Patsey and threatening to leave if he does not. Epps warns his wife not to set herself up against Patsey and states that he would rid himself of Mrs. Epps before he would sell Patsey.

Epps relationship with Patsey becomes increasingly violent and sexual throughout the rest of the film to the point where Patsey asks Solomon to take her life "out of kindness." However, these first two scenes should give students an idea of Patsey's suffering and also provide another perspective on enslaved women that contrasts the characters of Eliza and Mistress Harriet Shaw (a former slave who becomes the "freed" wife of a plantation owner near the Epps, but nevertheless wishes worse than "the curse of the Pharaohs ... [on] the

plantation class”) and Lizzie Mae from *Ask a Slave*. Patsey represents one of the most common lived experiences that enslaved women faced as a constant target for the master’s (or his sons’ or hired white workers’) affections. To reiterate McElya (2007), much of the Southern literature that contributed to the faithful slave narrative and mammy figure came in response to abolitionists’ accusations of the plantation class’s sexual depravity. And, as Livesey (2014: n.p.) argues, Patsey’s situation is among the worst horrors of domestic life under slavery: “the master sexually assaults her and the white mistress, instead of sympathising with her plight, subjects her to psychological and physical abuse.”

After showing these clips (a total of about 25 minutes) and spending some time in open conversation to help students process how the clips tie into their assigned readings, have students to get back into their groups for any remaining time. Instruct students to discuss how the various clips impact their ideas from Monday on how to represent their character, and be sure to mingle through the classroom to address groups’ questions and concerns.

Friday

The entire class on Friday will be used for the culminating town hall. To assist students know what the expectations will be for the discussion, we recommend teachers establish and provide students a rubric in advance. Based on the critical pedagogy literature discussed above, we believe a rubric for a workspace like this should include evaluations for content knowledge, role portrayal, and effectiveness as a discussion participant, including not engaging in personal attacks and being able to disagree *while* thinking rather than *without* thinking in a reactionary way. Although the exact nature of the town hall is ultimately up to teachers, we believe that students will learn to engage with memory, narrative, and empathy as they introduce their character and their perspectives on slavery, interact with other groups’

positions while still “in character,” and finally come together after breaking character to continue to discuss what they learned from the week’s memory workspace. Teachers will likely want to leave time available at the end to recap the week’s findings and educational outcomes, and we also suggest that teachers consider giving a short written assignment for students to “debrief” over the weekend while the experience is fresh on their minds. This assignment could ask students to list key characteristics or draw contrasts between the mammy stereotype and the women of the two filmic representations and should ask students to reflect on how the non-mammy characters make them feel about and identify with the enslaved differently than before the lesson.

Conclusion: Using film and critical pedagogy to combat racism

Wacquant (2002) argues that U.S. white elites have historically employed *many* institutions to define and control African American lives. The first of these was slavery, followed by Jim Crow laws designed to enforce segregation in the U.S. South and its contemporary in Northern industrial cities, ghettoization of African Americans who moved north during the Great Migration. In both systems, slavery’s legacies and impacts were manifold, most notably in the continued extraction of labor from, social ostracizing of, and open acceptance of violence toward black bodies (Wacquant 2002). Jim Crow, seen as a modified extension of slavery, took on a social potency all its own as former slaves remained largely suppressed by whites who used the legal system and extra-judicial violence against anyone who dared to challenge the social order. The impacts of segregation, although *legally* struck down during the Civil Rights Movement, are still felt today as blacks are overwhelmingly more likely than whites to face poverty, insecurity of housing tenure, lack

access to quality housing, and be incarcerated (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, Wacquant 2002, Gilmore 2007). This demonstrates the overt power that white privilege and patriarchy still carry today and says much about how potent slavery still is to modern racism and sexism. As Wacquant (2002: 8) summarizes:

The highly particular conception of ‘race’ that America has invented, virtually unique in the world for its rigidity and consequentiality, is a direct outcome of the momentous collision between slavery and democracy as modes of organization of social life *after* bondage had been established as the major form of labour conscription...

Although a weeklong workspace on a difficult topic like slavery can be taxing on teachers in terms of time and energy invested and the potential for great emotional toll, we find that critical pedagogy like the one outlined here can help students in and beyond the classroom. First, students can gain a desperately needed critical perspective on chattel slavery, which, as Wacquant (2002) and other scholars referenced in this chapter not-so-subtly claim, is strongly tied to white supremacy and racism prevalent in modern America. Second, students can improve their capacity for historical empathy by observing and actively engaging with the perspectives of historical figures, thus working to counter the arguments of Brooks (2009) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) that people have less capacity for empathy than scholars tend to think. Finally, despite the risk of sounding overly optimistic, we believe that educational experiences like those outlined here have great potential to teach students to be better-engaged members of society and equip them to fight racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

In conclusion, we look forward to continuing to contribute to discussions on how film, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and geographies of memory can be used to fight ignorance and harmful stereotypes. We welcome your feedback and critiques of the memory

workspace praxis outlined in this chapter, and we ultimately hope that our ideas are useful in your own classrooms.

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CHAPTER III
DEAD LABOR: FETISHIZING CHATTEL SLAVERY IN
CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN PLANTATION TOURISM

Abstract

In this chapter, I employ a Marxist analysis of the historical southern plantation and contemporary plantation tourism to advance a critical–historical geography of the United States’ chattel slavery system. The framework of critical–historical geography draws heavily upon the burgeoning field of geographies of memory and bears in mind that historical geographic scholarship is always as much about how people in the present remember, celebrate, ignore, commodify, reify, or obliterate the past as it is about the *actual* histories themselves. The foundations for my theoretical reading of the plantation draw upon Marx’s concepts of dead labor, alienation and commodity fetishism, and primitive accumulation. This paper also ties Marx’s theories with contemporary scholars who engage with theories of dead labor and recent research on the productive nature of violence, particularly under capitalism. By drawing these bodies of literature together and grounding them through the empirical example of the historical plantation and contemporary plantation tourism, this chapter works to advance counter narratives of slavery’s historical geographies and continued importance to the development of U.S. history, culture, and society. This chapter demonstrates how the historical chattel slavery system is still a productive force across the landscape, which has major implications in light of recent renewed calls for reparations and for the ways that people think about race in American society. By examining economic and social relations that make possible and sustain the contemporary plantation tourism industry, this chapter works toward a research agenda that advances more socially just and theoretically nuanced discussions of slavery’s historical geographies and importance to the foundation of the United States’ political economy and culture.

“America begins in Black plunder and White democracy, two features that are not contradictory but complementary.”

Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014: n.p.)

Introduction

In this chapter, I employ a Marxist analysis of the historical southern plantation system and the contemporary plantation tourism industry to advance a critical–historical geography of the United States’ chattel slavery system. The framework of critical–historical geography draws heavily upon the field of geographies of memory and emphasizes that historical geographic scholarship should focus as much on how people in the present remember, celebrate, ignore, commodify, reify, or obliterate the past as it does on *actual* histories themselves. Historical geographers have largely avoided Marxist analysis in their studies and critiques of the

plantation and U.S. slavery system, despite the increasing prevalence of Marxist scholarship in the geographies of memory literature. Foundational to my theoretical reading of the plantation are Marx's concepts of dead labor, alienation, commodity fetishism, and primitive accumulation and the work of contemporary scholars who have advanced theories of dead labor and the productive nature of violence, particularly under capitalism. By drawing this literature together and grounding it in empirical examples of historical plantations and contemporary plantation tourism, I advance new counter narratives of slavery's historical geographies and continued importance to the development of U.S. history, culture, and society. Further, my analysis opens up new avenues for research by advocating for explicitly Marxist views of the chattel slavery system and theorizing new trajectories for understanding slavery's continual effects on race relations in American society vis-à-vis violence against black bodies, the devaluing of black lives under capitalism, and recent calls to reconsider reparations as a response to slavery's outcomes (Coates 2014).

Over the last two decades, geographers have increasingly taken interest in studying how the U.S. tends to (mis)remember or marginalize slavery relative to other historical themes, particularly at former plantations. Antebellum plantation homes have frequently been converted into tourist sites throughout the Southeast, especially in "Deep South" states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, and many current plantation owners offer a range of services such as lodging (often as boutique bed and breakfasts), on-site weddings, restaurants, and "Big House" tours. Many scholars have shown that contemporary antebellum plantations do not spend much time, money, or effort to advance discussions of slavery with visitors (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Modlin 2008; Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011; Carter, Butler, and Alderman 2014; Hanna 2015; Alderman, Butler, and Hanna 2015) or in brochures,

travel guides, and online promotions (Butler 2001; Alderman and Modlin 2008; Buzinde 2010). Although public memory of chattel slavery has seen an increased presence across the cultural landscape in recent decades (for example, in local history museums and former slave markets), Eichstedt and Small (2002) found that most contemporary plantation tourism operations tend to promote a set of dominant narratives that disproportionately emphasize the antebellum white planter class; their history, material culture, and wealth; and architecture and landscaping. Slavery, if mentioned at all, is often relegated to optional tours “beyond the Big House” (Small 2013), or sometimes whitewashed through the use of terms like “servant” when slaves’ activities are referenced on tours. This omission of slavery from the plantation memoryscape effectively creates a mythical, romanticized version of history that selectively portrays Southern history as exclusively *white* history (Hoelscher 2003; Modlin 2008).

However, this is not to suggest that all refurbished plantation sites in the “Deep South” employ whitewashed narratives. Other researchers have looked at sites that focus more on *counter narratives* that give prominence to the brutal nature of the American chattel slavery system and challenge the myths that surround plantations and slavery. For example, Alderman (2010) observed increasing interest among African Americans to establish new counter memory sites throughout the South that recognize and honor various enslaved communities’ contributions to the development of United States history, culture, and political economy.

Also, as Carter, Butler, and Alderman (2014) and Cook (2015) have found, some plantations in Louisiana including Frogmore, Laura, and Whitney Plantations are doing more to integrate the history, culture, identity, and even names of the enslaved into their spatial, performative, and textual narratives, though each site takes quite different approaches to their relative incorporation of slavery. In the case of Whitney Plantation, for example, owner John

Cummings poured approximately \$8 million of his own money to convert the site into a museum dedicated to slavery, rather than imitate the business models of other nearby plantation tourism sites (Amsden 2015; Cook 2015).

This chapter's overarching goal is to examine the historical plantation system and the economic and social relations that make possible and sustain the contemporary plantation tourism industry. Entwining Marx's theories with contemporary literature and empirical research, I advance discussions of more socially just and theoretically nuanced understandings of the historical geographies of slavery and its importance to the foundation of the United States' political economy—themes missing even from existing critical studies of plantation tourism. At the outset, however, it is also important to note that while this chapter relies heavily on Marx's theories and historical geography literature, my interests are not merely in advancing either political economy or geography. The words of Fields and Fields (2012: 11, emphasis original) are quite appropriate here: "Racist concepts do considerable work in political and economic life; *but*, if they were merely an appendage of politics and economics, without intimate roots in other phases of life, their persuasiveness would accordingly diminish." Thus, I am also greatly interested in the social justice implications of how this research speaks to contemporary arenas of racism, race relations, and reparations in the U.S. My approach to social justice is informed by the work of many scholars, especially geographers who have called for critical geographies of memory and antiracist geographic research (Chouinard 1994; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Pulido 2000; Tyner and Houston 2000; Inwood & Bonds 2013). As Chouinard (1994: 36) summarizes:

At the end of the day, ... if we cannot reasonably claim that our research contributes to better understandings of the causes and consequences of social

power and oppression, however partial and limited those may be, it is time to hang up our hats (at least the radical ones) and go home.

In this chapter, I first explicate the literature I use in my analysis of the historical plantation and plantation tourism: Marx's concepts of alienation, commodity fetishism, primitive accumulation and dead labor, and recent research on dead labor and the productivity of violence. Next, I draw on historical research that outlines the large role slavery played in primitive accumulation and capitalism's beginnings in the U.S. I then briefly outline the methodology and empirical sites that inform my research on the contemporary plantation tourism industry before turning to an analysis of this industry through the lens of Marx's theoretical concepts.

Marxist theories, dead labor, and violence

In this section, I outline the relevant literature that informs my engagement with chattel slavery and the plantation's importance to the development of the United States' political economy and to the Southeast's modern tourism industry. First, I give a brief overview of commodity fetishism and alienation of social relations. Next, I look at the role of primitive accumulation, paying particular attention to the destruction of and violence toward native peoples and African slaves through the chattel slavery system. Finally, I turn to Marx's theories—and contemporary geographers' application and further theorization—of dead labor and the productive capacity of violence.

Fetishism and Alienation: Social Relations and the Plantation

As mentioned in the introduction, very little geographic or memory studies scholarship has engaged in Marxist critiques of either the historical plantation or present-day plantation tourism, though such approaches to theorizing slavery have been common in history and

other fields, beginning with Eugene Genovese (1965, 1974) and a recent resurgence of interest found, for example, in Baptist (2014), Ott (2014), and Rothman (2015). Coming closest to such an analysis in geography are Carter, Butler, and Dwyer (2011), who use Marx's concept of fetishism in their description of how contemporary plantation tourism hides the social relations between slaves who actually built the plantations and tourists who consume these spaces today. However, their efforts to "defetishize" the plantation employ a Critical Race Theory-centric reliance on narrative/counter narrative to deconstruct plantation museums' master narratives rather than engaging with historical-materialist analysis.

To bring commodity fetishism and alienation into a truly Marxist analysis of the plantation, an overview of these concepts is first in order. Marx (1992) explains commodity fetishism early on in *Capital Vol. 1* using the inherent contradiction of the commodity having a use-value and, in capitalist societies, being the "material bearers" of exchange-value. The exchange-value of a commodity—how much of one commodity such as money can be gotten in exchange for a given quantity of a second commodity—is determined by the amount of socially necessary human labor time embodied in the commodity's production. However, when commodities are made available on the market, the socially necessary human labor time that went into their production is hidden by the representation of the commodities' exchange-value. Further, the consumer does not go into the market, say a supermarket as Harvey (2010: 18–19) suggests, to purchase a commodity for its further exchange-value but rather for its *use-value*, for example as food and ultimately nourishment needed for social reproduction. As Marx (1992: 131) says, "nothing can be a value without being an object of utility."

These inherent contradictions in the system of commodity exchange form the basis of Marx's (1992: 165) concept of fetishism: "the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the

products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material...relations arising out of this.” In other words, as we experience commodities as exchange- and use-values, we are *alienated* from the actual value—socially necessary labor carried out by another person. Thus, the social relationship between consumer and producer is masked—and in complex capitalist systems *impossible to know*. Instead, we interact with commodities as an economic relationship between things (money exchanged for a commodity) rather than between people. Harvey (2010: 119) describes alienation using an apt metaphor of digging a ditch:

I can describe somebody digging a ditch in all its physical detail, including its relation to past labor embodied in the shovel, but I can’t tell from this description whether this is some nutty aristocrat who does it just for exercise, whether it’s a peasant, whether it’s a slave, whether it’s a wage laborer or a convict. So there is a way to look at the labor process...without actually knowing anything whatsoever about the social relations in which it is embedded...

Commodity fetishism and alienation are key components of plantation tourism’s financial successes. Because current plantation owners and operators are able to sell their commodities (tourism and all of its various components) on the market to consumers without having to address the dead labor and primitive accumulation that went into the plantation’s construction and success, they are able to reap a profit from fetishized *Tara*-esque master narratives.

Primitive Accumulation

Turning next to primitive accumulation—the early genesis for capitalism in various countries and contexts—Marx does not broach this topic until near the end of *Capital Vol. 1*. After spending hundreds of pages taking capitalism at face value as theorized by the top political economists of his time and deconstructing their arguments to demonstrate how capitalism *actually* operated, Marx finally turns to an examination of how English capitalism

began: through primitive accumulation. Luxemburg (2003), Harvey (2010), and neo-Marxist scholars have since argued that global capitalism did not have a singular historical moment of primitive accumulation, but rather primitive accumulation (or, as Harvey calls it, “accumulation by dispossession”) is cyclically necessary for capitalism to take off in countries all around the world, and indeed *resuscitate* capitalist economies after periods of crisis. Marx showed that the commonly held belief that capitalism in England sprung up in a peaceful transition from feudalism is *entirely false*; rather, it occurred by force: the violent dispossession of an entire class of people of the commons and their own means of production by the English state’s direct actions. Primitive accumulation’s ultimate outcomes, across its many historical–geographic forms and situations, according to Harvey (2010: 305) are to dispossess people of their assets, rights, and means of production.

Applicable to the United States’ case, Marx (1992: 915, 925–926), writing in the 1860s, commented:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised (sic) the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. ... If money, according to Augier, “comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek,” capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

In the U.S., early moments of primitive accumulation took place through settler colonialism and the chattel slavery system. And, Wolfe (2006: 387, emphasis added) has argued that “the question of *genocide* is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life—or, at

least, land is necessary for life.”^{3.1} Understanding slavery and settler colonialism carried out in the United States through a Marxist lens as periods of primitive accumulation adds a further damning argument against those who capitalize on plantation tourism—the lynchpin of genocide in early U.S. history—an argument to which I will return in the analysis.

Dead Labor and the Productivity of Violence

In concluding my overview of Marxist theory, I turn to dead labor and the productivity of violence. Don Mitchell (1996, 2000, 2003, 2007, Kirsch and Mitchell 2004) has been at the forefront of geographers theorizing applications of Marx’s concept of dead labor. Mitchell begins with Marx’s argument that commodities and capital can metaphorically be thought of as dead labor but turns this idea on its head by asking if we as geographers might benefit from understanding this in “*less-than-metaphorical* terms” (2000: 761, emphasis added). Mitchell makes reference to one of Marx’s most vivid metaphors from *Capital Vol. 1*: “Capital is dead labour [sic] which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (1992: 342).

By directing scholars to think through how commodity production quite often involves labor that is maimed, assaulted, or even killed, Mitchell (2000: 764) builds upon Marx’s metaphor to argue that violence is integral to the production of surplus value under capitalism:

What we need to do...is see that violence of various sorts is a foundation of the economy. On the one hand, “globalization” in all its guises from the slave trade to the US military’s well-known willingness to occupy whole countries to protect our vital interest in bananas, has always proceeded through and been built by violence against labor.

^{3.1} Wolfe (2006: 387) does note, however, it is possible to go too far in conflating genocide and settler colonialism: “Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal.”

Marx (1992) takes commodities to be metaphorically dead labor because they are the materialized, concretized product of human labor—the socially necessary labor time that gives commodities an exchange-value. When, under capitalism, people confront the world of commodities that they help produce, they do not confront commodities as the product of other humans’ labor (as social relations) but, again, as fetishized economic relations of commodity exchange:

[The] role played by past labour [sic] in mediating its useful properties has been extinguished. A machine which is not active in the labor process is useless... Living labour must seize upon these things, *awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values*. Bathed in the fire of labour, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy for the performance of the functions appropriate to their concept and to their vocation in the process, they are indeed consumed, but to some purpose, as elements in the formation of new use-values, new products, which are capable of entering into individual consumption (Marx 1992: 289-290, emphasis added).

Kirsch and Mitchell (2004: 698) use Marx’s example to demonstrate that a factory *qua* commodity containing the dead labor of engineers, mechanists, etc. can only “come to life” when it is set in motion by the living labor—i.e. factory workers—who daily use the product of dead labor to produce new commodities, thus keeping the wheels of capitalism in motion. Extending this argument to contemporary tourism at antebellum plantations—and bearing in mind Mitchell’s (2000) call to consider *dead labor* beyond its metaphorical origins—plantations, like factories, are the product of dead labor: the labor of the many slaves who built each plantation for their masters throughout the early stages of American history (cf. Franklin 2010). In fact, many plantations bear the *physical imprint* of dead labor in their very walls in the form of slaves’ thumbprints, preserved across history in handmade bricks. Like the factory, dead labor contained within the walls of plantation sites is brought to life and made

productive once again through contemporary owners and workers who use the plantation to sell new products of tourism.

Kirsch and Mitchell (2004) further explain that Marx rejected the notion of machinery in the factory itself being capable of producing commodities' value. Instead, "the value contained in the machine—itsself transformed from previous intellectual, manual, and mechanical labors—is transferred, bit by bit, to the products and preserved in them for the market" (Kirsch and Mitchell 2004: 698–699). Applying this theory back to plantation tourism, it is not the physical, material plantation itself that excretes back to its contemporary owners the value built into it by dead (slave) labor. Rather, being set in motion by workers operating the sites (the managers, staff, docents, etc.) the value concretized into the physical plantation itself is transferred into tourism products being sold. As money changes hands and profits accumulate, the discrete transference of value from dead slave labor to contemporary plantation owners' pockets is a process that fetishizes the social relations between tourists and the enslaved laborers that built the plantation. Thus, as we start to see, a Marxist reading of the plantation tourism industry raises important questions about how that industry appropriates and fetishizes the plantation under the guise of promoting historical narratives of the wealthy white planter class and images of a marginalized slave contribution rather than chattel slavery's harsh realities, largely in the name of profit.

Another body of literature pertinent to the argument that slavery was fundamentally important to the United States' political economy and highly interconnected with dead labor is recent theorization on the productivity of violence. Here, the work of Tyner and others (Tyner 2014a; Tyner 2014b; Tyner and Inwood 2014; Tyner, Inwood, and Alderman 2014; Tyner, Sirik, and Henkin 2014; Springer 2013) on geographies of violence is quite instructive.

Tyner and Inwood's (2014: 774) dialectical approach to violence argues that violence is not a thing but a political *process*: "Violence is not pre-given; violence is neither transhistorical nor transgeographical; it has no pre-social existence but comes into being through political practice." Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) theory that any given mode of production shapes space and social relations, Tyner and Inwood (2014) find that the dominant mode of production (specifically capitalism, across most of the world today) shapes what any given society regards as "violence." Tyner, Sirik, and Henkin (2014) add that any subsequent *memorialization* of violence is also inherently a socio-spatial, relational, and political process. Tyner (2014a), using the empirical example of the Khmer Rouge-orchestrated genocide in Cambodia, argues that violence—in all its conceptual distinctions and dialectical relations (direct, structural, administrative, law-making, and law-preserving)—can be viewed as fundamental to primitive accumulation *and* the administrative governance of modern society. Importantly, Tyner (2014a: 73) asserts that the violence of the Cambodian genocide did not simply comprise "instances of evil" or result from "living in a terror-state" but, rather, were the byproduct of a bureaucratic power structure that, although ostensibly modeled after Communism, nonetheless sought to gain surplus value by converting most of the population into laborers in a form of proto-capitalism. As Tyner (2014a: 76) succinctly states, "Violence does not simply happen; it is administered." In Khmer Rouge-controlled Cambodia, those in power reduced laborers to their use-value as productive bodies, with unproductive bodies seen as surplus to be eliminated. Returning to the historical example of chattel slavery with Tyner and Inwood (2014) and Tyner (2014a) in mind, under the then-dominant mode of production—a time of primitive accumulation sustaining colonial control and, later, early-American capitalism—white, male, landed elites overwhelmingly dominated the era's power

structure. These elite men justified, if not outright ignored, slavery's inherent violence as a given necessity and the right of the "dominant race" to administer upon racialized "heathens." Violence in the form of enslaved and literally dead labor not only sustained the capitalist political economy of the early United States but also continues to be a productive force to this day in the South's plantation tourism industry. In the next section, I further explore historical connections between slavery and America's capitalist beginnings.

Racialized chattel slavery and American political-economic beginnings

In the pantheon of scholarship on slavery, geographers only began to contribute in recent years. (See for example, primarily from the geographies of memory literature, Butler 2001; Ginsburg 2007; Alderman and Campbell 2008; Alderman 2010; McKittrick 2011; and Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry 2011). While it is perhaps ironic that geographers have largely left slavery untouched given how vast a spatial footprint and social foothold slavery had in the U.S., other academic disciplines have filled the void, namely history, sociology, anthropology, and American and Africana Studies. Here I draw upon this literature to weave an historical material narrative of the American plantation system, chattel slavery, and their roles in the development of the United States.

Goldberg (2002) contends that modern understandings of race were critical to nation state formation, and the United States was and is no exception. Racial definition was key to white Europeans' "discovery" and violent takeover of the Americas, and the enslavement and genocide of native populations that began under European colonialism later gave way to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which brought enslaved Africans to replace native populations as a source of free labor. Franklin (2010) adds that Europeans included black Africans in their

exploration of the Americas from the very beginning as slaves and explorers. Goldberg (2002: 4–5) also argues that racial articulations are critically intertwined with the principles of economic liberalism, and both were essential to the formation of the U.S. and other modern nation states:

The increasingly sophisticated elaboration of liberalism from the late seventeenth century played a critical role in this process of normalizing and naturalizing racial dynamics and racist exclusions. As modernity's definitive doctrine ... liberalism has served to make possible discursively, to legitimate ideologically, and to rationalize politico-economically prevailing sets of racially ordered conditions and racist exclusions. ... It is not farfetched to suggest that racially conceived compromises regarding racist exclusions—ranging from constitutional endorsements of slavery to formalized segregation, colonial rule and its aftermath, affirmative action, immigration and crime policy—have been instrumental in sustaining a consensual dominance of liberalism in modern state formation.

Omi and Winant (1994) agree, arguing that powerful white men (in most cases) in the Americas have used racial projects to justify their acts of enslavement, genocide, and “manifest destiny” through racializing non-white bodies as sub-human. The English, as primary colonizers in the Thirteen Colonies, led the development of slave trading practices and technology that were part of global primitive accumulation efforts, for example slave ships and slave outposts in Africa that stole millions of African slaves and sold them to the British New World colonies (Franklin 2010).

As history advanced toward the American Revolution, indentured servitude and slavery became more integral to the U.S. economic system—not just because owners captured nearly all labor value generated by their slaves but because of slaves' new status as *chattel* in the mid-17th century (Berlin 1998, Ott 2014). Fields and Fields (2012: 125–126) point out that while English planters bought Africans and Afro-West Indians to serve on their tobacco plantations from at least 1619, it was not until 1661 (in Virginia) that written law recognized

the conditions of perpetual slavery, including children born to enslaved individuals. As Ott (2014: n.p., emphasis added) explains, “When owners hold living creatures as chattel, they gain additional property rights: the ownership of the offspring of any chattel, and the ownership of their offspring, and so on and so forth. *Chattel becomes self-augmenting capital.*”

While there were small numbers of protests against the slave trade and a few states banned the import of slaves, the Thirteen Colonies largely tolerated and accepted the institution of slavery, even in Northern states that counted few slaves among their population (Franklin 2010). During the build up to the Revolutionary War, some colonial leaders like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson promoted claims to the tune that “abolition was desired in the colonies” yet blocked by the British.^{3.2} In one of the Revolution’s greatest ironies, colonial leaders decided that only free blacks could take up arms and serve in state militias, believing the use of slaves for the same task to be inconsistent with the freedoms for which the colonies fought (Franklin 2010). This became rather controversial during the war, as British forces attracted the support of many enslaved individuals. Following independence, Quakers and other groups that successfully abolished slavery in northern states attempted to renew nationwide interest in ending the institution of slavery, but resistance from Southern states, dependent on capital and free labor that slaves provided in the agricultural sector, prevented widespread abolition from becoming a reality (Horton 2006: 39-40). Du Bois (2013 [1935]: n.p.) argued that race remained a primary issue preventing nationwide abolition:

So long as slavery was a matter of race and color, it made the conscience of the nation uneasy and continually affronted its ideals. The men who wrote the

^{3.2} Abolitionists’ arguments and perseverance eventually resulted in the successful ban on slave imports in 1807 under federal law but did not stop trading, breeding, or owning slaves outright.

Constitution sought by every evasion, and almost by subterfuge, to keep recognition of slavery out of the basic form of the new government.

Additionally, after the Revolution, Upper South states like Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina—facing declines in tobacco commodity prices and soil fertility—sold much of their enslaved capital further south to toil on cotton, rice, and sugar cane plantations from South Carolina to Louisiana and eventually Texas (Ott 2014). Thus, slavery profited both North and South in the early nation and was not banned—or even directly *mentioned*—in the U.S. Constitution because of economic interests (Baptist 2014).

Clearly, the institution of slavery was foundational to the early American economy, as slaves' unpaid labor fueled the production and harvesting of crops (tobacco, indigo, cotton, rice, and sugar) that were the nation's staples sold to European industrial powers (Berlin 2004). The international market for these products brought new wealth and capital into the U.S., and capitalists used this ill-gained wealth to build finance capitalism and basic infrastructure that supported the nation's growth from a raw material-producing periphery into the world's largest economy by the start of the Civil War. Du Bois (2013 [1935]: n.p.) points out that chattel slavery formed the bottom rung of the Industrial Revolution:

The giant forces of water and of steam were harnessed to do the world's work, and the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce and industry; and they not only could not be spared, if this new economic organization was to expand, but rather they became the cause of new political demands and alignments, of new dreams of power and visions of empire.

Baptist (2014: xviii, 33) demonstrates that linkages between slavery and finance capital (such as insurance for early deaths among slaves, speculations on slaves as commodities, and loans to rich landowners to expand slave holdings) benefited elites all along the Atlantic coast—not just slave owners in the South or “back country.”

Hong (2001: 3–4, emphasis original) notes that increases in productivity on plantations were closely associated with the relationship between labor and *time*—particularly, a capitalist, scientific management form of time-discipline: “In the countryside, *land* and *labor* lords monopolized and reified time in their attempts effectively to manage field labor, enhance productivity, and ultimately increase profitability. ... The clock was an effective means of improving work efficiency and labor productivity.” In response to these time constraints, Hong (2001) says that the enslaved community’s response to their owners’ pursuit of time discipline, speedy work, and productivity was often resistance through implicit and explicit means. This took the forms of creating traditions and negotiating limits—to the best of slaves’ ability—that gave them time to improve their personal conditions, for example through small garden plots and selling their labor for cash to overseers or neighboring plantations on Sundays. Hong (2001: 25) writes that these opportunities gave slaves a small taste of selling their labor under capitalism and feelings of “quasi-freedom.”

Beyond the economic realm, Berlin (2004) notes that the wealth accumulated by slave-owning Southerners helped them secure positions of political power from the Supreme Court to Congress to the White House, and these men helped shape American political culture and values still cherished to this day—particularly, notions of freedom, liberty, and justice. Baptist (2014: 9) seconds this, noting that four of the first five U.S. Presidents were Virginia slaveholders, and four more out of the first 12 also owned slaves. Using their political power and influence, these men collectively shaped the political economy and geography of the United States through policy that attempted to achieve the unmitigated expansion of chattel slavery.

That expansion of slavery westward, coupled with the nation's intense belief in manifest destiny, grew into the defining political quarrel between "slave" and "free" states. While American History textbooks are quick to point to issues such as states' rights as the Civil War's major causes, most scholars view the intertwined issues of slavery and its spread to the new territories as the powder keg that led to war (Franklin 2010, Cobb 2005, Horton 2006). As Cobb (2005: 20) says of the South during the pre-Civil War period:

Despite the prominent role played by southerners in rationalizing and securing American independence and in drafting the defining documents..., the slaveholding South was simply too tied to the past, too wedded to hierarchy, and too wary of innovation and reform to make it much of a competitor as a potential role model for the nation.

Like a wedge driving North and South apart, slavery remained the defining institution in the earliest days of the United States' history as a nation state.

The Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation marked a major turning point in race relations in the United States, particularly in light of Du Bois' (2013 [1935]) 'general strike' thesis, in which he argues that slaves freed themselves during the Civil War by increasingly political (and class conscious) acts of resistance, sabotage, and taking up arms for the Union through United States Colored Troops' regiments. One must bear in mind, however, that while passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional Amendments was of utmost importance in formally bringing down the institution of slavery, the *effects* of slavery have been long-lasting and continue to affect race-relations even in the present (Foner 2014, Coates 2014, Marable 2015). In our scholarly understanding of the substantial and contradictory influences slavery had on the United States' political economy, society, and culture, we cannot merely stop at 1865—we must continue on through Reconstruction into the Jim Crow era through the Civil

Rights Movement and also focus on present-day geographical and political-economic injustices. As Berlin (2004: 1258) puts it:

There is ... a recognition, often backhanded, sometimes subliminal or even subconscious, that the largest, most pervasive social problem of the United States—what Du Bois called the great problem of the twentieth century, which is fast becoming the great problem of the twenty-first century, that is, racism—is founded on the institution of slavery.

Indeed, I would argue that slavery's legacy and the American political economy it helped build have continued to mutually reinforce each other in a dialectic relationship since Emancipation was proclaimed. The outcomes of this relationship are seen, for example, in early demise and forgotten importance of Reconstruction (Foner 2014); maintenance of the political, economic, and social status quo by Southern whites through Jim Crow's productive violence and prevention of class coalescence between poor whites and recently freed African Americans (Hoelscher 2003, Inwood 2011); and the ongoing destructive forces of white power and privilege, which support a variety of evils such as the police state (as evidenced by the murder by police of a black man, woman, or child every 28 hours in this country) and the prison industrial complex (Gilmore 2007, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement 2013). Finally, as Rothman (2015: n.p.) argues, recent scholarship pointing to slavery's foundational importance to American capitalism is also quite compelling in light of the 2008 financial crisis:

[An] emphasis on the darker side of capitalism's history comports well with the world today. It is a world where ... almost anything can be commoditised and securitised for the benefit of a small minority, while those at the bottom struggle to scrape by. In this world, a past in which the most vulnerable literally belonged to forces of capital that manipulated their labour and their lives for profit makes perfect sense. ... Black people can no longer be bought and sold as chattel, but they remain disproportionately subject to the predations of payday and mortgage lenders, court officials who extort them to fund local government operations, and law-enforcement officers who assume they have licence to discipline them with excessive and sometimes deadly force.

As I continue to show in my analysis of contemporary plantation tourism, employing a Marxist framework to the study of slavery opens up new understandings of slavery's continued work upon the American landscape. First, however, I turn briefly to an overview of the methods and plantation sites that inform my analysis.

Fieldwork methodology and site description

This chapter's analysis is based upon a dialectical reading of contemporary plantation tourism, supplemented with personal empirical observations and qualitative data collected from my fieldwork at plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana in August 2014 and research in March 2015 with the RESET Initiative team on National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded fieldwork along the River Road in Louisiana. Approximately 70 miles long, the River Road is a corridor from Baton Rouge to New Orleans along the banks of the Mississippi River where sugarcane plantations once held thousands of slaves. Today, River Road is an antebellum tourism hub with over 40 restored plantations, 19 of which are open to the general public for tours. Many more (approximately 25) former River Road "Big House" mansions have been converted into private homes, bed-and-breakfasts, and, in the case of Nottoway Plantation, a full-scale resort.

The March 2015 fieldwork consisted of surveying and interviewing tourists, docents, and plantation owners at five plantations along River Road: Houmas House, San Francisco, Oak Alley, Laura, and Whitney Plantations.^{3.3} These surveys and interviews solicited information from tourists before and after they toured the plantations and asked participants

^{3.3} This research is IRB approved through the University of Southern Mississippi, IRB #15010501, where Dr. David Butler, co-PI, is academically housed.

to evaluate their level of interest in topics typically presented on tours like Grounds/Gardens/Landscape, Architecture, the Civil War, Slavery, and Original Owners. Surveys also provided space for participants to evaluate the degree to which their tour had educational and entertainment value, rate their tour guide, and discuss whether/to what extent docents discussed slavery. I also include in my empirical analysis information gathered from interviews of four River Road plantation owners/operators that a RESET research team member (Dr. David Butler) conducted in 2013. Although I did not personally conduct these interviews, many details revealed in the transcripts pertaining to owning and operating these sites are highly relevant to my analysis. I maintain research participants' anonymity throughout my analysis, and for simplicity's sake I refer to these individuals as Owners One, Two, Three, and Four, though not all of them own the respective plantations at which they work. "Owner One," a wealthy white male in his 60s, owns his plantation mansion, surrounding land, and several tourism operation components, including restaurant and bar space, event space primarily rented out for weddings, and an upscale inn. "Owner Two," also a white male in his 60s, does not own the plantation site itself but leases the house and surroundings from a sugar conglomerate; however, he does own and profit from a Limited Liability Company (LLC) that operates the tours and gift shop. "Owner Three" is a white male in his 70s who made much of his initial capital as a part owner of mineral rights in the sugarcane fields surrounding the plantation. Owner Three was asked to manage the plantation tourism operation as part of a foundation that owns the plantation Big House and 28 surrounding acres carved out from the larger land holdings. Owner Three makes additional profit from owning and operating a restaurant and gift shop just off of the foundations' property. "Owner Four" is a white woman who manages (but does not own) the plantation with fewest average annual visitors

and the least profitable of the four River Road plantations considered in this chapter. Her site is owned by a major oil and gas company and sits on the property of one of the company's oil refineries.

Analysis: Toward a Marxist reading of antebellum plantation tourism

Next, I examine the contemporary Southern plantation tourism industry using the Marxist theories outlined above. Dwyer, Butler, and Carter (2013: 427) note that the rise of plantation tourism began as early as Reconstruction at some sites and was closely tied to efforts to reduce the South's reliance on agriculture as its dominant economic base:

Confronted by military occupation, exhausted ecosystems, exploitative labour strategies and vigorous international competition in commodity production, elements of the defunct planter class and urban boosters sought out new capital accumulation strategies beyond the traditional reliance on cash crops. ... [The] region's cultivation of heritage tourism as a place-based growth strategy presages present-day efforts at commercial place-making associated with festival markets and the like.

Using Louisiana's River Road region as empirical case study, the antebellum plantations along River Road have been purchased and restored over time—*not* by the state or federal government in an effort to create a memory district (cf. Till's 2005 examination of Berlin's state-sponsored memory district) or as a historic district under the National Trust for Historic Preservation,^{3,4} or even to enact some form of historic highway or driving tour. Rather, wealthy, private individuals and for-profit companies—most of whom lack historical connections to original families and owners—purchase and own the sites, and many

^{3,4} The National Trust for Historic Preservation holds and operate sites many former slave-holding plantations among its 27 sites nationwide. These include Drayton Hall in Charleston, South Carolina; The Shadows plantation house in New Iberia, Louisiana; and Belle Grove, Oatlands, the Woodlawn (originally part of George Washington's Mount Vernon) and James Madison's Montpelier. At least one additional National Trust site, Cliveden in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was also once home to enslaved individuals.

plantations have changed hands several times.^{3.5} Only 19 sites are regularly open to the public for tours, while the rest are private facilities available for lodging or rental (outdoor weddings and sorority gatherings, for example), or in some cases still function as sugarcane-growing operations and private homes. Of the sites open for public tours, only John Cummings, the owner of the most recently opened site, Whitney Plantation, explicitly developed the site for the purpose of commemorating and teaching about slavery (Amsden 2015, Cook 2015). Despite the Whitney's ostensibly laudable goals, however, it still falls within the ranks of other tourist-centered plantations that capitalize on the dead labor of slaves who built the plantations and made them successful enterprises, even if Cummings may never recoup the reported \$8 million of his own money put into the operation.

Trivialization and deflection of slavery—one of the most common representational tactics used by plantation sites—can be interpreted as an outcome of alienation and commodity fetishism at plantations and part of dominant trends in the United States to avoid critical discussion and engagement with racism and the racially unjust outcomes of slavery. Eichstedt and Small (2002) and Modlin (2008) found in their extensive research on plantation tours across the Southeast that deflection—defined as the intentional depiction of slaves as happy and/or faithful while their owners are presented as moral and paternal—is one of the most common ways that slavery is brought into plantation narratives, assuming a tour discusses slavery in the first place. Eichstedt and Small (2002), for example, found that 55.7

^{3.5} Rehder (1999), for example, covers changes in ownership over time at the six sugar plantations he used as case studies in *Delta Sugar*. Although I lack a scholarly source that confirms this trend at every plantation site, my research at Laura, Oak Alley, Whitney, and Frogmore plantations found that these sites exchanged hands multiple times as part of larger historical trends in the South such as the post-Civil War poverty of original landowners selling the plantations off at fire sale prices, eventual absentee ownership, lack of management and upkeep on the properties, and eventual purchase by land-speculating current owners who spend massive amounts of capital on renovation and conversion of properties into tourist destinations.

percent of the 122 plantation sites they toured simply did not engage with slavery at all (what they term *symbolic annihilation*), while another 27 percent of sites engaged in *deflection* rather than introduce more accurate historical narratives into tours. One clear example of deflection among the River Road plantations can be seen in the excuses made by Owner Three as to why he did not incorporate the history of slavery at his site until very recently:

So, our thing was that we kept hearing that we're not doing anything about that [discussing slavery]. You know, so I said well, I didn't want to steal all—steal somebody else's thunder... I mean, if Evergreen [a nearby River Road plantation in Edgard, Louisiana] has the most fantastic collection of cabins in their slave quarter—I mean they've got a wonderful slave quarter...probably the best remaining collection of slave quarter buildings in the country. And they were—they were open to the public...if people want to learn about that aspect of it, go down there, because I don't have it here... [It] was all torn down...by the 1930s.

Drawing again upon Berlin (2006: 2), slavery is absolutely fundamental to understanding race relations and other present conditions in the U.S., but many people remain ignorant of that history or do not want to believe in the first place that such an evil system was as important as it truly was to the U.S.' early political-economic development. Many people may accept that slavery happened, but believe that it was an *aberration*, rather than fundamental to American life. In other words, many Americans are simply unwillingly to believe the truth or are woefully miseducated about slavery. Beyond these elements of omission, however, is the “sin of commission” that contemporary plantation owners commit by purchasing the product of dead (slave) labor—the plantation and “Big House” mansion itself—and valorizing their investment through commodity forms of tourism and all its trappings. When discussing the large absence of slavery from his plantation tours, River Road plantation Owner One said in an interview:

Slavery is a difficult situation. We used to talk about slavery, too, but a minor statement. We have no slave houses [because the last owner prior to the Civil War freed his slaves and the slave cabins were dismantled and moved up river to a company town]... I don't feel that just because this is a plantation house, you have to educate people on the slavery laws. That's just my personal opinion. *Slavery is not an important issue to me.*

Owner Two, who does more than most River Road plantations to include slavery on his tours, nonetheless frames the plantation as a representation of regional culture:

[The] whole basis of why I think we're so successful is that we took those stories and my background of knowing what life was like here, and my understanding of trying to look at it from the outside in... We said: *this is not a plantation. It's not—it's not a house. It's not a family. It is the culture of Louisiana.* And we have insider's look into what it was like.

Comparing and contrasting contemporary plantation tourism operations with their historical counterparts is also quite instructive for understanding the “double valorization” of slave labor (once while living and now as dead labor). While Marx would have classified much of what took place in the antebellum Southern plantation system as primitive accumulation, both it and the current system of plantation tourism can be considered as fundamentally capitalist in nature. The historical model of chattel slavery on Southern plantations began with wealthy white plantation owners—often American but also French and German in the Southern Louisiana context—purchasing, inheriting, or receiving land for the dual purposes of crop production and controlling land being taken over from native peoples under settler colonialism. The labor used on the plantations was almost entirely slave labor, first consuming Native American populations and then, in much larger numbers, enslaved Africans who had greater immunity than native peoples to diseases spread by Europeans. Beyond slaves, the planter class at many plantations occasionally employed artisan specialists and overseers on their payrolls. Taken together, slave owners appropriated both the surplus value from paid

laborers and virtually all labor value produced by slaves on the plantation. The value of slaves as individually tradable or fungible capital belonging to the owner and his family also contributed to the white planter class's vast wealth leading up to the Civil War, not to mention the wealth and capital gained by financiers, speculators, insurers, transporters, etc. in the Northern U.S. and Europe. However, most of the Southern planter class's personal wealth was lost following Emancipation and the end of the Civil War. The combination of freed African Americans, who were finally given control of their mobility and labor power, and the debt and destruction left after the war throughout the South led to situations where many plantation owners sold all or parts of their property to survive. As Hamilton (2015) has noted, it is ironic that black bodies held such a high value during slavery, yet after Emancipation, white America began to consider them worthless, discordant, and threatening—a trend that has continued to this day as evidenced by the disproportionate number of police killings of unarmed African Americans (Robin 2015, Shatz 2015) as well as decades of redlining and disinvestment of black neighborhoods (Coates 2014).

Under contemporary models of tourism at publicly open plantation sites, a wealthy capitalist (or for-profit company in some cases) purchases the Big House, outbuildings, and land, and then pours substantial amounts of financial capital into converting, restoring, and building anew the facilities needed to make new operations (whether house museum, restaurant, bed and breakfast, resort, etc.) possible *and* attractive to visitors. For example, Owner One mentioned in his interview that he sometimes wishes he had not studied art and art history in his private school education because it made him feel the “need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on paintings.” In Marx's terms, this money poured into the property's restoration, upkeep, and expansion (often at great expense, as most owners are

keen to be as historical accurate as possible in their preservation efforts) becomes part of the constant capital of the operation—that is, the means of production. Variable capital comes into the equation when the owner employs workers to run the site, and part of the owner’s profit comes through the extraction of the surplus value created through these workers’ labor.^{3,6}

However, when we consider Mitchell’s (2000) call to remember dead labor, it is here that we see the concepts of *commodity fetishism* and *alienation* once again enter our critique of the plantation tourism industry. The commodities being purchased at the plantation—typically starting with Big House tours, but also anything from overnight stays in bed and breakfast cottages to the sodas and snacks purchased in the gift shops—conceal the socially necessary labor time congealed in the commodity being consumed. In the case of the Big House tour or, at a few plantations like Laura and Whitney plantations in Louisiana and McLeod Plantation in South Carolina, historical slave cabins, enslaved human bodies carried out the necessary labor time required to build and maintain these structures. Despite the belief among most plantation owners and operators that their decisions to offer tourism products come from good intentions, they nonetheless all benefit and profit from dead slave labor. For example, many of the River Road plantation owners mentioned in interviews that historic preservation and appreciation for art and architecture drove them to purchase, restore, and adapt their sites for tourism, but financial gain was also a clear factor. Owner One, for example, said:

^{3,6} Again, the words of River Road Plantation Owner One speak volumes here: “I have no volunteers on the property, I avoid volunteers. I’ve had people come to me and want to volunteer their time, and I ask them why they want to be a volunteer, as opposed to a paid employee, and they all basically tell me the same thing. They want to come when they come, and want to do what they want to do. I have a lot of employees that are paid that want to do that, too. Well, at my plantation house, you’re going to do what I tell you to do, when I tell you to do it, and I’m not going to put up with volunteers who would destroy the rest of the workforce!”

I realized if [a building] is beautiful, it's worth more...by putting a new façade on the building, you can get forty percent more rent than if it had an ugly façade. ... Biltmore is what I am copying. That's my model. I want it to be—the house is the anchor, and then, all kinds of other structures and buildings to entertain people, and to grasp money from it.

Owner Three also clearly indicated that despite it taking years to raise money to carry out repairs and build up the tourism operation, in the end what mattered was the business's success:

In '92, my brother became chairman of the board, and he was willing to listen to us in the trenches, instead of telling us, "if you can't afford computers, you can't have them." We said, you know, it's a chicken and an egg situation... I always believed that we needed to be on the cutting edge in whatever the technology was. That was the way that we would get, we would get a leg up, and be successful...which is what we, what we have done... So uh, with him being more supportive of running it business-like, instead of just saying you can't have anything and all...we grew the business nicely.

Later in the interview, Owner Three described how the tourism products offered at his site had expanded since the 1970s, starting originally with selling bagged lunches to bus tour groups to now offering a large restaurant, gift shop, overnight stays in cottages, and a mint julep station outside the Big House to supply drinks to customers waiting to start tours. Business, it seems, has greatly improved—Owner Three estimated that in the pre-Hurricane Katrina years (when they last had over 200,000 visitors in a single year), they grossed \$180,000 from the mint julep table alone.

It is worth noting at this point that not all of the River Road plantations actually benefit from the dead labor of slaves in *explicitly* financial terms. In the interview with Owner Four, who only manages her site while an oil company technically owns the property and surrounding oil refinery, it became apparent that the combined revenues from the sites' tours, weddings, and yearly community festivals are not enough to actually make a profit and cover

the cost of maintaining a historic house museum. The question then came up, why does the oil company still allow the site to continue operating? It turns out that the site's value to the company comes from public relations. As Owner Four put it, "I think that [the oil company] has come around to the fact that, okay, it has become a community asset. It's part of us doing business." She went on to explain that the company at one point purchased two plantation homes as part of their oil and gas speculation along the Mississippi River, but could not find an interested buyer in the first, more derelict plantation, so they bulldozed it to the ground. This led to substantial community backlash and uproar among people concerned with historical preservation, so they now maintain and operate the remaining plantation site not for *financial* gain, but I nonetheless argue the company still benefits from the dead labor of the enslaved community through improved public relations, cultural capital, and community goodwill.

Consuming these spaces and tourism products as a scholar, I was thoroughly uncomfortable during some fieldwork situations that involved engaging with the products of dead labor, though I should think the average American tourist may not be so concerned. As Meier (2012: 470–471) notes, "A place contains traces of former times and its previous life, structures, atmospheres, people and experiences. But these traces cannot be seen by everyone..."^{3.7} Empirically corroborating this observation, Butler, Carter, and Dwyer (2008)

^{3.7} Meier (2012: 470), in his research on the emotions of loss that former workers experience when thinking about and encountering their shuttered industrial workplaces in Bavaria, Germany, usefully employs the Derridean metaphor of "haunting" to theorize how formerly used structures (including industrial sites but, I add, southern plantations) tie the past with the present. "Against the background that the present exists only with respect to the past, he [Derrida] has developed the metaphor of haunting as something that folds time and unsettles the linear sense of time as it is represented. A haunting evokes a sense of injustice and triggers emotion." Meier also demonstrates that emotional geographies and sense of place are inherently tied to social class.

and Buzinde and Santos (2009) found in their research—at different plantation sites in different southern states—that foreign tourists were more likely than American citizens to indicate that they took issue with how little plantation tours said about slavery. While this may not be of major concern to many parties in the United States, engaging the theoretical tools of Marx to understand how contemporary plantation tourism operations benefit from—and, at least partially, are the product of—dead slave labor raises a number of concerns. For one, the consumption of the Southern U.S.’s history, largely in economic terms rather than invoking social relations, helps prolong and exacerbate personal *and* institutional forms of racism that are often unacknowledged and unaddressed. For another, McKittrick (2013: 9, emphasis original) argues that viewing the plantation as a site of anti-Black violence is “unsettling because it simultaneously archives the violated black body as the *origin* of New World black lives just as it places this history in an almost airtight time-space continuum that traces a linear progress away from racist violence.”

Finally, the irresponsibility of plantation tourism in the face of settler colonialism and primitive accumulation—and essentially, genocide—invite comparisons with other countries that have carried out, and in many cases *not* overcome, their own genocides. From Armenia and Nazi Germany to Cambodia and Rwanda, countries all over the world have dealt with the fall out of systematic violence and destruction. But somehow thinking about Auschwitz or Dachau or Sachsenhausen as being less than carefully monitored and controlled as museums owned by penitent states and instead turned into tourism landscapes meant to be consumed for weddings, SS Commandants’ barrack tours, and bed and breakfast setups is ludicrous. Not so with America’s plantation landscape.

Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have sought to advance theoretical understandings of the Southern plantation tourism industry and critical historical–geographies of slavery. Despite some initial efforts to include Marxist theories in the study of plantations by Carter, Butler and Dwyer (2011), the literature on slavery’s historical geography, memory, and the plantation tourism industry have largely gone uncritiqued by Marxist scholars. I have envisioned this chapter as an actual attempt to engage with Marx’s theories of dead labor, alienation, commodity fetishism, and primitive accumulation—and more importantly, to begin a conversation about how these interpretations open new venues for research by employing Marx to question and rethink tourism at plantations and other spaces related to the continued valorization of dead, enslaved labor. If, as I have suggested here, the owners and operators of plantation tourism sites by and large continue to profit from slaves’ dead labor, that raises serious questions about if—and, if *yes*, then *how*—those owners should in some way be held socially responsible for their ill-begotten profit.

In the United States today, it is more politically unthinkable to suggest that Congress even *study* slavery and the need for reparations paid to slavery’s descendants than it was during the era of enslavement itself, which saw many formerly enslaved individuals successfully receive reparations for labor time lost to their owners (Coates 2014). As Coates (2014) deftly explains, Congressman John Conyers, Jr., the longest-serving-current-member of the House, has introduced a bill calling for just such a study in the House of Representatives in each of the last 25 Congressional sessions. The bill, called HR 40, has never made it out of committee for the full House to even consider. Why not? As Coates (2014: n.p.) puts it, “We stand to discover much...in such a discussion—and that is perhaps what scares us. The idea...is frightening not

simply because we might lack the ability to pay. The idea of reparations threatens something much deeper—America’s heritage, history, and standing in the world.” A conversation about reparations would also threaten white privilege, which becomes perfectly clear in light of the beliefs held by River Road Plantation Owner Three who said near the end of his interview:

As a country, we’ve got to get away from...this *white man’s burden*, or the blacks feeling like they haven’t, you know, like that [slavery] was a terrible thing. And when they start talking about reparations and everything, you sometimes scratch your head, and you think, God, you’ve—if you’ve been to Africa, and you see what’s going on Africa, these days, *you think God, would you rather be here, or would you rather be there? Would you rather that your people never came here? Or, would you rather that—that they had been able to go back after? ... It’s just like—there’s no reason to keep making excuses about not having opportunity in America.*

If the United States lacks the political will to engage in frank discussions of slavery’s repercussions, then perhaps we should look again to Germany. Coates (2014: n.p., emphasis added) argues that if in the 1950s, West Germany could pay Israel reparations for the Holocaust—amidst only 29 percent of the population believing that Germany owed the Jews any restitution—then “*something more than moral pressure* calls America to reparations.” Perhaps, if the nation as a political whole cannot be made or convinced to engage in a serious conversation about slavery from a perspective of *responsibility* over how whites have benefited economically, politically, and socially from America’s racial project from slavery to the present—rather than as a question of *white guilt*, which frequently arises alongside observations that whites today did not personally own slaves—then scholars of the American South should take up the call of Schein (2009), Price (2010), Inwood (2011), and others in instead pursuing a more activist vision of social justice scholarship. For example, this could entail influencing contemporary plantation owners to support their local community, including many who are impoverished descendants of former slaves. A case in point demonstrating how such

community engagement could work comes from Connelly and Rea (2015), who describe their work at the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa (a prehistoric Mississippian archeological site in Memphis, Tennessee) engaging with the majority African American local community that the museum had previously ignored for decades. After an expansion to the institution's mission in 2007 and working to simply make contacts in a community that mostly mistrusted its relevance and motives, the museum became an asset and stakeholder in the Southwest Memphis area by going beyond its purview of Native American history to include service learning opportunities for local schools and museum exhibits on Memphis's African American culture and history. Although some sites in the River Road region—such as River Road African American Museum in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, and Whitney Plantation—engage in similar community outreach programs, they are unfortunately the exception rather than the rule.

Or perhaps, as Marable (2015: 227-228) argues, the only true path to Black political-economic liberation can come through a radical break from capitalism offered by a socialist revolution, not limited to Black Americans but all in American society who suffer under the “convergence of racism, sexism and economic exploitation which comprises the material terrain of this nation.”

In 1896, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote (p. 196) that “no American can study the connection of slavery with United States history and not devoutly pray that his country may never have a similar social problem to solve, until it shows more capacity for such work than it has shown in the past.” While it is possible that Du Bois began to finally see an increased “capacity for such work” near the end of his life—he died in 1963, in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement—his point still rings true today: the U.S. still has a long way to go to atone for and reparate the effects and outcomes of slavery.

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CHAPTER IV
COUNTER NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY IN THE DEEP SOUTH:
THE POLITICS OF EMPATHY ALONG AND BEYOND RIVER
ROAD

A version of this chapter was originally published by Matthew R. Cook:

Cook, M. R. 2015. Counter-narratives of slavery in the Deep South: the politics of empathy along and beyond River Road. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. 1–19. DOI: 10.1080/1743873X.2015.1100624.

This article was sole-authored by the student. The text and figures are included in this dissertation based on the final version of the article accepted for print by the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*.

Abstract

From history museums and plantation tours to roadside markers and street names, the historical institution of slavery has become unevenly memorialized across the United States' cultural landscape. This unevenness is particularly noticeable in the 'Deep South' states, such as Mississippi and Louisiana, where labor-intensive cotton or sugar cane plantations once required vast numbers of slaves to economically succeed. While several former antebellum plantation sites now function as tourist attractions complete with tours of the 'Big House,' they often ignore, downplay, or annihilate the memory of slavery from plantation history. However, not all plantations and museums disregard slavery so readily, and the owners, creators, and workers at these sites intentionally employ counter narratives of slavery to evoke empathy in visitors and create a more socially just cultural landscape. This paper examines three such sites along and beyond River Road that employ counter narrative techniques, namely the Natchez Museum of African-American History and Culture, Frogmore Cotton Plantation and Gins, and Whitney Plantation. The paper includes a discussion of each site's counter narrative tactics and how they stand out from other antebellum plantation tourism sites in their representation of slavery. Engaging in the growing conversation on the *possibilities* and *desirability* of empathetic responses to counter narrative spaces, this paper also takes up the argument that empathy—while certainly important and possible for many visitors and consumers at these sites of memory—may also preclude important political activism and greater solidarity between racial groups in the United States.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, geographers and other scholars have studied how the historical system of slavery in the United States is misrepresented or ignored relative to other historical themes.^{4.1} Presented in museums and on plantation tours, roadside markers, and

^{4.1} Though certainly not an exhaustive list, many of the key works to come out of this period of research on slavery across geography, history, memory studies, and tourism studies include Adams (1999, 2007), Alderman

street names, the institution of slavery has been unevenly memorialized across the American cultural landscape. This is particularly noticeable in ‘Deep South’ states such as Mississippi and Louisiana where labor-intensive cotton and sugar cane plantations once required vast numbers of slaves to succeed. Antebellum plantation house museums have functioned as tourist sites throughout the American South for decades, but several scholars have argued that these sites traditionally have not spent much time and effort discussing the history of slavery through their guided tours, marketing materials, exhibits, and landscape iconography (Carter et al. 2014; Eichstedt and Small 2002; Modlin 2008; Modlin et al. 2011; Alderman and Modlin 2008; Butler 2001; Buzinde 2010). While museums and historic sites discuss and represent slavery in many ways, Eichstedt and Small (2002) found many plantation museums prioritize dominant narratives of the wealthy white planters, their historical importance, their material culture, and their homes’ architecture (see Figure 4.1). Slavery has often been relegated to optional tours beyond the ‘Big House,’ if it is mentioned at all (Small 2013).

However, a growing number of sites seek to challenge the ‘moonlight and magnolias’ motif that runs through southern heritage tourism, in which site owners promote a series of myths about the Old South more faithful to ‘the Lost Cause’ narrative than actual history (Dwyer et al. 2013; Modlin 2008). For example, Carter and his colleagues (2014) found that some antebellum plantation museums are doing more to integrate the enslaved community’s history, culture, and identity into their discussions of slavery on Big House tours, and some sites do include slave quarters as part of the paid tour rather than as an option for tourists to

(2010), Alderman and Campbell (2008), Alderman and Modlin (2008), Berlin (2004, 2006), Butler (2001), Buzinde (2010), Buzinde and Santos (2009), Carter, Butler, and Alderman (2014), Crutcher (2008), Dwyer, Butler, and Carter (2013), Eichstedt and Small (2002), Horton and Horton (2006), McKittrick (2011, 2013), Modlin (2008), Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry (2011), and Small (2013).

complete on their own. Further, as Alderman (2010) observed, there has been increasing interest among African Americans, especially those living in the American South, to create counter memory sites that recognize the contributions made by enslaved communities to the social and economic development of the United States.

In this paper, I discuss findings from fieldwork conducted in August 2014 and March 2015, during which I explored museums and antebellum plantation tourist sites in the Deep South. I particularly sought to research heritage sites that challenge the marginalization of the memory of slavery. The three sites I analyze in this paper are found within and immediately beyond the River Road region: the Natchez (Mississippi) Museum of African-American History and Culture, the Frogmore Cotton Plantation and Gins (Frogmore, Louisiana), and Whitney Plantation (Wallace, Louisiana). Two major strands of scholarly literature shape the framework for my analysis of these sites. The first comes from the geographic study of social memory, memory studies in general, and critical historical geographies of the plantation. This literature informs my study of the textual, performance, and artifact-based strategies sites use to present counter narratives that refuse to forget the enslaved. The second body of literature comes from scholarly conversations surrounding the importance and possibilities of engaging people (tourists and museum visitors, in this case) in historical empathy. In my analysis, I survey the somewhat small body of literature on the geographic study of empathy, building upon the work of scholars who argue that sites of memory have great potential to evoke empathy and create more socially just cultural landscapes (Alderman et al. 2013; Cook and Alderman 2015; Modlin et al. 2011). The potential for sites of memory to stimulate empathy might appear to be something assumed or expected, but it is a theme that has received limited attention in the scholarship on geographies of memory. However, I also challenge the existing

literature's findings that empathy is a possible or desirable response among consumers of public memory, drawing upon literature from Holocaust Studies and Critical Race Theory that argues historical empathy is impossible or does not go far enough toward building solidarity. Identifying tensions running through the empathetic potential of memorialization is necessary as scholars move toward understanding and facilitating a recovery of slave experiences in heritage interpretation at tourism sites, including but not limited to plantations. I, like a growing number of scholars, see the duty of heritage tourism research as not simply analyzing the industry but also making a meaningful intervention in terms of equity and justice.

Dominant narratives vs. slavery counter narratives at plantations

Butler (2001) was among the first to empirically study narratives presented at plantation tourism sites. After visiting plantations along Louisiana's River Road and in Charleston, South Carolina, Butler (2001) found that most of those sites largely erased material evidence and discussions of slavery from the tour. Butler analyzed text from over 100 southern plantations' tourist brochures and found that the theme of slavery appeared less frequently than others like *architecture, original owners, current owners, furnishings, gardens/ landscape, the Civil War, and heritage/politics*. These themes form the major components of dominant narratives presented at plantation tourism sites in the Big House material landscape and in scripts used by many docents and guides, which Butler (2001: 170) argued could facilitate the creation of fictitious histories, "responding to the unconscious desire, including the hope, of the custodians that slavery did not happen."

Eichstedt and Small (2002) conducted another early example of a study of slave-marginalizing narratives, evaluating the number of times tour guides mentioned slavery on 122

plantation tours in Virginia, Louisiana, and Georgia. Eichstedt and Small (2002) classified their findings with a typology that ranged from ‘symbolic annihilation’—removing almost all traces of African American life from the plantation—to ‘segregation’ of the role of slavery, in which slavery is relegated to optional tours. Eichstedt and Small (2002) found few sites that practiced ‘relative incorporation’ of slavery narratives. In a similar study, Modlin (2008) built upon the work of Butler (2001) and Eichstedt and Small (2002) by identifying myths used at plantations to normalize the sites’ minimal presentation of slavery and justify site managers’ and docents’ promotion of other themes as more important than slavery. The myths Modlin identified include myths at the national scale (e.g., a focus on the Civil War or on slavery as only important leading up to the Civil War), regional scale (the beliefs that slavery was rare or nonexistent in the Northern U.S. or slavery was primarily rural), state scale (Virginia as the ‘birthplace of democracy,’ Georgia’s connection to *Gone with the Wind*, North Carolina’s hard working religious settlers), and local or site scale (‘slavery did not take place at this plantation’ or ‘slavery was somehow better here’). Modlin (2008) defined several site production myths that defer attention away from the harsh realities of slavery. These myths include pretending, hiding, or lying about former owners not holding slaves, claiming that little is known about chattel slavery in the United States, or employing faithful servant/good master tropes that perpetuate white supremacist beliefs in slavery as a mostly benevolent institution. Themes other than slavery that Modlin found prevalent (echoing Butler 2001) include the history of antebellum owners, Big House architecture and gardens, the Civil War, production of crops in the 18th and 19th centuries, and information about the current owners.

The themes and myths identified by Butler (2001), Eichstedt and Small (2002), and Modlin (2008) do not simply exist as free-floating ideas but have been (and continue) to be

made socially important because of textual, performance, and artifact-based strategies used at plantations. Current plantation owners and docents employ these strategies in various combinations that often work to deflect any engagement with critical discussions of slavery. Many myths and themes fall into the textual category, given either as factual information during docent-led tours or within the plantation landscape on informational signs. Some examples include the history of the planter family, a focus on the Civil War, rhetoric of the good master and faithful slave, the politics of the time period, and references to ‘servants’ rather than slaves. While some of these examples may appear benign, many current plantation owners and docents rely on the power embedded in such myths to ‘whitewash’ the history of slavery at the plantation and normalize dominant themes throughout commemorative landscapes in the American South.

Taken together, the performance and artifact categories of narrative strategies finalize and further concretize the whitewashing of slavery narratives at many plantations. Performance strategies include the actions of plantation and museum employees guiding and directing tourists, and in some cases *literally* performing as costumed characters. Examples of dominant narrative performance strategies can be found at many plantations along Louisiana’s River Road that deflect attention from slavery’s role in the economic success of agricultural operations by only permitting tours inside the ‘Big House.’ The importance of historic plantation home tours comes at the expense of symbolically—or in some cases physically—annihilating spaces used by slaves. Sites that are frequently neglected or ignored include kitchens, slave housing, overseers’ houses, barns, and other outbuildings that primarily served agricultural functions on the plantation. The performative nature of the dominant narrative also often frequently involves white docents or historical interpreters in period-authentic

clothing leading tours of the Big House, while African Americans are largely not employed as staff. The final category—that of artifactual strategies—is crucially entangled with performative strategies. Tour guides often rely heavily on the plantation’s material culture to demonstrate historical evidence of what the (predominantly white) owners’ lives would have been like. By limiting material presented on tours to the artifacts and spaces of the upper echelon of historical southern society rather than the entire southern agricultural system including slaves, tour-operators and docents are able to avoid uncomfortable conversations about slavery, the physical and psychological effects it had on the enslaved, and class structure and inequality within southern society. Further, as Alderman and Campbell (2008: 340) found, plantations and museums that rely on artifacts to support dominant plantation narratives all-too-conveniently claim that little material evidence remains from the enslaved.

The trivialization of slavery at plantation sites across the American South can be viewed as a product of larger trends in the United States to avoid critical discussion and engagement with racism and unjust outcomes of slavery. As Berlin (2006: 2) has argued, slavery is absolutely fundamental to understanding the present condition of the United States, but many people are unaware of that history or do not want to believe that slavery was foundational to, rather than an aberration of, the development of the American economy and society. In other words, many Americans are simply unwilling to believe the truth or are woefully miseducated about slavery. Complicit in this ‘miseducation’ have been many plantations and other sites of memory across the United States that employ dominant narrative strategies to whitewash slavery from the cultural landscape. However, as I demonstrate in my analysis of counter, slave-centric sites in Mississippi and Louisiana, the emphasis on narrative strategies can also be used to think through and study the ways in

which heritage tourism employs counter narratives—more socially just and historically accurate accounts of plantations and their enslaved communities.

Approaching counter narratives and empathy with the enslaved

The purposes of counter narratives of slavery are to challenge the dominant narratives that romanticize slavery and educate the public on “the history of American slavery [as] a shameful tale of inhumanity and human exploitation and ... attempt[s] to hide national hypocrisy behind tortured theories of racial inequality” (Horton and Horton 2006: x). Racial definition was key to the ‘discovery’ and violent takeover of the Americas by Europeans, and the enslavement and genocide of native populations that began with European colonialism were extended in the New World as the trans-Atlantic slave trade brought Africans to replace the native populations as a source of enslaved labor. Indeed, as Franklin (1980: 33) notes, Africans were part of Europeans’ exploits in the Americas from the very beginning as slaves, servants, and explorers in their own right. Goldberg (2002) explains that racial articulation—and by extension, racist practices like slavery—have been intertwined with liberal economic theories critical to the formation of the modern nation state. Omi and Winant (1994) concur with this idea, arguing that from its beginnings, the idea of race has been used to justify slavery, genocide, and manifest destiny by deeming non-white bodies as sub-human.

Alderman (2010: 91) summarizes that “southern and American public history have been narrated in a white-centric ways, marginalizing if not altogether ignoring the memories, contributions and struggles of African Americans.” One example of the power of counter narrative sites can be seen in the work of Alderman and Campbell (2008), who describe their interactions with the Slave Relic Museum in Walterboro, South Carolina. Alderman and

Campbell (2008: 338) introduce the idea of thinking about the shift to counter narratives as *symbolic excavation*: “the unearthing of difficult and long suppressed (and repressed) historical narratives...through memory work, the construction and representation of the past.” The Walterboro museum specifically employs artifact-based counter narrative strategies like participatory, tactile engagement with the ‘tough stuff’ of slavery like chains and shackles used on antebellum plantations and during the transatlantic slave trade (see Figure 4.2).

Scholars in geography, memory studies, and Holocaust studies (Alderman et al. 2013; Arnold de-Semine 2013; Cook and Alderman 2015; Modlin et al. 2011) have taken interest in the potential for tourists, students, and everyday citizens to empathetically engage with difficult historical subject matters. The broader literature on geographies of affect and emotional geographies (Bondi 2003; Bondi et al. 2007; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Jones 2007; Kearney 2009; Pile 2010; Rose 2004; Thien 2005; Wood and Smith 2004) has long held that concepts such as affect, emotions, and empathy must be taken seriously when evaluating social actions, including the responsibility of historical sites to present socially just narratives of the past. Given the contributions that slavery and its aftermath have made to the political-economic development of the United States and to contemporary systems of racial discrimination (Berlin 2006; McKittrick 2011), one might expect to find numerous places that strive to actively engage people in empathetic understandings of race relations throughout the United States. However, I argue that the counter narrative sites analyzed in this paper—and a small number of similar sites around the US—constitute the exception rather than the rule. Further still, Holocaust Studies and Critical Race Theory scholars have argued that research on memory work and commemoration should move *beyond* a focus on empathy. In the remainder of this section, I will expound upon my second conceptual framework by unpacking three

positions in the scholarly conversation surrounding the possibility and desirability of empathetic responses to remembrances of the past.

The first position in the conversation comes primarily from cultural and historical geographers who research geographies of memory. These scholars have tended to take the position that empathy is an important facet of people's encounters with sites of memory, particularly at spaces of former violence or tragedy, and they have tended to call for more research on empathy. Arnold-de Semine (2013: 16, emphasis added) argues that empathy is a fundamental requirement for historical memory:

Both the memory boom and the museum boom of the last 30 years are intimately connected to an increasing fascination with the past and especially with narratives of oppression, marginalization, persecution and suffering. ... Memory is ... a way of relating to the past that is autobiographical, personal, emotional, sensory, based on lived experience (one's own or that of others) and *requiring empathy and identification*.

Examples of this position can be seen in Modlin et al. (2011) and Cook and Alderman (2015). Modlin et al. (2011) studied practices used at Destrehan Plantation on Louisiana's River Road, contrasting textual strategies that docents use on tours to tell the history of slavery and the white planter family. Modlin et al. (2011) found that tour guides at Destrehan tended to provide emotionally evocative accounts about the slave owners but largely described slavery through factual, non-emotive accounts, an injustice the authors refer to as affective inequality. One suggestion the authors make for Destrehan is to include slave cabins on officially guided tours rather than advise tourists to view them after the Big House tour. This is a strategy that could be employed at many plantations that predominantly offer Big House tours, but most plantations no longer have authentic slave cabins on their grounds. In some cases, slave housing was appropriated and upgraded by sharecroppers, and in more recent history, many

plantations' slave cabins fell into disrepair or were torn down by the landowners. This brings up the substantial problem that all museums face with the preservation and presentation of authentic historical artifacts. An example of this from fieldwork can be found at Oak Alley Plantation, which has recently constructed a set of replica slave cabins to present textual and artifact evidence about slave life on a Louisiana sugar cane plantation. Despite not being 'authentic' in the sense of being the original structures, the cabins were built in an authentic style in the approximate original locations behind the mansion. The affective potential for these cabins is quite great, but also quite *optional*, as the tour included in the ticket price only includes the Big House.

Cook and Alderman (2015), in their study of the *Stolpersteine* Holocaust memorial project in Germany, found that people's reactions to encountering the memorials—small stones embedded in sidewalks that commemorate individual victims—ranged from empathy with Holocaust victims to complete aversion or even hatred. Cook and Alderman (2015) argued that through memorializing individual victims and spatially distributing these memorials throughout Germany and other European countries at sites where victims once lived and worked, the *Stolpersteine* challenge state-sponsored memorials and their tendency to present Holocaust victims as an unnamed monolithic group. The memorials, Cook and Alderman (2015) contend, help the public (re)interpret the past in more nuanced ways that can open more empathetic understandings of the Holocaust.

In contrast to these scholars, the second position in the debate over empathetic possibilities comes largely from the Holocaust Studies literature. Samuel Moyn (2006) argued that recent historical research on empathy does not adequately distinguishing between *sympathy* and *empathy*. Moyn reviews the work of historians Carolyn Dean (2004) and Dominick

LaCapra (2004) and argues that their research on empathy actually substitutes *empathy* for Enlightenment-era understandings of *sympathy*.^{4.2} Moyn (2006: 399–400, emphasis added) says:

Sympathy...implies in Greek what *compassion* implies in Latin, suffering others' situations or pain along with them. *Empathy* suggests a more internalized understanding of or identification with such people's states, seeing things from their point of view or 'in their shoes.' Where the former seems to stop at the apparently necessary externality of two people to one another, the *latter suggests the possibility of a self-transformation* that allows *partial internality*.

Other Holocaust scholars such as Elie Wiesel (1978) and Gary Weissman (2004) have gone further and argued that empathy with Holocaust victims is impossible. Wiesel (1978: n.p.), for example, has referred to the Holocaust as “the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted.” Weissman (2004) empirically grounds this idea by examining many different ways that people in the post-World War II era have expressed desires to ‘know’ what it was like to experience and survive the Holocaust. Weissman (2004) argues that *nonwitnesses* (those who did not experience the Holocaust) have tried to make the Holocaust feel ‘more real,’ as if it were possible to become a prisoner and feel the actual horrors of death camps. Weissman (2004: 4, emphasis original) problematizes contemporary efforts to empathetically engage with witnessing past atrocities of the Holocaust: “This desire can be satisfied only in fantasy, in fantasies of witnessing the Holocaust for oneself...these fantasies express a desire for the Holocaust to feel *more real* than it does today...” In the context of remembering slavery (or a lack of remembrance) at plantation and museum sites in the American South, Wiesel (1978), Weissman’s (2004), and Moyn’s (2006) position that

^{4.2} LaCapra (2004) and Dean’s (2004) research comprise the core of what Moyn (2006) calls a new ‘school of thought’ that considers empathy to be the new, enlightened cultural imperative in the post-Holocaust world.

empathy is not possible presents an underutilized way to theorize and analyze how people respond to encountering slavery counter narratives.

The third position in the debates over empathy come from Critical Race Theory. Scholars in this field have argued that trying to overcome racial disparities by engaging oppressive groups using empathetic dialog is an empathic fallacy. Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 28) define empathic fallacy as “the belief that one can change a narrative by merely offering another, better one—that the reader’s or listener’s empathy will quickly and reliably take over. Unfortunately, however, empathy is in shorter supply than we think.” Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 28) go on to argue that many people lack the ability to truly empathize because they do not engage with people who are racially or socially different from themselves on a regular basis. By focusing on empathy—which may or may not be possible for many people according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001)—the plantations and museums analyzed in this paper may miss opportunities to engage their visitors in more important intellectual and political responses such as solidarity with oppressed groups or questioning positionalities like white privilege.

For my analysis, I blend aspects of the first and third positions outlined in this section. While I think that empathy is a possible response that sometimes leads to positive changes among plantation and museum visitors who experience it, I also agree with Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) position that focusing solely on empathetic creation can lead sites of memory (and those who research them) to miss other important responses such as solidarity with the descendants of the enslaved community. Many of these descendants still face racial discrimination and poverty today, and many still live nearby the plantations where their ancestors were once enslaved. In the next section of this paper, I discuss my fieldwork

methodology before turning to the analysis of the Natchez Museum, Frogmore Plantation, and Whitney Plantation.

Fieldwork methodology

At the sites analyzed in this paper, I used direct observation and qualitative methods as the primary means of investigation. Fieldwork was conducted in two stages, by myself from 5–11 August 2014 and from 5–8 March 2015 with a group of researchers working on NSF-funded research at plantations along Louisiana’s River Road. During the first stage in Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, my research was intentionally exploratory in nature and mainly involved observation at several museums and plantations. As Kearns (2010) argues, the act of observation goes beyond sight to include touch, smell, sound, and reflexive awareness of how the researcher’s previous experiences shape their observations. Considered in this light, observation is far more than something that should be “regarded as ‘inherently easy’ and ‘of limited value’” (Kearns 2010: 241). Keeping Kearns’ advice in mind, I spent time each day to ‘debrief’ by writing notes, opinions, and observations in a journal and blogging them on my personal website.^{4.3}

Based on methods employed by Eichstedt and Small (2002) and Modlin (2008), I toured many sites during the first stage as a typical tourist would without initially disclosing my position as a researcher. As Eichstedt and Small (2002) and Modlin (2008) argue, disclosing one’s position—that of a researcher who is specifically interested in slavery—while on a public tour risks the introduction of bias on the part of docents, who may deviate from the standard

^{4.3} The author’s personal website, on which he posted his observations and notes from fieldwork, is <http://matt-cook.com>.

tour narrative to present what they believe the researcher wants to hear. To ensure I received the standard public tour, I did not talk to docents or other staff members beforehand at all but one of the sites visited during my first stage of fieldwork. For example, at Frogmore, I paid for a guided tour that was open to the public and took the tour with a large, predominantly white group of retirees. After the tour, I talked informally with one of the docents to introduce my research interests. While this method did not follow typical qualitative research design practices that call for transparency between researcher and subjects, I did not seek personal or professional gain from the lack of transparency, and subjects were not exposed to any risk. For access to the Natchez Museum, I did call the museum before fieldwork to ensure they would be open while I was in Natchez. After arriving at the museum, I reintroduced myself to museum docent David Dreyer.^{4.4} Unlike at plantations, where guides present fairly standardized tours to the public, the Natchez museum is meant to be perused at tourists' leisure. However, like many small museums, Dreyer and I were the only two people in the museum most of the afternoon, so I felt it more logical to introduce myself. Dreyer gave me a selective tour of the most important slave-centric and other counter narrative exhibits in the museum and explained the staff's reasons for including these exhibits in the museum.

For the second stage of the research, I participated on a research team from several American universities as part of a National Science Foundation-funded project. The research team interviewed and surveyed tourists at five River Road plantations, interviewed plantation

^{4.4} Having already read about the museum in an Al Jazeera America article (Parker, 2014), I knew that David Dreyer, a docent and local historian, could point me to several counter-narratives presented in the museum and give me more information about the collection and its history than was simply presented on signs throughout the museum.

docents, and took tours to observe how each site conducted their operations.^{4.5} This multi-year, multi-state project works to identify, study, and challenge social inequalities present in the plantation tourism industry. The majority of my time during this fieldwork was spent at Whitney Plantation, where I took the tour and surveyed and interviewed participants as part of the larger team. The research instruments asked tourists questions such as their reasons for visiting the plantation, what they expected to encounter on the tour, if the tour met those expectations, and if slavery was presented on their tour and in what ways. These interactions help inform my analysis of Whitney Plantation in this paper.

Also important in this paper are my own personal photographs collected during fieldwork. Many geographers and scholars of tourism and memory have argued that photography is a key ‘vehicle of memory’ (Hoelscher 2008), and spaces that are deemed aesthetically pleasing or worthy of a photograph also shape the tourist’s gaze. One of the foremost geographers studying the meaning and power of photography, Steve Hoelscher argues that photographs have the potential to bear witness to atrocities and destruction but also cautions that photography hides as much as it reveals (Hoelscher 2008, Hoelscher 2012). By including my own personal photographs in this paper, it is my intention to use photographs as an aid by which to remember detailed aspects from fieldwork and present various audiences of this research with visual examples from counter narrative sites. I am an avid photographer with training in photojournalism and other photographic disciplines. Photography, to me, presents the opportunity to document places, much like tourists themselves photograph spaces they find most appealing or striking for various reasons. I do,

^{4.5} These plantations included Oak Alley, Laura, Houmas House, San Francisco, and Whitney. I personally was part of the teams that worked at Oak Alley and Whitney.

however, recognize the selective framing of heritage tourism that is inherent in using one's own personal photographs, and I would point out that other researchers might take different perspectives and approaches with photography.

Sites and their situations: An examination of museums that differ

Natchez Museum

A site with several prominent African American counter narratives, the Natchez Museum of African-American History and Culture presents the history of African American life in the Natchez area from slavery to the present (see Figure 4.3). Parker (2014) reports that Natchez depends heavily on its tourism industry centered on Old Confederate history and the annual Spring Pilgrimage, begun in 1931 by the Natchez Garden Club to display elaborate gardens and antebellum mansions. The pilgrimage was such a success that the city spent decades restoring the columned mansions and branding itself with idyllic images like southern belles and Confederate history. In contrast, the Museum of African-American History and Culture devotes its space to documenting the African American community's many contributions in and around Natchez. For example, upon entering the museum, visitors are presented with the history of slavery in Natchez, beginning with the enslavement of Native Americans—the first slaves in the Natchez area under the French. Africans were later brought to the area as slaves, and one exhibit features tribal masks from Mali, where many of the enslaved community were sold to European slave traders. By presenting slavery front and center, the Natchez Museum engages in a form of symbolic excavation (Alderman and Campbell 2008), particularly relying on textual counter narrative strategies.

The Natchez Museum has built its collection through somewhat piecemeal practices over the years, and one of the oldest exhibits in the museum to use artifactual counter

narrative strategies is a collection that displays middle-class black life during the 20th century. Members of the city's African American community donated the items in the collection, and the artifacts reflect the fact that many African Americans were no longer sharecropping in the mid-20th century, even if their grandparents had few other choices after Emancipation. By displaying artifacts from African American homes in the post-Emancipation period, the Natchez Museum challenges the 'frozen in time' trope (Modlin 2008), whereby many plantation museums present life on the plantation as a fixed point in time (usually a good year prior to the Civil War).

The Natchez Museum also tackles other myths commonly included in the dominant slavery narrative with the history of Abdul Rahman Ibrahima Sori, a Muslim prince from West Africa sold into slavery in Natchez and later New Orleans. Abdul Rahman was eventually freed from 40 years of enslavement after an improbable meeting with Dr. John Cox, who met Abdul Rahman's father in Africa decades earlier. The museum presents information on Abdul Rahman from the recent biography, *Prince Among Slaves* (Alford 1977) and the award-winning 2006 Public Broadcasting Service documentary of the same name. By prominently addressing Abdul Rahman's history, the Natchez Museum challenges the pervasive myths that not much is known about slavery in the American South and that slavery was predominantly defined by the period leading up to the Civil War. With the emphasis on a single person about whom much is known, the Abdul Rahman exhibit also opens up empathetic possibilities for visitors to emotionally grapple with the horrors that he experienced at the hands of white slave traders and plantation owners.

As outlined in this section, the Natchez Museum is a useful starting point to study the variety of counter narratives strategies that can be used to challenge white-centric plantation

depictions that trivialize slavery. While the empathetic potential at this site may not be as great for some visitors (upon personal reflection, the Natchez Museum did not evoke as strong an emotional response as the plantation sites), the variety of artifacts and factual text presented in the exhibits is still a much-needed commemorative project of recovering the enslaved. Beyond merely challenging the lack of slavery education, there were several other narratives that Dreyer showed me that I have not listed here. I have included only those counter narratives that are most relevant to the history of slavery in the Deep South rather than, for example, also discussing exhibits about Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and local author Richard Wright. Taken together, the Natchez Museum goes far beyond simply recording and retelling one city's history to stand as a beacon of truth in the landscape of race relations in the American South.

Frogmore Plantation

Next, I turn to Frogmore, a site with great potential for examining empathetic responses to the history of slavery. Frogmore Plantation and Cotton Gins is across the Mississippi River from Natchez in Concordia Parish, Louisiana. I took the Historical Cotton and Plantation Culture tour with a group of predominantly white retirees from Wisconsin. The tour itself lived up to expectations generated by their website, which addresses slavery front and center (see Figure 4.4). Frogmore's tour contrasts starkly with many other Deep South antebellum plantation tours, first because of its heavy reliance on counter narrative textual strategies. Second, Frogmore's performative strategy includes an extreme rarity among Southern plantations because the tour's *spatial presentation* of heritage (Azaryahu and Foote 2008) does *not* include a Big House tour.

In terms of textual narrative strategies, the two tour guides with whom I interacted were highly knowledgeable about the region's history of slavery and what life was like on the plantation. Particularly noteworthy was co-owner Lynette Tanner, who owns the plantation with her husband Buddy. Lynette incorporates substantial archival research and written accounts of slavery during tours, and she has edited a book (Tanner 2014) on plantation life and slavery in Louisiana using interviews of former slaves conducted in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Writers' Projects. Tanner and other docents also said that they have read portions of Solomon Northup's autobiography *12 Years a Slave* on tours for approximately 16 years—long before the book was turned into the 2013 Academy Award-winning Hollywood film. Using *12 Years a Slave*, Tanner and her team present visitors a first-hand account of slavery's everyday injustices.

Spatially, Frogmore differs from many large plantation operations foremost because the Tanners live in the former Big House. Frogmore's mansion has not been preserved as a historical house museum but updated and modernized over time. Instead of touring the mansion, visitors can enter several outbuildings including an overseer's house, the slave kitchen and quarters, a one-room church, a smokehouse, and an 1880s-era cotton gin. An optional side tour includes a visit to Frogmore's modern ginning operations, which are run as a successful agribusiness by Buddy Tanner. Although one of the guides described the overall nature of the tour as *not* being a 'slaves and shackles' tour, it was obvious that the Tanners have spent a lot of time and money to be able to demonstrate the history of slavery in the cotton-growing Deep South. Their efforts include purchasing additional buildings like original slave cabins from plantations in the Natchez area to bring to Frogmore, preserve, and include on tours.

One major counter narrative presented at Frogmore challenges what Modlin (2008) identified as the ‘life was hard for everyone’ myth. This myth is commonly employed at plantation museums and historical sites across the United States where slavery is minimized by claims that living conditions in the 17th through 19th centuries made life more difficult for everyone. As Modlin (2008: 279) argues, “statements [that life was harder for everyone] imply an equality of experience that just did not exist. By saying that everyone lived a difficult life, slavery is framed as [only] a slightly more difficult form of existence in the antebellum period.” Frogmore challenges this myth by contrasting the lives and experiences of several different types of slaves on the cotton plantation. First, guides give attention to the relatively better off workers, particularly the enslaved overseer, the house slaves who cooked for the family, and their relatively lighter workloads and better housing conditions (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6). These are contrasted with the more physically demanding work of the field slaves, who worked Frogmore’s cotton fields in the brutal Louisiana heat for much of the year. By presenting the hardships and cruelty that the enslaved community faced at sites like Frogmore—from discussions of the long, hot work hours to examples of how physically demanding cotton production once was—the Tanners and their staff help visitors viscerally grapple with the realities of slavery and its aftermath of sharecropping and rural poverty.

Whitney Plantation

Whitney Plantation is the most recent addition to the River Road plantation tourism region. Although it was once slated to be converted to a \$700 million rayon plant, wealthy New Orleans lawyer John Cummings purchased Whitney Plantation in the early 2000s (Amsden 2015). Cummings began the expensive process of restoring the buildings and adding other historic plantation structures he purchased and transferred from around the American

South. According to Amsden (2015), Cummings put approximately \$8 million of his own money into restoring the Whitney. Cummings states (quoted in Amsden 2015) that after he purchased the plantation and read more about slavery he had no intention of converting the Whitney to mimic other grandiose plantations along River Road. Instead, with assistance from Senegalese scholar Ibrahima Seck, Cummings has created a plantation museum solely dedicated to slavery.

In terms of narrative strategies, the Whitney puts a significant twist on conventional plantation tour logistics. Rather than touring the Big House first (or solely), tours begin in a church founded in 1867 by former slaves in a nearby parish. Cummings purchased the church, moved it across the Mississippi River, and restored it for around \$300,000. Inside the church, the guide shows a short film about the plantation's history as the home of German immigrants, the Heidel family, and discusses Cummings's vision to establish a slavery museum. In the church and around the plantation are a series of terracotta statues that depict enslaved children as they would have appeared around the time of Emancipation. These statues are part of Cummings's emphasis on the suffering and death of enslaved children, which reflects the potential for Whitney to evoke empathy from visitors. After exiting the church, tourists are led through a series of three monuments. First is the Wall of Honor, which commemorates the 354 slaves held on *Habitation Haydel* (as the plantation was once called). Next on the tour is the Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, which names 107,000 Louisiana slaves. The monument, which draws its artistic inspiration from the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C., is named for a Rutgers professor (Gwendolyn Hall) who researched the history of Africans in colonial Louisiana and created the Louisiana Slave Database. The final memorial, called the Field of Angels, commemorates the 2,200 enslaved children in Louisiana

who died before the age of three. Interspersed with the names on the three memorials are quotes from former slaves who were interviewed during the WPA's Federal Writers' Project.

After viewing the memorials, tours continue much like at Frogmore, during which visitors learn about the living and working conditions of the enslaved and walk through outbuildings like restored slave cabins, the kitchen, and an 1800s-era jail (see Figures 3.7 and 3.8). Only for the final 15 minutes do tours finally enter the mansion, which Cummings has left relatively unrestored and sparsely furnished. Rather than spending much time discussing the opulent lifestyle of the owners, most of the time in the Big House is spent explaining how difficult life was for house slaves. During the tour I observed, the guide explained how difficult it would be for an 11- or 12-year-old young slave to prepare hot water for the family to bathe. Tours conclude in the museum's entrance building, which houses a bookshop and museum exhibit on the transatlantic slave trade. In this building, visitors are encouraged to reflect on the tour and write feedback on sticky note to post to a wall (see Figure 4.9).

The Whitney employs textual, performance, and artifact strategies to tell a more socially just history of the enslaved community. Textual counter narratives begin as soon as visitors enter the main building to purchase tickets, after which they are given a lanyard (with a picture of a terra cotta statue and quote from the WPA interviews). While waiting for the tour, visitors are encourage to read an informational display on the transatlantic slave trade, which covers the history of slavery from 15th century Portuguese enslavers to the 19th century international business of human trafficking.^{4.6} Guides also rely heavily on textual strategies once tours begin, encouraging tour groups to spend as much time as they want to read the

^{4.6} In 1452, Pope Nicholas V's decree *Dum Diversas* granted Portugal the exclusive right to trade with Africa, which included trading for slaves. Under *Dum Diversas*, Portugal was given authority to enslave 'pagans' such as Africans in perpetuity.

names and quotes inscribed on memorials. Textual strategies are also an important part of visitors' interactions with the plantation staff, as seen on the wall of sticky note comments (Figure 4.9).

Performative strategies at Whitney include the order in which the tour is spatially conducted, placing the least emphasis—in terms of order and time spent—on the Big House, a space that was predominantly occupied by white people. Many visitors first view the mansion as they look through the bars of the jail (Figure 4.8), which guides encourage visitors to enter to visualize the horror of being locked up during the hot Louisiana summer. In terms of artifact-based strategies, the Whitney presents several original artifacts in the transatlantic slave trade exhibit, including chains and shackles, but the church, slave cabins, plantation, kitchen, and other buildings on the tour are relatively sparse in comparison to the multitude of artifacts shown on many other plantations' Big House tours. However, guides try to help tourists visualize the material culture that slaves used in their everyday lives, for example baking in the kitchen or the plainly furnished, overcrowded cabins.

Not only does the Whitney use multiple counter narrative strategies to present a more historically accurate remembrance of slavery, these strategies also hint at the many emotional experiences that tourists may encounter while taking the tour. Gauging from comments posted after the tours, some tourists find the tour to be *beautiful, heartbreaking, emotional and humbling*, and a *powerful and moving experience*. While these select keywords have been cherry-picked from the wall of comments, they do suggest there exists, if nothing else, the *possibility* for tourists to empathetically engage with difficult, suppressed histories and come to a more enriched knowledge of the effects slavery had in the United States.

However, this is not to suggest the Whitney is without difficulties or problematic qualities. While conducting interviews, for example, I approached and asked an older African American gentleman if he would be interested in being interviewed about his tour experience. He initially expressed an unwillingness to participate, but followed up by stating that he planned to contact the owner to explain his general dissatisfaction with the tour. His major point of contention was that he felt the tour—though accurate in its portrayal of the harsh, brutal realities of slavery—still subscribed to long-held racist beliefs that enslaved Africans were dumb and passive. The gentleman wanted to know: Where is the discussion of slave resistance? Where are the narratives about the ingenuity and depth of agricultural knowledge that Africans added to the plantation system? Although I could not answer his questions, I encouraged him to follow up with Cummings, who frequently meets with groups before or after tours and expressly invites them to provide him with feedback and ideas on how to improve the Whitney. The gentleman's questions point to the fact that tourism site owners and managers are inherently limited in what can and cannot be presented, but Cummings's willingness to improve and add to the museum also demonstrates that sites of tourism need not be static either.

Concluding thoughts

Empathy is important to the growing movement, along River Road and elsewhere, to recover and re-tell the history of slavery, reflecting a belief held by operators of counter narrative sites that tourism has the capacity to create an empathetic engagement between the visitor and the memory of the enslaved and to move the public, emotionally and politically, to recognize and identify with slave experiences. Returning to the Critical Race Theory

perspective (Delgado and Stefancic 2001), heritage tourism site managers who merely desire or even expect that visitors will experience empathy, merely for empathy's sake, will not necessarily lead to a more just society. Thus, for example, even though Whitney and Frogmore make important advances by challenging other antebellum plantations' presentation of normative, 'moonlight and magnolias' interpretations of southern history at the expense of the enslaved community's memory, further research and discussions are needed to advance even greater, socially responsible forms of tourism. In contrast to tourists taking an empathetic glimpse backward to the past on a relatively brief tour and returning home unchanged, Inwood (2013) argues that it is imperative to consider how affect, emotion, and even love can be used to build political movements. In the case of museums and plantations in the American South, I have not found many sites where clearly defined political actions are explicitly stated as goals. At the very least, my experiences and research suggest that tourist spaces could provide much more information to explicitly help visitors understand why alliance and solidarity with oppressed people are important.

In this paper, I have related findings from three sites in the Deep South that challenge common narratives and myths employed to marginalize slavery at many plantation museums. My on-going research evaluates in greater detail the potential for these sites and others to evoke empathy with those who suffered under slavery but also engages in the inherently political act of studying how these counter narratives can be further advanced. Chattel slavery was foundational to the development of the US political economy, as slaves' unpaid labor fueled the production and harvesting of the nation's staple crops: tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar (Berlin 2004). The sale of these products on the international market brought wealth and capital into the new country, and predominantly white, European-descended people used this

wealth to build the infrastructure that has supported the American economy ever since. Further, as Berlin (2004) points out, the wealth accumulated by slave-owning Southerners helped them secure positions of political power ranging from the Supreme Court to Congress to the White House. These white men helped shape American political culture and values still cherished to this day—particularly (and indeed, ironically), notions of freedom, liberty, and justice.

One major area in which counter narrative sites in the Deep South can continue to work and improve upon is how to make these connections between the institution of slavery, the foundation of the United States, and slavery's impacts on present-day race relations more explicit to the public. As Inwood, Tyner, and Alderman (2014, n.p.) have recently argued, the complex situations surrounding the violent deaths of black men like Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Eric Garner on Staten Island, New York; and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland are certainly a product of the “neoliberal and racialized conditions” in the United States today but are also part and parcel of a more than 400-year legacy of devaluing black lives and black bodies dating back to slavery. Spaces such as the three counter narrative sites discussed in this paper are critically important to resisting revisionist histories and for their potential empathetic power among visitors. I remain hopeful that with further political action, these counter narrative sites can help lead to a more just society.

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored several approaches to better understand the historical geographies of the chattel slavery system in the United States South, recognizing the importance of interrogating and making an intervention in how those in plantation tourism, public history, and educational circles remember and represent the history of African bondage. The social memory of slavery has traditionally been narrated in ways that ignore and marginalize the brutal and important role that slave communities played in American and southern development. These injustices in representing the history of African Americans continue to exert a strong influence upon the landscape. At the same time, the geographies of public memory are undergoing challenges and changes with the rise of counter-narratives that are decidedly devoted to opposing this tradition of forgetting the enslaved and their historical contributions. Yet, these counter-narratives can be characterized by their own limitations, contradictions, and exclusions that potentially affect their political and emotional efficacy. The overarching goal of the dissertation has been **to study the processes through which people form, operationalize, and can advance counter narratives of slavery.** The broader applications and significance of this research, beyond its contributions to scholarly literature, are found in the ways empirical findings and theoretical advances can be applied to contemporary race relations and understandings of the effects and outcomes of slavery in the United States today. The overarching framework that I employed throughout the dissertation has been to take a critical approach to understanding what historical geographic research can (and should) include, theoretically informed by historical and cultural geography; geographies of memory; Marxist political economy; Critical Race Theory; critical pedagogy; and literatures on empathy, social justice, and historical responsibility.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I first revisit the three research goals that I laid out in the dissertation introduction in a discussion of each goal's intellectual merit and will recap their main contributions. The subsequent section addresses the broader impacts that this research has and will continue to have, both in academia and to the general public. In the last section, I suggest further avenues of research that I have considered related to the topics and issues presented in this dissertation.

Intellectual merit

Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each address, in varying ways, the first research goal to **identify counter narratives of slavery**. Using and expanding upon the textual politics method advanced by Alderman (2012), Chapter 1 identified a few examples of counter narratives scripted into the Alabama Historical Association's historical marker program and observed a pattern that the program has gradually become more inclusive of African American historical narratives over the last two decades. Still, African American history is nowhere near parity with other narratives across Alabama's historical marker memoryscape, particularly those celebrating the "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy. Chapter 2, though most directly addressing the second research goal on the pedagogical value of counter narratives, nonetheless does engage in a media analysis of two recent filmic representations of slavery, *Ask a Slave* and *12 Years a Slave*. In my analysis, I described how both of these media texts operate as counter narratives that challenge the dominant, mythical narrative surrounding the "faithful slave," particularly as it has portrayed "Mammies" as desexualized, uneducated, and devoted members of enslavers' families. Chapter 4 took a strong focus on identifying slavery counter narratives at sites of memory including the Natchez Museum of African American History

and Culture, Frogmore Plantation and Cotton Gins, and Whitney Plantation. These sites stand in contrast to other museums and plantations in the Deep South, particularly along Louisiana's River Road, that have tended to ignore or downplay the history of slavery in their tourism operations. Further, these three sites—especially the Whitney—are gradually pushing some nearby plantations to better tell the history of the enslaved. Through this identification of counter narratives, these three chapters all make empirical contributions to geographic literatures on counter narratives, geographies of memory, and most importantly, the limited literature on historical geographies of slavery. Finally, one additional point woven throughout all four chapters that confirms the findings of much of the existing literature (Adams 1999, 2007; Butler 2001; Alderman and Modlin 2008, 2015; Modlin 2008; Butler, Carter, and Dwyer 2008; Litvin and Brewer 2008; Inwood and Martin 2008; Buzinde and Santos 2008, 2009; Hanna 2015; Bright and Carter 2015; Potter 2015) is that the whitewashing of the history of slavery is pervasive throughout and across the cultural landscape, not just at plantation tourism operations.

The second goal to **understand and extend the pedagogical and empathetic value of counter narratives of slavery** is addressed in Chapters 2 and 4. Drawing upon critical pedagogy literature (Wills 2005, Yilmaz 2007, Brooks 2009, Hess 2011), Chapter 2 outlined a pedagogical praxis of how to turn a classroom into a “memory workspace” to address difficult historical geography through film. I argued that using both *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave* to teach about slavery enables educators to de-stabilize white-centric versions of history that tend to marginalize or write out the enslaved. I found that filmic representations have far-reaching educational potential for challenging various audiences' perceived conceptions and lack of understandings about the racist and sexist horrors of the

U.S. slavery system, and also investigate *12 Years a Slave* and *Ask a Slave* for their empathetic potential to help students connect emotionally with historical actors. Collectively considered with other filmic representations of slavery released over the last few years, these media challenge racially charged (and sometimes racist-inspired) narratives of slaves as a ubiquitous, monolithic group without agency, personality, or humanity. Building on the need for classroom pedagogy on slavery, I also argue that slavery counter narratives demonstrate the need for greater *public* pedagogies on slavery's historical geographies. The markers, museums, tourism sites, and media representations that I researched reveal by their very existence that there is a substantial need for these counter narratives to teach the general public and stand in opposition to dominant, mythic narratives of slavery. Simultaneously, these counter narratives work to be part of the solution to meet that need.

Building upon the empirical identification of counter narratives, I use Chapter 4 to study the empathetic value of counter narratives employed by sites of memory. This is where my major theoretical contribution to the historical-geographic literature comes into play in Chapter 4, as I argued that while visitors' empathetic responses to counter narratives of slavery are important for site owners and operators to consider as they shape their ongoing historical interpretation (and also a useful area of research for scholars), it is perilous to focus exclusively on empathy at the expense of other, more *political* responses such as solidarity and activism with the enslaved and their descendants today.

The transition from the second research goal, on pedagogy and empathy, to the third goal, to **advance new counter narratives of slavery and a social justice research agenda**, is made clear in Chapter 3. I engage with Marxist social theory (Marx 1992, Harvey 2010, Mitchell 2000 and 2003, Kirsch and Mitchell 2003) and recent work on the productivity of

violence (Springer 2013; Tyner 2014; Tyner and Inwood 2014; Tyner, Sirik, and Henkin 2014) to build upon the findings of Chapter 4 on counter narratives sites and the fieldwork research for this dissertation at several plantations along Louisiana's River Road that engage in a wide variety of touristic and money-making practices. Informed by Marx's theory of dead labor, I traced the influences that slavery has had on America's political economy from its very beginnings into the present, as wealthy contemporary plantation site owners still extract value from their sites built on the backs of slave labor. Further, I call into question how contemporary plantation tourism operations socially alienate visitors from the enslaved and in so doing effectively fetishize and naturalize the consumption of the products of slave labor. This chapter contributes to the literature of critical geographies that engages with Marxist theory and critiques the productive nature of violence, critical tourism studies, and, again, the limited body of scholarship on slavery's historical geographies.

Broader impacts

As hinted at in this chapter's opening, the broader impacts of my dissertation research beyond the intellectual merit of my findings include many potential benefits to society, both within and outside of academia. Within academia, I have and plan to continue disseminating this research to a wider audience. This includes the presentation of all four of my main chapters in some format at various academic conferences (annual meetings of the American Association of Geographers and the Southeastern Division of the AAG, and the biennial Race, Ethnicity, and Place conferences and UT Knoxville Geography Department Symposia) and the publication or anticipated publication of each chapter in geography and tourism journals and in edited book volumes on teaching difficult history using film and the

geographies of language. My research also contributes to the field of Southern Studies and adds to the “Southern Turn” in Black Geographies—inspired by the work of scholars such as Woods (1998), Wilson (2000), McKittrick (2006), Eaves (2015), and many others to not just critique the South but also find in it sites for inspiration that challenge “conventional” stereotypes of the South as a racist backwater. This research has and will continue to also inform the college-level geography courses that I teach. I have incorporated several aspects of my dissertation research into the Geography 101 (*World Geography*) courses I have taught while a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, and my research can continue to be used in cultural and historical geography, popular culture, and historic preservation classes and seminars that I would like to teach as an early career faculty member.

Looking outside of academe, my research has positioned me to present findings in the form of community-engaged scholarship in its many facets. This could take the form of helping plantation tourism sites and museums with ties to slavery develop better “best practices” for their operations, historical interpretation, and community engagement. I can also disseminate findings to the general public through white papers, op-eds, and other forms of media engagement. Finally, the research from Chapter 1 can be used to assist historical associations and state governments to work toward more inclusive historical marker programs, while the pedagogical praxis outlined in Chapter 2 can be shared with high school and college educators to encourage them to engage more critically with the historical geographies of slavery in the classroom.

Future research trajectory

This dissertation research is one part of a much larger research trajectory that I plan to continue as I advance within the academy. As I have neared the end of my dissertation, many new and connected areas of research have become apparent that are closely in line with my personal interests in racial and social justice, historical responsibility, and critical geographic research. The first of these potential areas is to return to one idea for the dissertation that I eventually had to leave out for time's sake—that of the role of women (particularly African American women) in the advancement of counter narratives of slavery. At many of the sites I have visited, particularly at sites not included in this dissertation like McLeod and Magnolia Plantations in Charleston, South Carolina, and at sites like Oak Alley that are slowly starting to expand their focus on slavery, women play a major role in the historical preservation and interpretation of the enslaved community's history. In addition, a few months ago I interviewed the woman who runs the Twitter account “African American History Fails” (@afamhistfail), a Twitter account that she uses to anonymously discuss former work experiences at a large historic plantation site in the South. In a manner similar to the ways Azie Dungey used the *Ask a Slave* web comedy series to point out visitors' frequent racism and lack of knowledge about slavery, @afamhistfail highlights many examples of the unjust, ludicrous, and angry questions that visitors posed to her regarding the enslaved on her tours.

The second potential area of research I would like to pursue is a continuation of my focus on sites that engage with counter narratives of slavery. This could take the form of researching sites in new geographic areas, particularly in Charleston, South Carolina, where I have conducted fieldwork at several plantations like McLeod and Magnolia, mentioned above, and at Middleton Place Plantation and the Old Slave Mart Museum. I am also keen to

continue working with the RESET Initiative on their NSF-funded research in the James River Region of Virginia in 2017, and I would also like to see this kind of research expanded to include other Southern states, particularly Georgia and Tennessee. My interest in slavery in Tennessee, beyond the simple reason that I have grown up and received my higher education here, grew largely after I visited a temporary exhibit at the Tennessee State Museum that did an excellent job of interpreting the slavery period at Wessington Plantation in Robertson County. Georgia is a state that has largely gone unmentioned in the literature on historical geographies of slavery, despite being of great significance to the antebellum Southern economy and, as Baptist (2014) highlights, Georgia was a major player in the migration of slaves from the Northern U.S. and Upper South to the Deep South during the antebellum period.

The third area of research I would like to continue pursuing is in the area of media analysis of films and TV series that address and depict slavery. These include *Django Unchained* and *Lincoln* and newer TV series like AMC Network's *TURN: Washington's Spies*, WGN America's *Underground*, and Black Entertainment Television's slavery-themed, time-travel web series *Send Me*. This media analysis would focus on how filmic representations of slavery continue to operate as counter narratives (or ways in which they might reinforce dominant slavery narratives) and continue to present difficult histories and geographies to American and international audiences. Finally, the fourth area of research would pick up where Chapter 1 of the dissertation leaves off, continuing to expand my research on textual politics in Alabama to other states in the South and beyond.

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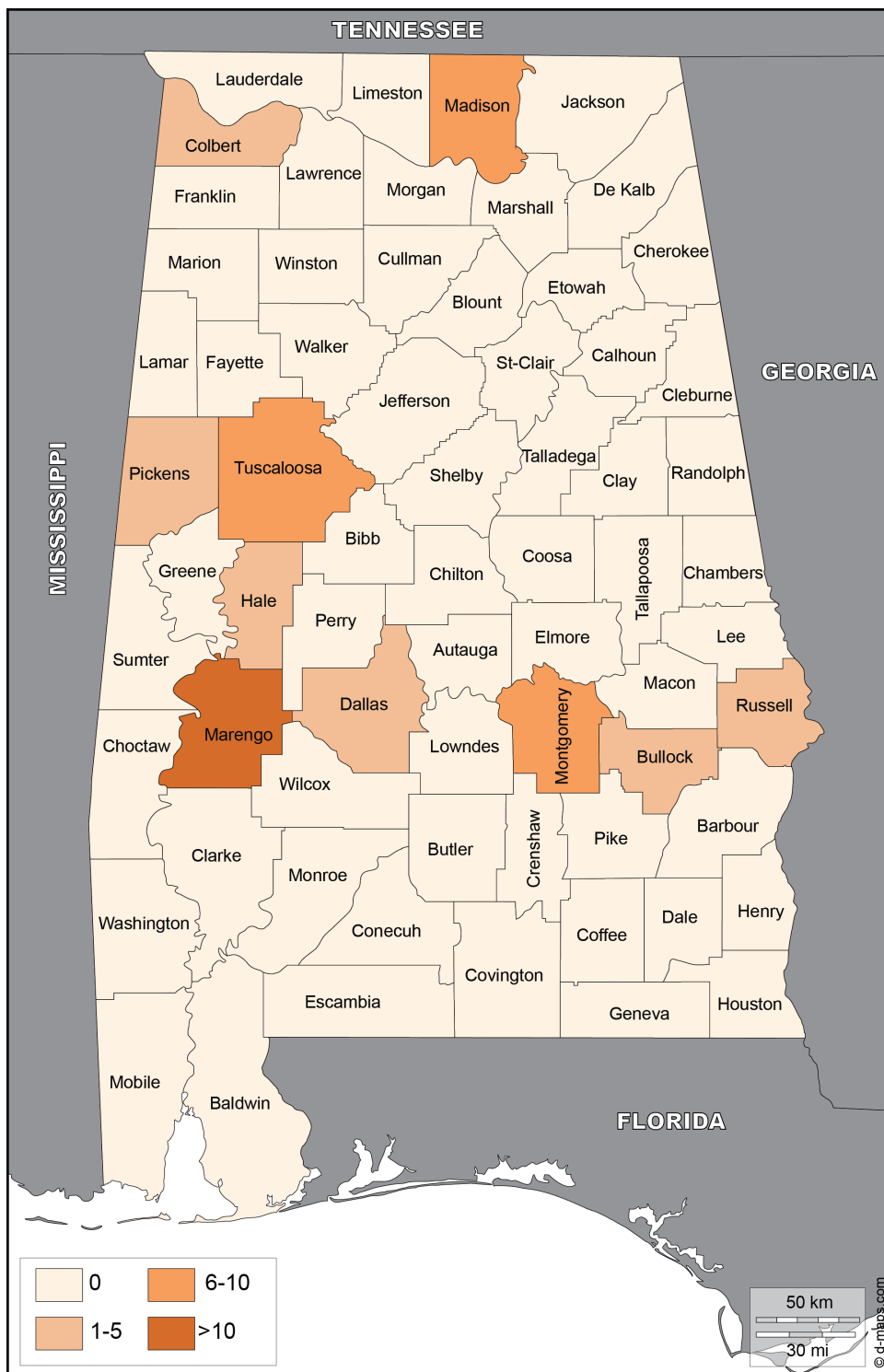
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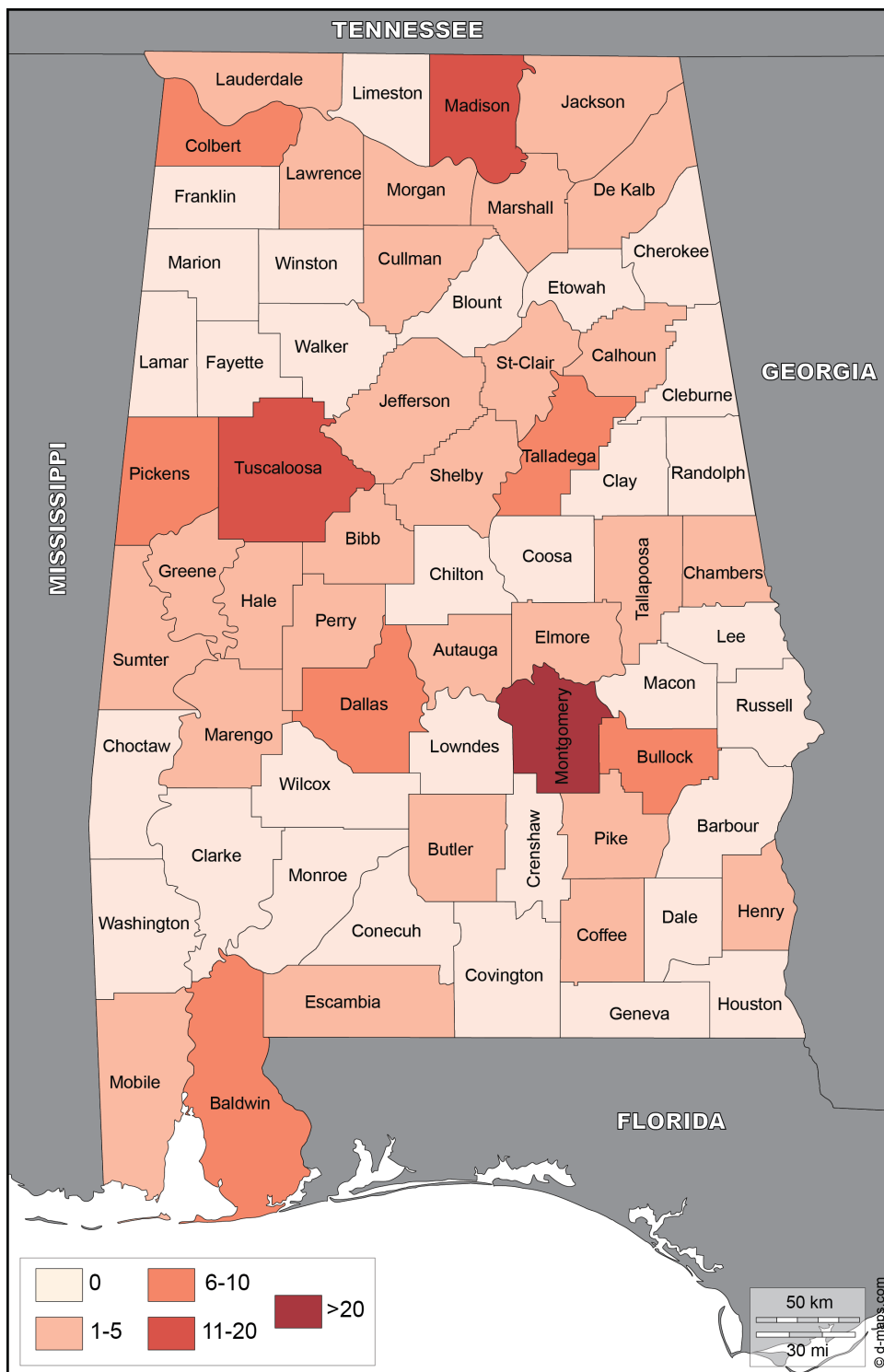
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APPENDIX: TABLE AND FIGURES

Table 1.1: 25 Most Common Words on Alabama Historical Association Markers

WORD	COUNT	SIMILAR WORDS
Church	770	Churches
Alabama	661	
First	597	Firsts
County	480	Counties
Schools	418	School, Schooling
Buildings	366	Build, Building
Site	320	Sites
States	295	State, Stated, Stately, States'
Montgomery	282	
War	276	Warring, Wars
Baptist	267	Baptiste, Baptists
Built	258	
City	236	Cities
Named	231	Name, Names, Naming
Serving	229	Serve, Served, Serves
Street	228	Streets
House	226	Houses, Housed, Housing
John	220	Johns, John's
Creek	198	Creeks
Indians	189	Indian, Indians'
Road	189	Roads
South	189	
William	188	Williams, Williams'
Land	182	Lands, Landed, Landing, Landings
Year	179	Years





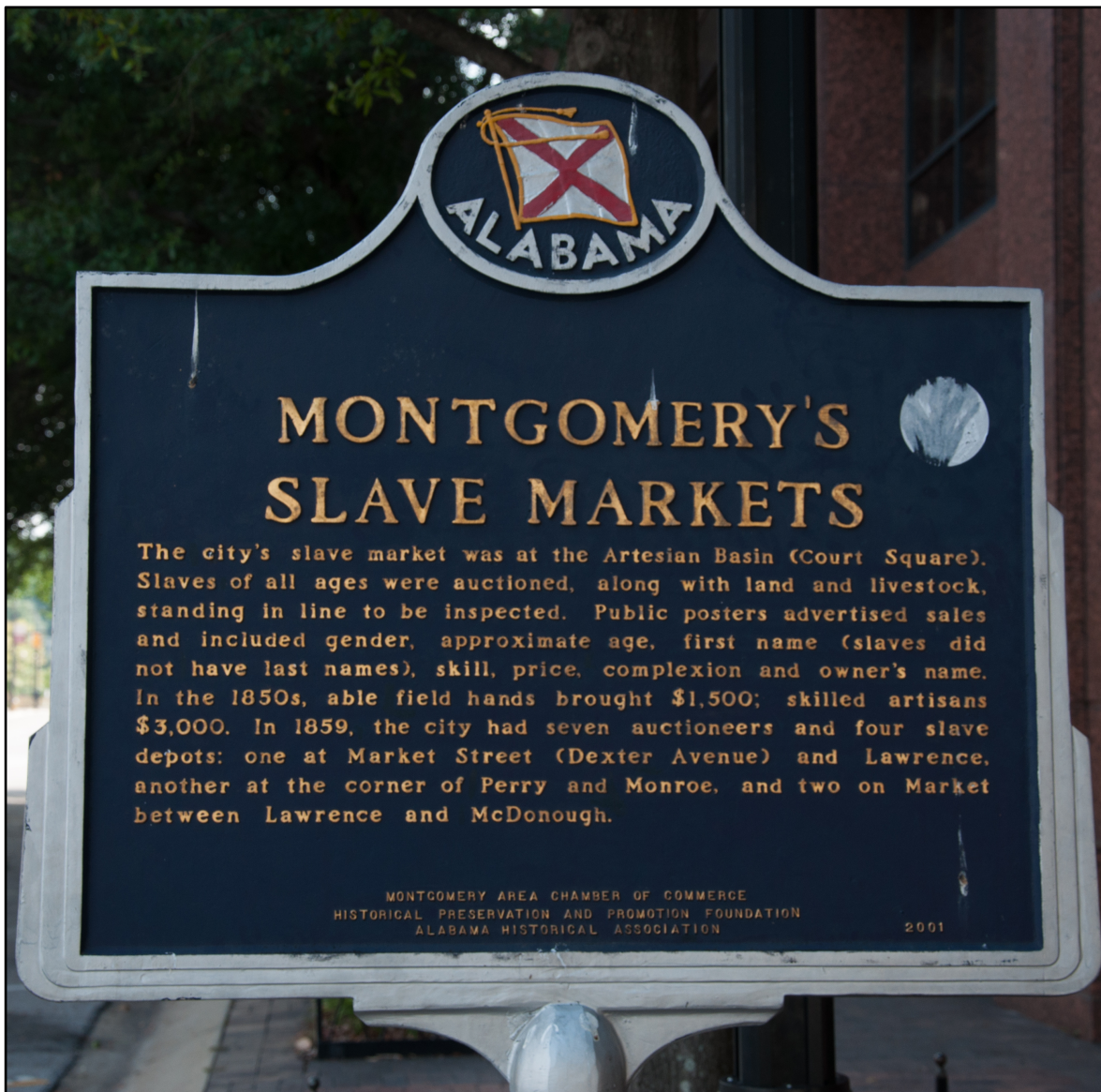


Figure 1.3. Alabama Historical Association marker *Montgomery's Slave Markets*, located near 115 Montgomery Street, Montgomery, Alabama. Photograph by author.

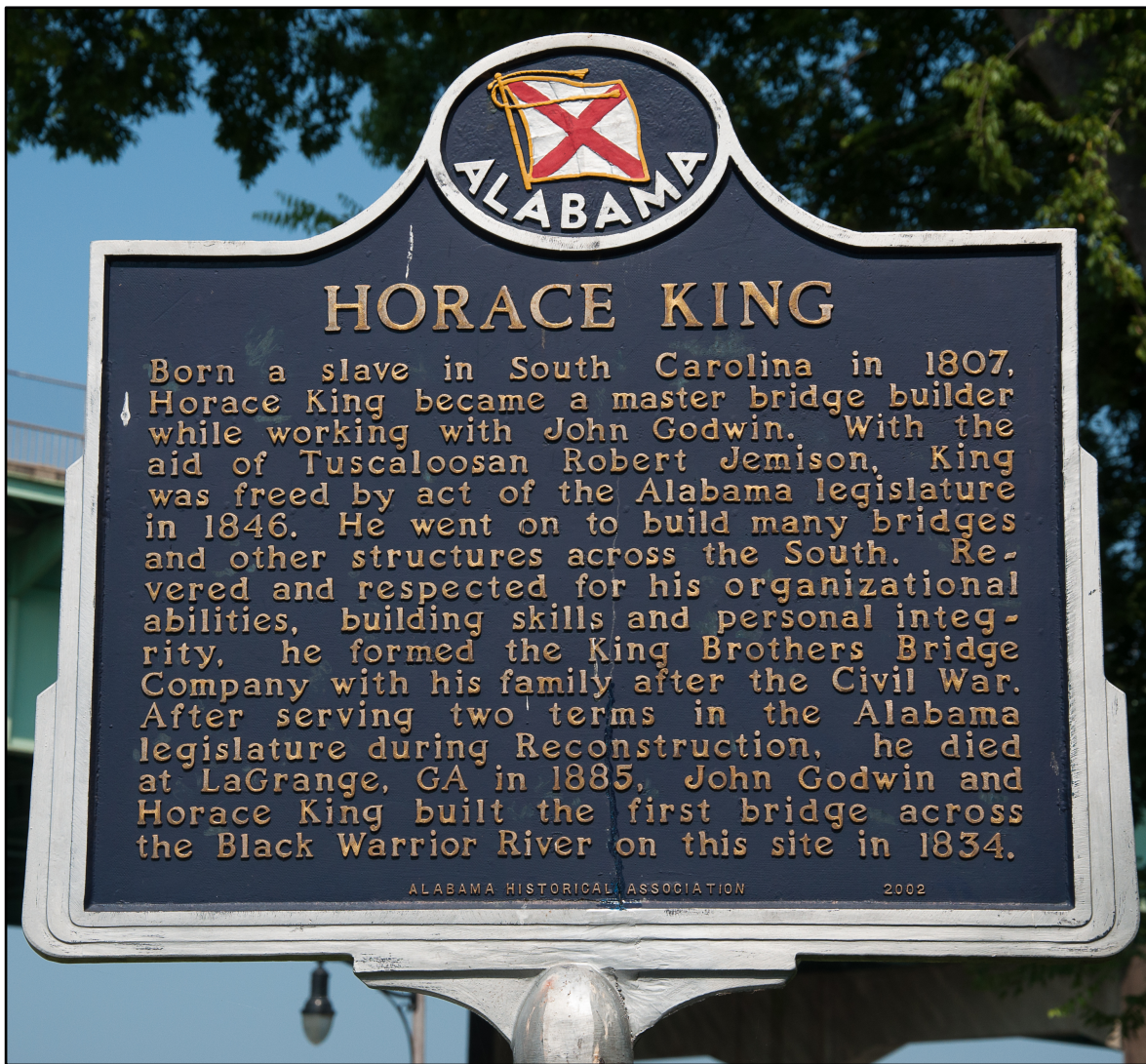


Figure 1.4. Alabama Historical Association marker *Horace King*, located at the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Photograph by author.



Figure 1.5. Alabama Historical Association marker *Hunter's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, located at 1105 22nd Avenue, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Photograph by author.

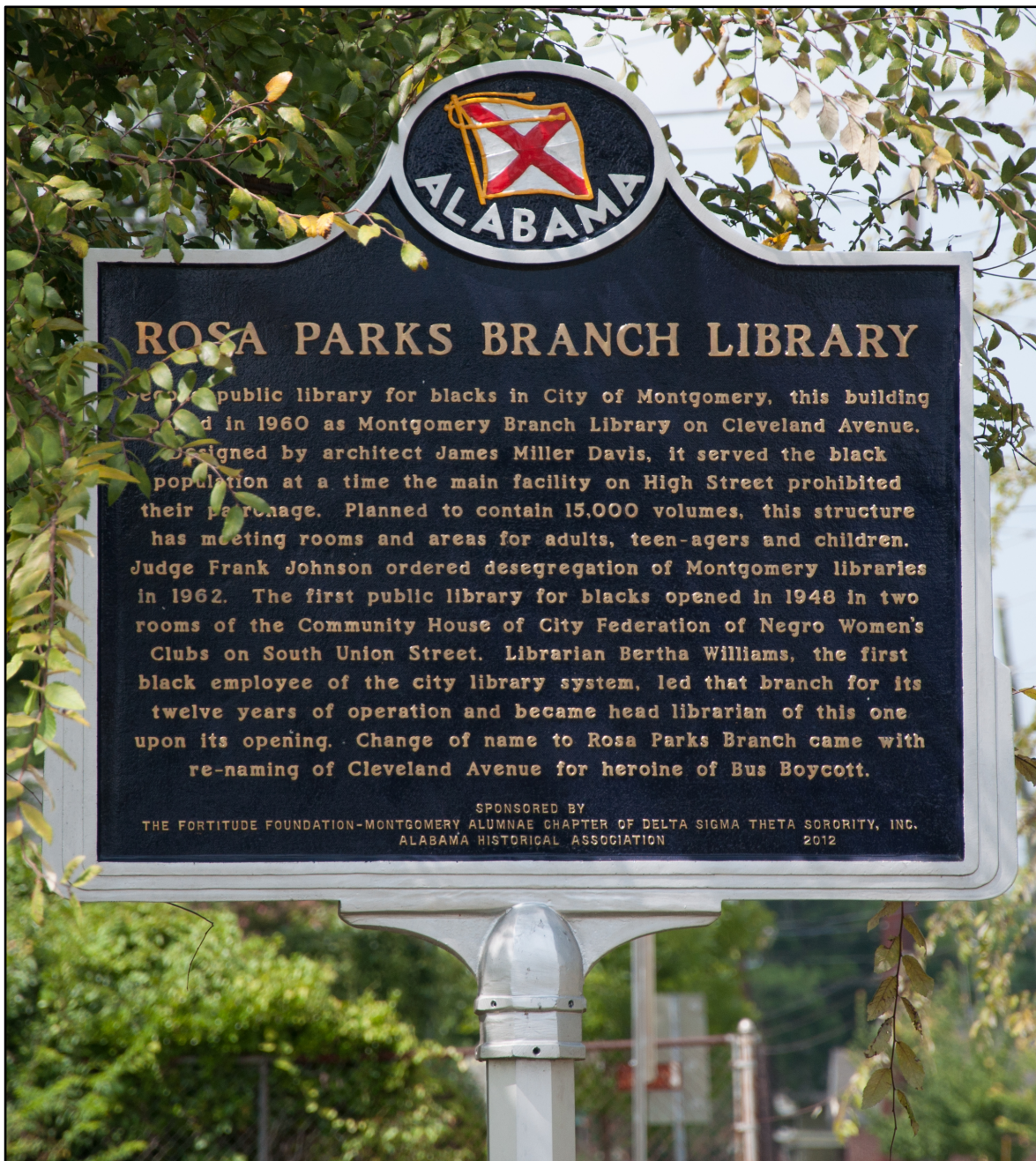


Figure 1.6. Alabama Historical Association marker *Rosa Parks Branch Library*, located at 1276 Rosa L. Parks Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama. Photograph by author.



Figure 1.7. Alabama Historical Association marker *The E.L. Posey Parking Lot*, located at 56 N. McDonough Street, Montgomery, Alabama. Photograph by author.

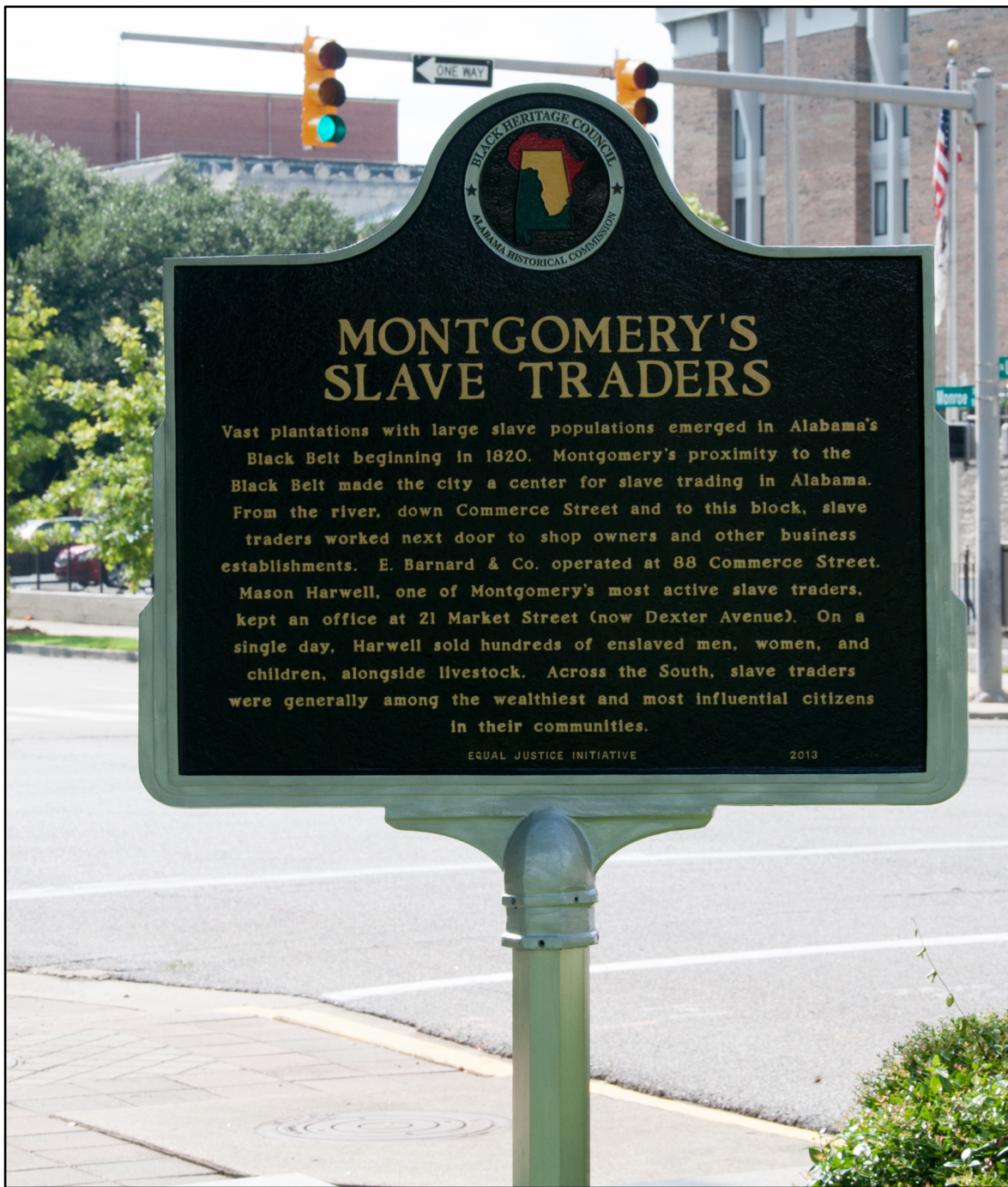


Figure 1.8. Alabama Historical Commission's Black Heritage Council marker *Montgomery's Slave Traders*, located in downtown Montgomery. Photograph by author.

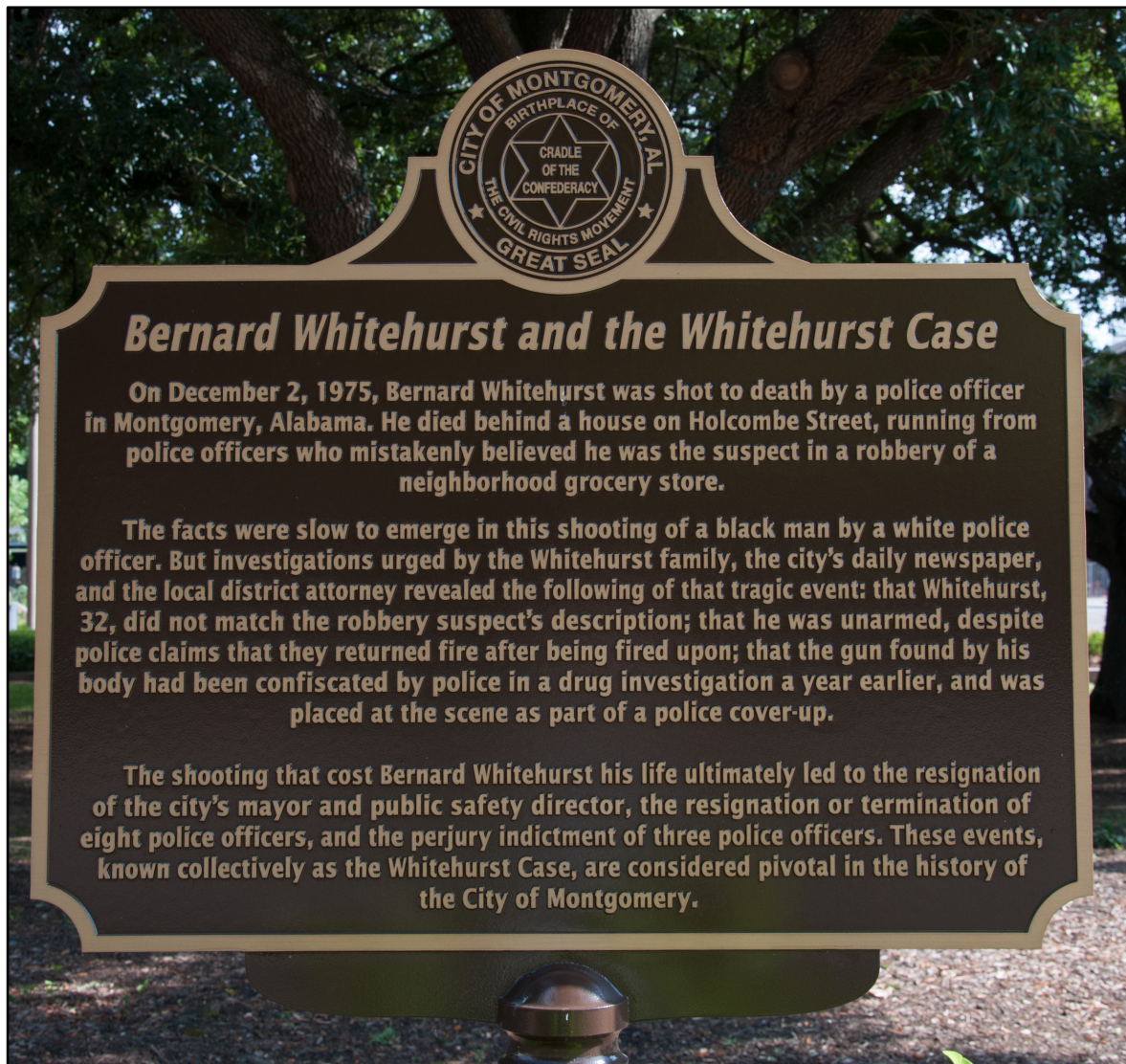


Figure 1.9. City of Montgomery historical marker *Bernard Whitehurst and the Whitehurst Case*, located in downtown Montgomery. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.1. Oak Alley Plantation, St. James Parish, Louisiana. Oak Alley, with its famed walkway of Oak trees leading up to and behind the mansion, has long typified the ‘moonlight and magnolias’ presentation of the Antebellum South to tourists along Louisiana’s River Road. Despite the recent construction of six slave cabins behind the ‘Big House,’ visitors purchase tickets to gain access to the grounds and a tour of the mansion, while the replica slave cabins are simply left as an optional part of walking the expansive historic site. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.2. Children's Transport Shackles, on display at Oak Alley Plantation, St. James Parish, Louisiana. The text reads: "Circa 1820-1850. Restraints were specially made for a child's small wrists and ankles." The presentation of actual chains and shackles used in the slave trade is a strategy more frequently used by slavery museums and plantation house museums. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.3. The Natchez Museum of African American History and Culture, Natchez, Mississippi. Natchez's African American museum is part of a growing drive to promote African American history and tourism in Natchez, which has historically relied on what Hoelscher (2003) has called white cultural memory. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.4. The grounds at Frogmore Plantation, Frogmore, Louisiana. At the left and right sides of the wide, grassy walkway are situated several former slave cabins, many of which are original to Frogmore. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.5. Overseer's house at Frogmore Plantation, Frogmore, Louisiana. Historic tours at Frogmore begin, following a short video introduction, with the overseer's house to contrast the different statuses and life courses that workers and the enslaved community faced at plantations such as Frogmore. The relative privilege of the overseer was quickly contrasted with the poor conditions of the slave cabins. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.6. Slave cabin interior at Frogmore Plantation, Frogmore, Louisiana. This cabin was spatially configured to present narratives about slaves' work as cooks for the big house and contrasted the diets and variety of foods available to the white planter class family with a slave's average diet. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.7. Recently restored slave cabin at Whitey Plantation. Walking in and learning about outbuildings where the enslaved community lived and worked is an important performative strategy used on tours at Whitney. Photograph by author.



Figure 4.8. Late 1800s jail at Whitney Plantation. Photograph by author.

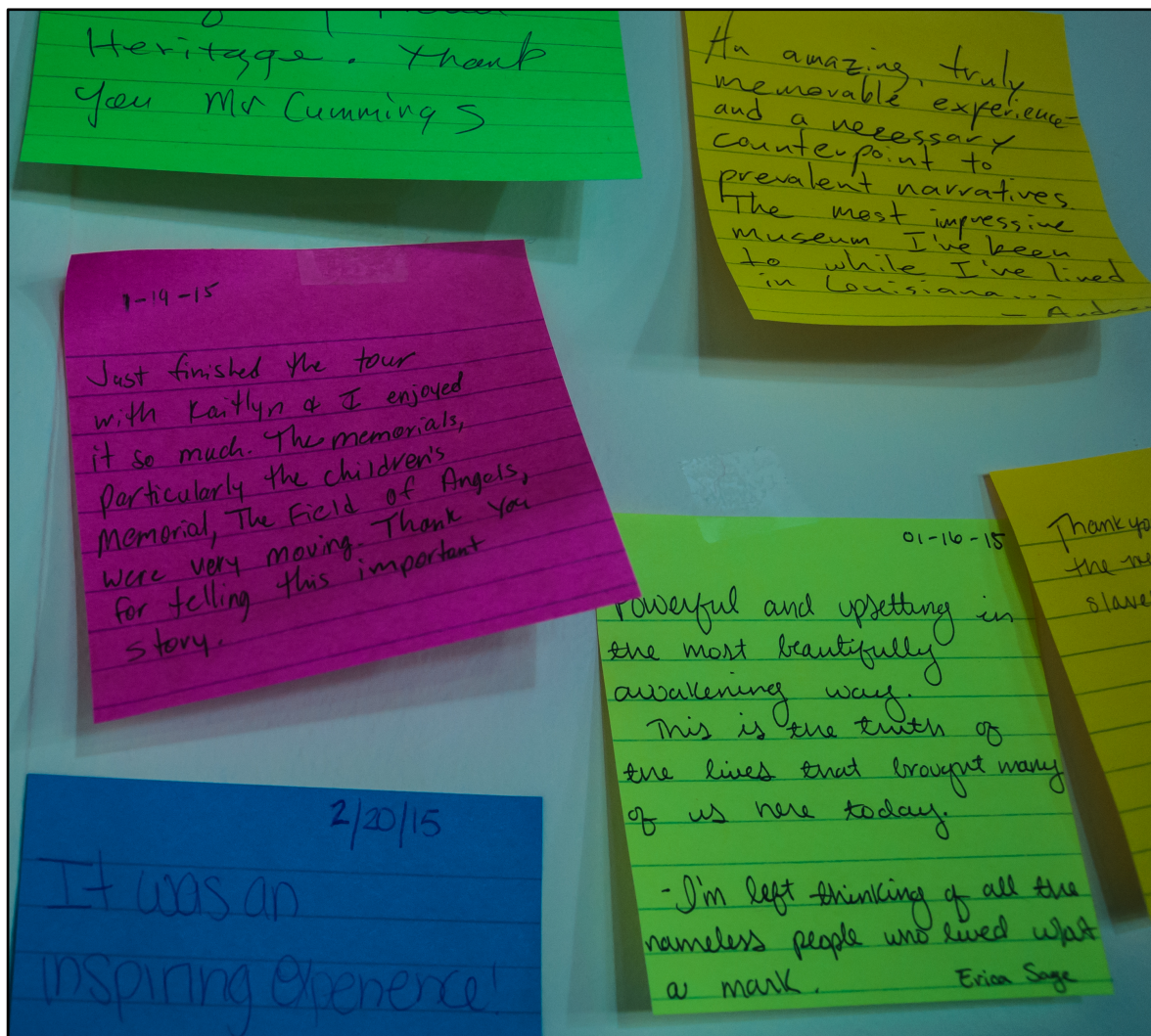


Figure 4.9. Written responses that individuals post after their tour in the Whitney's entrance building. The text on the note at center-left reads, "Just finished the tour with Kaitlyn and I enjoyed it so much. The memorials, particularly the children's memorial, the Field of Angels, were very moving. Thank you for telling this important story." The top-right note reads, "An amazing, truly memorable experience and a necessary counterpoint to prevalent narratives. The most impressive museum I've been to while I've lived in Louisiana." Photograph by author.

VITA

Matthew Cook grew up in West Tennessee, where he graduated valedictorian from Westview High School in 2005 before attending the University of Tennessee at Martin. At UT Martin, Cook obtained Bachelor of Science degrees in Geosciences with an emphasis in geography and Communications with an emphasis in journalism. While at UTM, he decided to study geography at the graduate level, thanks to the advice of his major professors Jeff Rogers and Mark Simpson. He graduated UT Martin as a University Scholar, *Summa Cum Laude*, in 2009.

Cook began the Master's program in Geography at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 2010, studying with Dr. Micheline van Riemsdijk. He conducted his master's thesis research on the *Stolpersteine* Holocaust memorial project in Berlin, Germany, and earned his Master's of Science in May 2012.

In the fall of 2012, Cook began the Doctoral program in Geography at UT Knoxville and began studying under Dr. Derek Alderman in 2013. Upon completion of this dissertation, he will have completed all requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and he plans to continue a career in academia.