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Representations of Southern Tourism Imaginaries and Negotiations of Difficult History in
Plantation Site Interpretation

by

Elizabeth Johnson

Under the Direction of Jennifer Patico, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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ABSTRACT

During the 20th century, wealthy Northern families purchased hundreds of Antebellum plantation estates in the Southeast, altering the meaning of the word “plantation” with profound implications for the historical memory of slavery in the South. Plantation scholars have documented how these sites were restored with re-established traditional hierarchies— a legacy that persists today. Portraying slavery through a lens of paternalism and nostalgia, the plantations reified the pre-existing social order which appraised White authority and Black servitude as natural. The symbolic capital of the post-slavery plantation is deeply intertwined with alliances of race and class, influencing which narratives prevail and which are forgotten. Utilizing ethnographic interviews (n=17) and observation, this work documents the negotiations between material change within historic preservation and the popularity of plantation tourism in the region. Seeking an equitable and representative public history of plantations, this work highlights historic actors and resilience which have been obscured.

INDEX WORDS: Plantations, Tourism, Difficult history, Museum education, Collective memory

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2022

Nostalgic Representations of Southern Tourism Imaginaries and Negotiations of Difficult
History in Plantation Site Interpretation

by

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Office of Graduate Services
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May 2022

DEDICATION

To my hometown. To the communities who raised me and molded me into the scholar and advocate I am today. To Irami, whose unsparing tough love permanently changed the course of my life.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who were willing to share their histories with me. I give my most heartfelt thanks to Mr. Jackson of the Black History Museum, for whom I have the upmost respect. I am especially grateful for the public library and its staff who played no small part in raising me to be a life-long learner. Thank you, Mrs. Donna, for allowing me to document some of your most cherished memories. Thank you, Gloria, for inviting me to take shelter from the rain under the wraparound porch of your museum, for giving me a personal tour of the neighborhood, and most importantly, for sharing companionship despite the weary conversation. Thank you all, those who I have named and those I have not, for shedding new light on a place I have witnessed countless times. I am humbled and eternally grateful for this opportunity. Your individual contributions, influence, knowledge, and hard work made this thesis possible.

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life's work and am proud to call it anthropology. To Dr. Sharratt, who challenged me to see museums in a new light and allowed me to prototype a plantation museum of my own creation, I don't think you know how cathartic and rewarding that experience was. To Dr. Burnet, who singlehandedly taught me how to design and conduct ethnographic research, thank you for believing in me and supporting me every step of the way. You showed me the importance of collaboration, community building, and safeguarding your sanity, and for that I am forever grateful. A huge thank you to my peers for building such a supportive and silly cohort that I could always count on, especially the esteemed members of the possum posse.

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PREFACE

Some believe that it is too recent to discuss the all too painful past, resulting in part, in its absence from public history. Yet during my childhood, I was witness to stories of lynching and racial violence that were absolutely pulled from, utilized in certain spaces, and mythologized in the town memory. Though I grappled with these histories throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, the true impetus for this thesis came about during the Spring of 2021 in my Anthropological Theory and Praxis course. Motivated by recent protests for racial justice and praxis principles of community embeddedness, participation, and equity, amongst other influences, I felt compelled to shift my focus both inward and toward the place I long called home.

For the purposes of this ethnography, the town name will be anonymized as ‘Washington,’ the most common city name in the United States and apt as Washington was one of the many plantation-owning founding fathers who held enslaved Africans in bondage. All other place names and names of individuals have also been anonymized with a pseudonym.

1 INTRODUCTION

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken. Audre Lorde (1977)

Driving through the rolling clay hills of Washington county, over train tracks, through cotton fields, there is an old brown road sign which reads “Jim Jackson Black History Museum.” If you were not keenly aware of what you were looking for, you might miss it. Nestled within the corner of an abandoned segregated school, the museum is located in the Sandy Bottom district, the historically African American area of town adjacent to the neighboring Pinewood Plantation. The museum embodies the culmination of Mr. Jackson’s life’s work. Mr. Jim Jackson, who traces his lineage back two generations to an enslaved woman and a notorious local planter, is the sole founder and director of this exceptional museum. The only place of its kind for hundreds of miles, the museum represents a testament to Mr. Jackson’s dedication over a span of fifty years, originating as a small tri-fold school project for his son in the early 1970s, and expanding into the multi-room exhibit space it is today. Mr. Jackson is an enigmatic yet kind man, who dutifully ducks out of his back office when visitors step through the museum threshold, setting off the dated door buzzer. A spry octogenarian, he welcomes all visitors, personally and emphatically guiding them through the winding halls between walls teeming with historical artifacts and testaments to Black excellence. The museum is rich in quality and dense in size, housing over five thousand artifacts of African American History, spanning over three hundred years, and featuring over thirty exhibits in three gallery spaces.

Central to the first exhibition space is a rotating tiered display which reads: “It’s Black History! It’s Educational! Slavery was Painful!” Encased between the lines of text are rows of obituaries— individuals who represent Black activists from the region, both friends and family of

Mr. Jackson and the descendants of those individuals who were enslaved on the local plantations. Preserved within this case and the museum itself are two parallel yet intertwined legacies. The traumas of slavery, highlighted in bolded and red text, are unquestionably central to the generational stories being shared at this site; however, the legacy of the resilient individuals, who took upon themselves the charge of fighting for their freedoms and educating the following generations, stands equally tall.

Mr. Jackson's museum represents the only site in the region which documents and celebrates Black history, let alone addresses the history of the enslavement and the local plantations. This absence, however, is not unique to the region. Across the Southern states, there are roughly 375 plantation museums— though only one, the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, centers its interpretative focus on slavery. This network of plantation museums is part of a thriving and nostalgic tourism industry in the South, the majority of which smooth over their own difficult histories; however, in recent years, the more high-profile plantation museums have integrated African American histories into their interpretation in response to calls from the work of African American scholars, activists, and members of local communities.

More than ever, these static plantation museums are responding to demands from the public to incorporate African American history into their focus. Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, for example, has developed its own "Slavery at Monticello Tour" which highlights a more inclusive and honest account of the lives of the enslaved on-site. While this ethnography serves as an account of place, specific in its nuances to the field site in question, this story is also a part of place. In many ways, the institutional actors and community members in this ethnography reproduce a wider racial reckoning of American plantations writ small. Therefore,

this account should be understood as an illustrative example of the conflicts negotiated by public historians, museum curators, educators, and community members across the South.

1.1 Research Questions

For this work, I have collected and connected perspectives from educational and museum professionals, as well as community members and leaders, to evaluate to what extent and how plantations and museums are incorporating the history of slavery and race relations into the built, narrative, and performative landscapes. I highlight the role of nostalgia in commemorative heritage practices and other affective manifestations of representing so-called “difficult history” and investigate whether shifting the social production of memory in these spaces might address cultural trauma through community accountability and restorative justice (involving reparation, accountability, and reconciliation). These are the overriding research questions that guide this exploration of the relationship between the community and the plantations and the remembering of slavery at these sites.

Though there is extensive literature focused on Southern plantation life immediately prior to and after the Civil War, the role of plantation life and ideology in the contemporary South is only beginning to be recognized by scholars. While this research project contributes to a deeper understanding of slavery as a former foundational institution, it also explores further dimensions regarding the future of African American history and agency in the South. This project seeks to document and facilitate the forging of reflective relationships and novel partnerships between actors of historically divided Southern ideologies to transform the rooted physical and social landscapes.

This project also engages with theories of tourism, historical representation, museum studies, and antiracist pedagogy. By exploring and challenging the driving motivations and

limiting factors which shape the constructs of race and remembering in the South, I seek to enrich the conversation surrounding difficult history, nostalgia, and collective memory as they relate to contemporary plantation sites. I query prevailing dominant narratives and seek to establish a vision for equitable representation and public history's role in addressing systematic racism. By interrogating the avoidance of race, place, and memory in public history, this study is committed to bridging the disconnect between archiving and acknowledging the historical legacies of American slavery and the contemporary ways in which it is remembered and written for public consumption.

1.2 Background

Landscapes define, shape, and mirror identity, cultural myth, and collective memory. Historically, however, the landscape of the American South has been monopolized by a White-centric hegemonic view of identity and heritage. In many ways, inscriptions in the landscape have written African Americans “out of ‘belonging’” in certain spaces (Schein 2009: 811). Landscapes of the American South, oft exclusionary, continue to preserve a mythologized and valorized historical memory that is affectively rooted in White supremacy (Dustin et al. 2021). Recent protests and counter-protests surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments reflect the social and political relevance of these debates and lay bare the violence inherent to White supremacist ideologies.

Much scholarship has demonstrated the violence produced by monuments to White supremacy through the United States (Loewen 1999; Hague 2008; Dessens 2003; Eichstedt and Small 2002). These nostalgic efforts serve to aid in the construction and maintenance of racialized landscapes—cultural landscapes that are especially implicated in racist practices and social relations. There is a growing body of research which examines memorials, monuments,

and other sites as important places of memory construction and contestation that have important social justice implications for including or excluding certain narratives and identities from public acknowledgment and responsibility (Alderman and Campbell 2008; Blight 2009; Dwyer et al. 2013). The politics of commemoration, national identity, patriotism, and heritage tourism are paths to core theoretical questions about violence, capitalism, racism, and heteronormativity (Foote and Azaryahu 2007; McKittrick 2013; Tyner, Inwood, and Alderman 2014). Slavery's legacy, tied to authenticity, belonging, and reclamation of culture, produces an incessant struggle with marginalized groups for control of narrative, knowledge, and racial ideologies that pertain to slavery (Woodard 2019).

Central to this legacy, plantation museums symbolically sit at the intersection of political negotiation, both public and personal. Historically, most plantation museums were founded on traditions of erasure, apologist attitudes, and Lost Cause ideologies (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Small 2013; West 1999); that ideological lineage remains the political undergirding of the plantation tourism industry. The research site in focus is situated within the rolling landscape of the Red Ridge region, which comprises a small portion of the Southeastern United States and spans the boundaries of five counties across two states. The ethnography centers on three primary sites of historic memory: Pinewood Plantation, the History Center, and the Jim Jackson Black History Museum (all identifying places and names have been replaced with pseudonyms). Of the over 70 plantations in the area, Pinewood Plantation was selected because it serves as the most visible, public-facing plantation in the region. The 3,000+ acre property evolved from "working farm" to winter home to shooting plantation for the Harden family in late 1800s, when, upon the last living family member's death in the 1980s, it was opened as a museum to the public.

This project marks an intimate personal return to a place which has both intrigued me and troubled me during my youth. Thus, I conceptualize this project as a means of staying with, and returning to, the trouble (Haraway 2016; Rappaport 1993). I spent most of my formative years in the Red Ridge region, on and around the seventy-one existing plantations in the area. As both a product of place and self-elected outsider, I reached out to the members of my community to foster the frank discussions that were long regarded as taboo throughout my childhood. In total, I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with local community members ranging from public history professionals and site visitors to various community stakeholders (i.e., administrators, directors, tour guides, activists, curators and educators).

1.2.1 Plantation Mythos and Racial Erasure

Advertised as a landscape of spectacular beauty, rich traditions, and historical charm, the plantation South rarely, if ever, recognizes the violence and oppression that occurred at the sites or the voices of the marginalized who continue to suffer racial terror and economic oppression. The symbolic capital of the post-slavery plantation—signifying wealth, power, and leisure—is deeply intertwined with alliances of race and class, influencing which narratives prevail and which are forgotten. The popularity of plantation tourism in the Red Ridge region, however, is not confined only to the plantations which today host many sporting elites. The local culture has long been shaped by and defined itself around its distinctive plantation lifestyle. Tourism, which was responsible for the economic revitalization after the end of the Civil War, continues to play a major role in the local economy, as well as in directing local heritage preservation and historical memory. The mythology of manorial southern plantation life dominates the local tourism industry, with publicity dating back to the original “Gone with the Wind” private premiere showing on a plantation outside of Washington (Margeson and Kitchens 1991). According to one

account of plantation tourism, “It is Gone with the Wind Country that the majority of [sic] first-time visitors wish to see—a land of legend, of cotton and camellias, mint juleps and magnolias and all the rest of it...At Washington, the plantation belt is no figure of speech” (Perkerson 1952: 1, 299). Contemporary history scholars (Brock and Vivian 2015) attribute the draw of the uniquely local plantation culture to the region’s “time-honored traditions, the decaying remains of an enormous slaveholding complex, and the survival of...an authentic past and powerful presence” (48).

Contemporary plantations in the American South are often characterized as estates, with their own identifying architecture set on expansive tracts of land. Originally, however, the Southern plantation functioned as a principle of settlement, agricultural production, and public order which established, standardized, and sanctioned the social order and customs of the South (Matrana 2009; Singleton 2009). Plantation society in the Old South provided an ordered regimentation of race, class, domestic, and sex relationships of a large proportion of the population. Slavery and the forms of labor control that preceded and followed it became intelligible only in the context of that institution, the plantation, which was established as a response to the chronic and persistent demand for labor and capital (Thompson 1975; Singleton 2009). In this context, the categories of labor and race collided to sanction and to rationalize a mythologized political order. In plantation societies generally, this took the form of a belief in inferior and superior races. In fact, many scholars contend that the construct of race in the South was produced at and functioned as part of the plantation itself (Thompson 1975; Vivian 2018; Wright 2006).

During this period, enslavement based solely upon race was thoroughly integrated into social life, accepted by master and slave classes alike as the basis of relations. Class

consciousness consisted of several classes of Whites, based on material success, with the exception being that even the lowest White member of society was considered inherently superior to the enslaved African. Central also to the plantation system was Southern patriarchy, in which White men were responsible for the protection of the system, a social order that contributed to the code of honor Southerners lived under (McPherson 2003; Adams 2007; Rotman and Savulis 2003). In addition to gentility, other beliefs and myths ensured the subordination and obedience of laborers based on their belonging to a race deemed inferior, while simultaneously conferring prestige and authority onto the White planter class. In this way, the formalization of race in America was established according to the status and needs of the planter as a principle of control. With the conclusion of the Civil War, the rigid social structure of the plantation economy was adjusted yet preserved.

The myth of White superiority continued to be perpetuated and presented instead via the notion of the sovereignty of states' rights (Williams 1972). By the early twentieth century, racial logics continued to define "Whiteness" in contrast to "Blackness." Race would eventually come to be characterized in dominant Southern narratives as such until the constructs were no longer co-presented structurally or ideologically. This movement from co-constitution to separation allowed "Whiteness" to be entirely severed from "Blackness," denying the historical implications of racial meaning in the South (McPherson 2003; Adams 2007; Rotman and Savulis 2003). Though it historically has been asserted that absolute White and Black racial categories exist, contemporary scholars propose that shared identified Southern traditions between races and class may provide common ground for forging new emotional and ethical connections, in a so-called "alliance of accountability" (Rotman and Savulis 2003). Because the American South is often presented as a dialectic between tradition and change, racial categories and the plantation

system offer an intriguing and fruitful site for the exploration of the South's "counter history" and reconciliation.

Recent protests and counter-protests surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments also reflect the social and political relevance of these debates and lay bare the violence inherent to White supremacist ideologies. Beyond discrete instances and spaces of memorialization or commemoration, the study of memory lies at the heart of coming to terms with the American racial project. In the South's history of race relations, Confederate monuments echo the paradox of symbolic memory. Competing identities born of slavery and Lost Cause ideology have long defined the formation and recognition of Confederate Civil War memorials and monuments. In American history studies, the Confederate 'Lost Cause' captures the pseudohistorical mythos which asserts that the Confederate motive for entering the Civil War was predicated on heroism, rather than a defense of the economic system of slavery. For example, the Confederate flag has long been a controversial symbol of racism to many slave-descendent Blacks. Alternatively, many Whites, especially those who descend from Civil War confederate soldiers, identify the 'Stars and Bars' battle flag of General Lee's Army as a symbol of patriotism and southern pride (Woodard 2019; Hague 2008).

To many, the Confederate battle flag symbolizes the bravery and sacrifice of their ancestors—the honor and integrity of the struggle for "Southern Independence" as embodied in the myth of the Lost Cause. In contrast, others interpret the battle flag as symbolic of the South's political and military efforts to preserve slavery within its boundaries, since the Lost Cause was a defining element of Southern White life, inextricably tied to slavery. As part of this myth, southerners celebrate and revere the South's prewar conditions, structures, and viewpoints. This mythologizing and rationalization created a religion of the Lost Cause (Dessens 2003; Hague

2008). To ensure that this view of the past would not be forgotten, Confederate sympathizers formed organizations across the South to keep the memory alive. The Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Ladies Memorial Associations actively promote the Antebellum South by elevating the symbols of the confederacy to a sacred status. These organizations constructed hundreds of monuments in Southern cemeteries soon after the end of the Civil War, erecting statues, plaques, and flags in the region's prominent public spaces. Since the plantation system was defended by the Confederacy, these symbols are otherwise understood as an emblem of the racism and violence of human chattel slavery by most of the region's Black residents (Hague 2008).

Other origins of the mythic South stem primarily from popular nineteenth-century Southern literature. Novels were set in the South, often on plantations, and the storylines often followed characters who were typically planters and their families. In these works, glorification of the aristocratic, Southern past is central to the narrative, and the characters often present prototypes for figures that have become staples of the mythologized South: the aristocratic gentleman (loyal, noble, and generous) and the Southern lady (prideful, dignified, and delicate), both explicitly or assumed White (Hague 2008; Dessens 2003; Eichstedt and Small 2002). Authors generally characterized the institution of chattel slavery in a positive light, typically portraying slaves as happy individuals with full adoration for their masters. Over the course of over two centuries, Southern fiction writers produced a body of literature which emphasized and created distinctive features of Southern culture and praised Southern plantation civilization. After the Civil War, these writers were no longer justifying an existing order, they were portraying a society that no longer existed, that had probably never existed (Dessens 2003; Eichstedt and Small 2002).

Beyond the literary realm, the persistence of the Southern myth informs an American tourist industry tradition of rehabilitating the figures, events, and heroes of the Confederacy. In the plantation South, it is manifested through the celebration of a very distinct history, turning people who, a century before, were considered traitors to the national cause, into heroes. The Confederate Battle Flag is still regarded by many southerners as the symbol of their singularity. It represents an American alternative to mainstream values, a reaction to a central government seen as overpowering, a rejection of industrialist society, a reaction against the Civil Rights movement, and is the symbol of racist sentiment (Dessens 2003). Thus, the plantation South simultaneously represents the site of the trauma of slavery and the mythic location of a vast nostalgia industry. The brutalities of slavery and Jim Crow remained disconnected from representations of the material site of those atrocities, the plantation home (Dessens 2003; Eichstedt and Small 2002; Swanson 2012). Stereotypical images of Southernness such as the “Southern Belle” denoting innocence and purity are aligned with patriarchy and gentility rather than with histories of racial violence. The true history of cross-racial connection is obscured by these mythologized, stereotypical racial representations in popular culture and the southern advertisement of the “Old South” after the Civil Rights movement.

Moreover, the debate over discussing, censoring, or omitting difficult histories such as slavery and racism in the United States is also playing out in news media, as well as in state and national legislatures. As of March 2022, bills banning classroom discussion of critical race theory, or so-called “divisive concepts,” have been introduced or have passed in 42 states (EdWeek). In common usage, the term “critical race theory” (CRT) has been co-opted from its original academic form to refer, most simply, to a teaching of American history that addresses the effects of systemic racism. Within a crucial moment of flux, the right to discuss and to teach

a truthful history of race and racism in the United States and the lived experience of people of color is being widely challenged.

1.2.2 Plantation Site Interpretation

Many of the most iconic historic house museums and sites commemorate the country's Founding Fathers, predominantly wealthy European White males. From the Liberty Bell to Mount Vernon, scholarship has time and again documented first person narratives of ugly battles among curators, historians, and members of the public over racialized representations of the past (Miles 2010). The South is a particularly fraught site for issues of race and the interpretation of slavery, including misrepresentations of the past skewed toward valorizing a White male population and sanitizing the history of chattel slavery. Race and ethnicity are often glossed over or ignored in historic house museums and former plantation sites, which function as quintessential racialized landscapes (Woodard 2019; Eichstedt and Small 2002; Turino and Balgooy 2019).

While former plantations in the South have grappled with the issue of retraining guides to use "enslaved" over the long-used term of "servant" to refer to the men and women held in bondage at their sites, sensitivity through language is still fraught with tension (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Turino and Balgooy 2019; O'Rourke 2016). Additionally, the violence of slavery is often perpetuated through erasure at historic sites, through a phenomenon which historian Marcus Rediker refers to as "a violence of abstraction" as the lives of the formerly enslaved are only presented through ledgers, maps, and balance sheets (Rediker 2007; O'Rourke 2016; Woodard 2019). While Civil War history and tourism is celebrated via plantation pilgrimages and battlefield reenactments, the experience of the slaves is typically not the one that is addressed (Woods 1998). Gaps and silences, omissions, and inconsistencies in traditional

historical records foreground public memory practices in commemorative tourist spaces gripped by a painful past (Woodard 2019).

Traditionally, most scholarship on the plantation South focuses on the plantation mansions (or the “Big House”) themselves. More recently, the plantation landscape has been treated as a cultural image, or as a way of representing, structuring, and symbolizing our ideas about the world (Winberry 1997; Singleton, 2009). In this way, the plantation landscape is encoded and shaped as social relations are negotiated and contested (Rotman and Savulis 2003). Increased tourism at, and attention to, plantation museum sites has elicited several recent inquiries into the production and consumption of heritage and nostalgia, and the simultaneous erasure of the legacies of slavery (Adams 2012; Alderman et al. 2016; Buzinde and Santos 2008; Carter et al. 2014; Eichstedt and Small 2002). Subsequently, the gradual transition in plantation museums to expand the representations of slave life are documented in the literature (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Shackel 2003; Horton and Horton 2006). Plantation house museums are emotionally powerful settings that contribute to the stability, pride, and sense of place of their communities. These museums are gathering places, bringing people together, and giving historical perspective. They demonstrate the power of place, physically illustrating that historical information and context are important for understanding the human past (Turino and Balgooy 2019).

Visitors seek nostalgia at historic sites because they represent tangible links to the past. Visitors also make a personal connection with a site that may manifest as a deep engagement, empathy, or spiritual communion with the people or events of the past (Turino and Balgooy 2019; King et al. 1977). Furthermore, these sites facilitate and host commemorative practices which stimulate group solidarity and aid the formation of collective memory (Woodard 2019). At

these sites, the emphasis on history and natural beauty for tourists marks the evolution from agriculture on the old plantation to its significance as a cultural and historical monument of family, regional, and state history (Swanson 2012). When interpreted through an anti-racist lens, however, these historic buildings may tell the stories of enslaved people and their descendants. In fact, antiracist interpretative strategies shed light on African American and Indigenous stories throughout history at the forefront of research in the material culture of slavery (Darling-Hammond 2017; Turino and Balgooy 2019).

1.2.3 Anthropology of Tourism

Within the field of anthropology, studies on tourism have emerged at the turn of the 21st century as an area of academic interest. A complex phenomenon driven by the acceleration of globalization, tourism represents an object of study that has been notoriously difficult to consistently and universally define (Crick 1988; Pearce 1993; van Harssel 1994); however, most definitions characterize tourism as a “multi-compartmentalized modern industry that takes many shapes and forms” (Burns 2004: 5). Driven by temporary and voluntary travel to a place other than home, tourism is often tied to fundamentally Western notions of leisure and escapism (Przeclawski 1993; Lanfant 1993). Initially, the anthropological discourse on tourism primarily centered around debates on the commoditization of cultural authenticity and postcolonial studies (Greenwood 1989; Cohen 1988). Acknowledging the need for a greater disciplinary focus on tourism studies, Ahmed and Shore (1995) published a volume explicitly highlighting writings on tourism, modernity, and nostalgia while also encouraging future research on the tourist generating end of the phenomenon. Since their publication, the anthropology of tourism has gradually garnered more attention and expanded to include wider dimensions of analysis (Burns 2004).

Today, the anthropology of tourism holistically examines the historical formation of imaginaries (i.e., heritage, nostalgia, “difficult” or “dark”), though predominantly within the context of post-war Eastern European studies. Imaginaries as conceptualized by Salazar and Graburn are defined as “socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings and that are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices” (2014). Though intangible and implicit, imaginaries materialize and are enacted within institutions, space, place, and landscape. Tourism’s foundational dynamics rely upon imaginaries—produced and circulated between the economic global and the cultural local. Like mythology, the imaginary possesses a special significance, manifested via the social practice of tourism (Hennig 2002) and likewise is part and parcel to identity formation (Gaonkar 2002). Further, imaginaries may be tied directly to geography and landscape. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said, for instance, examines how spaces are *imagined*, utilized in meaning making, produced, represented, and interpreted (1994). This research explores the ways in which museums and plantation sites function as institutionalized bearers of nuanced Southern imaginaries, whose claims to authenticity and historicity dynamically respond to tourists while conforming to imaginaries in a dialectical manner.

Tourist destinations strive to enhance their appeal, often fashioning themselves as a facsimile of the outsider’s perception. Salazar and Graburn point to experience (how tourists’ experiences incorporate feedback and reverse gazes from destination communities, and from tour guides and other mediators) as a driver of this ongoing narrative process of enhancement (2014); however, these imaginaries represent more than commoditized or commercial cultural representations. Often, these imaginaries fuse an “elsewhere” authenticity or drive toward nostalgia with historically inherited stereotypes (Salazar and Graburn 2014). Through

continuous circulation (both regionally and globally), tourism imaginaries aid in the (re)creation of people, places, landscapes, materials, and cultures:

Tourism images and ideas easily travel, together with tourists, from tourism-generating regions (which are also destinations) to tourism destination regions (which also generate fantasies) and back. However, tourism imaginaries do not float around spontaneously and independently; rather, they “travel” in space and time through well-established conduits, leaving certain elements behind and picking up new ones along the way, and continuously returning to their points of origin. Tourism imaginaries are easily reembedded in new contexts by a process that constantly alters both the imaginaries and the contexts, building on local referents to establish their meaning and value (Salazar 2010a).

Negotiation involving variously situated stakeholders and their engagements with tourism is central to the reproduction process, both restricting certain potentialities while creating new subject positions.

The field of tourism studies additionally incorporates networks of knowledge constitution, lived experience, and a body of critical theory to foreground issues of justice and praxis (Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic 2011; Botterill 2003; Nash 2007). Critical scholarship within the field reveals how broader cultural and ideological structures create and mediate tourism representations (Ateljevic et al. 2007; Urry and Larsen 2011). Most recently, the intersections of critical pedagogy and tourism have been explored in relation to the prevalence of colonial discourses which continue to dominate representations of socially excluded, silenced, or othered groups (Boluk and Carnicelli 2019). Within this framework, I contribute to the collective body of work on the critical questioning of pedagogical practices and the dismantling of dominant structures within tourism-generating ecosystems (Hall and Smyth 2016). Tourism practices are often rooted in persistent historical and material oppressions; therefore, this study opens the possibility for counter-narratives to surface within the Southern plantation tourism industry (Boluk and Carnicelli 2019).

1.3 Methodology

The main objective of this project is to collect perspectives from educational and museum professionals, as well as community leaders and members, to evaluate to what extent and how plantations and museums are incorporating the history of slavery and race relations into the built, narrative, and performative landscapes. Further, this project documents the role of nostalgia in commemorative heritage practices and other affective manifestations of representing difficult history. The long-term, ambitious aim for this project is to work alongside these local organizations to build a more equitable and truly representative public history pedagogy of plantations in the South.

The project design centers on the most visible, public-facing plantation in the Red Ridge region as a case study: Pinewood Plantation. Designated in her will, the last living family member, Elisabeth Lee Harden, opened the plantation to the public. Currently, it functions as a major community hub, serving as a central venue in the lives of the affluent, White Southern class. The plantation hosts a wide variety of gatherings and events including weddings, receptions, parties, lunches, holiday celebrations, festivals, school trips, and more. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and visitors to the site can take tours of the grounds and of the main house, featuring antiques and art representing domestic plantation life.

A review of the literature on plantation life informs this ethnographic study of mixed methods, including participant in and unobtrusive observation of on-site events, documentation of material culture, and interviews with members and affiliates of the target community. This research began with a review of existing theory and plantation research which assessed the history of the formation and development of the institution of slavery in the South from the colonial period to today— and the defining characteristics of plantation life, as well as formation

of race and ideology via the institution of slavery. The second methodological component is comprised of the ethnography. An ethnographic design is best suited for this project because it enables exploratory investigation as well as a deeper “selective investigation of targeted topics” (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 77). LeCompte and Schensul describe how ethnographic methods are designed to collect a variety of data that relates to the cultural domain in question, and then collect generalizable data on individuals and networks. Therefore, the two primary methods of data collection for this research project include semi-structured interviews and interlocutor observation. Following LeCompte and Schensul’s description of ethnographic work, I have collected qualitative data and assembled it to construct a thorough portrait of how race and difficult history is negotiated and portrayed in Southern heritage pedagogy.

The sampling procedures, data collection plan, and data analysis methods combine to constitute my multimethod approach. Data were collected at multiple sites in Washington County where Pinewood Plantation resides. The county’s demographics reflect that “Black or African American alone” identifying individuals comprise 53% of the population, while “White alone” identifying individuals comprise 43%, with the rest primarily consisting of a small Hispanic population at 3%. Strikingly, 25% of the population is “persons in poverty.” In fact, according to the U.S. Census, 32.9% of Black or African American residents live below the poverty line, constituting more than half of their total population by ethnicity, whereas only 9.9% of White residents live below the poverty line, representing less than a quarter of their total population by ethnicity (2019). Unsurprisingly, these demographics do not vary significantly from 1860 census data (Rogers 1976).

I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with local community members. These community members include public history professionals, site visitors, and various community stakeholders.

I also spoke with administrators, directors, tour guides, archivists, curators and educators of NAACP, History Center, Visitors Center, the Arts Center, Daughters of the American Revolution, Pinewood Plantation, and the Black History Museum. Interviews took place at a time and place that I and the interlocutor agreed upon in advance. Though circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic gradually improved, most interviews took place virtually via Web Ex, although others did take place in person. Of the seventeen people I interviewed, fourteen are women and three are men. Five interlocutors identified as African American, eleven identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Middle Eastern.

On-site, unobtrusive participant observation, or passive observation of public engagement with no identifiable information or contact, is situated in events, activities, social situations, and cultural scenes at various community events such as the Arts Festival, Old South Day, and Victorian Christmas. Additionally, analysis of material cultural artifacts includes local curriculum materials, guidebooks, advertisement media, historical markers, and field note entries which recall and recreate incidents, events, routine, interaction, and visual image from prior observations. The mapping of spatial data from the plantation site was also utilized from field notes to inform the ethnographic narrative. Other data were collected via primary sources documents and video dating back to the early 20th century.

By focusing beyond a single official or objective narrative, this study recognizes the advantage of emphasizing how the various interpretations of the sites are used and employed by interested parties and individuals (Abu El- Haj 2001; Appadurai 1981; Bender et al. 1998; Bond and Gilliam 1994; Bruner and Gorfain 1984; Gable et al. 1992; Herzfeld 1991). Musante (2014) identifies participant observation as the primary method of capturing explicit culture, in addition to aspects of culture as praxis (Zahle 2012; Spradley 1980). Those aspects of culture which are

not readily observable become embodied in the day-to-day practice of living and are often manifested in emotional responses to places, situations, and individuals (Desjarlais 1992; Crapanzano 2010; Davies and Spencer 2010). Utilizing passive observation, then, allowed me to thoughtfully process and reflexively analyze understated phenomena (Davies 2010; Jackson 2010; Zahle 2012). As active engagement leads to the elucidation of the implicit, meaningful analysis is possible through participant observation. Field notes, alongside transcription, represent the primary method of capturing data from observation (Bernard 2011; Emerson et al. 2011; Sanjek 1990).

In this study, participant observation incorporates all physical senses as field notes and transcriptions are collected. Notes are derived from the observation of various stimuli, including the arrangement of physical space and people, activities, movements, interactions, verbal and nonverbal communication, mapping, and more. Further, it is important to emphasize, as Musante (2014) has, that the process of analysis was “inherently iterative” as the ethnographer must return actively to review field notes and transcripts to explicate deeper or shifting meanings. Narratives and semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically for analysis.

1.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

This research was approved by Georgia State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July 2021. The interview guide was developed from the prevailing themes of a relevant literature review. It includes 35 open-ended questions designed to probe community members on their experience of plantations, including racial dimensions. Not all questions were asked of each interlocutor while additional questions were asked of others during conversation. A standard set of demographic questions was also asked of each interviewee. Prior to the interview, a study-specific informed consent form was presented to the interlocutor and permission to video or

audio record the interview for transcription was granted by the interlocutor. The format began with personal introductions and typical conversational questions to establish a basis for conversation and build researcher-interlocutor rapport. Gradually, the questions broached more emotionally charged or potentially uncomfortable topics through the course of conversation. Topics that I sensed may be uncomfortable for the interlocutor (e.g., matters related to plantation slavery or race relations) were approached indirectly, delicately, or gradually (Levy and Ollan 2014). Broadly, I took a non-confrontational approach to more sensitive topics while I also attempted to push back somewhat against some assertions.

Levy and Ollan argue that the conversational “oscillations between respondent and informant modes” are critical to the illumination of “spaces, conflicts, coherences, and transformations” (2014: 314). Throughout the interviews, the use of follow-up probes, active listening signals, and intentional silences promoted rapport and allowed for thoughtful processing. These cues were intended to elicit information beyond the question-and-answer format. For example, a nod of the head or a verbal directive such as “tell me more” intentionally fostered conversational ambiguity in which the interlocutor’s response is (presumably) more personally intentioned rather than prompted by one of my questions (Levy and Ollan 2014: 300). These techniques, then, were utilized in conversation to uncover interlocutor beliefs, intentions, and meanings.

Each of the interviews took place face-to-face, whether virtually in person or on site. As the elicitation of nonverbal meanings in symbolic interaction is critical to the interpretation of meaning, nonverbal communication was documented in addition to logocentric communication (Fernandez and Herzfeld 2014). On-site interviews did provide additional insight into the community experience of plantations as interlocutors were submersed in and able to gesture to

their surroundings as they inspired thoughts, emotions, or recollections. From these interviews, themes were identified for coding analysis per the four-stage Grounded Theory method (Bernard and Ryan 2010) using NVivo software, available through the Department of Anthropology. This work presents an ethnographic narrative combined from interview content, using direct quotes that illuminate important concepts, and interlocutor/material observation.

1.3.2 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with an ethically conscious model of anthropological research, this project abides by the requirements of the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board and the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics. In order to protect the right to privacy, the protection of confidentiality includes limiting access to private information due to the sensitive nature of research topic (Marshall 1992). Interlocutor identifying information has been removed from the record of the data and names in the ethnography have been replaced with a pseudonym at the transcription stage, such that real names are only attached to the original audio data. Names and any data that might point to interlocutors' identity will be left out of presentations or publications about this research to protect anonymity, particularly considering the small size of the community environment in which interlocutor anonymity may be more difficult to maintain.

Additional breaches in trust between researcher and interlocutor do have the potential to threaten interlocutors' emotional, physical, economic, or other well-being (Marshall 1992). The contentious and emotional nature of the research topic may upset the interlocutor or even unearth trauma in some capacity. In some interviews, interlocutors did become emotional, so I took care to express empathy and to allow them to guide the conversation in these moments. Other ethical considerations inherent to the interview process lie in the researcher's ability to elicit interlocutor

trust and willingness to disclose opinions, thoughts, or recollections. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, I did invoke my personal history as a community member or “insider” as necessary, in addition to my positionality as a researcher or “outsider,” in a consistently transparent and honest manner. I also took great care to self-monitor during interviews, except in rare cases where I gently challenged an interlocutor’s assertion and reviewed the recordings to incorporate constant correction of technique and to prevent cognitive distortion. I believe this technique served to allow interlocuter’s the opportunity to mitigate potential discomfort and to speak freely. Levy and Ollan describe this process of corrective learning as, “the kind of learning that every anthropologist undergoes in a new field setting” (2014: 310).

The consideration of ethical theory and praxis highlights the advocacy component and moral commitment to the community and interlocutors. Because advocacy and accountability are inherently embedded within the interpretation, definition, and translation of the research problem and findings, I strived to practice reflexivity (Marshall 1992) in alignment with the “reflexive turn” in anthropology, which explores the power dynamics of ethnographic research relationships (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Burke, Lovell-Jones, and Smith 1994; Meskell 2002; Bolles 2013; Ruby 1982), the aim of which is to facilitate a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and community through the minimization of the researcher’s own “authoritative voice.” Further, this turn coincides with a trend toward the practice of applied anthropology, wherein one aim of the research process is the ethical imperative of reciprocity (Farmer 2013; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Stanford and Angel-Ajani 2006). As the researcher, I reiteratively acknowledged the duty to hold myself accountable to facilitate this research in collaboration with the community and interlocutors. Nevertheless, it is important to note in this

context that, “agency and power never exist *a priori* in an encounter but are constructed through relationships and are situationally dependent” (Utas 2005: 407).

1.3.3 Reflexivity and Positionality

Because this work is situated in my own hometown, I am not only deeply embedded in this community and familiar with the plantation bloc, but am deeply passionate about the praxis component of this project as an advocate for social justice in my community. Further, I believe that the research themes are incredibly relevant to contemporary discussions of race, heritage, and identity. Perhaps the most critical component to the ethical considerations of the research theory, design, and methodology is the consideration of one’s own position in the social world. In the field of anthropology, the call to practice reflexivity in the examination one’s own positionality requires the researcher to consider the ethical consequences and influences of the assumptions and values which underlie research theory and practice. The researcher’s positionality, and the biases inherent to it, persist despite the most whole-hearted attempts at a positivist neutrality. The critical call for reflexivity within anthropology is captured by Bourdieu who refers to it as a move nonetheless toward a more objective and wholistic analysis of the social world (Swartz 1997).

As a response to the social construction of reality and the situated, context-based nature of history, reflexivity represents an engagement in interpretation, reflection, and critical self-examination. With the aim of understanding the role one plays in the dynamics of knowledge production, reflexivity aims to take a meta-perspective of the social field under scrutiny which incorporates, rather than excludes, the researcher from the research process (Mauthner and Doucet 2003; Finlay 2002; Alvesson and Skoldbery 2009). By “situating the research and knowledge production so that ethical commitments can be maintained” (Sultana 2007: 376), self-

reflection may facilitate new discovery, insight, and hypothesis which inform the research question (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1988; Okely 1992; Opie 1992). But because “one’s position within the social world influences the way in which you see it,” the researcher must consider how background, personal values, and experiences taken together affect the design and execution of research analysis (Temple and Young 2004: 164). The examination of positionality, through standpoint theories, stems primarily from critical epistemological feminist perspectives (Collins 1990; Haraway 1991; Hardin and Norberg 2005; Smith 1990). Based on the premise that one’s perception of the social world is constructed and shaped by ones’ identity (i.e., socioeconomic status, education, training, ethnicity, gender, ethics), standpoint theories reveal the ways in which these factors unduly influence the design, execution, and interpretation of research findings (Goar 2008; Lynch 2000; Rose 1997; Greenbank 2003; May and Perry 2017).

Moreover, the “insider” versus “outsider” debate seems to have dominated, at least in part, the discourse surrounding reflexivity and positionality (Agar 1980; Srivastava 2004; Young Jr. 2008; Innes 2009; Davis 1997; Aguilar 1981). The researcher status of either/or signifies a continuum on which affiliations between researcher and interlocutor affect the study itself, facilitating certain forms of understanding while impeding others (McCorkel and Myers 2003; O’Brien 2011). Thus, it is possible to retain characteristics which render the researcher multiple statuses, facilitating insider moments with interlocutors, or even being the “outsider within” (Merton 1972; May 2014; Collins 1986; Zempi and Awan 2017). These relationships are ultimately determined by and shift according to relational and situational factors (Bolak 1996; Doucet 2008; Woodward 2008). In this way, the identity of researcher and interlocutor often are “continually reconstituted through the process of fieldwork” (Musante 2014; Erickson 2011; Rashid 2007; Wanat 2008; Winchitz 2006). Per Spradley’s degree of researcher participation

continuum, my participation as a researcher reflected a combination of “active participation” and “complete participation” (1980). This entailed navigating between a level of engagement as both a participant in cultural life, as a passive observer, as well as a member of the group being studied as a native ethnographer (Appadurai 1981; Kraidy 1999).

I tread a more nuanced navigation between the traditional “insider” or “outsider” role. Critically, Fryer notes that one’s positionality is often fluid, “congealing around experience, social hierarchies, and continuums of privilege and domination that may emerge despite or because of our membership across the enmeshed social categories we each occupy” (2020: 27). To this end, the reflection that follows will interrogate my lived experience in the community under study, which is constructed via the multiple, overlapping lenses I bring to this project. My academic training is heavily influenced by critical theory within the fields of geography, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The larger methodological approach of this project is then rooted in anthropological theory, pulling primarily from contemporary post-modern, reflexive feminist scholarship. For this research, I will also incorporate other studies and methodologies from the fields of museum studies and public history.

Regarded as a member of the community under study, I am often granted easier access by virtue of being “one of us” (Sanghera and Bjokert 2008). In fact, I overheard this stated explicitly by an interlocutor to another community member, “As Bob used to say, ‘you’d better have a connection to this town, or no one is going to talk to you.’” Practically, this results in the ability to enter spaces which may otherwise be guarded to outsiders. Additionally, due to a shared knowledge of local history with many community members, I was able to ask more meaningful or insightful questions which probe deeper knowledge as well as to challenge assertions regarding the historical record.

When initiating or concluding an interview, interlocutors would inevitably ask me, “Who are your people?” Interlocutors were interested in which local schools I attended or who the members of my extended family were, thereby establishing an understanding of my kin network and positionality in relation to their own. In this way, my insider status facilitated trust which may have secured more honest or direct answers to questions, particularly considering the difficult nature of the topic under study. There are, however, other challenges that present due to my insider status. My positionality also shaped community member’s expectations of what they believed I could or did want to hear.

I also encountered community pressure against raising provocative questions or uncomfortable topics. In the same vein, I was also surprised to encounter my own aversion to bringing up difficult topics in an interview. Though I may only hypothesize the motivations for aversion in my interlocutors, I can recognize and attribute my own avoidance or discomfort to several factors. First and foremost, it is considered a taboo within polite conversation, particularly in the South, to address disturbing or divisive topics. Second, discussing and addressing the histories of slavery can be an emotionally or physically painful experience for all parties involved, to varying extents. In conducting my own background research on these histories, I experienced anger, grief, confusion, outrage, horror, anxiety and more. Holding space for the discomfort alone can be a taxing experience, physically and emotionally, on anyone. Third, I feared entering a conflict with my interlocutors that would reveal fundamental political disagreements between us or undermine the rapport and trust that was being built. Because the culture of silence surrounding racism and enslavement is so deeply internalized within us, the fear of the unknown, of the lack of social script or experience for navigating these fraught topics, weighed heavy on the conversation.

Further, as an insider-outsider, the potential to assume a myopic view of the culture must be acknowledged. My identity as a college-educated, politically liberal White woman affords me significant privileges in the field and manifests in a few ways. The local museums, plantation sites, and heritage preservation organizations uphold a long legacy of hiring practices which trend toward and select for college-educated, White woman from the area such as myself. Initially driven by the transition from domestic labor to the public sphere, upper-class White women from the region continue to dominate the nonprofit sphere and are more likely to affiliate with shared characteristics of my background. However, my identity diverges from others in my community in significant ways. The political demographics of the region skew heavily toward the conservative right, a position which does not align with my own political views. Because interlocutors were briefed on my thesis topic, they were made aware to some extent of my personal political views which influenced this work.

Further, many individuals that I interviewed regarding plantation life were African American community members and leaders who I believe held concerns regarding my background, researcher positionality, and research topic. Regardless of racial or socioeconomic background, I did encounter skepticism and mistrust with respect to my identities and research intentions. In response, I found myself shifting in my outward presentation of personal characteristics such as my political alignment or social capital, extending even to the way that I dressed or the form of speech that I employed (i.e., uncovering a long dormant, traditional Southern accent). These slight shifts often occurred on the unconscious level as I navigated between identities and mediated the rapport between me and my interlocutors.

1.3.4 Engaged Anthropology

This project is rooted in the field of engaged anthropology and strives toward emancipatory praxis. The subfield of engaged anthropology foregrounds concerns about social justice and structural violence, recognizing the linkages to processes of globalization, colonialism, and capitalism (Kirsch 2018); whereas praxis provides the knowledge of the reality in which action is motivated and informed by theory (Warry 1992). As such, the production of applied anthropological research requires the consideration of ethical and political decisions (Warry 1992). This includes, for example, involving interlocutors as equal participants in the research process, emphasizing participation rather than one-sided observation. Praxis is related, then, to the ethics of accountability and researcher reflexivity. The interlocutors' wellbeing should be central to the research focus as part of a shared social world.

The research design also draws from the McCloskey et al. framework of community engagement (2011). The project aim is to ground the methodological principles in fairness, justice, empowerment, participation, and self-determination. To this end, the level of community involvement, impact, trust, and communication flow should fall on the "collaborative" end of the author's proposed continuum. This research design allows for decision making at the community level, formation of strong partnerships, broader trust building, and positive outcomes for restorative justice. Community organization and participation will require meaningful engagement with various members of the community, not just local leaders. This also includes stakeholders such as site visitors and designated tour guides.

Warry defines praxis as, "a specific form of activity: activity based on knowledge informed by theory and performed according to certain ethical and moral principles for political ends" (Warry 1992: 157). A step further, emancipatory praxis is characterized as both a moral and

political endeavor for the liberation of individuals or a community from the “alienating aspects of everyday practice. The utility of praxis theory then sources in part from its ability to highlight social inequalities and the hegemonic forces which uphold and reinforce them (Frankenberg 1988). “Praxis consists of a tension or negotiation between objective knowledge of the world which is operative in a given time and place and the subjective experience of the world found in ongoing human action. This negotiation teaches us about the implicit patterns that underlie human existence” (Baba 2000: 27). Therefore, central to the ethical considerations of this project are the engaged anthropological and emancipatory praxis components, which strive to advance theory and to mitigate local needs and concerns.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter Two introduces the history of the region, focusing on the political economy and geography of enslavement. It also explores the construction and formation of a plantation culture in the American South. I illustrate the relationships between museum sites, local mythology, and the ways in which heritage and nostalgia construct monuments and rhetoric of erasure. Chapter Three develops the notion of difficult public history through the lens of the anthropology of tourism. This chapter draws connections from the ethnographic moments I captured to the affective tension between nostalgia for a ‘bygone era’ and heterogeneous collective memory. Chapter Four makes a return to the praxis component of the project, reflecting on both the work completed, where I find myself within this landscape, and the fate of plantations in the American South in relation to the paradigm of anthropological praxis, and theoretical contributions and implications of my study. This conclusion centers on a strikingly symbolic, yet physical example of the erasure of African American history, though primarily seeks to imagine futures for these landscapes to broaden the conceptualization of what is possible to achieve.

1.5 Contributions

There are several outcomes of the project ranging from immaterial shifts in the perspectives of community members to changes in the material interpretation at these sites. For the shifts to make any substantial, enduring difference, the intervention must be driven by the community and maintained by the community. My aim is that the knowledge gained through the process of negotiation and documentation, the material changes enacted in the educational materials and physical representations, and relationships fostered will persist and strengthen beyond the duration of this project.

On a basic level, the primary intention of this research was to create contacts within the local community who share an interest in plantation life and cultural heritage, to create an empathetic but critical analysis of the systems at play which will be shared with the stakeholders, and hopefully, to extend an invitation to this network to develop more sustainable objectives for the future. Most ambitiously, however, this project is driven by a desire to address the hundreds of years of an uneven power imbalance and structural violence enacted upon the local African American community by the minority, affluent White planter class and their contemporary descendants. Further, it is my hope that this work will push for changes to the educational policies and practices and in the material representations of the plantation site and museums in focus. This has, and will, require community commitment to greater inclusion of African American life and contributions in the historical record and collective memory.

Consequently, the implications for this research and potential future directions are manifold. As the United States is reckoning with the racial tensions rooted in our history as a country on a national scale, this project acts as a local case study which is anticipated to demonstrate the ability of a community to utilize empathy and communicative skills to bridge divergent

collective memories. It also serves to illuminate the tensions which slow or prevent this reconciliation.

2 A PLACE APART, A PART OF PLACE

A visit to Pinewood is sure to result in an awe-inspiring and memorable experience for all who enter the plantation's gates. Pinewood Plantation has been called a Southern Belle. This stately architectural beauty stands proudly amid the magnolias and long leaf pines, and like an alluring belle, it has magnetic appeal and breathtaking beauty. With its relaxed order and sense of timelessness, Pinewood puts everyone immediately at ease and invites closer inspection of the plantation and its former occupants. Pinewood Website (2022)

During the 20th century, wealthy Northern families established more than seventy plantation estates in the Longleaf Pine region of the Southeastern United States. By preserving certain features from earlier periods and adding new buildings and landscapes, wealthy sporting enthusiasts and Northern families invented a new type of plantation. In the process, they changed the meaning of the word “plantation” with profound implications for historical memory of slavery and contemporary views of the South. These former sites of slave labor were restored as new estates which re-established traditional hierarchies, with White elites as landowners and landless African Americans as laborers. Portraying slavery through a lens of romance and nostalgia, the plantations reified the pre-existing social order which appraised White authority and Black servitude as natural. Advertised as a landscape of spectacular beauty, rich traditions, and historical charm, the plantation South has historically failed to recognize the violence and oppression that occurred at the sites or the voices of the marginalized who continue to suffer racial terror and economic oppression.

The symbolic capital of the post-slavery plantation—signifying wealth, power, and leisure—is deeply intertwined with alliances of race and class, influencing which narratives prevail and which are forgotten. This chapter provides background on the history of the region, exploring those alliances and the relationship between material change—in the use, form, and representation of heritage preservation—and the rising popularity of plantation tourism, which

functions to obscure the memories of slavery, labor, and commercial enterprise. Beyond the plantations themselves, the plantation tourism industry is a major driver of the contemporary economy of Washington, catering to (and curating) a particular form of collective memory that appeals to a sanitized sense of nostalgia for the Old South. As such, this chapter introduces theories of collective memory and nostalgia as factors which drive tourism and commemoration, as well as the absence of African American history in these spaces, primarily through the gentrification of historic African American neighborhoods.

2.1 Historical Context

The research site in focus is situated within the rolling landscape of the Red Ridge region which comprises a small portion of the Southeastern United States and spans the boundaries of five counties across two states. Settled by Native Americans by the early 16th century, the region was continuously occupied by various first nation peoples including the Apalachee and the Seminole until the arrival of White settlers prompted their violent removal from the surrounding lands. The White settlers, mainly wealthy migrants from the Chesapeake region, almost immediately established working agricultural plantations in the Red Ridge region by the early 1800s. The heavy, red clay soils that characterized the region were ideal to farming and extremely conducive to growing cotton, thereby drawing antebellum planters to settle the area (Gatewood et al. 1994).

The formalization of Washington County, in addition to the surrounding countries, was introduced into legislation under the leadership of a notable local planter, Washington L. Johnson; however, even after the official formation of the counties within the state, the historical record celebrates instances of colonial settler violence directed at Native American men, women, and children through the 19th century (Rogers 1963: 37). By the 1840s, the cotton crop

dominated the local economy and cemented the institution of slavery in the local plantation economy (Rogers 1963: 51). At this time, the importation of slaves from Africa had ceased. In fact, slaves who arrived in the Red Ridge region brought with them the settled cultural traditions and social structures of the piedmont cotton and tidewater rice plantations, leading to a “rich merging of the earlier experiences and customs” of the newly arrived residents, both Black and White (Margeson and Kitchens 1991: 4). At this time, the larger region boasted the fifth largest cotton production amongst all counties in the surrounding states. The rise of plantation capitalism in the Red Ridge region would firmly establish the economic and social order which gave rise to the nickname “Cotton Kingdom” and the persistence of “plantation culture” through the 21st century (Baptist 2002). Clearly, the plantations played a significant role in shaping the region’s economy and social organization, functioning as the primary drivers of the region’s growth and development. Despite this notably high agricultural output, the upland plantations of the Southeast have received little scholarly attention relative to the tidewater plantations of the coast. Considering this deficit, this thesis research will contribute to the small body of work on the region’s distinctive yet relatively unexplored history.

Increasingly, the Black enslaved population outnumbered the White population, comprising a large majority of the local community. Many of these individuals were considered chattel or property under the control of several large planter family dynasties, although a significant number of individuals and yeoman owned a few slaves (Rogers 1963: 50-61). The most recent estimates indicate that around thirty percent of the local population owned at least one enslaved person, although planter families often held around one hundred slaves at any given time. Broadly, the slaveholding elite held a massive concentration of wealth at the expense of the oppression of the Black majority (Lockley 2001). During the period before the Civil War, the

neighboring county reported a population of 2,197 White persons and 8,200 slaves, with Washington County reporting similar racial proportions. In fact, the large population of enslaved African Americans in Washington County ranked twenty-second in the state by number of slaves, despite its small relative size, and was designated one of forty-three counties with more enslaved persons by population than Whites (Gatewood et al. 1994). Without a doubt, the residents in the Red Ridge region consisted of White farmers who were drastically outnumbered by a large population of Black slaves who lived, worked, and died on the plantations (Groene 1971).

Regarding the treatment of the enslaved African American population, the sparse historical record oscillates between racist apologetics and unfeeling population statistics (i.e., violence of abstraction). Into the Civil War, the city of Washington established “sundown” codes making it illegal for slaves or any free persons of color to be “about the corporate limits.” The punishment for disobeying these codes was thirty-nine lashes (Rogers 1964: 79); however, according to one report, local slaves were not “excessively abused in the community” (Gatewood et al. 1994). Often cited as an example of benevolent treatment, plantation slaveowners throughout the region permitted their slaves to observe various holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Grand holiday celebrations emphasized the wealth and status of the plantation owners and created a sense of generosity yet control (Brock and Vivian 2015: 44). These celebrations functioned to celebrate, replicate, and uphold the social planter order, self-described and marketed by the plantation elite as the “extravagance of living” and the “noble ethic of hospitality” (Baptist 2002: 254). This conceptualization of ethics and harmony conveniently eschewed the exploitative nature of plantation paternalism.

The plantation economy continued to rely upon the labor of enslaved African Americans throughout the century, expanding operations until emancipation forced the planters to reconstitute the shape of the labor force. Although emancipation in Washington County officially went into effect on May 8, 1865, most of the local plantation labor force remained and entered the sharecropping system (Gatewood et al. 1994). Many planters lost most of their wealth, and source of free labor, by the conclusion of the war. In response, many divided their lands into a series of tenant farms or sold off the landed estates to wealthy industrial families from the North (Gatewood et al. 1994). By 1875, Washington County had 2,155 Black farmers, but only 562 White farmers, who were not landowners; all these people either worked for wages, rented or sharecropped (Gatewood et al. 1994). The sharecropping system, described as a “long chain of debt” not far removed from enslavement, operated on a fixed commodity basis in the region (Rogers 1989: 39). Cotton, coincidentally, is the only cash crop that does not produce sufficiently to provide the tenant with profit beyond rent (Paisley 1968, 103) which only perpetuated the disparities in wealth. Into the 1950s, the segment of tenant farmers likewise continued to reflect the racial disparity, with over 75% of farms operated by Black farmers run on a cash or shares basis as opposed to less than 40% of White tenants operating on a cash or shares basis in 1900 (Brock and Vivian 2015). Although the economy faltered during Reconstruction, the plantation land nonetheless remained profitable, and the racial hierarchy was left fundamentally intact. Margeson and Kitchens, in their work on the quail hunting plantations, attribute the preservation of the plantation social system to sharecropping and the area’s regional isolation (1991).

With the conclusion of the 19th century and the start of the Gilded Era, the Red Ridge region, by virtue of its burgeoning tourism industry and plantation heritage, evolved into a

playground for the Northern nouveau riche, and even European royalty. Alongside the development of the Southern rail and establishment of seven luxury hotels in the 1880s, the area marketed itself to and modeled itself after the system of industrial capitalism. Although the booming hotel economy was short-lived, it placed Washington and the Red Ridge on the map as a “sportsman’s winter paradise, a legacy that led directly to the present-day shooting plantation” (Margeson and Kitchens 1991: 2).

For much of the 20th century, these plantations became a (wealthy White male) sporting enthusiast’s paradise. The new “leisure” plantations were directly modeled after the original cotton plantations. According to Margeson and Kitchens, these new hunting plantations proved “more durable than the cotton kingdom they replaced” (1991: 5). To this day, the owner’s residence is known locally as the “big house” while staff housing is referred to as “the quarters” and managers are referred to as “overseers”. The new plantation life emerged, in part, from a nostalgic longing for a return to the mythologized Antebellum plantation South (Giltner 2008: 57). Further, by emphasizing the leisurely, sporting pursuits and natural environment while simultaneously downplaying the continued legacy of racial exploitation, the region’s plantations formed their own plantation myth. While affirming “long-standing tradition,” this myth made plantations anew as sporting resorts thereby establishing the non-agricultural plantation mythology (Brock and Vivian 2015: 22-23; Pope 2018). Occupying the very same physical space and lived experience of planter life, these individuals directed the local narrative on race relations, class distinctions, identity formation, and heritage commemoration.

Further, the newly established leisure plantations reified the pre-existing social order which appraised White authority and Black servitude as natural. After the fall of the sharecropping system, the new estates directly inherited the very same workers who were

generationally connected with the land. As Bernard M. Baruch wrote: “A certain number of Negroes came with the place. They had been there, as were their fathers before them. They knew no other home.” (Brock and Vivian 2015: 27). Despite holding racist attitudes toward their Black plantation workers, the owners of sporting estates chose to portray the environment as a uniquely harmonious site of race relations (Brock and Vivian 2015: 38). Through the rebranding and establishment of the hunting plantation paradigm, the elites returned to “that bygone era” of racial control while working diligently to rewrite the narrative on enslavement and race relations in the region (Giltner 2008: 46). To this day, all but one of the local plantations functions to serve the exact same niche segment of the population. Local planter dynasties and wealthy international elites continue to preserve and utilize the region’s plantation destinations, while the town of Washington continues to celebrate and honor the partial memory of this legacy through a lens of romance and nostalgia.

This study is founded on anthropological and geographical theories of race, space, place, and landscape. As social relations and values are imbued in the landscape of everyday places, this study will interrogate the dynamics of the cultural landscape of post-slavery plantation communities. Cultural landscapes, as characterized within the field of geography, consist of the built environment and spatial ordering accompanied by varying epistemologies and ways of seeing the world (Groth and Wilson 2003; Schein 2006). Everything from architecture to amusement to public interaction shapes and reveals details of wider social life, exposing the “temporal and spatial organization [which constitutes] the social order through the assignment of people and activities to distinctive places and times” (Camp 2004; Harvey 1996: 212).

Institutions tied to landscape and the built environment engage in identity and cultural work by shaping visitor perception of belonging and identity within the larger community.

Producing these sites as places of historical memory, these institutions ascribe meaning to the landscape, “carrying powerful associations and investments for particular communities... which are often historical in nature” (Davis 2016: 54). In this way, landscapes define, shape, and mirror identity, cultural myth, and collective memory. Historically, however, the landscape of the American South has been monopolized by a White-centric hegemonic view of identity and heritage. In many ways, inscriptions in the landscape have written African Americans “out of ‘belonging’” in certain spaces (Schein 2009: 811). As sociologist Les Back describes, racism functions as, a “spatial and territorial form of power which aims to secure and claim native/White territory but it also projects associations on to space that in turn invests racial associations and attributes in places” (Back 2005: 19). As a result, landscapes of the American South, oft exclusionary, continue to preserve a mythologized and valorized historical memory that is affectively rooted in White supremacy (Dustin et al. 2021). Due to this socially constructed asymmetric belonging, physical spaces and places of public memory commonly elicit affective responses from visitors and tourists, though often in conflicting ways (Ladino, 2019). Ladino characterizes the phenomenon, affective dissonance, as “fertile psychological ground” for making sense of conflicting feelings about a place or landscape (2019: 146). The fields of anthropology and critical tourism studies shed additional light on this consideration.

2.2 Collective Memory

Collective memory, first identified by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s, is generally defined as the shared pool of knowledge and memories held by social groups (Halbwachs 1992). In his seminal work, *On Collective Memory* (1992), Halbwachs argued that memory operates in a social framework, “...it is in society that people normally acquire their memories” with society itself, not the individual, providing the framework for memory (38). His

work, which provides the basis for contemporary memory studies, examined the ways in which memory is socially constructed by groups and argued that the collective often influences and shapes individual memory recall (or lack thereof) (Hossfeld 2005). Collective memory, distinguishable from other forms of social memory not relevant to this review, is also distinct from history, the formal process of trying “to arrive at an objective account of the past” (Wertsch and Roediger 2008: 321) and from public history, or the interpretation of history in public space through historic sites, memorials, commemorations, and historical markers. Rather, collective memory is often used to refer to “aggregated individual recollections, official commemorations, collective representations, and disembodied constitutive features of shared identities...located in dreamy reminiscence, personal testimony, oral history, tradition, myth, style, language, art, popular culture, and the built world” (Olick 1999: 336), and is identified according to characteristics generally agreed upon by contemporary memory scholars. Hossfeld (2005) elaborates them as follows: (1) memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; (6) memory has a history.

Collective memory, then, provides communities with narratives about the past, but in its partiality, privileges some histories and identities over others in a manner which typically reflects traditional power dynamics (Zelizer 1995; Olick 1999). Further, Zelizer (1995) asserts that collective memory possesses texture, existing “in the world rather than in a person’s head, and so is embodied in different cultural forms” (232). Therefore, collective memory is mediated through the material world in various ways, described by Hossfeld as ‘infrastructure’ which permits interpretation and engagement (2005: 10). This ‘texture’ or ‘infrastructure’ of collective

memory is omnipresent at museum sites and plantation tourism destinations, which serve as sites of memory, or the gatekeepers which facilitate processes of remembering and forgetting (Weedon and Jordan 2012). The notion of gatekeeping remembering and forgetting at plantation sites is explored further in Chapter Three.

Halbwachs' conceptualization of collective memory rested upon the cultural exchange of "imagos," or generalizations of memory. Halbwachs argued that, over time, collective memory is sustained via the social production of symbols and narratives through commemoration (i.e., rituals, ceremonies, and monuments). Commemoration effectively reproduces the past for the present, establishing an "official" reference point which serves to stabilize collective memory (Zelizer 1995). As a vehicle of collective memory, commemoration utilizes symbolic objects to build schemas of a shared past. This anchoring of collective memory occurs in physical space and landscape, establishing a concrete (textural) relationship to historical memory and complementing the affective and embodied performance of commemoration (Saito 2019). Expanding upon Halbwachs's theory, Jeffrey Olick (2007) imported Pierre Bourdieu's field theory into collective memory studies, emphasizing the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of commemoration. According to Olick, collective memory is constructed through multiple fields with distinct rules of engagement and actors. While different fields produce different collective memories, they nonetheless interact and influence one another under the effects of various power dynamics (Olick 2007). Olick's work also highlights the "affective ties" of collective memory which influence the identify formation and group coherence of the actors in the field (1999: 114). Commemoration, then, capitalizes on the affective ties of ritual and memory to transform historical knowledge into social identity as individuals "shift from a subject position

of audience/observer to actor/participant” (Saito 2019: 649). In both instances, commemoration is central to the formation of group identity and collective memory.

Through commemoration, institutions sustain and reproduce the “‘imagined communities’” with which individuals identify and that give them a sense of history, place and belonging (Weedon and Jordan 2012: 143). Recent scholarship on collective memory characterizes museums or heritage sites as “identity places” which are imbued with affect and explicitly used by “individuals and/or groups as a resource for the maintenance or construction of identity” (Whitehead et al. 2015: 16). A place can be presented as “a distinctive source of pride, a site from which to view one’s horizon of belongings, a place where ‘things happened’ that are integral to constructions of common identity” (Golding and Walklate 2018: 28). These identity places and collective memories may even be manipulated or invented through mechanisms such as selective omission, fabrication, exaggeration, or embellishment in order to curate a particular narrative history.

Identity places often embody, as well as participate in, the construction of remembering and forgetting in collective memory. They legitimize, maintain, order, and condition social life, including collective *silences* within collective memory (Hossfeld 2005). Increased interest in narratives which reproduce the past and shape identity formation, however, has laid bare contemporary inequities regarding power, voice, and representation in collective memory and historic commemoration. Saito (2019) points out that despite the work of commemorative rituals in affirming group solidarity, “heterogeneous versions of a past event always exist” (651). In fact, disjunctive commemorations point to the ways in which narratives push up against one another and are frequently contested. The broken nature of collective memory is evident in the debates surrounding monuments and museums, fractured along racial or political lines in the

American South (Autry 2017). Later in this chapter, the conflict over commemoration and fractured collective memory plays out regarding the revitalization, or gentrification, of the historically African American Bottom district and adjacent neighborhood.

Despite a broader legacy of erasure, it is important to note that various institutions have challenged the hegemonic versions of the past and continue to validate marginalized constructions of identity. Disrupting the hegemony of dominant collective memories, alternative narratives, or “counter-memory,” may work to rewrite prevailing narratives (Weedon and Jordan 2012; Foucault 1977). For instance, the symbolic annihilation of the African American experience manifests in many ways, including at post-slavery plantation sites. At these sites, the commemorative practices and dominant collective memories represent a “Southern identity characterized by very narrow and exclusionary parameters” (Davis 2016: 7). Museums, central to the project of representation and commemoration, now represent sites which “convert collective memories about difficult histories into public narratives about group identity” (Autry 2017: 145). In Autry’s words, “the multiplicity of memory and historical interpretation and the controversies they spark speak volumes about the coercive nature of collective memory or the social expectation to orient oneself to the past in very specific ways” (2017: 184). The rising interest in difficult history reflects the broader pushback against this legacy and interest in the negotiation of messy collective histories at museum and heritage sites.

2.3 Nostalgia

The rising popularity of the anthropological study of tourism has been accompanied by a renewed interest in memory and affect, thus resulting in increasing anthropological attention to nostalgia. Though typified in a variety of ways over time, the “nostalgia” construct has been utilized to study contemporary issues of identity, politics, and history at the intersection of the

individual and the social. Despite belonging to a considerable body of work, anthropological studies of nostalgia have primarily been oriented within a relatively niche paradigm, namely, broad-scale analyses of post-socialist contexts (Angé and Berliner 2015). Broadly, though, theorists describe nostalgia as a distinct attitude orientated toward the past, though inherent to contemporary culture, characterized by a mourning of the changed present or longing for the past, with emphasis placed upon the temporal aspect.

Anthropologists, upon integrating nostalgia into their work, emphasized the phenomenological aspects and generally became “as interested in the reliability of memory as in the memory work itself” (Angé and Berliner 2015, 4). Some scholars posit that nostalgia is an affective response to perceived threats to identity continuity and construction (Davis 1979). Taking on many forms, nostalgia as affective discourse and practice may “mediate collective identities, whether they are social, ethnic or national” (Bryant 2008; Cashman 2006). As nostalgia is positioned toward the irretrievable past and (dis)continuity in the present, it is frequently tied to narratives of loss, power, and resistance. Nostalgia, as an analytical tool, “allows a number of important reconciliations: between the anthropological, the historical and the psycho- logical; the continuous and discontinuous; the persistent and the mutable; but also between the past, the present and the future” (Angé and Berliner 2015: 12). This study calls upon nostalgia as an affective conduit of place, memory, and identity as it relates to the tourism imaginaries of the American South.

The circulation and negotiation of romantic tourism imaginaries establishes fertile ground for the development and promotion of nostalgia. Employed and engaged in as a mechanism of the tourist imaginary, nostalgia takes many different forms. Often, nostalgia in the tourism industry calls upon the fictionalized worlds of media or mythology to curate a

stylized local authenticity and identity (Salazar and Graburn 2014). In this way, tourism imaginaries facilitate the development of a nostalgia for a nonexistent past. Appadurai (1996) and Rosaldo (1989) initially identified two forms of fabricated nostalgia, “imagined” and “imperialist” respectively. Referring to the so-called “innocent yearning” of the tourist industry to “capture imaginations and conceal its complicity with domination,” both scholars point to the ways in which nostalgia may be experienced despite lacking collective historical memory or despite bearing responsibility for the loss of past ways of being (Rosaldo 1989: 108). Similarly challenging the innocent manifestation of nostalgia, Michael Kammen and others have asserted that nostalgia is “history without guilt” (Muller 2006). In the contemporary plantation South, a vast nostalgia-based tourism industry has thrived despite also being the location of chattel slavery. Driven by Lost Cause ideology and the economic pressures of late capitalism, the plantation industry employs nostalgic constructs which code the landscape’s history as elegant and grand (McPherson 2003). As we shall see, the history of the plantations continues to be romanticized, enshrining the lives of White elites in tropes of lost grandeur and gentility that, in truth, rarely existed at these sites.

2.4 Tourism and Commemoration

For the city of Washington, tourism is one of the primary drivers of the local economy, elevating its regional status from small town “no-where” to self-proclaimed “micropolitan.” Today, the city’s tourism board is responsible for marketing the local attractions and generating an economic demand for these experiences. As a region dense with historic plantations and other heritage sites, however, the city of Washington has long oriented its marketing strategy around this draw. The tourism industry historically caters to, in many forms, the mythologized and valorized history memory of plantation sites, honoring only the partial memory of this legacy.

For decades, the town advertising and guidebooks highlighted the historic plantation sites as breathtaking experiences that provided visitors with inside tours of the stately Greco-Roman architecture and natural landscape. In conjuring up the mythologized image of the Southern Belle, moonlight streaming through the magnolias, and a slower paced lifestyle, the advertising was directed to a very specific demographic, that is, retired couples. In particular, plantation marketing was designed to attract retired White women in their late 50s or 60s. The tourism generating economy, which modeled itself to the patronage of older women, took on this Southern mythos, and they drove each other in a reciprocal way. Beverly, the current Tourism Director of Washington and my former Bible school teacher, met with me to speak about the history of plantations within the town's tourism economy:

Beverly: We were really, at that time pushing plantation tours. Even before I got here. I'm going to say around 2010, there was about 12 bed and breakfasts in Washington and that was kind of the thing that you did. You went into a small town, you went to the local restaurant, you shopped the local stores. And you know, you're somewhere in the South. So go see a plantation, go see plantation. So really, that mindset was very popular.

She spoke to just how popular plantation tourism was, describing the decision to market the region as a plantation destination as a "mindset" which shaped the local economy.

Though the plantation marketing was designed to attract a specific market, the region also made a name for itself as an international tourist destination. Visitors from all 50 states and over 20 countries worldwide are drawn by the local tourism industry, which serves almost as a mediator between these historical sites and the audiences which they cater to. Strikingly, many European visitors are travelers from Germany, who in addition to having relatively long vacations, are drawn specifically by the plantation tourism economy. Further, there are historical ties between the local plantations and Germany, with a couple of plantation owners being German WWII veterans. According to one plantation museum curator, these visitors "look up

plantations in the South, and they're interested. Usually, they—some have been—kind of surprised because this is the 20th century plantation, you know, with the roots in the history.” Those same historical “roots” are also the reason why contemporary Southern plantations found themselves under scrutiny in 2020:

Ashley: I feel like they're inappropriately relevant today. I feel like they're beautified and they're glamorized. And it's, you know, people want to go out there and take their, their wedding pictures out there. And I'm like, 'Oh, my gosh, if we traveled back 100 years ago, 150 years ago, you would be devastated by what you're seeing and what you're hearing', but you're sitting here celebrating your wonderful family moments and laughing and having a great time and using. They're using their slave quarters as a backdrop.' You know, like, it's disgusting to me. Like, and honestly, that's something that was just brought to my attention within the last year or two. Because I used to, I used to take pictures of, you know, I mean, yes. Sometimes hard to tell a difference between like, a slave cabin versus a sharecropper's cabin. But I used to take a lot of photos of them. And, you know, I would get all these different 'Oh, it's so beautiful. Look at that beautiful plantation', but, and, you know, I would be flattered that they loved my photo, but then, you know, I got to thinking like, this isn't always beautiful for everybody. And if I'm going to document anything, when it comes to plantations, from this moment on, it's not going to be for the purpose of making it beautiful. I'm not going to try to portray it as something beautiful, because a lot of ugliness happened to a lot of terrible things happened on the plantation land. And so, I mean, everybody wants to come to Washington to visit Pinewood. Or, you know, and it's you get there adorned with Christmas lights. Yeah, it's a part of history. It's a part of history that we can't change. Don't pretend like this is beautiful. Don't- it's not *Gone with the Wind*. But yeah, there's some stuff that needs to be documented. There's some stuff that needs to be included in this history. And it just goes along with you know, how are children are being taught, we weren't being taught what really happened in the past.

Ashley's attitude here reflects the broader shift in some White Southerners' outlooks on plantation tourism. As a local photographer, Ashley admitted to having played a part in glamorizing the plantation landscape for public consumption. When public perception began to change nationally, she re-contextualized her work and began to speak out against the romanticization and White washing of this history.

Facing heightened public criticism, many national corporations also chose to rebrand their image and adapt company policies to place more value on acknowledging and combatting

systemic racism. During this time, the larger regional tourism board also made the decision to rebrand, removing the word “plantation” from its prominent feature in the state-wide advertising campaign. When I asked Beverly about this decision, she responded: “We’re not stupid.” She emphasized how the regional board saw the proverbial writing on the wall, that it was a “sign of the times,” and that the optics of keeping the word “plantation” so central to the marketing were less than ideal, particularly as perceived by an outsider:

Beverly: We realize that maybe that here, *we* understand the role of our plantations. But for an outsider, they're thinking we're caught in plantation- *sugarcane* plantations. And we have these deep, dark, seedy histories with slavery. Was there slavery on the plantations? 99.9% yes. There was some slavery out there. Because that's what all of the markets, that's what everybody was using in the South, your labor, unfortunately, was a slave labor. And so there is that history. So is that being negatively looked at? Absolutely, it was. So we had some long discussions, and we decided to change the name of the travel region and remove the plantation because for others in the community, others in this entire area, it didn't even fit. It didn't fit who they were.

While, on one hand, she characterizes “plantation” as a negative buzzword that marketing should move away from, she also followed by re-emphasizing the deep ties and present working relationship between the tourism board and the local plantations. Likewise, the nod to regional exceptionalism, that the local plantations were distinct in many ways and therefore absolved, was a common discourse amongst members of the local community. In her analogy, Pinewood Plantation is to Washington as the World of Coke, a major Southern tourist attraction, is to Atlanta, or as she put it, “You can’t think about certain things— one without the other”. In many of my conversations with community members, the local tourism board’s messaging would inevitably arise in concert alongside discussion of plantation history. As one community leader shared, “I would think we attract a certain market...which is sad to me. And we’ve talked about before, how can we make that more.... I don’t know... open-ended?” Here, between pregnant pauses and as her sentence trailed off, it seemed to me that “open-ended” perhaps

euphemistically replaced other terms which have initially come to mind. Another community member recalled that “even like three or four years ago, I felt like, by just talking about our plantations, we were missing, the other aspects that we have, such as the vibrant downtown.” In many ways, the focus on the plantation history was suddenly no longer serving the regional economy, and in fact, there was growing recognition that it had long detracted from other local historical attractions.

In response, the city tourism board has made the decision to shift the focus of its marketing. Instead of highlighting the plantation history of the region, the board has begun to target a younger demographic— White women aged 19 to 35— and publicly promote local shopping and dining attractions. Though the tourism board is still “working closely” with one of the local plantations, the tourism director acknowledged that this represented a shift in their approach to marketing:

Beverly: We're getting more mindful, we're listening. Yeah, we're listening. And we've had people, you know, they would pick up our visitor guide, you know, and say stuff like, ‘Well, you don't have any, I'm not seeing any Black people in your cover.’ So, we've done, we're doing a better job about it, you know, so we're definitely doing better with stuff like this. So, you know, coming up with our marketing stuff to be more inclusive.

Driven by public feedback, the tourism board did make the decision to reflect upon and revise their approach; however, the decision to highlight greater racial diversity in the visitor guide was received with some negative feedback from some community members, though not in the way one might expect. In conversation, some locals shared that they felt the representation didn't reflect the real racial makeup of the events, shops, or attractions highlighted in the guide. They pointed out that, in reality, the featured, historic Main Street district was not actually frequented by the local Black community. That, in fact, seeing photos of Black families and couples shopping in the downtown elicited a sense of irony, though this was not elaborated upon. When I

then asked asked members of the tourism board about other material changes to the city visitor center and “Welcome” exhibit, I was slightly surprised to learn that, despite the new changes implemented since 2020, the exhibit space had not been updated. Rather, the “giant display board that has a lot of historical images” remained, highlighting “people dressed up in Victorian outfits and quite a few plantations.”

The plantation tourism economy is currently in flux, being negotiated through various mediums and by different communities, from public online discourse to private board meetings, as it is destabilized by broader cultural and ideological structures. Calls from the public to destabilize traditional power imbalances in historical representation, in fact, are acting directly upon this industry. And as the tourism ecosystem acts as a chimera, responding and adapting to the outsider’s perception, the current effect has translated to an unsettling of geographically localized silences. There are other communities, domestically but also internationally, which have fashioned themselves as a facsimile of the imaged or quintessential plantation “Antebellum South,” the Festa Confederada in Brazil being a good example. This annual festival, held in Santa Bárbara d’Oeste, is celebrated with Confederate flags, Southern fusion Brazilian food, and traditional Confederate uniforms and hoop skirts for dances. This celebration originates in the migration of some 20,000 Confederates to Brazil during Reconstruction, and today this festival and their descendants honor that legacy. In these instances, the long-standing plantation symbology has traveled in space and time, the exportation of an imaginary, but has resettled in its place of origin, re-embedded itself within a new context, and re-established its meaning and value. In Chapter 3, I provide richer ethnographic descriptions on contemporary plantations in Washington County.

Another driver of tourism locally is the strikingly well-preserved historic architecture throughout the town. In fact, Washington prides itself on the extent of history that has been preserved and that is featured today throughout town. The dedication to historic preservation is deeply intertwined with formation of community identity and place-making but also plays a crucial role in supporting the local tourism economy. Beverly, the Tourism Director, emphasized the importance of historic preservation to the region when I spoke with her in the Fall of 2021:

Beverly: The history that still intact within Washington...you see all these beautiful historic homes... the beautiful historic plantations. And then the history museums that collect this and provide experiences for our visitor...The way that they interpret these experiences and this history, allows me an opportunity to provide both– maybe it's education for school groups coming in, or maybe it's entertainment, taking a group of ladies out there to tour Pinewood.

There are a handful of local organizations committed to the preservation of the town's history, as well as ecology, that are supported in large part by the wealthy White families who reside in the region. With direct access to significant resources, the town has been able to preserve quite a few historic constructions, including the brick-lined streets of downtown, the 200-year-old stores along Broad Street, the county courthouse, countless Victorian homes, cemetery sites, and more.

In order to get a better of idea of how local heritage organizations were operating in the community, I met with the Director of one such organization. Because the organization's mission is to preserve the heritage of Washington, but heritage is quite a broad category to determine, I asked her to define what the region's heritage meant to her:

Linda: The legacy of caring for the land, of building beautiful homes that are shared, investing in downtown and making it your business that the local economy is strong. And so I think one era's priorities informed another, which adds layers to heritage. Does that make sense? So the heritage here is multifaceted. It's certainly architecture, it's certainly traditional landscapes. It's certainly plantation-based economy. It's certainly informed by racial distinctions but overlaid by all of that is the fact that we have been guided, we've been fortunate to have been guided by an informed, well-traveled leadership, who continues to invest here and for a little tiny place, we have a lot going on.

One of the projects that her organization has prioritized over the years is an oak tree preservation program. Linda pointed to that project as the indelible mark of historic preservation on the landscape and as a representation of the town's intrinsic heritage. Described as "a living legacy two-hundred, three-hundred years into the future," the focus on the preservation of the town's tree canopy highlights the priorities of those with the funds to lead the local preservation movement. Her response also semi-begrudgingly hit upon the central focus of the heritage movement locally, which is the "traditional landscapes" of the plantation-based economy. Most crucially, however, she emphasized the multifaceted nature of heritage, that each era of local history was influenced by that which came before, becoming layered over itself.

The palimpsestic presence of the plantation in daily life is manifest in Washington, as it is entangled in many understandings of the past across the South. The palimpsest as metaphor has a dual meaning here. Chiefly, a palimpsest is understood as a text which is altered yet still bears visible traces of its earlier form. In this way, the story of the plantation history in Washington, consisting of layers of storytelling superimposed over partially erased or effaced texts, comes to stand for the multiplicity of temporalities. Once more, in literary theory, the palimpsest also functions as a trope of memory for which the community of origin cannot entirely remember its own true origins. Groote describes how this effectively posits a "demonstrably mythical event,, in concealing under that event any dissenting traces" (2014, 3). As history in Washington is layered over time, the mythic magnolia and moonlight plantation trope has taken hold while other histories have been obscured, particularly that of the enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Though evidenced explicitly throughout the region, this disparity was typified by the town's attitude toward the restoration of one historic cemetery. Over the course of my research, I

was stunned to discover an old newspaper article highlighting the rich history of the Midway Church cemetery. Originally a site of clandestine worship, the church had been founded by some of Washington's first enslaved people. Before the church was built, they gathered in the brush harbor under the canopy of a huge oak tree. Sometimes also called hush harbors, this practice of secret religious assembly was common practice during the 19th century which offered the enslaved hope, reassurance, and agency. If caught, the enslaved could suffer severe punishments as planters and slave owners were afraid that organizing could lead to revolt. For decades, the enslaved and their descendants had worshipped there, eventually erecting a chapel and schoolhouse, and establishing a cemetery. Over time, the building fell into disrepair and the church moved locations, leaving the deteriorating structures and cemetery plot behind. Though occasionally visited by family members, the grave sites of the enslaved and their descendants became overgrown and obscured. When family members attempted to visit their ancestors' graves, they were dismayed to discover that they couldn't access the site because it was completely engulfed by the woods.

Three years ago, one devoted man resolved to tend to the site and restore it, though his efforts alone have not been enough to preserve the site's integrity. Enter Ashley. A photographer new to the area, Ashley was driving around town, searching for natural and built landscapes to photograph at sunset, when she came upon the church building and cemetery. Amazed by the beauty and significance of the site, she was totally shocked by its complete obscurity:

Ashley: I'm googling Midway Church, Washington, nothing is pulling up. Nothing. And I'm like, how, how is even possible with the church being as old as it is? It's rich in history, like, nothing has shown up. So I kind of just gave up I was like, okay, weird, you know, whatever... Not even on the map? You know?

Feeling called by her conscience, Ashley, too, resolved to aid in restoring the site and the graveyard. She set out on a campaign to publicize the project, to spread the word on social media and the press, and to consult with local historic preservation stakeholders on site restoration.

However, she became quickly grounded when the public didn't respond to her call to action. Though she garnered an article or two in the town newspaper on a cemetery cleanup initiative she was spearheading, she felt stonewalled by the disparity in attention and funds that Black history received as opposed to the White history of the town.

Ashley: Everybody was, you know, oh my gosh, pumped ready to go, the whole community was ready to help him out. And kind of like what's going on. Now, when it comes time to pull your bootstraps up, and, you know, put the, you know, your feet to the pavement, and they just kind of, they're nowhere to be found. And I was really, so he said that every little grave that he has, you know, there's that's visible at that point, was one that he physically uncovered himself. So and then he proceeded to tell me there are at least 150 others that he recovered.

She attempted to mobilize the community, yet the project and handful of volunteers quickly lost momentum. Though she reached out to various organizations involved with historic preservation in the community, no one was willing to help.

As she relayed the story to me, I could see how exasperated she had become by the lack of response. Linking the narrative to the plantation history, Ashley pointed to the sad irony of the situation:

Ashley: To me, it's shameful because you, being from Washington, you know about Washington so, you know, there's over a hundred plantations around here. And these are the people that built these plantations. And it's a lot you know, the families and, you know a long something line of their ancestors, but, you know, those slaves lived their entire lives with disrespect and neglect and treated lesser than and now they have to lay to rest in that manner. And that's unacceptable to me. Like they, they have a huge contribution to the history of Washington and I feel like if they should be honored as such, you know what I mean? That's a huge part of the history as well. I would love to have a plaque just because there's so many unmarked graves out there. To have a plaque that just gives a general explanation that these are Washington, some of Washington's first slaves. This is where they lie along with their free descendants. And, you know, you know, that way if you come across an unmarked grave, you know, not saying that the

name doesn't matter. Because their names matter. They had lives. But you know, their significance in the history of this town.

As a newcomer to the town of Washington, Ashley had quickly picked up on the primary role of plantations in the town's history and tourist economy, especially the contradictions between how that history was advertised without acknowledging the lives and contributions of the enslaved.

This is also laid bare in the way that plantation history is commemorated today. One of the biggest local attractions is the annual arts festival, in which Southern sport hunting and plantation history are commemorated. First held nearly thirty years ago, this festival attracts visitors from around the world to celebrate this area's rich history, kicking off with a black-tie gala and concluding with a lavish party and art auction at Pinewood Plantation. Race is not implicated in the festival at all, but rather the emphasis is primarily placed on the physical landscape, the native wildlife, and bird dog hunting. Tickets to the festival sell at a price point in the hundreds to thousands, not including the cost of items at auction or hunting trips, all but ensuring that only a select few individuals who own, run, and enjoy the plantations today are able to attend. Broadly, the festival adopts symbols of plantation life, or *imagos*, that serve as reference points for the broader mythologized heritage, and which rationalize contemporary social life, including racial class distinctions and silences in collective memory. Moreover, the region hosts two other major festivals which cater to a nostalgic collective memory of a by-gone past: Old South Day and Victorian Christmas. Both are also relatively recent inventions, having been conceptualized by the region's tourism board for marketing purposes. Old South Day serves as a tribute to the past, celebrated today with a large parade, antique show, Southern comfort food and more. Victorian Christmas is also a large production which effectively shuts down the center of the town to commemorate that period in Washington history and is also celebrated with various attractions and traditional Southern food by locals dressed in period attire.

Altogether, the community utilizes these annual festivals to anchor collective memory in the past while simultaneously reproducing that past for the present. In this way, the town celebrates and commemorates a Victorian or plantation heritage in a selective manner, curating an imagined sense of shared history. At the same time, Emancipation Day, originally celebrated locally on May 20th by the local African Community during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is no longer celebrated. In addition to more passively allowing Black history to fade into obscurity, the city has also been actively engaging in a process of gentrification and displacement with historic Black neighborhoods.

2.5 Gentrification as Living History

In Washington, the gentrification of historically Black neighborhoods is being presented to the community at large under the guise of historic preservation and commemoration of Black history. This is, in part, a function of the fact that most of the local wealth is concentrated in White hands. This has resulted in an entirely uneven preservation of local histories along racial lines. The historically Black neighborhoods near downtown are, for the first time, currently undergoing an intensive process of gentrification. The Bottom (also discussed in Chapter 3) and the adjacent historic neighborhood were first identified by the city as problem areas in the 2010s and subsequently targeted for renovation into a tourist-minded “creative district.” In my conversation with city representatives regarding the initial project planning, Susan, the public outreach coordinator, described the state of the district as bad:

Susan: So anyway, out of all those public meetings, came a master plan for the Creative District and included creating like a walkable and connected community. Developing a business entrepreneur friendly environment, activating space, it was really rundown. It was bad, you know, it was bad.

Though the priority of the project was to renovate the space and bring new business to the district, in my interviews, the city representatives publicly harped on the importance of preserving local Black history:

Beverly: One of the things that we did was we make sure that we kept the history of the Bottom very, that we didn't lose any of that... And we put markers in the ground marking what those businesses were remembered to be, maybe it was [], pharmacy, it was the Tasty Shop that was, you know, the dry cleaners or whatever it was. We're really working to make sure that we don't lose this African American history. Unfortunately, it is getting lost in, it's really at a time where we've got to hold onto before it's gone because people like Mr. Jackson aren't going to be here forever.

Though voicing intention to preserve Black history, she nonetheless admitted that it was being “lost” at a critical juncture in which its history would either be preserved or disappear entirely. In less than five years, the struggling Black downtown district was completely remodeled and remade in the service of the upper-class White wealth. Stores that were previously owned by African Americans which served primarily African American communities, such as the barber shop and dance studio, for example, were replaced with upscale boutiques selling organic craft yarn, yoga classes, hiking gear, and craft beer, just to start. All the while, the project was being publicly pitched and praised as a tribute to the African American history of the district.

The inclusion of the markers in the ground dedicated to the former businesses was driven by Mr. Jackson, who repeatedly advocated for the city to commemorate the history in some way. Inspired by a visit to the Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Jim fought for those plaques and commemorative markers to be placed, nagging the city to salvage the remaining links to the Black community. He said, “I had to push, because no one else was going to,” yet the city’s characterization of the decision painted it as steadfast priority. In the center of the district, the city also erected a sign with three plaques which commemorate the African American history and cite Mr. Jackson by name. One anonymous interlocutor was displeased:

This is the other thing that's really strange about them. If you ever walk back, walk through Broad Street again, you will see that brick wall that honors all the Black businesses that were on Broad Street as part of the picture of it. But when you go to the shops that are there, now they're all White. So how do you honor them? There are still Black people here who could own businesses! Why is it that you only have all White businesses, as you're honoring Black people? There's a disconnect there.

She pointed to the hypocrisy of commemorating Black history with a plaque while simultaneously pushing out contemporary Black businesses or tearing down historic ones. Once more, the *pièce de résistance* of the district renovation was a large, centrally located outdoor amphitheater space dubbed "The Ritz." Susan, one of the city representatives with whom I spoke, remarked proudly on their work: "It's made in honor of the Ritz theater". In local context, the Ritz theater was known as the segregated movie theater, which operated in the Bottom District for decades prior to desegregation and later suburban expansion. It functioned as a hub of Black life during the period and famously welcomed Black children seeking enrichment after school, much unlike the White theater located two and a half blocks away. Though the original Ritz theater building had itself been demolished and renovated into the predominantly White Anglican church, the city capitalized on the moment and symbolically gestured their support for African American history by naming the new venue after the Ritz theater.

In this way, the city, and the White community at large, was able to superficially assuage their troubling consciences while nonetheless persisting in the erasure of local Black history.

Ashley, the local photographer leading the cemetery cleanup initiative, expressed her own frustration with what she perceived to be the double-edged nature of the decision.

Ashley: It's right there with downtown with everything else that's beautified and made to look pretty and to me. Excuse me. I'm not trying to be judgmental or bitter or anything. It's just to me, it seems like it's the... it seems like a very superficial way of supporting the African American history of this town. You know, like, oh, well, we'll spruce up the area that, you know, they were only allowed to work in. I was like, okay, great, but it's right behind Broad Street, you know where everybody else is?

Interlocutors highlighted the superficial nature of the city's gesture and pointed out that there were opportunities for city funds to go directly to the African American community in other capacities.

Gloria, a retired African American art historian, artist, and curator, harped on the importance of the Bottom district. She explained to me how the freed slaves were given that land (at the bottom of the plantation) after the Civil War, and how they established thriving Black communities in the neighborhood which persisted through segregation. As we sat on her porch, just two blocks from the new Ritz theater, and watched the cars drive by, she gestured toward the district. Every year the town celebrates a major festival by providing elaborate decorations for the shop windows in downtown. due to COVID restrictions limiting social gatherings, the town had compensated by going above and beyond to decorate the shops in the Bottom; however, the three remaining Black-owned business that were still in operation didn't receive any decoration from the town. Gloria sighed, "And they weren't even mentioned. They were totally ignored." She recalled her response to this slight:

Gloria: And I said 'how do you have Main Street decorated, and you have Black businesses here. And you don't include them? You have the barbershop and I said, you know, you have this barbershop- why don't you bring your children to get their hair cut? Why don't you get a haircut? How is it a favor? If you helped them hold on to their businesses, it would be really doing something.

She signed, shaking her head with distaste. As the remaining Black businesses struggled to stay afloat, upper-middle class White families were moving into the neighborhood, shopping only at the White-owned businesses. For the long time Black residents of the area, the symbolic gesture of support for Black history read as a slap in the face. Gloria recalled many different local sites that had been torn down for apartments (that never materialized) only to later be recognized as a valuable structure and commemorated with a sign. Over the years, she witnessed this cycle time

and time again, with the erected signs eventually collapsing or fading into nothing. She then posed a rhetorical question, not to me, but to the community at large:

Gloria: And this whole area, is in a state of gentrification, and all these people are going to be pushed out. And people are trying to hold on to what their ancestors gave them. So I, put, you can put this in your notes, because I have asked everybody, if this land was given as reparations meaning payment for hundreds of years of free labor, is there a time limit on reparations? So White people can just take it back? Well, you know, somebody said to me, ‘Well, White people don’t ask that question. They don’t talk about reparations, so they can just come in and take it.’

The greatest symbolic loss, to Gloria, was that the neighborhood would no longer stand as a visual and empathetic testament to the rich history that happened there. When new people moved in, the neighborhood would gradually lose the material tether to its own legacy. The histories of reparations paid, which made possible the constructions of churches, schools, and homes for freedmen, would become yet another chapter of Black history lost. In ten years’ time, the neighborhood would be regarded only for its proximity to Main Street and “quaint” character. Capital in the hands of the local elite and heritage preservation organizations was not interested in saving the district. Gloria shared that she had requested support from one of these organizations, whose exist to aid in preserving historical buildings, but her request was declined. Instead, the warehouse building, located just three doors down from the porch we sat on, had been recently renovated by the local historic preservation organization. Though the building was just a brick shell of its former purpose, it quickly became a popular, historic venue for White social events. Later, when I asked the Director of that organization about future work, she shared only that a project to improve the local Confederate cemetery was in development.

Materially, Washington is witnessing in real time the extinction of this particular era of Black life, and some locals are fighting and mourning that loss, while affluent Whites work to curate an empty nostalgia of place. The texture of collective memory is shifting in the Bottom

district, no longer embodied in the form of Black life and business, but rather within a written narrative on a brick wall. The city, acting as the gatekeeper of collective memory, continues to provide the community with sanitized narratives of the past that privilege certain histories and identities over others. Further, through commemorative festivals, events, and tours celebrating the plantation lifestyle and the “Old South,” this uneven preservation of collective memory is not only sustained and constantly reproduced but also linked with an imagined nostalgia of history without guilt.

3 DANCING AROUND THE ISSUE

The Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice, who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice...Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)

Difficult history is characterized by Gross and Terra as “periods that reverberate in the present and surface fundamental disagreements over who we are and what values we hold” (2018: 52). Similarly, Epstein and Peck (2017) use the term “difficult histories” to describe the type of violence dominant groups enact on marginalized ones (i.e., slavery, racism, Black codes, Jim Crow). Difficult histories are often associated with pain or trauma which may threaten or undermine dominant collective histories. Due to their divisive and sensitive nature, difficult histories have provoked contentious public debate regarding the content of history curriculum and the commemoration of certain histories. As memory, heritage, and identity are constantly socially constructed, shaped by various actors, and relevant to the interpretation of the social present, the meaning of heritage and history is often disputed (Lähdesmäki et al. 2019). The interpretation of difficult history, due to its controversial nature, multiplies the contestation of collective memory and heritage. The complexities of addressing and teaching difficult history are challenging and manifold, particularly as the construction of collective memory is central to group identity; yet, Cole posits that teaching the violent or difficult past may function as a potential form of community reconciliation (2007).

Within museum pedagogy, the rise of “new museology” has called for a more critical examination of the explicit and implicit ways that curriculum and curation address difficult history (Segall 2014). Educational theorists Pitt and Britzman have pointed to the ways in which pedagogical encounters with difficult knowledge “cohere and collide to construct mechanisms

of knowing and not knowing, of remembering and forgetting” (2003: 56). Not only are museum visitors responding to difficult challenges to personal identity and history, but also museum professionals are grappling with the ideological and political presentation of the narratives. This results in a multitude of responses and approaches, frequently unique to each person or institution. Museum visitors and staff may wish to avoid, forget, or ignore difficult histories or turn away from the knowledge that they do not desire to know or address (Rose 2014). Taylor highlights the difficulty with which museum educators navigate both processing difficult histories for themselves and responsibly interpreting and teaching these histories for public consumption (2010). Because difficult history often exposes memories of pain, injustice, and violence, museum educators grapple with feelings of discomfort and risk through interpretation or resign to silencing certain histories. At museums and other sites of memory where difficult history is displayed (or neglected), the tension and negotiation of commemoration is inscribed into the space, landscape, and material embodiments of being (Davis 2016). Though not necessarily explicit, difficult history nonetheless shapes the creation of place, and ultimately, collective memory (Denson 2017).

In the South, the legacy of slavery, and its role as a foundational American institution, is one of the most contested and difficult topics to address in public history. While the pedagogy of some Southern historical sites and museums involves interpretation of racial histories including violence and discrimination, many institutions shy away from engaging with this history due to its uncomfortable and challenging nature. This chapter will examine the role of difficult history at three different museum sites and explore the negotiations between acknowledgement and representation versus silencing and avoidance. Alongside Pinewood Plantation, there are two history museums which together represent the major local players who are responsible for

curating history and sharing it with the public. The professionals and locals who run the plantation sites and local history museums share a common belief in the historical importance of the plantation sites and likewise view them as central to the community; however, their approach to presenting and engaging with this history varies slightly. In examining these approaches, I pull from multidisciplinary theories of difficult knowledge and difficult history, which have gained traction in the public sphere as identities, politics, and public histories in the South are increasingly negotiated. I also discuss narrative apologetics and aversion as techniques through which community members minimize, rationalize, or outright avoid difficult history.

3.1.1 Pinewood: Case Study #1

In Washington, nearly all the local plantations remain in private hands (Brock and Vivian 2015), apart from two public facing plantations and museum sites. The largest of the two, Pinewood Plantation, is one of the oldest plantation sites in the region, tracing its roots back to the initial formation of Washington County and the rise of the cotton plantation complex. Originally owned by planter Washington J. Johnson who formalized the region's counties, Pinewood was eventually developed into a shooting plantation by the Harden family of Cleveland, Ohio in the early 1900s; however, Margaret "Daisy" English Lee, a Harden granddaughter, and the last family member to own the property, willed the plantation to become a museum at her death.

Consequently, Pinewood's 3,000-acre plantation property has been open to the public since October 1983 and is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For over forty years, the plantation has served as a community center and tourist destination as a private operating 501(c)(3) entity. Today, the organization offers guided tours of the Main House and everyday self-guided tours of the grounds to the public. There is a variety of educational

programming for school groups, local organizations and families including private events, field trips, workshops, grounds tours, and more. Though I visited the plantation throughout my childhood for events and even attended my senior prom on site, I traveled back one sunny afternoon to document the plantation tour experience.

The tour unofficially begins with the long winding trip through the old entrance gates, along the well-manicured landscape with tall tree branches swaying in the breeze, into the heart of the plantation. When I strolled into the Visitor Center to purchase my ticket for the tour, I discovered a clerk clearly flustered by the sheer volume of travelers who had arrived to take a plantation tour that weekend. The tourists waited and wandered around viewing the merchandise on display until everyone was settled, then we snaked through the building to a theater room. The clerk hit play on the introductory video then disappeared. The video itself was only around 10 minutes long, though less than a minute of that time was focused on the Antebellum history of the plantation. The narrator began by reading:

Washington Jefferson Johnson was one of the first settlers to come to this frontier as an enterprising young man. He acquired the initial Pinewood acreage in 1825 and built the first house on the property in 1827...and together they continued to operate Pinewood as a successful working farm. When Marshall died... the strong-willed Julia Ann was determined to continue the farming operations on Pinewood.

Immediately as the calming voice of the female narrator concluded that sentence and the serene music quieted, a lively rag-time tune began to play and continued through the rest of the video, which focused exclusively on the more recent history and the site architecture:

Visitors come from around the world to marvel at the main house, with more than 40 rooms which are furnished entirely with Harden family furnishings and to be amazed with the stately architecture. Bringing the outside in is a wildlife mural in the big room depicting the flora and fauna of [the South]. It is a natural favorite among visitors. The family's love of nature is spoken through the love of art and the many different collections in the main house. The elegant main hall is dressed with 33 Audubon lithographs. Some 45-50 wedding receptions are held on the grounds each year as well as holiday events, outdoor concerts, and family outings. Even corporate and civic events are

held on the plantation... Pinewood in all of its beauty where pines and magnolias throw long shadows across long green lawns and gardens is a place where history can become a part of the modern world. More than a plantation, located in Washington Georgia's backyard, there is a legacy of women with all its grace and beauty, and true southern treasure for all to enjoy today.

At this point the video concluded, and we were introduced to our tour guide, a classic White Southern woman in her mid 50's (think Paula Deen). On this particular hour, the tour group consisted of one middle-aged White couple from the Midwest, a White mother and daughter pair, a White man, and me. Immediately, I noticed that the design of the tour was no different than the video.

As we walked across the lawn to the main house entrance, our tour guide introduced the site, reiterating the video's points and touching briefly upon the Antebellum ownership of the plantation. Halfway to the house, she paused and shared:

Washington County and Pinewood have been connected for 200 years... When she inherited this property, it was this typical southern working plantation. At that time there were enslaved people here at Pinewood. Only twenty to twenty-one people but we have to acknowledge that that did occur.

Everyone nodded once knowingly without skipping a beat, and our guide continued past that period of time and ushered us into the Main House. We were not the only tour group, I learned, as we entered the house packed with docents leading various groups through the mansion space. The tour consisted of a thorough exploration of the different parlor rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and more as we marched single file through the hallways, stopping only to gaze over the red velvet stanchions at every room's entrance or to admire the former owners' antique collections. Our tour guide was energetic and knowledgeable, sharing information on the family history, notable guests over the years, and the final owner's personality.

Though the inside tour of the Main House lasted about an hour and half, I only highlight one exchange that occurred toward the end of the tour. We entered a smoking room that was

adorned with Native American artifacts from the former owners' collection. The walls of the room itself were covered entirely with a large mural of the regional landscape, prominently featuring a depiction of two Native American hunters with stereotyped features and scant dress. As we explored the room, the guide caught someone's gaze and announced, "That is not a swastika!" She was pointing at the wall to a framed arrowhead display, sighed audibly and said, "Sometimes I tell our curator, just take it down." The all-White tour group chuckled in solidarity, and she bemoaned, "She [the curator] is like 'No!'" Our guide explained to us that it was simply a "multicultural symbol for peace and gratitude, the swastika is more angled at a different angle." Though the swastika motif does appear on Native American artifacts, and granted is not exclusively associated with the Nazi party, this display, which consisted of various arrowheads angled to indeed form a swastika within a European photo frame, certainly raised eyebrows in the group. When the guided tour of the main house concluded, we were given a map and encouraged to explore the grounds ourselves.

The first and primary stop along the trifold map was the family cemetery, located directly adjacent to the Main House. The rest of the tour group and I headed over to the shaded red brick walled-in cemetery to learn more about the past owners of the property. Within the gates, we discovered a quaint and meditative green space, clearly well maintained by the staff with each headstone visible for inspection. While the other tourists were marveling at its condition and beauty, I became preoccupied with the next stops on the map. As I strolled alone through the vast grounds, through the flower gardens, outdoor pool deck, hedge maze, dairy, stables, schoolhouse, and more, my interest in visiting the other cemetery became a personal mission. In my conversations with community members, I was told that there was also a staff cemetery located on the property, though in none of my many visits over the years had I ever discovered it.

The map was of no assistance as the staff cemetery was not marked on the page. Brazenly, I must admit, I decided to journey off the trodden path and into an area of the property that dubiously permitted public access. There were no signs of any sort or markers indicating the site's existence, yet I miraculously spotted another walled-in brick area about a hundred feet ahead. Afraid that I might be caught by disapproving plantation staff, I checked my surroundings but there was no one in sight. Because I discovered the gate unlocked, I entered briefly to survey the grounds and the state of the burials. This clandestine moment of discovery became representative, in my eyes, of the plantation's attitude toward the individuals who worked there over the last 200 years.

In their study of tourists at southern plantation house museums, Alderman and Modlin remind us that visitors arrive at the museum with their own views of history, and they internalize museum representations in different ways (2016). While some museum visitors seek to be challenged by controversial topics (Bright et al. 2018), others continue to seek emotional affirmation and reinforcement of their views rather than be confronted by alternative or uncomfortable ideas (Arnold-de Simone 2013; Steiner and Zelizer 1995). For our small tour group, this seemed to be the case. While the rest of the adoring tour group remained in the family cemetery, I parted ways to seek out a more prohibited part of the story.

Tours, however, aren't the only experiences that the plantation markets to the public. During the COVID 19 pandemic, the plantation marketed the experience to cosplay ("costume play") as a plantation owner. At a high price point, an individual can rent the Main House and play host to a dinner party for their invited guests (service included). Further, for special events, such as weddings and parties, the plantation provides its own "Plantation Police" force security which attends and monitors these events. As the earlier video mentioned, the plantation also

functions as a venue which hosts weddings and corporate events. In fact, weddings constitute a large portion of the plantation's income in supporting operating expenses. Nationally, however, plantation weddings have come under public scrutiny, demonstrated in part by large companies such as Zola and Pinterest announcing a departure from plantations in their marketing. Plantation weddings are also held in mixed regard in the community. While many of my own former classmates have wed at Pinewood Plantation in recent years, other interlocutors condemned the practice. Ashley, the local photographer who used to view plantation landscapes as idyllic backdrops for special events, disclosed to me that she now believes their marketing to be shameful. Former deacons of the Black church on the plantation have also pushed back against this perspective.

After touring the plantation, I interviewed many of the plantation's current employees regarding their work and the plantation's role in the community. Crucially, however, I was fortunate enough to meet with the executive director of the plantation, Susan, to discuss the operations. Though we did not know one another, we shared similar backgrounds, having attended the same high school and pursued a professional interest in museums.

When we both logged on to our virtual Zoom meeting, I could tell that unlike other interlocutors, Susan had prepared for this interview. She was holding a packet of papers in her hand for our discussion, what I could only assume were answers to the list of questions she requested ahead of time. From her preparation, tone, and posture, I sensed some hostility, discomfort, or maybe mistrust from her at the start of our conversation. Keenly aware of my research focus, she armed herself with specifics regarding the Antebellum history of the plantation, presumably to provide me with quick and accurate information. The real substance of the negotiation emerged when I began to ask about the earlier history of the plantation and

challenge its absence in interpretation. Susan made a point to note that the Pinewood staff strive to be good stewards of their historical property; however, without remaining structures from the 1800s, they were limited in the scope of interpretation.

Susan: And you will notice that most of my comments relate to the 20th century and that life... We have no argument, no structures from before 1900. Right? Before, we don't have anything to show, yes, we can only share information. But again, what our mission is, as defined by our last owner is the education related to 20th century, you know, sporting plantation. So, you know, we want to be good stewards in sharing history. And we do. But unlike a property that would have some 19th century construction, let's just say, we don't have that we don't have anything to show in terms of architecture.

She walked a fine line between acknowledging the earlier history of the property while also playing damage control, emphasizing that when the final owners purchased the property, "slavery was long since over." Further, she hedged her own assertion regarding sharing information, a task not limited by material culture, by adhering to the mission's focus.

In terms of material culture, however, she did mention later that the plantation was interested in restoring one of the older staff buildings on the property (dated to 1910s) alongside a staff residence hall, thereby adding a layer of interpretation on the domestic life at Pinewood. Again, she emphasized that the staff at this time was not held in bondage (though they were direct descendants of those individuals). Though not mentioning what duties staff would have carried out day-to-day, she did mention that "the family did provide so much for the staff and staff schools on the property" including basic medical care, a community garden, dairy products, and big Easter and Christmas celebrations. Regarding other limitations, Susan cited lack of staff capacity, lack of material culture, lack of funding as reasons for this gap in interpretation.

Further, she asserted that:

Susan: Pinewood has always been an organization that we want to do things well, we want to give the respect to whatever we're doing, whether that's the landscape tour, whether that's, you know, domestic life, whether that's early history, we don't want to do something that does not honor whatever it is we're trying to interpret. So you're not, you

know, I don't think that the decision would never have been made to just throw some posters on the wall to have something up when it— it didn't meet the fit in with everything else.

This assertion, however, cannot be read as a simple statement on resources. For example, Pinewood did have the capacity to organize a brand-new tour of the grounds focused on the landscape architecture, which was introduced in the fall of 2021, and to decorate the Main House lavishly for Christmas festivities. Throughout our conversation, Susan hedged around the fear of or uncertainty with addressing this aspect of the history. Though not shared explicitly with me, I could tell she wanted to shield Pinewood from accusations of racism as she vaguely evaded certain topics.

Beyond conversational taboo, Pinewood continues to dodge research or archival requests and other inquiries relating to the Antebellum period in its history. Upon request to access the records, the “big house” museum curator insisted:

The archives, like I said, are not organized in a way that it would be helpful for researchers. We're not a research institution, but we do— if someone approaches us with a specific request. And I do my best to go up and. Again, and find what they're asking for, we get a lot of requests. From descendants of people who lived here. For the most part, they would have been staff, they would have worked here. And so a lot of our wonderful record books lists the names of the people who work here. And that is an area of research we were hoping to really dive into it, it's been superficially done. But we would love to be able to provide to these people who are doing their ancestral research with as much information as possible.

In the course of my research, I was not granted access to those records. Similarly, I heard from an academic, another museum professional, as well as some descendant family members, that those requests were not honored. To quote the museum professional “There is zero public or private access their archives” though one research archivist was granted access to preserve some of the plantation film.

Further, questions regarding the Antebellum history often go unanswered, or staff will direct the interested party to one source, *Pinewood: The Story of a Plantation*. This work, however, was commissioned by, approved by, and dedicated to the final owner of the plantation. With a limited number of copies in print, it is virtually impossible for the typical visitor to obtain that historical record. This “exhaustive book” on the “plantations during the early years” was written by a local historian in the 1970s. However, another scholar who once visited Pinewood to write about its history, rejected the opportunity to write about the site after personally witnessing the treatment of the Black staff. Regarding the treatment of staff, Susan shared:

Susan: Culture here, for the staff, was quite good under the Harden's. But as I said, you know, looking prior Harden period, is certainly something that we are doing, have done and share about, but we just refer on our focus, and, again, because we don't have anything to show to anchor it. So, we, we share what we can, and then, you know, hope that they will follow up and reach out to the museum and other organizations. But yeah, for these two new interpretation spaces, that will give us an opportunity and a place to do some interpretation of, you know, the American Indian history, as well as the earlier history, which of course, does include, you know, he did have slaves here, it was a slave worked plantation. We look again to that [sic] book for the research that he did. And, you know, no one, you know, not to excuse anything and or attempt to Whitewash anything. I don't mean it that way. But, um, you know, there, there is no scandalous past, to this particular property that we are aware of, you know, there's no one incident that happened here. It was a part of slavery, worked property. But you know, there was no, some properties have a specific activity to, you know, relate to a... happened or, you know, something like that, and we don't have that. So ours is a much more general, again, 19th century life.

Here, Susan does directly acknowledge that Pinewood is not taking a deliberate approach to White wash the history of the plantation, but that nonetheless is the resulting effect. Again, the contradiction between excusing slavery and denying a “scandalous” past, which presumably refers to lynching though she trails off, is an interesting contrast.

When we discussed the future directions for interpretation on site, Susan did highlight the desire to convert those two older staff buildings into a space which highlights ‘domestic life’ as Pinewood, though “domestic life” functions as a euphemism or catch all category for the

enslaved, sharecroppers, or African descendants who served the family in the big house. This new approach to representing the earlier histories would mark a departure from the previous silences and facilitate dialogue on the racial and class distinctions that are embedded in the plantation history and would certainly add dimensionality to the house tour as well. At the end of our conversation, Susan grappled out loud with one of the driving questions underlying this research focus, another thing we share. She returned to the plantation mission and asked a rhetorical question. How do plantations make themselves relevant in the 21st century, now and beyond? As director of the plantation's finances, no doubt this question motivated the uptick in the plantation wedding industry; however, with the national dialogue on race and racism garnering much attention in the last few years, the staff's return to this question regarding plantations and their contemporary relevance may beget new answers.

3.1.2 History Center: Case Study #2

Not coincidentally, the local history museum (the History Center) has an origin story that is deeply linked to Pinewood. In fact, the last owner of Pinewood Plantation played a vital role in the initial founding of the museum, primarily by purchasing the building and donating the site on which it is located. Visitors to the History Center may notice upon arrival that, if not directly linked with the plantations, the center certainly caters to upper echelon, Southern gentile class. Located on and within a historic Victorian property and dedicated to the 20th century plantation owning family, the History Center contains 125,000 photographs and innumerable objects and documents related to Washington and Washington County's heritage as well as seven historic buildings which have been restored and added to the complex. Since its founding in 1972, the History Center has offered tours, programs, and outreach to the public, a quarter of which are local students and teachers. In fact, I toured the History Center in 2nd grade, though much of the

tour is lost in my memory. The History Center does offer guided tours with advance reservation; however, I took the opportunity one afternoon to wander through the exhibits myself.

When you arrive at the History Center, it feels like you are approaching someone's home. I walked up the steps of the front porch and rang the doorbell outside, nervous that I may be turned away without a formal appointment. Fortunately, I was welcomed in by the Director into an entryway that felt exactly like a grandmother's formal living room and is furnished as such. It's the type of place where you keep your arms by your side like a child, carefully not to touch anything breakable or priceless. After sliding my payment into the industrial-sized gold cash register with a loud 'cha-ching,' the Director led me into a video room and gestured for me to sit down. I hesitated, uncertain whether I was worthy of sitting down on the vintage Victorian parlor sofa just to watch the informational video, but I complied. The video, which had been recently updated, covered the entirety of the region's history, from early Native American settlement to today. It concluded by lauding Washington's 200-year commitment to "embracing development while also promoting its rich history," not an unfamiliar refrain.

I then wandered around the exhibit spaces in the house which featured traditional glass cases sparsely filled with silver spoons, coat of arms, extravagant Victorian clothing, and more. The main house is focused on just one local plantation owning family, who according to the interpretative text, ran "prosperous agribusiness which relied on the labor of hundreds of enslaved people to produce cotton and other crops". Then, I made my way through the building into a separate and larger room. This exhibit area was set up in a more traditional manner, sans priceless antiques, and felt more like a large school room. On display is memorabilia of local life, a hall of portraits featuring only the wealthy planter class which is prefaced by a panel titled "Enslavement in Washington County" alongside a slave prod and shackles from local

plantations. The second half of the room is comprised of a large collection of Confederate memorabilia, with a couple of local Confederate troop flags on display.

Like many institutions, the History Center was forced to close its doors to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This disruption, however, marked a rare chance for the staff to reflect on, and make changes to, the exhibit space. In part motivated by the coinciding national Black Lives Matter protests, the staff completed a reinterpretation and redesign of the entire museum. The most striking example of these revisions was concerning slavery in the region. The previous interpretation had been written by the History Center's very first and long-serving curator (1972-2007). Reflecting on the previous curator's career, the current curator, David, shared:

David: In the way he put it, he decided to leave teaching in the 1970-71 school year for some reason. Um, and it doesn't take a lot to put two and two together in there. Then, you know, the museum was getting ready to open...they hired Bob, like, you know, right after that. And Bob is, you know, a lifelong member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. He's an unreconstructed Confederate and tightly reflects the education of history that you would have received in Washington, you know, the sort of and you know, Coulter's interpretation of history, which was that, you know, Southern Whites were the true victims of the Civil War and Reconstruction, that slavery was beneficial to Blacks.

No doubt informed by the former curator's background; the original exhibit text read:

In Washington County, for all the plantations that were here, only 9% every owned any slaves at all. But 99.9% of the South had every piece of hard currency, even to the family jewels, tied up in war bonds. Just one more year and the "yankees" would give up. Well, they didn't. By the end of four years there was nothing left, and the Fourteenth Amendment said they could never be paid back. Most families never got over that...

This text doesn't need much interpretation. It is evident that the previous curator held sympathies for the many Confederate families living in the region, and their descendants, and decidedly less sympathy for the enslaved individuals. Further, the argument has been positioned to minimize the culpability of plantation owners by downplaying the percentage of whom had owned slaves prior to the war.

In my conversations with one of the current curators, he directly challenged that 9% statistic:

David: The oft quoted number that, you know, only 10% of people ever own slaves, which was-even before I took this job had come to learn was a deeply flawed statistic. But more the point was, it's a flawed number, because it's like saying, who owns a car in a household? And well, okay, really only maybe one or two people in the household might actually own a car. But everybody in that household is benefiting from that car ownership? Yeah, so the question that we recently asked ourselves, when interpreting history was, can we get an accurate number for Washington County? And can we then begin to figure out what percentage of you know, of the population directly benefited? Now, we believe that all Whites benefited from slavery in one way or another, that it's something that was not outside the touch of anyone, if just for the matter of social status, and having a sort of vertically stacked social status. But also, okay, you know, if you had 12 kids in your household, they were all benefiting from the, from the labor of enslaved people. So we, we, we couldn't come up with an example. We just didn't have the time or the resources to really, fully spend on it, although it's something that we want to do in the future. But using some numbers, we kind of roughly thought that maybe more like 30% of households, actually may have directly owned enslaved people. And that may be somewhere closer to, you know, 40-45-50% of the population may have actually directly benefited from the labor of enslaved people.

David, a Northern transplant, and White male in his thirties, spoke earnestly and emphatically in his opposition to the previous interpretations, describing them as sexist, racist, and “painfully, painfully, cringy.” In fact, he shared that he stores the old panels in order to unsettle new hires. The panels themselves have become a tangible and taboo artifact of the History Center’s self-perceived embarrassing history.

Another example of previous interpretation, this time focusing on cabins for the enslaved read:

Washington was one of the largest slave-owning counties in the state. We had 3000 more than Brook (next door) and Colquitt County, only had 110 slaves in the entire county. This is how they were housed in Washington County, and we make no defense of how they look. We do point out (top left) this is also a very typical White family in the same period. “Poor is poor” no matter what color your skin.

Surprisingly, this represents one of the few, if only, local interpretations which acknowledges the relatively high population of enslaved individuals within the county during the 19th century.

Also in this excerpt, the former curator makes no apology for the ways that the enslaved were treated during this time, but the interpretation attempts to equivocate the suffering of the enslaved with the material reality of poor Whites during the same period—a fundamentally incommensurate comparison. Finally, it employs the classic disavowal of histories of racialized violence by reducing disparate communities to a unified human race. Notably, the History Center’s interpretation has changed and evolved over the years, though occurring rarely and subtly in what the curator called “baby steps.” In navigating this difficult local history, the curators “danced around it” and began with revising interpretation that wasn’t considered controversial, following up on the Antebellum Period and the Civil War “probably eight or nine years” later. Though some of the staff wanted to take the interpretation a little further, the reality does not reflect this as it stands. Referring to the old text, David shared:

David: It was the only place in the museum where I felt it was really important to make a moral statement, I guess, because so much of Bob’s interpretation was focused on the slave owners and his various apologetics for the slave owners...Look in the Black community, we are the *White* Historical Society. And it's something that we know, we can't change overnight, but we are working diligently to change that. And it's not going to change in a generation or two generations, but we're hoping in fifty years, you know, maybe that can change a little bit, but we don't know, you know, it's hard.

Here, he has identified the moral crux of stressing an equitable, albeit difficult, history for public interpretation. The center’s history of utilizing racial apologetics and racial erasure has resulted in not only avoidance by the local African American community, but also certainly has impacted children whom, for example, visited regularly and internalized these messages about their history as impartial fact. After 2020, the staff incorporated the aforementioned new interpretation titled “The Black Experience in Washington” which discusses, sans apologetics, the slave codes, local racial punishment and racial violence, amongst other topics; however, the marginalization of the

Black experience to a handful of panels of text in the back speaks to that imbalance in representation that one curator hopes will one day change.

3.1.3 Black History Museum: Case Study #3

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Jim Jackson Black History Museum is focused entirely on the Black experience in the United States, with a particular focus on highlighting the accomplishments and successes of local African Americans. Mr. Jackson's museum, though regionally focused, also attracts tourists from around the world. For example, on one visit I encountered a traveler from Germany who spent 45 minutes in the Jim Crow exhibit section "to see the comparisons." The Jim Crow Era section is particularly arresting and is no doubt the justification for the content warning posted to visitors at the entrance to the museum. To my surprise, it was in this exhibit that I learned the origins of the most iconic pictures of slaves working in the field, as well as young Black men working on chain gangs, were taken in this very county. In a display in the front of the museum is the signal horn used by Richard Jackson, Sr, Mr. Jackson's grandfather. Born into slavery in 1823, the son of slave master Simon Jackson, was assigned as a child to sound the horn for mealtimes and quitting times to those working in the field. Mr. Jackson's personal connection to Pinewood Plantation is also evidenced by an exhibit space devoted to Black life on the hunting plantation, featuring his own photographs and publications. On this section, Mr. Jackson shared:

Jim: Some people, they look at it that like why we promote, why are we promoting a plantation. I...well. That's my history. Why should I ignore that? Why did [my father] raise his fourteen kids on that plantation? I mean, why should I? Why should I deny, I'm not going to— I wouldn't— I don't want my kids to be ashamed of the plantation because of my ancestors.

Mr. Jackson, speaking to the criticisms of plantation history interpretation, argued that sharing plantation history was important, particularly to descendants of the enslaved such as himself, and that interpretation of that history shouldn't be read as promotion.

It's nearly impossible to separate the museum itself from the founder and director, Mr. Jackson. Although a somewhat polarizing figure, he is well-known throughout the community as a force of nature. Without any formal degrees in museum education or history, he nonetheless has dedicated his life to building the museum into the achievement it is today. I noticed as I spoke with more and more community members, that rather than discuss enslavement and Antebellum history themselves, there were many White folks who dodged the question by suggesting I should ask Mr. Jackson instead. In many ways, this seems like an appropriate response. Mr. Jackson was born on the plantation and runs the Black History Museum; therefore, he is likely the most qualified to speak personally and professionally on this era. However, the unintended consequence of this subversion is the Mr. Jackson has become the de facto representative of the local African American experience within White spaces. Considering how Mr. Jackson regularly approaches race and racism from a conservative perspective, White leaders of local institutions have settled into a comfortable relationship with his style of advocacy. Prior to our introduction, one community member warned me, "You won't hear any negative things from him." In this way, he has accepted an impossible task and unwittingly become an imperfect mouthpiece for a diverse group. Another individual commented:

I'd say Mr. Jackson's interpretation of, of Jim Crow, enslavement is far more conservative which maybe shouldn't be surprising, I guess, given his age and background. That also comes with two other things, which is, it's never been embraced by the Black community of Washington. You know, he was gone during the Civil Rights era...But for a lot of the civil rights leaders of Washington, they sort of roll their eyes like, 'he wasn't here'. You know, 'he doesn't really know what was going on'. And even more than that, a lot of the civil rights leaders were from the Black community of the *city*, not the Black

community of the *plantations* and their, say, culture break within the Black community. You know, it's, it's hard to reconcile that.

The distinction between various groups rightly demonstrates the ways in which the local African American community is not a monolithic block. Again, the dynamics of Mr. Jackson's engagement with different communities becomes important when you consider how his identity is practically inseparable from his museum. The decisions he makes on the museum's behalf are often interpreted or translated to the White community as decisions endorsed by the entire African American population.

To further complicate things, in 2019, the Black History Museum initiated a hiring search for a brand-new Museum Educator position. When Mr. Jackson hired a young White man from outside the county to fill the role, instead of the previous tour guide who was a young African American man, many community members were surprised. Nearly everyone with whom I spoke about this decision expressed confusion and even, pity, for the new educator—a “he-doesn't-know-what-he's-in-for” form of sympathy. Contextualized with his personal values, this decision also makes sense when you consider Mr. Jackson's benefactors. I spoke with him inside his office one afternoon, and as I was getting ready to leave, he shared some final thoughts on his approach to so-called difficult history:

Jim: If people was offended by the Jim Crow exhibit I got back there, they would not come back. They will not send people here. They will not have sent me thousands of dollars. My money comes from the White community, most of my money comes from—like-I'm not-this is not—Blacks donated but not like the White community does. So, they embrace what I'm doing because I know I'm helping their kids. Look, look at you. You came back.

Here he is alluding to the fact that not too long ago, I was one of the kids who visited his museum, and that it was possible to educate White community members on difficult history in ways that were constructive and accessible rather than alienating.

Often, Mr. Jackson graciously speaks on the benevolence and generosity of White women, with whom he has entered into a mutually beneficial public relationship. For example, he will remind you that one of the plantation owners was benevolent for paying for his siblings to go to college. Other local wealthy White women with an interest in history wield their financial assets to exert a measure of control over the historical narrative, the Black History Museum included. This speaks to the ways in which White capital and philanthropy have historically structured the education of Black children. Nonetheless, the museum benefits from their financial support and, in truth, might not exist without it. In addition to monetary donations, local White women are also responsible for donating shackles, a whip, and various collections of racist caricatures and dolls from their own personal collections. These items, which once likely represented a cruel and demeaning hobby for Whites at the expense of African Americans, now constitute their own exhibit. In our many conversations, Mr. Jackson and I spoke about the lack of acknowledgement of, and education on, Black history, especially the Antebellum and Jim Crow eras, and the consequences of that aversion:

Jim: But if we were in a museum today, don't talk about that piece of history. And then we'll get told, right? That's what they what— they're doing. They're pushing it under the rug, leaving it for somebody to come along and do it... It's okay. We're telling a story. We don't drag nobody down. We don't put no one down, that it happened is education to everyone. It's okay, to have a young kid got to know that. It was not— they're gonna learn some somewhere. You know, when I was in high school, we didn't talk about slavery... I tell the story. I don't— I'm not sugarcoating nothing. I got slavery in here. And I want people to see this museum. I show them how we've done great things.

Mr. Jackson, from experience, spoke to how critical it is to educate children on Black history, regardless of race. Further, he asserted that it was possible to do so without being confrontational or accusatory. That rather, teaching Black history was empowering. His museum is a testament to this. In reference to the other local museums, Mr. Jackson asked:

Jim: Do they talk about that piece [Jim Crow]? That is the sad piece that still continues to be left behind. It took place. Yeah, it really is still a problem today. But still, it's better today than they were years ago. But, but so we're able to show all that we able to show from the success to slavery. This is different. It's different from the History Center. From Pinewood Plantation. It's a different museum... We're playing catch up. You know, we've lost history, Blacks. We've lost so much history. We lost a whole bunch.

He sounded exhausted. In this moment, he allowed those words to hang heavy in the air, and I could sense his exhalation of despondency settling down toward the ground like a heavy fog.

With his typical high energy and charismatic personality, it is easy to forget that Mr. Jackson is 85 years old. In the moment, however, he did acknowledge that his journey to establish the Black History Museum and to preserve Black history in his community has been a long and arduous passion project. For decades, Mr. Jackson has advocated for the preservation of this history, in building up his own museum, but also in conversation with other historical sites in the region. He has a working relationship with the Pinewood Plantation staff, about whom he shared this opinion:

Jim: I mean, you got evidence that it was a slave plantation at one time, make a statement, say you have no records. And please hope— please hope that nobody will run, find some records. If you do they in a vault somewhere and you find em. But if they got no records up, they didn't have a record, you know, but you can go look on the headstones that you know, when the plantation was founded back in 1825. When it was founded, it *had* to have been a slave plantation.

He is speaking semi-hypothetically here but is likely recalling that for years, locals, including some Pinewood staff, did publicly deny that there were ever slaves that worked on the plantation. Bolstering this is the handful of negative tour reviews on Trip Advisor and the like from tourists in the last few years which lament the complete absence of slavery and Black history in the tour. Though my tour guide did mention enslavement at Pinewood recently, I am not certain if this is a new intuitional practice or a decision left to the guides' discretion. Further, Mr. Jackson says “to hope that no one will uncover records,” likely alluding to the fact that Pinewood is the only one

able to grant public access to their records, which they have not done; therefore, there is no way for the public to confirm what is and isn't documented within their archives, including slavery.

He has also explicitly pressed the Pinewood staff to more thoroughly address African American life on the plantation. In conversation with the director, he emphasized the importance of addressing the Antebellum plantation history:

Jim: And I told her that, we talked about it. I don't know whether she took my advice and moved on. But to me, if you change it to something else, you're gonna lose, you're gonna lose the business. You know, people go there for curiosity. That's what I emphasized to them, five or six years ago. I keep telling y'all. You need to put an exhibit out on the Black people that work there. People go there. They're very disappointed over the fact that they think they're going there, they gonna show something about Blacks but they got it, but they haven't shown it. So somebody's waking up... They know now that the timing is right to do it. *Tell the full story*, whether it's good or bad.

Mr. Jackson has repeated the refrain in italics on more than one occasion, publicly and privately. Why is it that the Black History Museum highlights both the “good or bad” histories, while other institutions struggle to address the bad? The demographics that each museum serves do differ, which may influence the desire to avoid certain histories. Moreover, by virtue of his positionality as an African American man, Mr. Jackson may feel more assured in addressing histories of enslavement or Jim Crow in a manner that does the subject matter and the descendants justice. It may also be that, in predominantly White spaces, the ability to avoid topics of race and racism is a privilege afforded within those spaces and benefits them as such. I cannot say with absolute certainty; however, in my conversations with community members, White or Black, individuals nonetheless struggled with varying levels of discomfort in discussing enslavement and racism.

3.2 Narrative Apologetics and Aversion

Museum educators and other community leaders are challenged to both process difficult histories for themselves and responsibly interpret and teach these histories for public consumption. As with educators, museum guides have their own feelings about difficult subjects

and varying levels of preparation for managing conflicts (Turino and Balgooy 2019). In fact, museum workers and visitors report experiencing deep feelings of risk and discomfort when engaging in tours of historical plantations in South Louisiana (Rose 2014). Originally conceptualized by Britzman, “difficult knowledge” has been further developed particularly in the context of education (1998; Zembylas 2014), and racism is one such example of difficult knowledge (Darling-Hammond 2017; Zembylas 2018). The necessary challenge for museum educators is to address and interpret the traumatic histories of American slavery.

Addressing difficult history often elicits memories of pain, injustice, and violence, therefore museum educators grapple with feelings of discomfort and risk through interpretation or resign to silencing certain histories. This discomfort can manifest in various ways but became particularly apparent across the board in my discussions with locals on topics such as plantations, slavery, Jim Crowe, and segregation. The way interlocutors respond to my introduction of race as a subject often suggested indecision or discomfort. Linguistically, this is conveyed in multiple ways through uncertain prefaces (i.e. “um”, “I’m not sure”, “I don’t know”), long pauses, mitigated verbal constructions and self-interruptions, circumlocutions, and repetition. Bringing up an uncomfortable topic, such as racial violence, may be characterized as a type of relational transgression that undermines conventions of politeness and trust which typically uphold social bonds and ideologies. For example, when I broached the subject of segregation, interlocutors commonly responded by changing the topic of conversation or otherwise indicated through their body language that they were uncomfortable. Altogether, I analyzed this responses and identified three emergent strategies, or responses, through which community members navigate and manage this conflict, whether consciously or subconsciously: minimization, rationalization, and avoidance.

3.2.1 Minimization

In conversation, many individuals engaged in minimization of difficult histories when it became otherwise difficult to avoid addressing. Conceptualized as an attempt to reduce an uncomfortable or undesirable subject to a smaller degree, minimization served as an adopted response that allowed individuals to shield themselves and others from experiencing the negative affective associations with that history. Importantly, the practice of minimization may not be entirely attributed to internal or conscious self-serving motivations nor to honest ignorance, as it is a more complex presentation of some combination of various factors. By reducing the extent of harm suffered to a more palatable degree, interlocutors seemed to have a less difficult time with speaking about the subjects. The instinct to minimize harm seems to be otherwise common in everyday social exchange, though in this instance, interlocutors serve as representatives of public facing organizations and represent the primary stewards of local history and heritage. Principally, the discourse I highlight in this chapter is intentionally assembled as a reflection of the broader attitudes held by many community members, rather than a critique of any one individual's response.

Though some individuals minimized and mitigated discomfort with the subject through euphemism, others tackled the subject head-on and provided justifications for the plantation economy or downplayed the severity of racial violence. Returning to my conversation with the Tourism Director in Chapter 2, I observed that while she was not afraid to speak on the plantation history of the region, she did on numerous occasions downplay the more pernicious aspects of that economic system. This is not too surprising considering her professional role is to market the appealing parts of the town's history, a circumstance which I believe made our conversation all the more crucial. I pull heavily from that interview for two reasons. The first

being that, unlike others, Beverly was willing and open to having a more transparent conversation about the plantations with me. The second being that I believe that her responses frequently mirrored the attitudes of others in the community. Historian Dr. Julia Brock characterizes this phenomenon as Washington's strategy to curate a "usable past from a very complex reality, by adopting a White geographical innocence associated with tourism" (Brock 2012: 223). When we indirectly broached the subject of plantations and enslavement, she was clear to disassociate the local plantation history with any ties to racial violence or exploitation:

Beverly: None of us here have plantations that are crop plantations. We have farmers in our rural area, right? They have farms, they have land tracks, they are in farming and land management. It's a big business... We realize that maybe that here, *we* understand the role of our plantations. But for an outsider, they're thinking we're caught in plantation—*sugarcane* plantations. And we have these deep, dark, seedy histories with slavery. Was there slavery on the plantations? 99.9% yes. There was some slavery out there. Because that's what all of the markets, that's what everybody was using in the South, your labor, unfortunately, was a slave labor. And so there is that history.

This conversation also reflects the ways in which my own identity as an insider influenced my interactions with interlocutors. There is something protective about the way she and others delineate the enlightened "we" against outsiders, who presumably would view the plantation history through a more one dimensional, condemning lens. This defensive response, common amongst locals, is no doubt driven by the more recent negative coverage of Southern plantations in the media at large. She spoke animatedly and with hyperbole of the "deep, dark, seedy histories with slavery," as though to ridicule the notion that these practices existed. Then, she seemingly preempted a critique, conceding grudgingly that there was slavery on 99.9% of plantations. I believe that in grappling with how to read and present this history for herself, Beverly was struggling to reconcile her own cognitive dissonance. Immediately after, however, she generalizes the accusation, removing it from its localized geographic belonging and placing the responsibility for slavery to a nondescript, generalized "out there." She then justified local

plantation slavery in a manner your parents may have warned you about: everyone was doing it. “Unfortunately” slavery in this characterization innocently constituted the passive status quo.

I was repeatedly reminded (and nearly chided by some interlocutors) that *our* plantations, as understood by locals, are distinct from *other* plantations. Instead, the ownership of enslaved Africans as property was ascribed elsewhere. Later in my conversation with Beverly, she repeated this refrain minimizing the type of harm that occurred locally in comparison with other regions of the South:

Beverly: If your focus is on the plantations, there's more to it than meets the eye... So if you look at Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, all have plantations. We were the South— in the economy, coming out of the early 1800s, would have had to be agriculture. So to look at *their* definition of a plantation and its role was very different because *we* were a community where— we were a resort community where you would come and it was very wealthy, you almost had to be kind of wealthy to come here. It was kind of the Palm Beach before there was Palm Beach.

This argument accredits the region with a mythologized geographic innocence, particularly on the part of the plantation owners. The choice to liken the predominance of the plantation economy to a resort community as well as to emphasize wealth, exclusivity, and leisure effectively erases the “seedier” histories of chattel slavery. Granted, in conversation, it is often difficult to ascertain which period in plantation history interlocutors are referring to. Even after emancipation, many of the formerly enslaved remained on the plantations and continued to provide domestic and agricultural labor for the plantation owners. Many representations, including the following excerpt from my interview with Beverly, portray the nature and growth of the agricultural plantation economy as an innocent outcome of the leisure economy:

Beverly: When you came, you came with maybe some of your maids, maybe your maid was a White woman, maybe she was a Black woman, you came with your, some of your house people... And you had to have a cook or a maid or somebody or you know, helping you keep your house because you were so busy entertaining.

In this scenario, she justified the necessity of domestic laborers with the social economy of the leisure, or affluent, planter class. The use of “you” in this scenario was appropriate, in part, because she was speaking directly to me, a White woman who presumably would have fit within the racial and socioeconomic confines of the planter class, though it conjures a fictitious everyman quality. Likewise, this applies to the false equivalence between a White or Black maid, as if race was not an aspect of the equation. She continued:

Beverly: And they set up these grand homes and they were really meant to entertain your guests in the same style that you were used to. They would have plantations. One, you had to have crops to feed all these horses and cows, and you had to have the cows for the milk, and you had to have the grain to feed the cattle, and you know, you had to have—because you were so far out a trip into town—now you had to grow everything that you were going to eat. So you had to have corn, you had to have, you know, some fruits and carrots and beets and stuff like that. So for your vegetables and stuff. And luckily, again, that role shifted because you did have a farm and you were growing what you would eat, but also what was going to feed everybody else on the plantation. And then when the families leave and go back up North, the extra that you have behind you... We can—can the tomatoes or can the okra, and you were able to sell it. So again, you were allowed this income that other communities did not have. It was, it was just different. So that if you look at the way of plantation work, much like a farm, yeah, you work the land, you sell the crops, you get the money and you start over. So it's just a different role.

I believe that she is trying to identify with the social pressure plantation owners experienced to practice consumer display that was predicated entirely on the labor of Black workers. Again, the use of “you” here invited the listener to identify with slave-owner subjectivity. The logic, however, snowballs into an avalanche of apologetics and justifications for plantation agriculture that fails to adequately account for the larger ideological structures that played into the formation of this system. Here she, like other affluent White locals, speaks with a sense of sympathetic identification with plantation owners whom they view as misunderstood in a contemporary context. In this view, plantation agriculture was necessitated by the isolated nature of the homestead which required total self-sufficiency. This belief characterizes the production of agricultural exports as innocent happenstance, selling the “extra you have left behind.”

In addition to minimizing the harms of slavery and systematic racial servitude through share cropping, interlocutors also minimized the harms of segregation. In contemporary discussions of segregation, the suffering experienced by local African Americans was handled euphemistically, and even condescendingly. In recent years, the revitalization of the local, historic African American shopping district has received a lot attention. Discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, the ‘revitalization’ (in other words, gentrification) of The Bottom district is touted by city leaders as a progressive acknowledgement and celebration of local African American history, yet public dialogue on the history of The Bottom district is rife with language which minimizes the harms of segregation. To start, the city Tourism Director informed me:

Beverly: That area was always called ‘The Bottom’ and it wasn't derogatory. Some people look at it and go, ‘Oh, it's the bottom.’ But what they refer to, it was the bottom of the hill, if you think about Washington Road, Broad Street was a little bit raised up and there was the hump right there at Madison and then everything kind of runs downhill. And so they were at The Bottom. And that was the name that was given to that area.

Appropriately contextualized, The Bottom district represented the town’s segregated central business district. Though she minimized the term’s derogatory history, the land, as many historic bottom lands throughout the United States, constituted the undervalued real estate that was undesirable to Whites. Fundamentally, bottom districts are characterized by scholars as “space, constituting a vernacular landscape that was shaped by America’s largest marginalized group and maintained by oppressive and separatist policies and practices. With an increasingly derogatory meaning for those living outside it” (Davis 2018). Rhetorically, the name “The Bottom” served to describe the suboptimal land on which the district resided, as well as the Southern socioeconomic system of racial stratification which placed African Americans at the very bottom. Again, most of the language used to describe this district that was formed due to segregation relies upon euphemisms to avoid the explicit. For example, one interlocutor was

speaking about the Green Book and mentioned that “you know, they weren’t welcomed in every community.” For context, the Green Book was a travel guide published during segregation which listed a variety of businesses that would welcome African American travelers. Mr. Jim Jackson, who had his own fair share of “being turned away from the inn” on long travels with his wife and children by his side, is working to revive Washington’s very own Green Book hotel, which is in poor condition though still standing. Here, the phrase “weren’t welcomed” is a soft replacement for overt racial discrimination and violence.

In 2021, the city held an event to celebrate the completed renovations and commemorate The Bottom, which featured a panel of African American residents and invited them to share their memories from the time. As the Tourism Director, Beverly later recalled the details of the event to me as she understood them, singing the praises of the Black experience in The Bottom district:

Beverly: They were telling about all these great times and in school and buying their dress or getting their shoes or going to the shop and talking. And I mean, it was like watching an episode of Happy Days where all the characters were Black. And you know, it was all ‘we’re gonna go dance, and we’re gonna go pick up a chili dog over here.’ And then finally, when we were finally wrapping up the evening, somebody said, ‘You guys talk about all these great times. But, you know, we’ve all heard about all the angst, and you know, the, maybe, poverty with the Black community or not feeling welcome. But none of you have spoken to that, not once all night long.’ And so they did shift gears and they said, ‘you know, did we always feel welcome downtown? No, not on Broad Street. We didn’t feel welcomed, we couldn’t go up there. But we knew, it was always you know, what do you need, you know, why are you here? And there were certain shops that we knew that we were more welcome in, or they wouldn’t give credit or something like that. Then, we knew the shops that totally didn’t want us. Um, you know, we had what we needed. Do we have everything we wanted? No, but our needs were taken care of for the most part.’

She highlighted the positive memories panelists had shared from the youth, likening it to Black Happy Days. Even the panelists elected to share the joyful memories of food and fun from that time rather than relive the negative ones. The African American community was in many ways

nostalgic for a time when the town had a thriving district of businesses run by members of their own community—businesses that would later become obsolete after desegregation and suburban corporate expansion. Eventually, however, after reliving some of the good memories, an audience member did pivot the conversation to the negative impacts of segregation. Though I was not able to attend this event, there is a public recording available on the city website; however, after watching it, I realized that this portion was cut out and could not retrieve direct quotes from the community members.

In Beverly's account, the harms of segregation were verbally minimized by panelists who emphasized that everyone's material needs were nonetheless met. As Beverly continued, she quoted the panelists further and named the perceived discomfort with discussing race and racism:

Beverly: [Quoting the panelists] 'Was there a hard time, we all, we do, we know of people in our youth that got hung. Well, we had heard about some hangings, you know, some lynchings and stuff like that. Did we ever get run out of the store? Absolutely, we did.' So, you know, they were, they were very frank. And which is sometimes hard for us, that this Black community in a room full of, you know, there was probably definitely more Black people in the room than White people for that event... So for them, to be perfectly honest, about what they experienced, amongst us White people is not always comfortable.

I believe her interpretation of the event here conveys her discomfort with relaying the negative aspects of the history that were discussed by the panel, as well as the discomfort that she perceived the panelists experienced in speaking to an audience that included White community members. She noted that it was "not always comfortable" for local African Americans to discuss aspects of difficult history with White folks in the midst, that that would in fact, effect their willingness to speak freely or candidly. Though she quoted lynching and enforced segregation as "stuff like that," I cannot know whether those were her words or theirs. Regardless, minimization was frequently employed as a technique for softening the impact of addressing difficult histories.

In mixed race settings or audiences, it may be more likely that all parties utilize minimization to this end.

In my personal interviews with African American community members, they were also prone to minimize the impact of racial violence or discrimination experienced in their lifetime. I believe this avoidance was, in large part, a result of my identity as an unfamiliar White woman, which limited the level of disclosure they felt comfortable sharing with me. I was told that there were many things which I would never know, such as personal or traumatic histories that wouldn't be shared. This barrier, in addition to barriers making the disclosure of traumas difficult in the first place, resulted in many conversations in which the effects of racism were downplayed. On another occasion I met virtually with Linda, the head of a local non-profit focused on heritage preservation, also a White woman. A long-time resident of the town, she worked on a research project involving race in the 1990s and shared the avoidance she herself observed in the role of interviewer:

Linda: I will tell you, though, that in oral histories that I was able to do up a very long time ago, I spoke with elderly African Americans. And one man who was then in his 90s was the grandson of that, right? No, it was his son was the grandson of an enslaved child on a local plantation. And in 1865, that enslaved child was 10 years old. And he saw the freedom rider, coming down the plantation drive to tell the people freedom had come. I got to turn 1865... And I realize you haven't asked me this. African Americans know their history, to the same degree that the rest of the world does. And while they will share particular parts of that history, once they reach a particular point, it's too painful. And that history is all bit sacred. And they're not going to tell someone who looks like me. They know it and they just don't trust sharing aspects of that.

Linda highlighted how her positionality affected the type of information her participants were willing to disclose. She also pointed to the affective toll that sharing those histories took on African American individuals, with anyone, let alone an unfamiliar White woman. In her view, this history was too sacred to be shared in that space.

Whether motivated by discomfort speaking candidly with a White woman or otherwise, the African Americans I spoke with did engage in this minimization. For example, one interlocutor described an instance in which her aunt was denied emergency medical care at the hospital simply because she was African American; however, she summarized this moment by stating “there were sometimes when things weren’t as pleasant as you would hope they would be.” Later in the interview, in fact, the same interlocutor became very emotional and teared up through our discussion of race and racism. Though she was observably trying to discuss her history with reservation, the sheer emotionality of the subject seemed to seep through the pretense. There was a fundamental level of uncertainty or mistrust by virtue of my identity as a White woman that I believe speaks to the ongoing violence of White supremacy and the local legacy of the plantation system.

I heard from multiple community members, White and Black, about a cross that was burned at the local high school on the first day of integration, though this was cited as an example of racial collaboration, since city leaders decided that the incident should not be publicized nor escalated at the time. On one of my tours of the local museums, the guide shared this story with two college students, one young Asian woman and one young African American woman, praising how this lone incident demonstrated how “integration went smoothly.” Because I was also on the tour, I pushed back somewhat on this assertion. The guide conceded, “Well, when two groups of people meet up, its hard,” but repeated the argument that Washington stood out as a regional exception to racial violence. Describing the process of integration as smooth is, on its face, a pleasant idea; however, the characterization that integration was effortless and without trial is untenable. Beyond this, the guide attributed the violent and institutionalized White supremacist backlash against the Civil Rights Movement to a “typical culture clash.”

Another community member upheld that the isolation of the cross-burning incident was representative of the city's progressive approach to racial injustice, only slightly conceding after that didn't "mean we didn't have awful things happen. We did. But there were people who were making strides to create a better world." In effect, she downplayed the legacies of racial violence and turned the conversation instead to praising the town leadership of the 1970s.

Unsurprisingly, interlocutors were more comfortable with highlighting stories which portrayed the residents and leaders as progressive, though this served to minimize the true legacy of racial conflict. In this way, minimization in the form of regional exceptionalism was a common refrain in my conversations with community members.

While many community members expressed that Washington was immune from racial violence, the historical record does not vindicate that assertion. For example, the plantations in Washington County were the largest producers of cotton and other agricultural products, utilizing the labor of enslaved Africans, in the region prior to the Civil War, though this is widely undermined by members of the public. Further, there were more lynchings in the county than any neighboring county, though this is outright unknown or denied, as individuals stated the opposite to me as fact (Tolnay 2021; Brundage 1993; Guzman 1960). These denials can likely be attributed to a lack of education and awareness of the region's true history, not an individualistic absolution of guilt or intentional institutional silencing. Though it may not have originated as such, the belief is a direct expression of the county's dynamic and mythic exceptionalism. In the Reconstruction Era, local African Americans persevered despite setbacks from racial violence and gradually rose to middle class fortunes; and it is in part a testament to their success that, today, that the region remembers these periods as a largely peaceful time.

3.2.2 *Rationalization*

Rationalization was another technique employed by individuals who attempted to explain or justify an action with logical reasons, even if these reasons may not be appropriate. In this way, it functions as a method through which interlocutors could vindicate personal or institutional silences on difficult history. Returning to my conversations with the Pinewood Plantation staff regarding the absence of Black history in their interpretation, I found that they attributed this absence to several factors beyond their control. One of the primary limitations, they explained, was the static house collection and the complete lack of structures that predate the 20th century. Without that material culture as a lynchpin, they argued, it was not possible to provide visitors with interpretation on the Black individuals who were enslaved or the lives of the Black staff. In my interview with the Director, she explained away the absence using logical reasons, though the reasons in question do not necessarily exclude interpretation of difficult history:

Susan: But there is really no where to put interpreting, and if you've ever done a lot with oral histories, no matter who you're interviewing, they don't think they might they have much to tell. It's just their world. It's just their life, they don't want to talk to me. And so you know, you run into that a lot. When in fact, they have a lot to tell. So finding a location. That made sense. That story was a big part of it. You know, so much of this. You're creating a museum exhibit within a historic property. And you don't just have limitless buildings to choose from. And you don't have limitless. I mean, you would think we have so many buildings that you do, but you really don't, you know, you've got it. And so one big situation was to figure out where to do that.

She hit upon reluctance from African Americans to disclose personal histories as well as the difficulty of finding a space to house the interpretation. Though the plantation operates multiple revenue-generating rental spaces on site, she felt that the staff was limited in its ability to create space for the interpretation of African American life.

Later in our conversation, she did discuss plans to renovate a couple of the preexisting buildings on site that staff used during the early 20th century and on; however, the “staff cemetery” in my mind represents a significant opportunity and location for acknowledgement, interpretation, or even reconciliation. This staff cemetery was the same site that I had visited during my tour of the plantation, though I had no information regarding the individuals interred there or its institutional history. When I spoke with Susan, she was able to provide more context:

Susan: One is the family cemetery, which includes both. I kind of think of Pinewood as having two distinct eras. The Marshall Era of the 19th century, and Harden era of the 20th century. Yeah, it's in there that I just kind of sweep over. But it that's pretty much the gist of it. Is those two periods... Oh, and then we do have what you— being the, the employee cemetery... It was a cemetery before the Harden's ownership of the property. And I've pulled my notes here to say, I never can remember this year, the oldest grave that is marked was for someone born in 1854. And it, she put a brick wall around that cemetery, and their graves and additional burials that took place for people associated with the staff of the hill. Yeah. So when in there are 97 marked graves. And of the marked graves, you know, some of them are readable. The unmarked graves? We don't know. So, you know, we only know the dates that are the marked graves. And like I said, the oldest one was before the birth year for some...we always keep a running list of names of individuals that people have contacted us about, because we don't have people, our archives are not digitized. So, you know, it's, we keep a running list of inquiries we get, because some of those that are not the most common name, family names are ones that, you know, hopefully, we will come across some things or by, you know, working in the archives. So we keep that kind of running list, if you will.

Again, the “family cemetery” is arguably the main highlight of the self-guided grounds tour of the plantation. Located directly adjacent to the house, it is where the lineage of various owners is buried; however, the “staff cemetery” is not acknowledged on the tour nor listed on the property map of the plantation. The plantation map given to guests for guides conveniently excludes the site from the list, though there are around 200 individuals laid to rest there. Less than half of the graves are even marked. Though she made a point to mention that the earliest listed birth date was 1854, local records indicate that the site served as an agricultural plantation which produced

cotton and rice from 1825 to 1881, and the cemetery does house African American individuals who died in the late 1800s.

Alongside lacking the space for interpretation, Susan also voiced concern that interpretation of the Antebellum period and African American life would not be “up to the Pinewood standard:”

Susan: We want to do things well, we want to give the respect to whatever we're doing, whether that's the landscape tour, whether that's, you know, domestic life, whether that's early history, we don't want to do something that does not honor whatever it is we're trying to interpret. So you're not, you know, I don't think that the decision would never have been made to just throw some posters on the wall to have something up when it- it didn't meet the fit in with everything else that that is kind of the standard, if you will.

In this way, she felt no interpretation was favorable to a comparably superficial level of interpretation. It may also be that, as an organization run exclusively by upper-middle class White women, the staff shared a level of discomfort in speaking for or to the African American community on this aspect of the history. Another outstanding limitation that Pinewood staff identified was that acknowledging Black history at the site was simply not a part of their mission. That is to say, that the Harden era of the 20th century as laid out in the mission is the interpretive focus of the property, whereas interpretation of the Marshall era of the 19th century is not. This circular reasoning serves to rationalize the absence of Black history, presuming that the mission as it was outlined in the 1990s remains static. Further, plantation and History Center staff stressed that lack of capacity and capital, which played into absence of difficult history in their interpretation. For many small museums (and all organizations at large), this is certainly an everyday constraint for staff; however, the use of capacity as a justification for lack of interpretation could also be understood as a means of distinguishing between historical subjects that are prioritized and others than are not. For example, Mr. Jackson of the Black History

Museum displays interpretive spaces on slavery and Jim Crow in addition to other aspects of local history, though for long spans of time, he was running a one-man operation.

Another way that rationalization manifests, in regard to plantation history in particular, is through paternalistic beliefs. Paternalism, as understood here, is an attitude, or justification, of those in positions of authority which regulates those subordinate to them in the subordinate's supposed best interest. Today, this attitude is evidenced in the ways in which individuals highlight the positive influence of the plantation on African American life locally. Many locals emphasized that those who were enslaved or worked on the plantations for the owners and wealthy Northern families were under great care. One manifestation of this is the belief that plantation wealth "could be shared by the whole community." That is, the stimulus to the economy from the plantations boosted quality of life for the local Blacks by proxy. In my oral interviews with community members, one of the final questions I always ask prior to concluding the interview is: "Is there anything I did not ask you today that you want me to know or to include in my thesis?" In response to this question, Beverly, the Tourism Director, stressed that I out to explore how plantation paternalism benefited everyone:

Beverly: This is definitely something that most people don't know about was the role of the plantations in the area, you're actually building up our economy. You'll find in areas where there's nothing but farming, you know, people can't wait to get off the farm. But the plantations here, when they switch the focus from farming, to entertaining. It just became a better economy for everybody.

She felt that, as discussed earlier, the negative views that outsiders held of plantations were unfair, and that, in fact, the post-slavery plantation economy improved the local economy in ways that served everyone's interest. Though there were still Black sharecroppers working the land who made no personal profit and the system of Black servitude as part and parcel to White supremacy was preserved intact, some individuals felt that other benefits reaped as a result of the

system rectified, in part, the injustices suffered. Other interlocutors explicitly praised the plantation owners, through the Antebellum period until today.

Life for African Americans on the plantation was characterized as “quite good,” and I was reminded regularly of the last owner’s generosity in providing basic medical care, dairy products, and an Easter celebration for the staff. Community members frequently praised the last owner of Pinewood Plantation for her generosity in investing in children’s education, Beverly included:

Beverly: One thing that you're going to hear...is Daisy Lee had— she felt that education was very important in every worker on her plantation. If their child could pass high school, she would pay for them to go to college. And she put, I don't even know how many people in college, but get this. Mr. Jackson has something like 14 kids in his family...but five of his siblings went to college on Daisy English Lee’s dollar and she paid for, not just undergrad, she paid for you to become a doctor. You want to be a lawyer; she’d pay for you. So anyway, to hear about that. That's the type of stuff people don't hear about. And so it's really neat.

Because many spoke so highly of Daisy Lee’s generosity and care for the African American staff, I wondered why Pinewood Plantation chose not to include that aspect of the history in their museum interpretation. Though no one I spoke with had a negative story to share of the former owner, there are other sources which characterize her treatment of the staff as inhumane. In particular, the work of a former History Center employee documents an incident in which another historian discovered that staff were instructed to hide in bushes if the owner’s family walked by, should the view of an African American employee mar her perception of the idyllic plantation landscape (Pope 2018). Altogether, paternalistic care for local African Americans and logistical constraints were cited by museum professionals at the History Center and Pinewood Plantation as justifications for the absence of African American history in the official narrative. Rationalized as such, this evasion only perpetuates silences surrounding race and racism.

3.2.3 *Avoidance*

The most common response to a conversational broach of difficult history, however, was outright avoidance. To avoid the subject is to presumably escape discussing, processing, or acknowledging difficult events from the past. Many interlocutors were prone to avoid answering questions which probed them on difficult topics (defined here as slavery, plantations, racism, Jim Crow, segregation). Irvine has analogized conversational avoidance more broadly, though it applies to discussions of difficult history, to an 800-pound gorilla, stating that “when avoidance is conspicuous, the unmentionable is implicated. The way we tiptoe around the 800-pound gorilla in the room can be precisely the way we acknowledge, and reveal, its presence.” (2011: 14). In this case, the 800-pound gorilla in the room is tension around racism and racial violence. In my participant observation at these sites, the avoidance was unmistakable, materially evidenced in body language as well as in the way heritage is inscribed in the landscape.

Various museum professionals spoke candidly about their experiences navigating the 800-pound gorilla and the difficulties that they encountered in presenting difficult history to the public. One afternoon I met virtually with Melanie, a White woman in her 30’s who serves as the Museum Educator for the History Center. Because I also have a background in museum education, we spent a great deal of time talking about public outreach and the types of programming that the History Center offers to the public; however, in the latter half of our conversation, we ventured into discussing the contemporary role of plantations in the South and difficult history interpretation locally. After the public murder of George Floyd and widespread Black Lives Matter protests in early 2020, the 800-pound gorilla was placed under a spotlight. For the first time, museum visitors were bringing up race and racism to the museum staff.

Melanie shared that she felt cornered (literally, in the anecdote below) into taking a public stance on the role of plantations and broader histories of racial violence:

Melanie: People would try and catch you at moment between buildings of, ‘so, what do you think about this or that’ and I’m just kind of like walking through the backyard? The History Center has a public position on, but otherwise you're asking for my personal opinion. To be polite, I'm not going to share that. Um, you know. There’s intent sometimes to separate yourself from the institution, because that's. You have to do that, and you can't speak for the institution in a lot of ways.

Because the History Center is comprised of eight separate buildings, she found herself suddenly vulnerable to scrutiny as visitors would seize the opportunity to question her personal beliefs.

She was incredulous and clearly frustrated with being spontaneously asked to speak about such a divisive and uncomfortable topic that may then also reflect on her employer, as a spokesperson for the History Center.

Through there was a long-standing culture of institutional silences, public debate and interest had brought these issues to the front. Around this time, the History Center was responding, behind the scenes in internal meetings, and eventually publicly in re-doing some of the exhibit spaces. Melanie relayed to me that the process of revising the museum’s interpretation was fraught with tension and uncertainty as well:

Melanie: Um, but you may have discussions, but I can say from our experience and in redoing the exhibits last year that there were very intentional conversations about wording. The tone that we're facing, you know, the ways that we are discussing elements of local history especially in placement position of artifacts and in relation with each other and the stories they. Um, for example, redoing our Antebellum- one part of our Antebellum section, we have a rather large collection of planter portraits that were all painted by the same person within a short of amount of time. There's a connected history. All the subjects are related to each other. They all are plantation owners and owned enslaved people. Um, we made the decision, and whether it's read by the public, to put two things. A door panel explaining the enslaved code of Washington that was kind of formalized within, like code and all of that and then, um. Artifacts and photos that we've had of enslaved– formerly enslaved people before that story. Putting that before we got to the pretty portraits. Um, most people probably don't pick up on that as an intentional decision. Other people do and we get a little nod of ‘ok I see what you did there’. Um, it comes down to a lot of it really in our work so... So, I would say our approach is to

introduce these things kind of slowly and steadily. We're not coming out. Um. Making statements that especially now are very easily politicized as much as we, as staff want to do more. Right and unfortunately the way it kind of has to be done around here is, or at least that's our perception of it. It may not be. You do it carefully um.

The staff took a great deal of care to be intentional in their interpretation of Antebellum history, especially because, as she shared, they were afraid of making a political statement. The anticipation of community pushback in the way that locals may receive the changes seemed to be a strong factor influencing staff comfort and limiting the extent to which they addressed that history. Though on a personal level, the staff may have wanted to be more explicit or comprehensive in the way they address histories of racial violence, they ultimately felt beholden to present it to the public in a more palatable manner.

Like one interlocutor shared earlier, the community views this museum as the “White history museum.” Therefore, it seemed like staff were afraid of bringing difficult history into the fold, particularly histories which cast Whites in earlier time periods in a negative light. Because slavery and segregation have historically been avoided in all White spaces, the staff felt that their primary audience would take issue with interpretations that appeared critical of plantations or elicited emotions such as anxiety, grief, or horror in White visitors. Though interpretation of difficult history can be difficult for all audiences to process, only in certain spaces is discussing African American history considered to be political. This speaks to the often more invisible ways in which Black communities have been effectively racialized, whereas Whites are often paradoxically perceived as existing outside of race in American history as a neutral category. For example, the staff believed that adding a section on Black life to the Antebellum exhibit would signify a public political stance, whereas the static exhibit room in the main house focused on a White plantation owning family was not. The staff’s response, as museum professionals and

stewards of public history, was to craft an approach which introduced incremental change over time:

Melanie: We started introducing, you could say, maybe a little more controversial. Subjects into some lecture series... Recently we had a program about Southern food history, but you can't talk Southern food history without talking... right? Um, economics and enslavement and all of these things. So, we're starting to sit on for subjects that are bringing these different narratives to kind of the programming that we do. But we've, we've kind of found that we have to do it. I don't want to say subversively, but... subtly.

Revealingly, her sentence trailed off as she was about to mention the very topics she prefaced as controversial, though after taking a beat to seemingly consider her phrasing, she followed up by stating the explicit. Though I asked about public pushback against some of these changes, she did not disclose the nature of that negative public reception. Her body language was tense as she expressed, almost strategically, that some form of public pushback did indeed result in the staff decision to introduce difficult histories in a less conspicuous manner. It seemed also that the staff was particularly wary of updating materials in a way that read to their audience as accusatory:

Melanie: I don't want to say we're sneaking it, because we're not— we're being very clear and intentional about it. We're just also not like calling a spotlight of 'we're doing this because you never did'. We don't want it to seem like we're shaking our finger at people, right? It's complicated in the way we have to approach certain things and we know that there are certain subjects that we won't be able to really fully explore for a while, desegregation being one of them. The nature of the fact that we are in a small traditionally rather conservative, um, community. Rural. There are, there are factors that describe us that I won't say limit, but that are. Um. Factors.

In grappling with how to interpret difficult history, museum educators struggled to balance a fine line between accurate and comprehensive versus controversial and upsetting, and to present the material in a way that met a minimum level of approval from all the various stakeholders involved.

Segregation stood out as an area of difficult history which was treated as radioactive by community members. If institutional silences on slavery were only just beginning to crack, racial

segregation in the South was perceived as being far too recent for acknowledgement and to be avoided at all costs:

Melanie: We are very conscious of the fact that— and I'm sure David got into this— that the concepts and things that we are talking about are living memory. For most of our audience, there are things directly facilitated by their ancestors. We are not talking about a wide regional... We're talking local history, so, you know, if you want to talk about school desegregation. These were the children who were the first ones to be desegregated, their parents have very distinct opinions about that. And may have, um, expressed them publicly...One way or the other um, so, you know. It comes down to being respectful of that memory. But being honest about that controversy.

The interpretation of difficult history is even more difficult when that history is living memory. In my interviews, it was rare that interlocutor body language was so overt that I scribbled it in my notebook underlined with multiple exclamation points. Melanie spoke with her eyebrows arched sharply, eyes wide, to land on “local history” to underscore the gravity of her assertion. To her, interpreting segregation was entirely out of the question. Though racial segregation was enforced nationally and has already been interpreted in other museum spaces and classrooms, the ideological underpinnings of racial segregation and its legacy were all too present locally to safely address.

By remaining silent on histories of racial segregation, whose memories were being respected? Melanie and her colleagues expressed avoidance of addressing racial segregation out of concern for the individuals who lived through that time period.

Melanie: The one thing that we don't use is expressly use the names of the people doing it. Again, because it's, it's so... Washington is just so tight knit, you don't want to cause harm to the descendent. In essence, we don't use the names of the victims either. Because you don't want to do harm to the living, descendants either. And we talked about it a lot. Because, you know, on the one hand, you don't want to do favors for you know, people that behaved criminally you know, but it's likely in Washington, it honestly, is too soon. It's just too soon to, to use names. But we did- but we did make the conscious and sort of as a staff collective decision to, to go in as far as the way we could without getting ourselves in trouble.

Unlike a major city which can afford museum professionals more anonymity and freedom to interpret difficult histories without fear of backlash, Washington is a small town with just under 19,000 residents. In a place where everyone knows everything about everyone, the threat of disrupting the status quo is palpable, such that many community members continue to tip-toe around the 800-pound gorilla. Not only did staff feel uncomfortable with using names, but they also seemed to be afraid of potential retribution from individuals who “behaved criminally” and likely remain powerful figures in Washington. Another staff member of the History Center shared fearing repercussions for addressing topics such as slavery, segregation, sexuality, and more. David disclosed that he had to self-censor in order to reach certain audiences. In his words, “I didn't want to walk in and lose people, it was, you know, my first permanent full-time job out of grad school, I didn't want to get fired.” For David, talking to the public about these topics would betray the implicit social contract reinforcing these silences, resulting in a loss of some public trust. Not only that, as an educator, he had to weigh the risk of losing his job entirely.

White educators, in particular, were reluctant to name or address topics that they perceived to be an uncomfortable part of history. Castagno identified the same phenomenon within public schools, highlighting the ways in which White educators displayed a strong desire for comfort and ideological safety (2008). In her work, she demonstrates how White educators tend to hold a shared allegiance to the status quo and how silences around race and so-called difficult history “rationalize Whiteness because they allow most White educators to maintain the illusion that race either doesn't matter or doesn't really exist and to continue schooling in a business-as-usual fashion,” (2008: 315). By avoiding discomfort, whether for themselves or their audience, White educators often obscure histories of racial violence and uphold the ideological legacy of White supremacy. David also shared that his efforts to discuss topics such as

segregation felt constrained by his colleagues' and community members' colorblind discourse, which erases racializing histories and depicts the narrative as neutral and timeless.

David: They believe in the boomer liberal sense of believing in a color-free world, you know, which I think sometimes led them to not talking about things that needed to be talked about, and they would sometimes get upset at me when I'm like, I want to talk about segregation in office. And, you know, they were uncomfortable doing it because they believed in this concept of a color-free world, even from a, even from a left perspective, 60s left perspective, um, that led to results that still ended up covering up a lot of aspects of history.

Racial color-blindness describes an ideological belief that individuals do not perceive color (race) in their social interactions with others or that larger systems do not discriminate based on race. Many scholars have argued that majority groups, in fact, rely upon color-blindness as a means of avoiding the discussion of race and racism and that, to believe in a "post-race" world decontextualizes larger systems of oppressions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Ansell 2006). As a result of these silences, subsequent generations who do not have first-hand memories of segregation, for example, are unaware of the true extent of discrimination and racial violence. After moving to Washington from the North, David was astonished to discover that many of the residents knew very little of this history of their own town. He shared a story with me about a local man, who upon seeing the segregated sound booths in the History Center's back collection, was resistant to believing that the local downtown stores had been segregated. After some back and forth in which David elaborated upon the enforcement of racial segregation, the man responded, "I had no idea." By virtue of the small-town size and insular community, the avoidance of these topics has resulted in the prevailing myth of regional innocence and a lack of comprehensive education, especially for White members of the community.

Avoidance was also signified in the hesitance of some community members to utter the words "segregation" or "plantation". As one educator outright stated to me, "We say the word"

as, in doing so, their organization was also taking some kind of political stance. Another local organization had recently made the decision to remove “plantation” from one of their largest event names, so I reached out to the Melissa, the Events Director, to discuss the staff motivations for the change. We were fortunate enough to meet in person to have this conversation. She sat across from me on a large lounge sofa in an exquisitely decorated library space outside of her office, situating us eye-to-eye. Through the conversation, the tension was again palpable, in a manner which caused us to speak with special intention and discretion. When I asked how the decision to remove the word “plantation” came about, Melissa recalled the events of 2020:

Melissa: It was a very interesting. Several months here. A lot of people were here that aren't usually. So a lot of people that summer away came down because there are so many threats, bricking and burning, and a couple of plantations did choose to drop plantation off of their name. The [organization] chose to drop plantation off our name because we were coming up to a time where people didn't want to be educated about a plantation environment, it meant to be educated about sporting culture, and hunting plantations versus cotton plantations or farming plantation. So it's very interesting. It was a very interesting place. But yeah, it was a different time. We had places like Pinterest, who were saying weddings couldn't be booked and they wouldn't allow a plantation wedding. It was interesting. We were in meetings for about six months.

Her perception of the Black Lives Matter protests was that it placed the affluent Northern White benefactors of her organization under direct threat of violence, so much so that it caused them to take refuge in their summer homes in the deep South. Melissa repeated the refrain “it was interesting” though never provided a direct answer, even when further pressed by my questions regarding those conversations. Because she too served as a representative for her organization, I had the sense that she was glossing over the tension with a veneer of respectability. Again, many of the individuals I spoke with felt discomfort in talking about difficult history or race in a way that could be seen as speaking on behalf of the institutions they represented.

Others who did not feel obliged to represent an employer spoke to personal and community avoidance as well. One older African American woman was initially reluctant to

share personal experiences with racism in depth, though eventually became comfortable with discussing what she called “hidden racism.” She recounted a memory from 2005 in which she and a friend visited a clothing store in downtown Washington. When they walked in, the staff did not acknowledge their presence, seeming to give them the cold shoulder. Yet, when two White women walked in after, the staff greeted them attentively:

Donna: I just turned around and walked out. I was like, you know, just speak to me, just acknowledge that I'm coming in, you don't have to do anything else. But just so...little things like that. You learn to adapt to it. I don't like confrontation. So, you know, okay. I-I don't want anybody to disrespect anybody.

Donna chose to walk away rather than remain in a situation which made her uncomfortable and could potentially lead to confrontation. In this way, she utilized avoidance as a tool of self-preservation in response to discomfort. To protect herself, she needed to evade a discussion with the staff on their blatant prejudiced behavior. In many situations, African Americans did not want to bear the onus of confronting people on racist behavior, of addressing it openly. To bring it up would be to become “the problem,” betraying conventions of polite behavior and requiring taxing emotional and mental labor on her part. When we spoke about racial diversity of representation in heritage and history, she spoke out against institutional silences and felt strongly that the full stories of African American history should be included:

Donna: I strive toward, I think, history is what it is, it is the story as it happened, and to try to sugarcoat, or to try to, to hide the accomplishments of all people, I think is wrong. Because as I said earlier, if you don't, if you don't tell me about my history, then all I know is what you've given me. So that is going to either build me up or tear me down because it's skewed, because somebody else isn't inclusive. The people that are not included, to have that inclusion could help lift up, lift to see how far you actually come. So you don't know the full story of the impact that has had on generations of life. And if we don't do things better now, you're still hindering another generation.

In her own life, she shared that there were many difficult topics that her own family did not talk about when she was a child. She felt that, by not acknowledging the histories of African

Americans, museum educators were also denying younger generations the right to know their full history. She identified the power that museum educators hold in determining the official narrative of history as it happened. The community at large is only educated to the extent that has been shared, a narrative that is influenced by the positionality of the museum educators themselves.

Other locals expressed frustration with the community's avoidance of difficult history and race as well. In my interview with the local photographer, Ashley, she nearly apologized for talking about the plantation history in a negative light:

Ashley: If I just gave you way too much information, but...sometimes people don't want to share any information because it's sort of like a conflict of, you know, oh, it kind of makes people uncomfortable to talk about this...And I feel like if we don't share our feelings about it, then nothing's ever going to change. And I do feel like change really, you know, I feel like little by little, we're heading in that direction. But I don't, I think if we just keep quiet about it, and just expect someone else to make the change, and it's never going to happen.

I had a sense that, as a White woman, Ashley was familiar with feeling like “the problem” by breaking silences on the local African American history. She seemed exasperated that the widespread culture of silence and avoidance was self-preserving in the service of White supremacy. In order to begin reconciling difficult histories locally and addressing the legacy of racial violence, individuals and local institutions had to first admit there was a 600-pound gorilla sitting right in the center of the community.

4 EVERY TUB HAS TO SIT ON ITS BOTTOM

That US slavery has both officially ended yet continues in many complex forms—most notably institutionalized racism and the cultural denigration of Blackness—makes its representation particularly burdensome in the United States. Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that ghost, something that is and yet is not. Only in the present can we be true or false to the past we chose to acknowledge. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995: 147)

One rainy afternoon, I strolled under the refuge of my umbrella along the oak lined streets of the neighborhood adjacent to the Bottom. These historic Victorian homes, each one uniquely designed and artisan crafted, stood stately along the row, despite the tragic fact that many of them were falling into disrepair. Wear over the decades had caused their foundations to sink into the clay soil, causing them to look world weary and somber. The remainder of the homes had been reduced to grass-covered lots interspersed between the rows of homes. Though seemingly empty, the lots served as visible reminders of the phenomenon occurring in the neighborhood.

Recent gentrification had raised the cost of the living in the neighborhood, so much so that African American families who had hand-built and lived in these structures for centuries were being priced out of their homes. Rather than pay for the pricey repairs and renovations required, not to mention the property taxes, these families were forced to abandon the homes. Eventually, the city would step in and condemn the building, removing what remained of the structure and leaving only an empty lot covered with weeds. Those who remained were dearly holding on the beautiful homes with tall columns and wide wraparound porches, that in many cases, their own ancestors had designed.

My destination, however, was a historic home and museum just on the outskirts of the neighborhood. The oldest boarding house in the district, the building was home to many

memories and testaments to the history of African American life in the town. The original owners, born into the slavery, erected the home in 1887 during Reconstruction, and the boarding home thrived for centuries, eventually being turned into a local museum and theater. There I met the curator, Gloria, an older African American woman with an impressive reputation for activism, scholarship, and the arts that preceded her. When she arrived, I expected her to lead me through the front door and around the still furnished rooms. Instead, I was shocked to learn that the house museum was entirely closed, both to the public and to the former staff. So we sat in the rocking chairs on the front porch, and she told me that the words I would publish about this museum were to close the final chapter on its history.

The storm was passing over us, spattering heavy rain droplets on the roof above, a fitting set for the conversation which unfolded. For what felt like an afternoon that existed outside of time, Gloria shared the history of the home with me, telling me stories of the lives of the former residents over the years. There we both sat, often in silence, as witness to the astounding memories embedded in place. She spoke almost as if her words were a eulogy, because in many ways, they were. Inevitably, many of the threads to her stories were wound up with histories of erasure. In her lifetime, she watched many local testaments to African American history sink into obscurity, monuments or structures which had been abandoned or torn down for new development. Though this museum had persisted, it too would ultimately succumb to a similar fate.

She illustrated this cycle to me through the telling of a personal memory. Years ago, she had participated in a grant program which included a trip to historic plantations throughout the South. From these tours, one image was especially embedded in her memory. She was shown a red brick, which still had the mark of a child's handprint upon it:

Gloria: They had a brick that has indentation of a baby's hand that shows that the children did do that. I look even got a postcard. Because to me that says 'I was here.' And so when you tear all this down, how are you supposed to say that I was here. And I think that's the greatest fear that these people that hold on for as long as they can and continue to pay the tax on buildings, they can't afford to take care of, just to say that they were here. And here's some people with money. And they're just gonna erase it all, and then put up a sign.

The bricks she referred to were not located in an archive or within a plantation museum, but rather still line the buildings and streets of downtown Charlestown, South Carolina to this day (Wise 2019). They are traveled over day-by-day without much contemporary regard to their formation. Historically, all brick making had been done at a local plantation using African labor. Slaves would travel to nearby rivers, harvest clay, and spread it out to set. Enslaved children were assigned the task of walking across the clay to crumble it, then once they bricks were set into shape, they turned the bricks over repeatedly to dry (Wise 2019). Still damp, many of the bricks were forever imprinted by the tiny palms of enslaved children. Gloria treasured the photograph of the bricks that she brought home with her as a memento to the legacy of those children. This example illustrated the crux of her abnegation. She refused to accept the erasure of her own history and African American history at large. Even in the face of extinction, she repeated the refrain, for the small, enslaved child "I was here," and for the local African American community, "We were here." With the erasure of difficult histories in the South, the avoidance of the traumas of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and the unrecognized legacy of African American resilience and success, these collective memories and histories are silenced in the present. Nevertheless, the presence of these histories, the ghosts of both a past and living presence, demand to say, "look at me," "I have suffered," and "I am here" (Trouillot 1995).

4.1 Reflection

Over the course of my research, I noticed material changes in the presentation of history at these sites that gave me a glimmer of hope. Public pressure and dialogue on difficult history and race, to my surprise, was driving incremental change. I observed that, despite the discomfort or pain associated with addressing ghosts of the past, some community members were stepping up and altering their interpretation and marketing. In a little over a year, I discovered that some community members were not only responding to my concerns, but also implementing new policies that were rooted in a more equitable public history practice. Pinewood Plantation shared that they would be updating the tour video to reflect more of the Antebellum history. The local heritage preservation organization shared that they may reinstitute teacher training during the summer to share more of local Washington history with educators and students. The individuals working on the cemetery restoration project plan to restore the original school bell to the building and are little by little documenting grave sites and gathering information on the individuals buried there.

In February of 2022, I attended a lecture on Jim Jackson's family history at Pinewood Plantation. The very first of its kind, this lecture represented a public collaboration between the two organizations. For the first time in its history, the plantation foundation hosted a Black descendent to commemorate Black History Month, and further, invited him to give a talk on the history of Black life at the plantation. Held on an early Friday morning, the lecture was open to the public and was given at the learning center located on the plantation's grounds. A ways outside of town, there was only a small crowd in attendance, the majority of which was represented by the plantation staff itself. Everyone made polite conversation in the way Southerners do until Mr. Jackson was granted the podium to begin. As he talked, the audience

listened closely, enthralled by Mr. Jackson's approachable charm and the subject matter itself. He recalled his ancestors' lives on the plantation, his own upbringing, and the generations of his family who, after leaving, migrated around the world. As he spoke to the all-White audience, there was a noticeable tension in the room, which he would alleviate now and again with a lighthearted joke that the audience was more than relieved to chuckle at. As the talk came to a close, Mr. Jackson paused and said, "Please. Tell the full story," as he looked around the room, making eye contact with the staff, other community members, and myself. Though this moment marked the first time in 200 years that the story of Black life at Pinewood Plantation was acknowledged publicly on site, it was clearly just the first step.

During the Q&A portion of the lecture, the underlying tension did bubble to the surface. Some audience members who did not belong to the plantation staff began to ask questions regarding the Antebellum era of the plantation's history. It was clear that there was serious public curiosity regarding the interpretation of that period, yet during the conversation, the plantation director stood abruptly and redirected its course. The back and forth between the audience and Mr. Jackson, in concert with the interjections from the staff, revealed the ways in which the plantation staff felt violently uncomfortable with the inquest, or uncomfortable with relinquishing complete control of the narrative. Despite this pushback and evasion from the staff, the event nonetheless marked the establishment of a public, working relationship between the two organizations, as well as movement in the interpretative focus of the plantation site's educational programming. Witnessing this moment, it brought me a lot of joy to see that the representatives of these organizations were capable and willing to begin to overcome their discomfort with difficult history to build a better, more inclusive public history pedagogy.

4.2 Future

Plantation sites have historically been and continue to play a central role in racial identity formation in the United States as well as in mythologizing “Old South” tourism imaginaries. As explored in Chapter Two, the development of the plantation economy and its foundational influence on the present is evidenced in the various ways in which collective memory and nostalgia have been mobilized through tourism as tools of mythology and erasure, part and parcel to the White washing of historical memory. The oft unspoken negotiations between remembering and forgetting certain pasts, manifest within the plantation tourism industry, proved a fruitful source for intervention.

Moreover, through disingenuous forms of gentrification, cast as historic preservation, cultural touchstones to African American history such as the Bottom district are quickly dissipating from the landscape. On its surface, particularly in White spaces, the mythologizing of the plantation South and the erasure of African American history appears to be a passive and inevitable phenomena; however, at plantation and museum sites, difficult history is interpreted as such, at surface-level, and the persistence of injustice and silence is upheld by pervasive narrative apologetics and aversion. As case studies, my exploration of interpretation and negotiation at Pinewood Plantation, the History Center, and the Jim Jackson Black History Museum evidenced the visceral discomfort experienced when discussing racial histories of violence or racism, demonstrating the power of an implicit social contract which characterizes transparency and accountability as transgressions against tacit White supremacy. Ultimately, the impact of minimization, rationalization, and avoidance is only the preservation of the status quo. A status quo which continues to deny African Americans the right to know their own histories while shielding others from facing the legacy of slavery. In service to the legacy of White

supremacy which shaped the initial formation of the plantations and continues to shape the education of the next generation, the South has failed to come to terms with its own past and to make amends for the continued violence perpetrated against generations of African Americans.

While plantation sites and local museums have obscured the lives and voices of African Americans in the community, many plantations across the county are heeding the call to revise their interpretive focus and make reparations for the harms of the past. There is a small network of museums that do highlight the histories of enslavement and racism in America, though these sites are not located on or affiliated with historic plantation sites. The Legacy Museum, Lest We Forget Black Holocaust Museum, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Ozarks Afro-American Heritage Museum, to name a few, serve as the primary bearers of this history.

I am cautiously optimistic about the future. As a native ethnographer, I believe that this work demonstrates that working alongside one's own community to produce anthropological theory is an asset to the discipline and serves as a model for the implementation of anthropological praxis principles and ethnography as intervention. Though this work does not present the full narrative that these intuitions are grappling with, it does shed light on the conversation by drawing it into the open to combat historic silences. By opening a dialogue with and between these local organizations, I hope that these relationships will be strengthened, and that staff will be provided with additional language for navigating difficult history in their personal lives and in museum interpretation. I hope my words and the words of various community members will be given a voice in this document, and moreover, that those will be taken to heart by local organizations. Most importantly, I hope this work allows for community members to be inspired by change and to envision themselves in a future that is progressive. I call upon them to start having

conversations about the things that divide us and to use that space to practice grief, healing, and reconciliation. Rather than close with my own words, which have already taken precedent in this ethnography, I leave you, the reader, with a powerful quote from a local descendent of plantation workers, whose voice I hope you hear when faced with the decision to speak or stay silent.

Donna: At the end of the day, as my grandmother would say, every tub has to sit on its bottom. Everybody has to give an account of who you are, when you stand, right? It has to start with you, you can only control who you are, what your beliefs are, what things you accept, what things you don't. So, you know, we are products of our environment, but when you know better, you do better.

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