Intersections of History, Memory, and “Rememory:”
A Comparative Study of Elmina Castle and Williamsburg

Thesis

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By
Ashley Camille Bowden, B.A.
Graduate Program in African American and African Studies

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Thesis Committee:
Dr. Walter Rucker, Advisor
Dr. Leslie Alexander
Dr. Ahmad Sikainga
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ABSTRACT

The representation of freed and enslaved people of African descent at sites such as Elmina, Ghana, and Williamsburg, Virginia, are subject to much criticism and praise. “Founded” by the Portuguese in 1482 and later controlled by the Dutch, Elmina is distinguished as the first of its kind. Initially established as a trading center between Africans and Europeans, those interactions soon gave birth to Elmina as a dungeon for holding Africans as slaves for sale into slavery. Williamsburg, a living history museum, is identified as the second colonial capital following the Jamestown settlement. On the eve of the American Revolution its citizens were confronted with questions of freedom, independence, and bondage. While many white settlers fought for independence and freedom from England, they simultaneously embodied slavery and unequal treatment towards enslaved and free African Americans.

Today, both Elmina and Williamsburg reflect historical spaces as memory of the past. This thesis explores the ways that contemporary historical interpreters depict Elmina and Williamsburg. Some of the goals of this thesis are to study and analyze the sites’ contemporary flaws, the sources these flaws, the ways that the histories of these sites are packaged for guests, and to explore how the sites’ guests are encouraged to re-interpret and identify with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. A comparative analysis of the
ways that Elmina and Williamsburg are interpreted by visitors, site administrators and the people that live in and around these sites was conducted to understand how these sites are memorialized. Finally, this thesis addresses questions of “musemification,” preservation, tourism, and the role that these sites play in shaping contemporary identities within and outside the African Diaspora.
DEDICATION

“For all those who were lost
For all those who were stolen
For all those who were left behind
For all those who were not forgotten.”

Rodney Leon-AARRIS Architects
African Burial Ground Memorial,
“The Ancestral Libation Chamber”
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VITA

2002  King/Drew Magnet High School of Medicine and Science

2006  B.A. Development Studies, University of California, Berkeley

2009  M.A. African American and African Studies (AAAS), The Ohio State University

2007-2009  Graduate Teaching & Research Associate, AAAS, The Ohio State University

Presentations

2008  “Conjuring Participation through Performance: A Case Study of Elmina and Williamsburg, Virginia,” Association for the Study of African American Life and History 93rd Annual Convention, Birmingham. 08/03/08.


2005  “Conjuring Participation through Performance at Williamsburg, Virginia,” Ronald E. McNair California Scholars 14th Annual Symposium, The University of California, Berkeley. 08/13/05.

Publications


Fields of Study

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INTRODUCTION

Taken from West Africa at the age of eight, enslaved and shipped to the Americas, on July 11, 1761, Phillis Wheatley found herself in Boston, Massachusetts. Purchased by John Wheatley, Phillis Wheatley was encouraged to read and write—at which time she was also trained in Classical literature and introduced to Christianity. In the eighteenth century, and even today, Phillis Wheatley is revered for her ability to express herself through multiple literary devices; however, her work is not exempt from criticism. While Wheatley was praised by her slaveowners and other members of the white planter class simply for her ability to read and write English fluently, historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson claimed that Wheatley’s writings were informed by Christianity and was nothing more than an imitation of existing works.¹ Moreover, contemporary scholars and intellectuals read Wheatley’s work with a critical eye by examining the larger implications of her writings. Specifically, scholars such as April Langley and Henry Louis Gates Jr. agree that Wheatley’s work reflect a strong affinity towards her native land and African past.² Wheatley’s reference to Africa in her poems

¹ Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 1743-1826 (Philadelphia: Printed for Mathew Carey, 1794), 204 [E-book accessed on May 9, 2009, from Ohio State University Library database].
² April Langley’s The Black Aesthetic Unbound: Theorizing the Dilemma of Eighteenth-Century African American Literature (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2008) is the most recently published text which explores how Wheatley expressed her appreciation for her native land. Also see S. E. Ogude’s Genius in Bondage: A Study of the Origins of African Literature in English (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press LTD, 1983), and Henry Louis Gate’s The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers. (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003).
and eulogies demonstrates how people of African descent are able to recall and connect
with their native land or the land from which their ancestors were displaced. For example,
in a number of her poems, Wheatley valorizes Africa and people of African descent. In
“On RECOLLECTION” she refers to the continent as a “vent’rous Afric in her great
design[;]” likewise, in “To MAECENAS,” Wheatley reveals her great veneration for
African people by identifying them as a “sable race.” In some instances, Wheatley refers
to Africa as a “Pagan land” and “land of errors[;]” however in these cases, one could
question whether Wheatley is writing from the perspective of a non-Christian, or from the
standpoint of an eighteenth-century Christian missionary who believed that Africa was in
fact a dark continent that needed saving.3

Regardless of differences in interpretations of Wheatley’s poems and eulogies,
one cannot deny that her writings challenged and continue to challenge ideas of history,
memory, and “rememory.” As Wheatley’s memory of Africa is an ongoing discussion
among scholars, her writings have pushed academicians to think about the
memorialization process, what it entails, and the ways that individuals and groups
(independently and collectively) remember events and occurrences of the past.
Wheatley’s work serves as a point of departure for discussions on the ways that enslaved
people and their descendants connect with Diasporic spaces that embraced the
commodification and enslavement of African bodies throughout the Atlantic World.

In addition to the works of Phillis Wheatley, the writings Olaudah Equiano and
Quobna Ottobah Cugoana also exemplify how memories and an awareness of Africa

3 Phillis Wheatley, Complete Writings, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Groups, 2001),
34, 10, 11, 13.
were in the minds of formerly enslaved Africans in the Americas. Similar to Wheatley, Equiano’s memory of his homeland is reflected in his constant reference to “Eboan Africans” as his “countrymen.” Furthermore, Equiano’s description of his native land as a place that was “uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produce[d] all kinds of vegetables in great abundance” also reveals a deference for his place of origins (even though he was kidnapped at a young age). Likewise, former slave, abolitionist, and devout Christian, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, was not only able to remember his homeland, but after years of enslavement, Cugoano was able to recall what he was doing at the time of his capture, and the amount of goods that a slaver exchanged for his life. The writings of Wheatley, Equiano, and Cugoano are symbolic of the larger themes evoked in this thesis—the interplay of history, memory, and rememory with regards to the slave trade and slavery throughout the Atlantic World.

Whether or not it is acknowledged, memories of Africa, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are present in social, political, and economic institutions throughout the Atlantic World. Although discussions of the slave trade and slavery are often silenced, undermined, or even overlooked, the holidays celebrated, specifically in the United States, speak volumes about the ways that contemporary institutions encourage their constituents to recall and identify with the past. As commemoratives and national holidays—such as New Years, the birthdays of Martin Luther King Jr. and George Washington, Memorial, Independence, Labor, Columbus and Veterans Days, in addition

5 In Quobna Ottobah Cugoano’s Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings Cugoana notes that he was playing in a field with other children at the time he was kidnapped from the “country of Fantee,” present-day Ghana. Cugoana also recalls that he was bought for “a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead” (see pages 12-14).
to Thanksgiving and Christmas—reflect attempts to foster a sense of nationhood, and a collective memory and identity among people residing in the U.S., they are by no means all inclusive, nor do they encompass days and events that played tremendous roles in the emergence and development of the country. Thus, when reflecting on such holidays and commemoratives, it is important to consider the following questions: To whom do these holidays appeal? Whom do they exclude? What histories do these days place in the forefront and/or the background? What messages are conveyed through the memorialization of such days? Why is the 4th of July a national holiday and not the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition (as identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO))? And finally, who decides what is celebrated and what is not? As national holidays reflect aspects of history that are valorized, the above questions can be applied to historical and tourist sites in the United States and throughout the Atlantic World.

Similar to the ways that national holidays encourage people to recall past occurrences, historical sites also embody and contribute to local and national narratives about the past. Although some sites are frequented more than others, and may, or may not, resemble how they looked centuries ago, they deliver contemporary interpretations about the people that lived in and around these sites. There are many historical locations throughout the Atlantic World; however, the most compelling ones to analyze are those that connect local and regional histories with other parts of the world. Particularly, narratives surrounding historical sites that reflect the trans-Atlantic slave trade along the Atlantic coast of Africa and slavery in the Americas are appealing because they tend to
convey different narratives about the historical actors who (voluntarily and/or involuntarily) participated in the trade, and the implications of their involvement.

Since local and national entities, in addition to philanthropic organizations, have different stakes attached to their involvement in the preservation of historic sites, their interpretations of the histories of these sites often differ tremendously. These groups’ involvement in the preservation processes speaks volumes about the sources of their interests, their targeted audiences, and their cultural, social, political, and/or economic investments in a site. Different conceptualizations of the past influences the messages delivered at historical spaces, and ultimately, impacts the ways that site guests are encouraged to interpret and digest past phenomena. In addition to evaluating how and why historical narratives differ among organizations, one must also consider the ways that individual (and collective) understandings of history, memory, and “rememory” work in tandem to shape earlier and contemporary narratives about the past. Thus, this thesis explores the ways that narratives about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are packaged and presented to guests at historic sites on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

History, Memory, and “Rememory” Defined

Not only are historical sites survivals of the past which serve as proof that certain events actually happened, they also reflect the interplay between history, memory, and “rememory.” The intersections of history and memory have been explored by scholars across many disciplines; Pierre Nora, a French historian, is recognized and highly regarded for his discussion on the relationship between the two. For Nora, “Memory is a perpetual actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” whereas “history is
a representation of the past.” While Nora suggests that history is static and fixed, and reflects a “reconstruction…of what is no longer[,]” he defines memory as a fluid and ever-changing process that “nourishes recollection.”6 Where Nora characterizes history and memory as binary opposites, one of the objectives of this project is to reveal how history and memory are mutually dependent. In fact, this thesis reveals how various memories and interpretations of the past informs conceptualizations of historical events; therefore, memory is fluid and continually determined by past and present understandings of historical events.

For some Diasporic Africans, their understanding of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are informed by many features: 1) the narratives delivered at historic sites about the trade, and 2) the physical places, objects, and people they encounter throughout their lives. While historic sites such as the slave ports located along the Atlantic coasts of Africa and the Americas contributed to the spread of Africans throughout the Diaspora, today, these sites foster an emotional, and even spiritual, connection between the site and its guests. Emotional responses and spiritual connections to historical sites are best described by Sara Ahmed in The Cultural Politics of Emotions where she contends that memories of the past are informed by direct and/or indirect interactions with physical or “imagined objects.” According to Ahmed, memories of the past trigger emotional responses which are informed by “past histories of contact, unavailable in the present.”7

Moreover, for Ahmed, not only are memories of the past generated by feelings associated with an object, person, and/or event, she also contends that a “recognition” of

past events experienced by others, coupled with pre-existing conceptualizations and experiences, can inform one’s emotional response and memory of past events such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the U.S. For instance, the experiences of an historical actor, person A, can inform how person B orientate towards an event or historical phenomena if person B acknowledges the experience of person A and is able to drawn on times when he/she experienced their own pain. Ahmed states:

the process of recognition (of this feeling, or that feeling) is bound up with what we already know. For example, the sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories: one can feel pain when reminded of past trauma by an encounter with another.8

Ahmed’s concept of emotion is inextricably linked to memory. Therefore, her conceptualization of emotions can be applied to Diasporic Africans’ memories of the past. For some Diasporic Africans, simply visiting an historic site which embraced slavery appeals to their emotions and encourages them to think about the harsh realities that their ancestors may have endured in a similar space. In addition to the contemporary narratives delivered at these sites, for Diasporic Africans, there is an ethereal connection to such spaces.

Ahmed’s discussion of history, memory, and emotions perfectly situates the notion of “rememory” as presented in this thesis—the ability for an individual to

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8 Ibid., 25.
empathize with the experiences of historical actors due to an acknowledgement of past events and circumstances, or even a shared ancestry. As there are no living slaves to reference in attempts to understand the realities of slavery, “rememory” is a tool that Diasporic Africans reference, consciously and/or unconsciously, in their efforts to understand the experiences of their enslaved ancestors.

While memories and “rememories” of the past have manifested themselves in the form of African retentions among enslaved people of African descent throughout the Americas, they also surface in scholarly and literary works by, and regarding Africans throughout the Diaspora. For instance, Toni Morrison’s Beloved situates and exemplifies the interplay between history, memory, and “rememory.” In a conversation between the main character, Sethe, and her daughter, Denver, Sethe recalls the plantation on which she was once enslaved, Sweet Home. In relation to “rememory,” Sethe states:

‘Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know…If a house burns down, it is gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.’ ‘Can other people see it?’ asked Denver. ‘Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes.’

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Similar to Nora’s description of history and memory, and Ahmed’s assertion of emotions, Morrison also contends that memories of the past are transferred to different bodies—specifically to those who are the progeny of historical actors—across space and place. For Morrison, memories are not created nor destroyed; rather, they are recycled and reused, and remain “out there in the world” for others to experience. Since, Sethe is explaining the idea of “rememory” to her daughter, she reinforces the significance of the interplay between kinship and recollection. Denver is able to recall Sweet Home because her mother once inhabited that space.

Similar to the way that Denver was able to conceptualize a place she never visited and the events that took place there, the notion of “rememory” can also be applied to the memories of contemporary guests at historical sites in the American South and throughout the Atlantic World. As people of diverse backgrounds trek to sites—such as Elmina Castle in Ghana and Williamsburg in Virginia—by the thousands, they travel to such locations with the hopes of connecting with the past. Like Denver, although guests of Elmina and Williamsburg sites were not alive during the times that these sites have come to represent over time, and while these locations may look drastically different in comparison to the ways they looked in the past, contemporary visitors situate themselves within the context of the events that took place there. Since generations of enslaved people were buried in and around these sites, the descendants of slaves in particular, as contemporary visitors of these locales, experience an ethereal connection to these spaces and the plight of their enslaved ancestors. As emotions are informed by “past histories of
contact,” when reflecting on the past, a past that one may not have experienced, guests of historical sites are able to remember and empathize with those who came before them.¹⁰

Historiographical Paradigms of History, Memory, and “Rememory”

The ways that the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are memorialized, packaged, interpreted, and re-interpreted in public spaces on and off the continent is a topic which has begun to receive much attention. Scholars have begun to make assessments of the ways that the guests of historical sites—specifically those which played crucial roles in the development of the slave trade and slavery in Americas—are encouraged to understand the histories of these sites. Scholars such as Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, Ralph Austen, Anne C. Bailey, and Saidiya Hartman have begun to explore the messages conveyed at historic sites regarding the slave trade and slavery on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small’s Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums attempts to “understand how plantation museums reflect, create, and contribute to racialized ways of understanding and organizing the world.”¹¹ This book on southern plantation museums focuses on the various ways that plantation museums in Virginia, Louisiana, and Georgia, are constructed in ways that not only racialize, but also silence the experiences of enslaved people of Africans descent. Eichstedt and Small examines the ways that some plantation museums deliberately overlook slavery which results in a “racialized regime of

representation that valorizes the white elite of the preemancipation South while generally erasing or minimizing the experiences of enslaved African Americans.”

Upon identifying 122 museums as either “white-centric” or “black-centric,” Eichstedt and Small grouped these museums into categories—symbolic annihilation, trivialization and deflection, segregation and marginalization of knowledge, and relative incorporation—to measure how the experiences of freed and enslaved persons are incorporated into the site’s narrative.

Eichstedt and Small take a multi-disciplinary approach to evaluate plantation museums. They collected their data by posing as participant observers during site tours, and they performed an interpretive analysis of the data collected. A compilation of brochures and videos, tourist literature, pictures, and pamphlets, in addition to detailed documented experiences observations of such tours served as the author’s primary sources for the foundation of Eichstedt and Small’s argument.

In Ralph Austen’s article, “The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slaving Voyage Documents and Communal Traditions,” he provides a thorough discussion of the sources that can be employed in efforts to understand the magnitude of the slave trade. Specifically, Austen explores how both oral traditions and empirical documents allow for scholars to conceptualization the scale of and varying perceptions regarding the trade. As empirical data provides information regarding the number—of people, ships, and money involved in the trade—involved in the trade, he

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12 Ibid., 2.
13 Ibid., 4, 10-11, 240-246.
14 Ibid., 12.
reveals how oral traditions equally contribute to understandings of the trade as they inform scholars about African peoples’ assessments of the trade.

In his work, Austen brings to the forefront debates about the usefulness of empirical and oral documents; he also reveals how modes of documentation by European and African actors involved in the trade convey messages about the political and moral economy of the trade. While Eichstedt and Small's work does not speak directly to the issues addressed by Austen, *Representations of Slavery* brings an added dimension to the ways that memories of the past are constructed at various historic sites throughout the American south. Likewise, Austen’s work emphasizes how different sources should be used differently, but in tandem, in attempts to assess past phenomena and events throughout the African Diaspora.

Anne C. Bailey’s *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade* examines both African and European actors involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, their levels of participation, and the impact of their involvement on African societies. The major thesis of Bailey’s text explores “the silence, memory, and fragments of the history of slavery and the slave trade as it pertains to both sides of the Atlantic.” By the end of her book, Bailey arrives at the conclusion that in order to overcome the issue of silence and “fragments of the history of slavery,” redress is imperative; in fact, Bailey’s text calls for “reparations as rememory and redress.”

For Bailey, reparations for the slave trade should occur via the erection of monuments and museums to honor those enslaved; she also proposes that the countries

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and continents involved in the trade should acknowledge their participation and gains
from the exchange. Bailey introduces the “reparations movement” as a means to bring an
end to disjointed histories of the Atlantic slave trade, and to combat the silence and
shame associated with the trade among the descendants of those enslaved and those who
were able to avoid enslavement. For Bailey, combating silence means giving a “voice” to
those enslaved and their descendants by acknowledging and remembering the past.

Using oral traditions as a primary source, coupled with archival research, Bailey
centers her text on the “Incident at Atorkor.” For Bailey, the “Incident at Atorkor” was
the “single incident” that encouraged the haphazard scramble for African people from the
interior and coastal regions of the Gold Coast.\(^\text{17}\) As leaders of the “Ewe community” had
pre-existing agreements with European slavers to provide African slaves from the interior
of the Gold Coast, and not the littoral, Bailey accepts the Anlo Ewe narrative which
argues how the kidnapping of drummers from the royal family gave birth to the arbitrary
capturing and selling of African peoples from the coastal and littoral regions of the Gold
Coast.

With the “Incident at Atorkor” as the point of departure, Bailey makes use of oral
narratives, interviews, and her own interactions with Ghanaians, to explore the source of
silence and shame surrounding the slave trade in present-day Ghana. Bailey arrives at the
conclusion that silence and shame are associated with sentiments of regret, shame, pain,
and sorrow which were birth in Africa—due to stigmas associated with domestic slavery
and being a descendant of a slave—and transferred to the Americas as a consequence of
the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, she also proposes that silence also stemmed

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 27.
from trauma and “survivors guilt” among those who avoided enslavement on the continent.\textsuperscript{18} Bailey’s work on discussions of slavery and the slave trade in Ghana is one of the first to directly address the silence and shame attached with slavery in the Gold Coast and in the U.S.

The most recent text on memories of the slave trade includes Saidiya Hartman’s \textit{Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route}. \textit{Lose Your Mother} recounts Hartman’s experiences in Ghana, and her efforts to gain a better understanding of how slavery is remembered in many spaces and places throughout the country. As she documents her many encounters while abroad, the underlying theme of Hartman’s text is to explore a reluctance to discuss the slave trade among many Ghanaians, and to assess differences in memories of the slave trade and slavery for continental and Diasporic Africans. Similar to Bailey, Hartman also evokes the notion of silence and shame in her discussion of slavery; however, unlike Bailey who devotes much attention to oral narratives, Hartman explores the explicit and implicit ways that Ghanaians neglect to address the trade. For instance, Hartman recounts her first visit to Cape Coast Castle where she was escorted by a young Ghanaian girl, Phillis. According to Hartman, Phillis was uninterested in the events that took place in the slave dungeons as she insisted on discussing fashion, African American singers, and movies. On another occasion, Hartman recalls her interaction with Kwadwo, a Ghanaian poet, where he explained and acknowledged the silence surrounding the slave trade. According to Hartman, Kwadwo states: “We, Africans, are ashamed for our participation in the slave trade, and for this

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 1, 13, 161-162.
reason are unwilling to talk about the very issue that brings most of you [Diasporic Africans] here.”19 The above examples are just two of many instances which reveal the ways that silences surrounding the trade manifest themselves throughout Ghana.

Moreover, for Hartman, the experiences of Diasporic Africans who repatriate Ghana are called to face slavery and the displacement of their ancestors in different ways. Hartman also investigates how Diasporic Africans, who visit or repatriate Ghana, struggle to carve out and define their own lives and identities upon returning to the land from which their ancestors were displaced. Unlike the silence that their Ghanaian counterparts embrace, Hartman observes that it is nearly impossible for Diasporic Africans to avoid slavery and the implications and consequences of the trade. For instance, Hartman’s longing and quest to “belong” while in Ghana are apparent in the question she poses to her readership: “What connection had endured after four centuries of dispossession?” In addition, after constantly being referred to as an “Obruni,” not only does Hartman becomes frustrated such term continual reminds of Hartman of her lack of “belong[ing] anywhere”—in the U.S. and Ghana. Because of the temporal and emotional displacement the trade created for the descendants of enslaved people, Hartman likens Diasporic Africans to “orphaned children” who are “stranger[s]” in both the United States and in Africa who reside in an “unbridgeable gulf between stranger and kin.”20

Ultimately, Lose Your Mother reflects on the ways that people of African descent remember slavery.21 In her attempts to understand how the trans-Atlantic slave trade took

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19 Ibid., 117, 73.
21 Ibid., 29, 3-4, 164.
shape and is remembered throughout the Ghana, Hartman is confronted with silence from many Ghanaians. Among Diasporic Africans, she recognizes a desire to “belong” as either visitors or repatriates to the country.

While the works of Eichstedt and Small, Austen, Bailey, and Hartman address the intersections of histories and memories of the slave trade in specific geographic regions, this project connects, compares, and contrasts conversations about the slave trade and slavery in Diasporic spaces on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Specifically, this thesis examines the intersections of history, memory, “rememory,” and silence regarding discussions on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery at historic sites in Ghana and Virginia. Historical sites in Ghana, such as Elmina Castle, and Williamsburg in Virginia represent places on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean that marked the beginning of the slave trade in Africa and slavery in early North America. Not only are these locations important because of the role that they played in the formation and maintenance of slavery, they are significant because they memorialize slavery in the contemporary Atlantic World.

Case Studies—Elmina Castle and Williamsburg

The complex relationship between Africans along the Atlantic coast of Africa and Europeans was marked by the arrival of the Portuguese in the Gold Coast, the area presently known as Ghana. These relationships began as early as the 1440s and were solidified by the establishment of São Jorge da Mina, commonly known as Elmina Castle. Built in 1482—and representing the first European-built structure in sub-Saharan Africa—Elmina Castle was established to store goods and to facilitate their exchange
between African and Portuguese traders. However, by the late 16th century, Elmina Castle evolved from a warehouse for the storage of goods to a dungeon which housed Africans as slaves for sale in the Americas. Elmina Castle came to represent the place whereby the trade shifted from the exchange of items to the buying and selling of African bodies.

Similar to slave dungeons along the west coast of Africa, colonial North America is significant because it houses many of the ports that received enslaved people from the continent and elsewhere in the Americas. Virginia is particularly important because the colony facilitated and nurtured race-based slavery. Although Massachusetts, in 1641, was the first colony to legalize slavery, in 1640, Virginia was the first colony in British North America to sentence a person of African descent, John Punch, to indefinite servitude. Furthermore, between 1699 and 1780, Williamsburg, Virginia, stood as the second colonial capital following the Jamestown settlement. Williamsburg is unique because it represented a paradox—on the eve of the American Revolution its citizens were confronted with questions of freedom, independence, and bondage. Specifically, while many white settlers fought for independence and freedom from England, Williamsburg simultaneously embraced and tightened its hold on race-based slavery. Not only do Elmina Castle and Williamsburg reflect historical spaces as memories of the past, they are historical markers which contribute to contemporary understandings of the formation of slavery in Ghana and colonial North America.

This thesis considers the contemporary interpretations of Elmina Castle and Williamsburg, the implications behind these interpretations, and the ways that the histories of these sites are packaged for different audiences. A comparative analysis of how Elmina and Williamsburg are interpreted by site administrators and the people that
live in and around these sites is conducted to explore how both locations are memorialized and how they call for guests to (re)interpret and understand the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. Parallels between Elmina Castle and Williamsburg are drawn to explore narratives presented on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean about the experiences of enslaved Africans in the Americas. The intentions of this project are to assess how narratives regarding the experiences of enslaved people of African descent are highlighted or silenced, placed in the forefront or background, and valorized or devalued at various historical sites in the Atlantic World.

Methodological Devices

As the parameters for this study were outlined, it was necessary to draw on a wide range of methodologies from many disciplines to assess memories of the slave trade and slavery at Elmina Castle and Williamsburg. The methodologies that this work references are ethnographic and archival based. As there are many problems and limitations with both methodologies, careful use of both allowed for an exploration of the diverse ways that the slave trade is interpreted and presented in the Atlantic World.

Simply defined as “a narrative that describes a culture or part of a culture,” there is no definitive or absolute way of defining or conducting “good ethnography.” As ethnographers are called to use whatever tools are available to them in order to understand how groups and/or individuals give meaning to their lives, ethnographic research calls for a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, participant

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observations, interviews, surveys, and video and audio recording of various events or phenomenon. Under any circumstance however, ethnographers must be critical of their intentions; specifically, researchers must practice “critical ethnography” whereby they “must not only critique the notion of subjectivity, but must also critique the notion of subjectivity as well.” Thus, ethnographers have the responsibility of looking inward—in an effort to understanding themselves—prior to making attempts to understand others.

As ethnographers are to enter the field with an “open mind,” the notion of an “open mind” is one of the major pitfalls with ethnographic research. Specifically, the reality of subjectivity undermines attempts at empiricism and objectivity. As people approach events and circumstances with their own intellectual, social, cultural, political, and economic worldviews, it is difficult for any two people to view any single event or phenomenon through the same lens. Although ethnography presents many challenges for the researcher and the group being observed, ethnographic methodologies can provide a wealth of information on contemporary conceptualizations of the past. Particularly, in this project, ethnographic methods have been useful in attempts to capture present-day conversations circulating about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Particularly, participation observation allowed for an exploration of naturally occurring conversations between the sites’ guests and historical interpreters. Moreover, interviews, assessment of oral traditions, analyses of the written and visual material distributed at these sites, and video and audio recordings, allowed for an understanding of contemporary narratives about the trade.

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As histories on the continent of Africa are transmitted orally, much of this project heavily relied on verbal messages conveyed about the implications of slavery and the slave trade. The devices employed during visits to various historical sites throughout Ghana called for conversations with site administrators about local and oral narratives regarding the emergence and development of the region. Other methods utilized included tape-recorded interviews with administrators, analyses of written and visual material distributed throughout the country, and an assessment of Ghana’s national initiative was conducted.

While Williamsburg is also an historic site, narratives about the past are constructed and presented in different ways. Whereas information about the slave trade in Ghana was collected via guided tours and etc, information for Williamsburg was gathered in a different manner. Since Williamsburg is a living history museum—where narratives of slavery are conveyed via historical reenactments—data was collected through personal observations and video recordings of reenactments, demonstrations, and presentations. These methods were employed in an effort to explore the ways that the guests of Williamsburg are encouraged to orientate towards various fixtures of the site.

At both sites, written and visual information distributed to the guests was collected to assess the messages that guests were encouraged to take away from the sites. Also, archival research preceded visits to each site in order to evaluate the ways that Elmina and Williamsburg were discussed and referenced by the historical actors that inhabited these spaces. Employing an array of methods allowed for an exploration of the ways that narratives about the trade and slavery are conveyed at sites throughout the Atlantic World. The above methodologies proved useful for this study because they have
provided insight into historical narratives and contemporary understandings about slavery and the slave trade delivered at Elmina Castle and Williamsburg. When used in concert, these methodologies allowed for an investigation of how guests’ attentions were directed to and away from various features of the sites.

Chapter one explores the ways that the slave trade is represented at various historical sites throughout Ghana. Specifically, this chapter discusses the factors that contribute to narratives about the slave trade which are circulated throughout the country. This section acknowledges the silences surrounding the slave trade, the sources of the silence, and the impact of silence on continental and Diasporic Africans. This chapter achieves the above objectives by assessing how local narratives, governmental policies, and tourism informs how guests of Elmina Castle, and other historical sites in the country, come to conceptualize and identify with West African peoples and their ancestors participation in the trade.

Chapter two is a discussion of the ways in which narratives about freedom and slavery are discussed at Williamsburg, Virginia, a living history museum. On the eve of the American Revolution, the white planter class of Virginia was confronted with issues of independence from British or the acceptance of mercantilism. Enslaved people of the colony also considered the possibilities of freedom and self-determination; however, unlike their white counterparts who fought in the American Revolution for economic and political independence, enslaved people of African descent fought for their physical liberation from bondage.

This chapter serves to describe the ways that administrators and historical reenactors at Williamsburg interpret and depict conversations that took place among the
black and white communities on the eve of the American Revolution. Analyzing two reenactments—one among white men regarding their response to the Dunmore Proclamation, and another among the enslaved community regarding their hopes for freedom—this section explores the staging of these reenactments and the ways that the sites’ guests are encouraged to participate in these demonstrations.

This thesis explores the different ways that guests of Elmina Castle and Williamsburg are encouraged to engage and participate in narratives about the slave trade. Moreover, these chapters reveal the factors that influence the interpretations and narratives delivered at these sites; they also explore how different messages are conveyed about the same historical phenomena. This thesis is a comparative analysis of the ways that narratives of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are discussed in Diasporic spaces. Particularly, this study highlights how messages about the slave trade and slavery are conveyed in various venues throughout the Atlantic World.
CHAPTER ONE:

“IF THERE IS ANY TREASURE HIDDEN IN THESE VAST WALLS, I’M SURE THAT IT HAS A SHEEN THAT OUTSHINES GOLD:”

PILGRIMMAGE TO GHANA:

“But the question is, why didn’t anybody stop them?... If nobody did stop them, let us unite in unity [to] stop them now. For no amount of [sic], of comfort, or reparation will be big enough to compensate for the errors of the slave trade. This is the plain truth.25

Celebrating its independence on March 6, 1957, Ghana, formally known as the Gold Coast, represents the first post-independent state in Africa to earn its independence from a European power. Immediately before and after its independence, Ghana served as a metaphorical and real rallying point around which people of African descent could unite in their demands for liberation, equality, justice and self-determination. The people that visited the Ghana prior to and after its independence were from different walks of life, and had varying intentions and visions for the newly independent country. For example, Richard Wright, in 1953, visited the Gold Coast prior to its independence to witness and

record the political transformations of the colonial state. Others, including Martin Luther King Jr., Lucille Armstrong and Ralph Bunche, traveled to the country to partake in independence festivities; in subsequent years, W.E.B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Julian Mayfield sought exile in Ghana. Finally, many Diasporic Africans relocated to Ghana to repatriate to the continent from which they were displaced.26

Although many visitors and expatriates left Ghana directly following the coup that forced Kwame Nkrumah into exile, their dedication to Pan-Africanism did not end. Rather, their devotion to the Diaspora was marked by their commitment to programs that sought alternative ways to link the history of Africa and the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the African Diaspora. Sylvia Boone, a former expatriate of Ghana, returned to the United States as a professor at Yale where she facilitated the 150th anniversary of the Amistad uprising. Dr. Robert Lee, also a former expatriate, is noted for his efforts to restore castles and forts along the Atlantic coast of Ghana.27 The works of these individuals have contributed to today’s influx of Diasporic Africans to the country to visit its castle, forts, and most notably, its slave dungeons. The 1950s and 1960s not only marked the fight for independence and self-determination throughout the Africana World, it also reflected a time when Diasporic Africans would turn to Africa to understand the intersections between the past and the present.

Ghana continues to serve as a point of destination for Diasporic Africans. Unlike those who visited the country in the 1950s and 1960s principally for politically-inspired

27 Ibid., 245.
reasons, today, Diasporic Africans visit Ghana with a wider range of goals and aspirations. According to Edward Bruner, “African Americans [visit] Ghana in a quest for their roots”—an attempt for them to understand their place of origin prior to the slave trade. In fact, the demography of people who visit and repatriate to Ghana includes a disproportionate number of African Americans in comparison to other Diasporic Africans. Moreover, whether it is the 1950s, the 1960s, or the present, people of African descent have taken, and will continue to take, the trek to the continent to either visit or repatriate to the land from which their ancestors were displaced. As Ghana represents one of the major points of embarkation for enslaved Africans destined for the New World, it embraces many narratives about the intersections of history, memory, and “rememory” for continental and Diasporic Africans.

Visitors to Ghana are unavoidably influenced by Ghanaian perceptions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The ways that Ghanaians remember and retell events leading up to, during, and following the slave trade are crucial to understanding how Ghanaians situate themselves and their history within the larger framing of the creation of the Atlantic World. Thus, when assessing the experiences of Diasporic Africans who visit Ghana, it is important to consider how Ghanaians repackage the pre- and post-colonial history of the region among themselves and for repatriates and visitors. The ways that Ghanaians conceptualize the history of their country, with respect to the trans-Atlantic

slave trade, can either inform or misinform visitors about how they should identify, or connect to the trade. Given the potential influence that Ghanaians have on shaping how Diasporic Africans identify with the slave trade, critical assessments of what is said, what is emphasized, and the spaces of historical silence which limit these Diasporic dialogues are necessary. In addition, an evaluation of the ways that information is presented allows for scholars to understand how Ghanaians influence Diasporic Africans perceptions of the Atlantic slave trade. This chapter aims to understand how various messages conveyed at historical sites throughout Ghana impact the ways that continental Africans, Diasporic Africans, and persons from other parts of the world identify with the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Historical sites throughout the country including, but not limited to, Assin Manso, Salaga, the Maniyha Palace, Fort Amsterdam (Kromantse), and Elmina Castle, Cape Coast Castle, and Christianborg Castle, not only represent fortifications that serve as proof of events that happened centuries ago, they also represent spaces that reflect the intersections of the past and present as they embrace histories, memories, and performances of prior events. The messages conveyed at slave sites are important because they inform how the site’s guests interpret and digest the events that took place in these spaces; these narratives also play a significant role in shaping and informing collective and individual identities, and contemporary conceptualizations of the self in relation to the past and the present. This chapter seeks to explore the circumstances under which Diasporic Africans have visited Ghana and the intersections between history, memory, performance, land, and identity they encountered. By assessing the narratives
delivered at the Maniyha Palace, and Elmina and Cape Coast Castles, in addition to a close reading of the texts, films and literature disseminated at these sites and throughout the country, this chapter investigates the implications of these narratives.

A plethora of material exist which can be used to analyze the messages delivered at various fortifications throughout Ghana. However, the most important narratives to consider are the ones delivered by the tour guides, the films and literature produced and distributed at these sites, and materials produced or distributed by the Ghanaian government and Ghanaian scholars—as these items are often consumed by guests from the Diasporic community. Referencing a variety of texts and films distributed by Ghana’s Department of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, site administrators, and the memoirs of individuals who have visited the country prior to and after its independence, this chapter will evaluate narratives about the emergence and evolution of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that are conveyed in Ghana.

Historiographical Paradigms of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the different messages conveyed at historical spaces via oral narratives and written materials distributed throughout Ghana that directly and/or indirectly discuss the implications of the trade. The case studies provided in this section shed light on the intersectionalities of history, memory, “rememory,” and performances, and the ways that these features shape continental and Diasporic African identities. Paying close attention to the ways that the trans-Atlantic slave trade is discussed, an analysis of material collected in Ghana and an assessment of
the narratives told by Ghanaian tour guides will provide insights into the ways in which Ghanaians conceptualize their own history. Furthermore, participant observations, interviews, and content analyses during a recent trip to Ghana reveal the implications of history and memory within the Diasporic African community. 30

The historiography of the trans-Atlantic slave trade has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. Specifically, discourse on the role that Africans played in the slave trade and the lens used to evaluate relationships between Africans and Europeans have evolved radically. Prior to the 1960s many discussions on the slave trade were monopolized by the Eurocentric school of thought—Europeans were posed as having initiated and sustained any and all trade to and from the continent of Africa. At the wake of the 1960s however, a Revisionists model emerged where scholars such as Basil Davidson, James Duffy, and Walter Rodney argued that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was, in fact, one-sided and had negative consequences for Africa. In this model, Africans and Europeans are juxtaposed as binary opposites with respect to their involvement in the trade. On the one hand, Africans are identified as victims and passive participants in the slave trade; on the other hand, Europeans are depicted as the aggressors who, single-handedly, controlled all aspects of the trade. 31

The discussion of the Atlantic slave trade was later revised by Neo-Revisionist scholars—a school of thought embraced by David Eltis, John Thornton, Elliot Skinner, George Brooks, among others—who “contend that Africans were a key source of

30 I visited Ghana for approximately three weeks in the summer of 2008.
dynamism, action, and change in Atlantic World commerce.” According to Neo-
Revisionists, initial interactions between Africans and Europeans were based on equality
and respect, however, after the 1870s, these relationships changed as Europeans engaged
in “empire building.” Unlike its predecessors, the Neo-Revisionist model gives agency
to Africans by acknowledging the roles that both Africans and Europeans played in the
slave trade.

Not only does the literature produced and distributed at historical sites contribute
to the historiography of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, materials distributed from Ghana’s
Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations also shapes narratives about the trade. This
new approach in the historiography of the trade can be described as a variation of
“indigenous historiography”—“the production of popular historical literature in Africa,
produced locally, often in non-western languages by individuals and collectivities
believing in their past, giving themselves their own histories which tell of those pasts, and
which have meaning, authority, and significance for local populations.” While the
“indigenous historiography” gives agency to local populations, this chapter also assesses
the ways that the Ghanaian government interjects narratives about the slave trade which
often differ from local narratives.

Assessing materials distributed in Ghana provides a means for understanding how
Ghanaians conceptualize particular historical occurrences within the context of local,

32 Ibid., 52.
33 E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, “From African Historiographies to an African Philosophy of History,”
in Africanizing Knowledge: African Studies Across the Disciplines, eds. Toyin Falola and Christian
national, and international histories. The films and texts circulated throughout Ghana speak to the ways that the slave trade is understood and interpreted by Ghanaian scholars, intellectuals, and governmental enterprises. Few of the texts, films, and narratives circulated throughout the country give African agency when discussing the birth and development of the Atlantic slave trade. In fact, much material tends to juxtapose African involvement and European participation—Africans are typically depicted as passively accepting their situation and Europeans are posed as having single-handedly orchestrated the trade.

The film “The Forts and Castles of Ghana” provides an overview of the different fortifications established along the Atlantic coast of Ghana, their founders and purposes. Narrated by actor Danny Glover, this documentary represents a revisionist narrative of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Specifically, a reenactment in the film staged at Cape Coast Castle, chronicles initial meetings between the Portuguese and African leaders; this performance reveals an interesting narrative of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as interpreted by the African Resurgence Theatre Company. The reenactment portrays Africans as having been pressured by Europeans to allow them to build forts and to spread Christianity. Specifically, the reenactors illustrate how African leaders generously volunteered Africans as workers, at which time the narrator states “Freely did we offered our labor, thinking that we were expressing our traditional African hospitality. Little did we know that we were digging our own graves. Before we realized it, it was too late.”

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While this reenactment depicts the roles that Europeans played in establishing themselves along the Atlantic coast of Africa and how the exchange of materials shifted to the human trade, it does not reveal the role that some Africans played in promoting the slave trade. In fact, the Company posed Africans as victims to the deceitful and treacherous intentions of Europeans. This reenactment fails to convey how some Africans willingly participated in the slave trade and the conditions of their involvement. There is no discussion, nor are there depictions, of how Africans provided European slavers with slaves who were prisoners of war, criminals, or debtors. Furthermore, the reenactment does not reveal how Europeans manipulated tensions between rivaling African groups to produce slaves. Summarily, the film provides little space for African agency as it ends with a very emotional narrator stating: “The question is, why didn’t anybody stop them?”35 This question is a prime example of how the theatre company endorsed the notion that Africans were victims, not actors, in the slave trade. Similar to the film “The Forts and Castles of Ghana,” written texts also tend to misconstrue aspects of the exchange.

The debate among scholars regarding African involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade has changed significantly over the years. Although the 1960s marked a period in which African history was written about in a positive light, few texts accurately discussed the Atlantic slave trade and even fewer incorporated African agency and participation. For example, in Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa, A.W. Lawrence’s discussion of slave castles and forts in West Africa only includes an evaluation of the

35 Ibid.
architectural style and transformations of these fortifications. Lawrence does not explain why these fortifications were built, nor does he describe the events that took place in and around them; instead, his text is limited to a discussion about the aesthetics of the structures.

In *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, Albert van Dantzig tends to focus on the structural evolution of the forts, dungeons, and castles located along the Atlantic coast of Ghana. A majority of the text is dedicated to discussions about tensions and fighting among Europeans powers for control over these structures. Similar to Lawrence, Dantzig does not explain the reasons behind Europeans’ desires to occupy such spaces. When the trade is mentioned, the discussion of the items for sale is ambiguous, and in many instances superficial, as Dantzig describes European quest for occupation as being driven by the desire for “exotic goods.” Unlike Lawrence, Dantzig provides some explanation about how these edifices came into being. Also, Dantzig gives agency to African people’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade by asserting that “Nearly all the forts were built with the consent, sometimes at the urgent request, of the local chiefs and people. It would be wrong to idealise the relationship between African and Europeans in those days, but it cannot be denied that they traded with each other basically on a footing of equality.”

While the previously mentioned works reflect changes in the ways that African agency and involvement were integrated into the historiography of the trans-Atlantic

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38 Ibid., xiv.
slave trade, books and pamphlets written by intellectuals and site administrators at various slave sites in Ghana today reflect a combination of accurate and erroneous information. For example, Ato Ashun’s *Elmina, The Castle and The Slave Trade* and Kingsley Kofi Yeboah’s *A Guide to the Cape Coast Castle* give very different interpretations of the slave trade.\(^{39}\) Not only does Ashun’s work expound on the historical background of Elmina Castle and the people that lived in and around the township, he also acknowledges the different stakeholders involved in the trade. By making sure to stress African involvement in the trade, Ashun gives African people agency by demonstrating their efforts to embrace and reject the trade.

While *Elmina, The Castle and The Slave* is a comprehensive text on the evolution of Elmina Castle, its occupiers and tenants, Yeboah’s work is a choppy, anachronistic and scattered text about the origin, history, and legacy of Cape Coast Castle. Not only does *A Guide to the Cape Coast Castle* provide a distorted narration of the functions of the castle, the text is full of contradictions and sweeping claims about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For instance, Yeboah claims that “The first reason for the existence of slavery was that, in Africa, partly because of lack of machines and money to pay servants, there was the need for Domestic Slaves.” In addition, he asserts that “In the Dungeon, they slept on straw or mats” and that “the female[s] prepare[d] traditional food to feed the whole family.”\(^{40}\) Yeboah misconstrues the reasons for the emergence of the slave trade and he


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 23, 31.
undermines the experiences of enslaved Africans during their tenure at Cape Coast Castle. The faulty narrative that Yeboah provides can have seriously negative implications for people who visit Cape Coast and purchase his text.

Not only do the texts by Ashun and Yeboah provide specific narratives about the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Ghanaian government also disseminates its own narrative about the trade. Distributed in 2007 to celebrate Ghana’s 50th year of independence, the 200th anniversary of the act that abolished the trans-Atlantic slave trade of 1807, and the commencement of the Joseph Project, Ghana’s *Official Tourist Guide: A Golden Experience* is a reference book which includes information about in-country tourist opportunities, and briefings on the historical, social, and cultural aspects of Ghana. Regarding the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the guide creates binaries between Europeans and Africans participation in the trade—Europeans are posed as the evildoers while Africans are depicted as the victims and recipients of maltreatment. The sections entitled “Forts and Castles” and “History of Slavery,” neglects to acknowledge or even allude to the fact that Africans willingly participated in the slave trade. Through graphic language, the guide paints an image of how “[Africans] were extracted from their paths of development separated from their kith and kin and transplanted to foreign lands under a system of slavery.” Through this language, Ghana’s *Official Tourist Guide* attempts to appeal to the emotions of its audience—specifically Diasporic Africans. Moreover, with respect to the implementation of the Joseph Project, the Ghanaian government’s objective is to “use the year to bring together, more closely, people in Ghana and brothers and sisters in the Diaspora and establish herself as the true gateway to the Homeland for
Africans in the Diaspora.”

Ironically, while the voice of Africans as participants in the slave trade is silenced, the displacement of millions of people is acknowledged with the intentions of encouraging Diasporic Africans to visit the country.

With the intent of redeeming Ghanaian history, the Joseph Project seeks to “reconcile and unite the African Peoples so that their positive spirit and strengths are released in a focused manner to elevate Africa and Africans worldwide.”

Although the objective of the Project is to unite Diasporic Africans, the Project has many shortcomings. Modeled after the Biblical story of Joseph, there are many aspects of Joseph’s story that the Joseph Project neglects to embrace and convey. As Joseph was favored by his father, and praised for his ability to interpret dreams, he was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. By selling Joseph into slavery, his brothers hoped that they would never see him again. In fact, Joseph’s brothers were conscious of slavery and its hardships as they debated on whether or not to kill or sell him—implying that death was comparable to slavery. After years of enslavement, Joseph ultimately obtains his freedom and is elevated to Administrator of Egypt because of his ability to interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh and his officers. As administrator, Joseph guides his constituency and neighboring empires through times of surplus and famine at which time he provides his brothers with food—the brothers who sold him into slavery.

The founders of the Joseph Project narrowly focus on the life trajectory of Joseph after he becomes the overseer of Egypt. As narrated in the Bible, in an effort to find food

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42 Ibid., 156.
43 Gen. 37-45 KJV.
due to a food shortage that plagued the land, Joseph’s brothers unknowingly sought food from him at which time Joseph selflessly provided his brothers with provisions. The story of Joseph is one of how forgiveness is to supersede betrayal. Similar to the Biblical account of Joseph, the Joseph Project also attempts to reconcile past atrocities (between continental and Diasporic Africans); however, the Project departs from Joseph’s narrative because the founders of the Joseph Project seek to bring tourism dollars into Ghana. In fact, the Joseph Project has two components. On the surface, the Project is packaged in such a way that entices Diasporic Blacks to make a pilgrimage to Ghana to “re-establish a kinship [:]” however, the ultimate objective of the Project is to stimulate Ghana’s economy by encouraging Diasporic Africans to invest in the country.44

While the Joseph Project aims to encourage “a pilgrimage to Ghana, one that every African in the Diaspora must undertake at least once in their lifetime,” the Project misconstrues and manipulates the narrative of Joseph’s life.”45 The Project does not address how Joseph was consciously and purposefully sold into slavery by his brothers, whose intentions were to never see him again. Instead, the Joseph Project simply encourages Diasporic Africans to return to their “homeland” to provide for, support, and reconcile with the continent and the people as “Every Joseph must return home.”46 The Project undermines African participation in the slave trade, and instead, focuses on the ways that Diasporic Africans can and should contribute financially to the development of Ghana. In fact, by focusing on the types of relationships that Diasporic Africans should

44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
cultivate with the Ghanaian economy, the Project diminishes the impact and magnitude of the trade; as a consequence, the evolution and development of the trade is silenced. Through the Joseph Project, the Ghanaian government creates a silence surrounding the voluntary and involuntary participants of the slave trade along its Atlantic coast in an effort to attract international investors.

The information about the Joseph Project is embedded in Ghana’s *Official Tourist Guide*. The pilgrimage does not stand alone; instead, it is connected to tourism and the stimulation of Ghana’s economy. While the Project is discussed in the pages of the guidebook, the guide’s primary purpose is to advertise premiere hotels to promote tourist attractions and restaurants, to encourage exploration of arts and cultural practices and centers, and to provide a brief introduction to the country’s history. For instance, in the front jacket of the guide, the Minister of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, J.O. Obetsebi-Lamptey, is quoted saying: “As a Bird Watcher’s Paradise, and Eco-Tourist’s Haven, a Cultural Delight, a Heritage lover’s Passion and an Adventurer’s Dream, Ghana has a little bit of everything that will excite anyone, and has become Africa’s best kept Tourist secret.”

Local Narratives Circulated about the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

While many Diasporic Africans travel to Ghana to explore the country, view slave routes and visit historical sites, the narratives delivered at these locations embrace the trans-Atlantic slave trade in different ways. In fact, the narratives circulated throughout

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47 Ibid., 2.
Ghana range from discussions about the equal footing that Africans and Europeans had in the trade, to depictions of Africans as victims and Europeans as antagonist; at some sites, narratives about the Atlantic slave trade are absent. Visits to sites including, but not limited to, the Maniyha Palace, and Elmina and Cape Coast Castles provided first-hand experiences and understandings about Ghanaian perceptions of the evolution and maintenance of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Ethnographic research and interviews serve as evidence for assessing the messages delivered at these sites.\footnote{Again, I visited Ghana in 2008 for approximately three weeks during the months of June and July. My visit allowed me the opportunity to visit historical sites that played crucial roles in shaping and maintaining the shipment of African bodies across the Atlantic Ocean.}

The Maniyha Palace—a living quarters sponsored by the British for Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I to dwell in after his return to the Gold Coast after 28 years of exile—exemplifies a site where tour guides neglect to discuss the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As guided tours offer explanations of the life of Prempeh I, prior to, during, and after his forced exile to the Seychelles Islands, the historical interpreters at the Palace avoid dialogues on the slave trade. For instance, a typical tour at the Maniyha Palace begins with an explanation of the conjuring of the Golden Stool and the birth of the Asante Empire, and jumps to a discussion on Britain’s attempts to undermine and dismantle the Asante Empire.

Although the Maniyha Palace was established decades after the abolition of the international slave trade, an investigation of the narratives conveyed about the slave trade, or lack of, at this site are important to consider since guided tours at the Palace begin with the formation of the Asante Empire. Since the Asante Empire was a major

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supplier of enslaved African people, a discussion about the slave trade should be conveyed at this site in order to provide a holistic depiction of the relationship between the Gold Coast, and Britain and other European countries.

As Elmina and Cape Coast Castles are popular destinations for Diasporic Africans, and some people of European descent, a series of interviews conducted with Ghanaian tour guides at each site provides insight into the objectives of guided tours. During these interviews, the guides shared how all guests received the same basic information which included a narration of the events that took place in the dungeons, an explanation of how enslaved people ended up at the dungeons, and an account of the people who were enslaved and shipped to the Americas. One interviewee explained how the sharing of this basic information was imperative because if such basic details were not conveyed, guests would be inclined to ask more questions.

While there are standard facts given to the touring groups, a number of factors inform the trajectory of a specific tour. For example, an interviewee at Elmina Castle revealed how the questions posed by guests dictated the depth of the tour and the topics discussed. Another interviewee stressed the importance of using accurate language when depicting the nature of the experiences of enslaved men, women and children while in the dungeons. For instance, the guide explained how the use of the word “rape” more

49 Over the course of a day, I interviewed four Ghanaian tour guides at Elmina and Cape Coast Castles to get an understanding about their experiences as historical interpreters and the messages they deliver to their guests. Of the ten questions asked during my interviews, three questions—“Given the limitations of time, how do you decide what to tell and what not to tell during your tours?”; “During your tours, what is the most important message that you want your visitor to take away?”; and “How familiar are you with the guests that visit the site?”—provided the most insight into the messages that these tour guides conveyed about the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in Ghana. See appendix A for a list of all the questions posed.
accurately defined the sexual abuse that European male slavers and traders exercised over enslaved African women. In fact, the interviewee critiqued those who minimized these unwarranted sexual liaisons by describing them as “abuse” and instances where European slavers “slept with [slaves].” The term “rape” speaks to the unwanted sexual advances and the dynamics of power within the dungeons and castles. Thus, a word other than “rape” undermines the sexual abuse enslaved African women encountered.

Guests of Elmina Castle travel from different parts of the world to visit the site for different reasons. According to the testimonies of historical interpreters at Elmina Castle, Diasporic Africans visit Elmina, and Ghana in general, in an effort to reconnect with their “ancestral roots.” Due to “the drive for people to see what [they] have in the country,” Ghanaians visit Elmina Castle, and finally, people of Europeans descent visit the castle as either students on a study/travel abroad program, or as members of a volunteering organization. Furthermore, with regards to some of the visitors of European descent, the interviewees expressed how the slave castle and dungeons are not their primary reason for visiting the country; rather, the guides shared how many people of European descent visit the site simply because they happened to be in the area.

The most recurrent themes that surfaced during interviews at Elmina Castle were the difference in reactions to the tours between African Americans, Jamaicans, guests of European descent, and Ghanaians. In fact, during the course of the interviews conducted

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50 Ibid.
51 My interviewees employed the terms “Europeans” and “white Americans” interchangeably to describe guests from Europe and the United States. For the purposes of this paper, the phrase “guests of European descent” is employed when referring to white Americas (from the United States) and those of European descent who reside in Europe.
for this project, interviewees arrived at the conclusion that African Americans tended to be very emotional upon hearing the events that transpired at the dungeons. They were identified as having asked many and specific questions about the experiences of Africans and, in general, they showed more interest in the site in comparison to other visitors.

Moreover, African Americans were described as having expressed anger upon seeing various features of the castle painted over and other people behaving disrespectfully at the site. By layering the outer walls of the castle with coats of white paint, many African Americans were described as feeling as though the atrocities committed and realized at the site were being sanitized and washed away with coats of paint. Moreover, others are described as believing that the slave dungeons in Elmina Castle are sacred spaces as they separated families, and represented death, abuse, and the commodification of African bodies. Therefore, giggling, laughter, loud talking, and inappropriate conversations and comments are frowned on. Whereas African Americans are also noted for calling into question the measures that the Ghanaian government take in their efforts to preserve the site’s history, Jamaicans on the other hand, were identified as “quick to react violently” towards other guests.52 They were described as fervent advocates against the idea of paying an admission fee to enter the site, and quick to pose a “smashing of questions” towards the tour guides.53

Guests of European descent had a number of characteristics associated with their visits and reactions to Elmina castle. On the one hand, interviewees identified them as

52 Although Diasporic Africans from many countries in the Caribbean visit Elmina Castle, my interviewees voluntarily talked about their experiences with and the reactions of Jamaicans.
having asked “irresponsible questions,” and having no consideration for the atrocities that took place in that space. On the other hand, in some instances, guests of European descent were identified as being guilt-ridden and apologetic towards other Diasporic Africans on their touring group. An interviewee at Elmina Castle revealed how some guests of European descent have expressed shame, in addition to having acknowledged the ways that they reaped the benefits of the trade. Another interviewee shared an instance where upon approaching the Door of No Return, some white patrons asked to be directed to the toilet at which time they left the tour and never returned. Afterwards, the tour guide noticed them walking around the outskirts of the castle.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, some interviewees explained how Ghanaians who live in and around the area are interested in the site; however, not much was said about their reactions to the space.\textsuperscript{55}

Given the diversity in the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of guests of Elmina and Cape Coast Castles, and the assortment of reactions experienced by these groups, tour guides often find themselves segregating tour groups according to their backgrounds when possible. A guide at Elmina Castle described the challenges he encountered when giving tours to groups where Diasporic Africans outnumbered white guests. Specifically, he revealed how varying emotional reactions created tensions among members of the touring group; in an effort to avoid conflict the interviewee explained how he makes an effort to keep touring groups segregated. While groups are segregated to lessen any

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} From my own observations during a visit to Elmina Castle, I noticed that Ghanaiian groups were relatively lively and loquacious when touring Elmina Castle. Specifically, I observed much chatter and laughter among Ghanaiian touring groups. In general, my interviewees did not have much to say about Ghanaiian touring groups.
potential problems or friction that may arise during a tour, there are major differences in the ways that guests experience the same site. Given that the questions asked on a tour dictate the trajectory or depth of a tour, tours can take a variety of paths. Therefore, regardless of the basic facts that all guests receive while on a tour, the intentional segregation of the touring groups, according to the guests’ ethnic backgrounds, implies that guided tours are inherently different.

Moreover, differences in understandings about the trans-Atlantic slave trade often present challenges during tours. For example, guests from the African Diaspora are known to ask their guide about his religious beliefs; for them, asking such question often determines the legitimacy of the guide and the narrative he conveyed. For instance, a guide at Elmina Castle explained how, upon arriving at the Dutch Reformed Church located above the female dungeon, guests occasionally ask if he is a Christian. If the guide responded in the affirmative, the legitimacy of his narrative was often undermined as the guests would proceed to question how and why he would practice the religion of European slavers. In addition, guests’ preconceived notions about the slave trade can also disrupt the trajectory of a tour. On one occasion, a guide revealed how a guest told him that he was lying regarding the involvement of Africans in the slave trade during a tour. Not only did the guest challenge the guide in front of other tourists, he also requested that the guide identify his sources.
Contemporary Interpretations of Slave Sites throughout Ghana

Given that Ghana’s visitors consist of an overwhelming number of Diasporic Africans, the duration of this section seeks to compile and synthesize the experiences of Diasporic Africans during their visits as narrated in memoirs and other texts. As previously mentioned, Ghana has witnessed two waves of visitors from the African Diaspora population. Although the nature and the individual circumstances that called for visits to Elmina and Cape Coast Castles differ tremendously, an assessment regarding the ways that sites’ guests identify with the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be made.

On the eve of the Gold Coast’s independence, the Gold Coast witnessed a great flux of Africans throughout the Diaspora with visions for the future for Ghana and the African Diaspora as a whole. In response to the move towards independence and the circulation of ideas of Pan-Africanism—fathered by W.E.B. Du Bois and supported by Kwame Nkrumah—attempts to unify all persons of African descent from around the world were made. As a consequence of Ghana’s independence, intellectual, political, and scholarly figures including, but not limited to, W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois, Louis and Lucille Armstrong, Malcolm X, Julian Mayfield, Lorraine Hansberry, Maya Angelou, Pauli Murray, Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, Ralph Bunche, A. Philip Randolph, George Padmore, Adam Clayton Powell, Norman Manley repatriated to, and/or worked towards building Ghana’s government. Scores of Diasporic Africans flocked to Ghana during a time when the world was recuperating from World War II, witnessing a call for the end of Jim Crowism in the United States, experiencing the rise of
tensions between the U.S. and Soviet Union, and when Africans throughout the continent were demanding their independence from European colonizers.

The experiences of Richard Wright, Maya Angelou, Anne C. Bailey and Saidiya Hartman, reveal how the socio-political and economic conditions of Ghana, and their interactions with those who lived in and around Elmina and Cape Coast Castles informed their reactions to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These personal narratives and literary works provide a look into the ways that Diasporic Africans receive and digest their experiences while in the Gold Coast and the newly independent Ghana. Not only do the narratives of these individuals reveal their personal experiences, they also speak to larger discussions about the intersections of history and memory, and themes of identity, silence, memory, and performance. Specifically, whereas the narratives of Richard Wright and Maya Angelou provide insight into their interpretations of the country’s political, economic, and social atmosphere directly before and after its independence, the works of Saidiya Hartman and Ann C. Bailey sheds light on the implications of the slave trade for contemporary Diasporic African populations who Ghana.

Richard Wright, an African American novelist and intellectual, who sought exile in Paris, visited the Gold Coast the year prior to its independence. While in Ghana, Wright’s goal was to document the Gold Coast’s liberation struggle and to share it with the rest of the world in a work entitled *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in the Land of Pathos*. Although there are many shortcomings and disappointments with Wright’s interactions with the inhabitants, and his assessment of the Gold Coast and its people,
Black Power provides a window into the conversations that were taking place in the Gold Coast amongst members of the elite and working class, and British administrators.

Surprisingly however, Wright’s discussion of the slave trade and his reaction to Christiansborg, Cape Coast, and Elmina Castles are briefly mentioned in the last couple of pages of his text. Wright’s lack of empathy and failure to expound on the ways that the locations served as a catalyst for the spread of African people around the world is surprising. Considering that Wright’s positioning in the world as an African American was shaped by the events that transpired at such sites, it is even more surprising that Wright did not provide his audience with a historical or contemporary account of the activities that took place in and around those sites between the 15th and 19th centuries.

Moreover, Wright neglects to document how he felt about the castles. At Christiansborg and Cape Coast Castles, especially, Wright tends to disengage himself by creating a distinction between himself and the people of the region, and the events that took place there during the slave trade. For example, while visiting Christiansborg Castle, Wright allowed an African guard at the site to call him “massa.” Such an interaction was especially odd and ironic given that the dungeon represented the place that birthed master-slave relations between Europeans and Africans in the Americas, as well as the paternalistic relations during colonialism. Wright allowing the guard to refer to him as “massa” perpetuated the ideas of Western supremacy and African inferiority. Allowing the guide to call him “massa” further demonstrated how he too was a victim of

Eurocentricism; Wright who was once the discriminated, judged, and oppressed in the U.S., now becomes the discriminator, judge, and oppressor abroad.

While Wright’s visit to Christiansborg Castle was undermined by Eurocentric ideas and mannerisms, his description of Cape Coast Castle further devalues his deference for past activities that took place at the site. In response to the castle, Wright simply states that the Cape Coast was “less impressive than the castle at Christiansborg.” On the contrary however, his reaction to Elmina Castle is quite different. Wright uses the phrases “awe-inspiring” and “somber but resplendent majesty” to describe the dungeon’s appeal. Furthermore, in contrast to his visits to Christiansborg and Cape Coast Castles, at Elmina Castle, Wright seemed to connect with the slave trade.\textsuperscript{57} Wright culminates his visit to Elmina Castle with his own interpretation of how slaves experienced the trade. Wright concludes by stating:

If there is any treasure hidden in these vast walls, I’m sure that it has a sheen that outshines gold…a shy tear that vanishes at the sound of approaching footsteps, but reappears when all is quiet, hanging there on that black cheek, unredeemed, unappeased—a tear that was hastily brushed off when her arm was grabbed and she was led toward those narrow, dank steps that guided her to the tunnel that directed her feet to the waiting ship that would bear her across the heaving, mist-shrouded Atlantic…\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 340.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 342.
With this description, Wright briefly acknowledges the pain and suffering that enslaved Africans experienced prior to being transported across the Atlantic.

Maya Angelou’s tenure in Ghana (1963-1966) took place after the country gained its independence. Her visit was marked by her work at the University of Ghana’s School of Music and Drama, the Ghanaian Times newspaper, and the Ghanaian Broadcast Corporation. Similar to Wright’s *Black Power*, Angelou’s discussion of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in her memoir is very brief. In fact, much of her text is dedicated to the socio-political atmosphere of Ghana during her visit. However, unlike Wright who does not fully engage the people or the cultures within the Gold Coast, Angelou goes to many lengths to absorb Ghanaian cultures and practices, and to blend in with the people. In the memoir of her travels and experiences while in Africa, Angelou recalls “I didn’t want to remember that I was an American…Not a Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African. The sensation was worth a lie.”\(^5^9\) Angelou’s visit alludes to her desire to reclaim a land and space from which she has been displaced suggests a yearning to find her “roots.”\(^6^0\)

Angelou’s reaction to the country is quite paradoxical. On the one hand, Angelou longs to embrace Ghana and Ghanaians; on the other hand, she rejects sites that embody histories of extraction and displacement. Specifically, although Angelou longs to pass as a Ghanaian woman, she avoids visiting Elmina and Cape Coast Castles—sites that

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\(^6^0\) Bruner, “Tourism in Ghana,” 291.
created and encouraged distance and displacement between her, the African continent, and African people hundreds of years prior. Regarding Cape Coast Castle, Angelou admits “Although many Black Americans had headed for the town as soon as they touched the ground in Ghana, I successfully avoided it for a year.” Angelou’s intentional avoidance and Wright’s seemingly disinterest in the slave dungeons indicated how they struggled to come to terms with what the sites mean to them. More specifically, their reactions speak to how they chose to identify with the histories of the castles and slave dungeons within. Does Wright’s disinterest at one site and interest in another project his frustrations with the trade? Does Angelou’s attempt to avoid the slave dungeons indicate a shame associated with not knowing nor being able to identify where she came from? In either case, Wright and Angelou’s seeming rejection of the slave dungeons depicts their sentiments about the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the implications of the slave trade for continental and Diasporic Africans.

Although Ghana has witnessed over 50 years of independence, people will continue to visit Elmina and Cape Coast Castles for a number of reasons. Saidiya Hartman’s Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route reveals why Diasporic Blacks visit the country, and their expectations and realities while in the country. Lose Your Mother traces Hartman’s journeys in Ghana and her effort to gain a better understanding of how slavery is remembered on either side of the Atlantic. While abroad, Hartman’s intentions, to “retrace the process by which lives were destroyed and

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61 Angelou, All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes, 97.
slaves born,” mark her efforts to understand how interpretations of slavery are constructed. While in Ghana, the many encounters that she experiences, both positive and negative, are documented to reveal to her readership how the trans-Atlantic slave trade is conceptualized differently by people of the African Diaspora—including continental Africans, descendants of slaves, and persons who were born abroad but chose to relocate permanently to Africa as repatriates. *Lose Your Mother* gives its readers an understanding of how memories about the slave trade differ among these groups.

During her stay in Ghana, Hartman sought to explore how both Africans and Europeans contributed to the rise and fall of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; her objective was to evaluate the consequences of the trade, and the ways that Ghanaians and Diasporic Blacks made sense of the exchange. The most unique features of the text, however, included her personal experiences and reactions to Elmina and Cape Coast Castles. Upon visiting Elmina Castle, Hartman arrives at the conclusion that there is a stark difference between her expectations of the site and its contemporary realities. Prior to disembarking from the bus, Hartman reveals how she would have “preferred mourners with disheartened faces and bowed heads and the pallor of sadness coloring the town.” However, once on site, Hartman is confronted with the reality that “Except for the castle, no visible signs of slavery remained.” Hartman’s experiences at Cape Coast Castle are frustrating because of her preconceived notions about the site and how she would react;
however, during her visit, she found that the slaves were “missing” literally and figuratively, from the castle and that the space was “mute.”\footnote{Ibid., 49-50, 116.}

Hartman’s visits to Elmina and Cape Coast Castles are described as “deflating,” and she adds that “each time it was the same. I failed to discover anything.” In her words, “I had entered the dungeon intending to do all the fine things stated in the marble plaque posted at the entrance: commemorate the dead, remember the anguish of the ancestors, and prevent such crimes against humanity from ever happening again”\footnote{Ibid., 118, 115-116.} “But five minutes underground dashed these grand aspirations.” Hartman’s reactions to Elmina and Cape Coast Castles reflect how history and memory are in a constant tug-of-war. Prior to visiting those sites, Hartman was familiar with the history and events that took place there. With this knowledge, she constructed a memory of how the site looked during the apex of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; when her conjured expectations and realities did not match, she was disappointed. Hartman’s overall experiences speak, not only to her expectations, but also to the performance of history by herself, her tour guides, and those who accompanied her on the tours.

Many debates exist about African Americans’ pilgrimages to Ghana, especially regarding their visits to the slave dungeons within Elmina and Cape Coast Castles. For many Africans, Elmina and Cape Coast Castles simply represent a part of their history that is long gone. However, for many African Americans, these spaces and places represent sacrificial ground which should be remembered and held to the highest
In fact, for many continental and Diasporic Africans, these sites are the source of silence regarding discussions about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As articulated in the travel accounts, diaries, and works of African Americans who have traveled to Ghana, a *silence* concerning the slave trade is attributed to not knowing—where one came from and his/her lineage beyond two or three generations. Hartman identifies the *silence* among African Americans as being attributed to the inability to trace past generations prior to their enslavement in the Americas, the pain and embarrassment associated with having to recall the past, and the contemporary idea that slavery is “vague and faraway.”

The 1950s and 1960s not only reflected a time when continental Africans called for their independence from colonial powers, it was also a time when Diasporic Africans trekked to the continent, specifically to Ghana, to play a role in realizing the country’s independence from Britain and assisted with the plans for the trajectory of the newly independent country. Although Ghana’s socio-political atmosphere has changed dramatically since the 1950s and 1960s, Africans throughout the Diaspora continue to make treks to the country. Focusing on those who are attracted to Ghana’s history of slavery, its involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the many castles which housed slave dungeons that held enslaved people to be shipped to and sold in the Americas, this chapter investigates the narratives that these groups are confronted with during their visits to such locations. Specifically, this section explored the messages that

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guests receive at the Manihya Palace, Elmina Castle, and Cape Coast Castle, and the ways that these narratives inform how guests are to conceptualize the slave trade and connect with the past. Historic sites such as the Manihya Palace, Elmina Castle, and Cape Coast Castle are manifestations of the intersections of history, memory, and “rememory.”

The messages delivered throughout Ghana have different implications for continental and Diasporic Africans. For continental Africans, Ghanaian narratives about the slave trade are informed by local oral traditions about the settlement of a people and formation of geo-political entities. Thus, narratives of the slave trade are woven into larger about origins and group formations. For Diasporic Africans and other persons from abroad, the narratives they receive are informed by their own preconceived notions about the slave trade, Ghanaian governmental policies, the tourist industry, and local oral tradition. The messages conveyed at the Manihya Palace, and Elmina and Cape Coast Castles highlights how histories of historic sites are remembered and embedded in national agendas and local perceptions of the sel
CHAPTER TWO:
“A PROCLAMATION:” FREEDOM IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA

The history of Virginia is a complicated narrative which encompasses politics, racism, classism, and a number of contradictions. While Virginia is remembered as a place whose inhabitants embraced ideas of freedom and self-determination, Virginia is less known for the ways its colonists practiced and embraced race-based slavery. In fact, Virginia’s troubling history of slavery is often neglected as many historical actors and contemporary citizens (of the U.S.) more readily embrace the idea that colonial Virginia engendered ideas of independence and freedom. In reality, Virginia represents a space where the English settled a land already occupied and claimed it as their own; the colony is a place where its colonial inhabitants welcomed class-based indentured servitude followed by race-based slavery; and lastly, Virginia reflects a place where English settlers pledged their allegiance to Great Britain and later fought the British for their independence. Williamsburg, the second colonial capital of Virginia, from 1699 to 1780, holds an important place in the history of the colony. Specifically, on the eve of and towards the close of the American Revolution, contradictory discussions about freedom and bondage simultaneously occurred at Williamsburg. Specifically, dialogues about politico-economic liberation from Britain for white settlers emerged alongside
discussions about the ways these settlers could limit the personal freedoms and rights of freed and enslaved people of African descent.

Today, Williamsburg serves as a living history museum which recaptures, through a series of reenactments, the conversations and events that occurred prior to and after the American Revolution. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how historical-interpreters at Williamsburg conceptualize and present narratives about slavery and the experiences of enslaved people for their guests. Some of the goals of this section are to assess the messages conveyed about slavery at Williamsburg, and to critique the site’s depiction of enslavement. An analysis of two scenes revealing the white planter class and black populations’ responses to the Dunmore Proclamation serve as case studies for evaluating contemporary interpretations and memories of the past. An assessment of these reenactments provides a lens to analyze how certain histories and narratives are placed in the forefront or background when discussing the history of colonial Virginia. In this chapter, the intersections of history, memory, and “rememory” are explored in order to understand how contemporary interpretations of colonial Virginia highlight the voice of some historical actors and silence others.

The Formative Years of Colonial Virginia

England’s exploration of the “New World” began as an effort to thwart Spain’s spread and potential dominance in what would become the Americas. For the English, Spain’s expansion into the Americas threatened England’s religious, political, and economic power in the “Old World.” For these reasons, England felt the need to reinforce
its legitimacy by establishing a presence in the “New World.” In 1584, English settlers reached Roanoke Island, along the Chesapeake Bay, and made many attempts to settle the land; however, their initial endeavors were fruitless. After many failed attempts to establish a settlement at Roanoke Island, the English finally formed their first successful colony in the Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607. This initial settlement, Jamestown, marked England’s first permanent outpost in the early North America. Prior to evolving into a major economic center, Jamestown would endure many trials and tribulations.

Soon after the “founding” of Jamestown, English military forces secured the colony; however, the land remained unpopulated by the English. In an effort to populate the colony and to encourage investors and settlers, Governor Thomas Dale of Jamestown created a program to attract English men and women from abroad. Known as the “headright” system, this program granted land to settlers of the colony. Under the “headright” system, one hundred acres of land was allocated to “Old Planters,” or people who settled in the colony before 1616. Shareholders of the Virginia Company would receive an additional one hundred acres; individuals arriving after 1616 would receive fifty acres of land; and those who sponsored others to make the trek across the Atlantic Ocean were granted fifty acres of land. For those sponsored by others to populate the new colony, they were required to work for seven years in exchange for fifty acres of land.

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68 Ibid., 25-43, 71.
For many investors and poor English men and women, the colony of Virginia represented a place to start anew. From the perspective of investors, the land was plentiful—as they were content with displacing the indigenous population—and the initial shortage of labor was longer an issue due to the introduction of indentured servitude via the “headright” system. For poor English men and women, a paid passage across the Atlantic Ocean for early North America presented them with the opportunity to own land and to potentially accumulate wealth. Essentially, the “headright” system was triple fold: 1) the system created financial opportunities for investors and poor English men and women; 2) it populated the colony; and 3) the English monarch viewed the exportation of their undesirable citizens—the poor, landless, beggars, the destitute and criminals—for Virginia as a means of purging their communities.

The Shift from Indentured Servitude to Race-Based Slavery

Up to the 1650s and 1660s, racial boundaries between black and white workers in the Chesapeake were “blurred” as they worked side by side. In fact, many white workers and people of African descent not only shared similarities in the types of work that they engaged in, they too shared common grievances and subjugations at the workplace. The intimate spaces and relationships that blacks and whites of the lower class forged encouraged them to create coalitions to express their grievances about the workplace. As colonial elites became aware of the establishment of coalitions—which

threatened their political and economic influence—they began to endorse race-based laws and practices to discouraged, and even criminalize, coalition building along the lines of class and shared experiences.\textsuperscript{71}

The shift from indentured servitude to the enslavement of Africans was a subtle one; however, the 1650s and 1660s marked the decades where race-based labor, as a fixed status of servitude, emerged in Virginia.\textsuperscript{72} Specifically, the terms and conditions of slavery were slowly written into the law, and then practiced in an effort to undermine collaborations among poor workers regardless of their race. For instance, in 1640, three indentured servants—John Punch, (a man of African descent), and two other servants, one Scottish and the other Dutch—attempted to run away from their employer, Hugh Gwyn, for Maryland. Upon their capture, each man received 30 lashes and their terms of servitude were extended. While the Scottish and Dutch servants were given an additional four years of service, John Punch was to serve the rest of his “Natural life” as a servant.\textsuperscript{73}

Although slavery was not written into the law in 1640, the narrative of John Punch is momentous because he was one of the first documented people of African descent to be sentenced to life-long servitude in the colony of Virginia. Later, in 1661, the House of Burgess punished white servants who ran away with black servants more harshly than those who ran away with other white servants; and in that same year, laws were

\textsuperscript{71} In Many Thousand’s Gone, and Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City, Ira Berlin and Thelma Foote, respectively, discuss how the 1650’s represented a shift from indentured servitude to race-based slavery as result of colonial elite efforts to undermine coalition building between blacks and whites who worked together.

\textsuperscript{72} Tate, The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg, 8.

established which prohibited interracial relationships between people of African descent and white settlers.\textsuperscript{74} In 1662, the terms of freedom and enslavement were attached to a woman’s womb; specifically, if a woman of African descent was enslaved, the child that she bore too would be enslaved. By 1664, conversion to Christianity no longer exempted a person of African descent from enslavement.\textsuperscript{75}

When Jamestown was burned down as a consequence of the 1676 Bacon’s Rebellion, Williamsburg made the slow transition to becoming the new colonial capital of Virginia. Founded in 1699, Williamsburg was established at a time when slavery was becoming a permanent fixture of the colony. Also, on the eve of the American Revolution, Williamsburg represented the space where paradoxical conversations about freedom and slavery simultaneously took place. Although the capital of Virginia moved to Richmond three years prior to the close of the American Revolution, Williamsburg has and continues to represent an important site in the history of Virginia and the United States. By 1926, Williamsburg was deserted, dilapidated, and no longer reflected the thriving community it was once. However, the vision of Reverend Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin, coupled with financial support of John D. Rockefeller Jr., rejuvenated the colonial capital to reflect how the town looked on the eve of the American Revolution. Because of the efforts of Goodwin and Rockefeller, today, Williamsburg serves as a living history museum which captures and recreates the conversations and events that occurred prior to and during the American Revolution. As a living history museum, the historical-

\textsuperscript{74} Breen and Innes, “Myne Owne Ground,” 30. Wood, Strange New Land, 32-33, 39. 
\textsuperscript{75} Tate, The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg, 12-14.
interpreters at Williamsburg re-interpret and present the experiences of the colonists and enslaved people who resided in Williamsburg on the eve of the American Revolution. Specifically, they shape contemporary memories of the past for guests about the colonial town. 76

Williamsburg in the 21ST Century

With the Capitol at one end, and the entrance of the College of William and Mary at the other, the Duke of Gloucester Street, approximately one-mile long, was and still is the main street of Williamsburg. During the eighteenth-century, if a historical actor were to walk down the unpaved road of Duke of Gloucester he/she would see a host of renowned taverns, the homes of distinguished families, and stores that provided goods and services to people of the colonial town. Today, contemporary guests of the historic area, similarly to an inhabitant of the colonial period, would see many of the same buildings in their “original” locations. In fact, a guest would see re-enactors dressed in eighteenth-century clothing, and engaging in the conversations and past time, and work related, activities that early colonists performed. However, one glaring flaw of Williamsburg is the museum’s African American presence. The representation of African American historical interpreters at Williamsburg does not resemble the African population prior to or immediately following the American Revolution. Although it is impossible for scholars to recapture and recreate the sounds, smells, and other physical

features of the colonial town, the representation of African American historical interpreters is a controllable variable. Since the representation of African American historical-interpreters does not compare to the African population during the Revolutionary era, the history of colonial Williamsburg and memories of contemporary guests are distorted and misinformed.

In 1776, the African American population was unavoidable; however, today, African Americans are not a part of the general introduction of Williamsburg. On the eve of the American Revolution, Thad Tate estimates that the total population of Virginia consisted of 293,272 people—173,316 whites and 120,156 African Americans. In today’s depiction of the colonial town, the African American population does not correlate to the population of freed and enslaved African Americans prior to and after the American Revolution. In fact, the presence of African Americans is the most striking variable missing from the site. Therefore, visitors do not choose whether or not they want to learn about the experiences of African Americans. Since African Americans are not noticeable, the institution of slavery is not at the forefront of the site nor is slavery central to the conversations and reenactments that take place at this historic site. In this aspect, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is not loyal to the facts.

While some scholars such as John Fleming contend that “museums are truly unique institutions whose functions include collecting, preserving, documenting, and interpreting material culture,” others argue that the formations of various museums
reveals much about the curator and the site’s targeted audience. In *Representations of Slavery*, Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small further expounds on this idea when they argue that that historic sites can be categorized as either “white-centric” or “black-centric.” When considering narratives conveyed about the experiences of freed and enslaved people of African descent, Eichstedt and Small argue that sites’ narratives about slavery can reflect one of symbolic annihilation, trivialization and deflection, segregation and marginalization, or relative incorporation. Considering these categories, Eichstedt and Small investigates how some museums are geared towards capturing the attention of specific audiences by providing a limited historical scope while others attempt to capture and educate a variety of audiences by providing a more comprehensive assessment of the past. In the case of Williamsburg, the museum catches the attention of a specific audience by undermining the experiences of all of its inhabitants—as the demographics of the town are not reflected in the contemporary set up of the site. The narratives and messages presented at Williamsburg do two things: 1) they point people in a certain direction when thinking about the past by encouraging them to think more about the experiences of the whites planter class; and 2) they guide the guests away from the experiences of African Americans.

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Williamsburg—A Living History Museum

Williamsburg hosts a number of reenactments and day programs to facilitate and inform its guests about the discussions and events that occurred in Colonial Williamsburg immediately before and after the American Revolution. These events include a series of reenactments, discussions, tours and plays—where historical interpreters presented information in the first, second, and third person. In the summer of 2005, Williamsburg launched a two-day, two-hour program called “Revolutionary City.” The “Revolutionary City” included a series of fifteen to twenty minute reenactments that shed light on the conversations that the towns’ men and women, black and white, freed and enslaved, had on the eve of the American Revolution.

Besides “Revolutionary City,” a series of day programs were hosted on a daily basis—whose were independent of those presented during “Revolutionary City.” The day programs began as early as nine am, with a new program commencing every thirty minutes, and ended at approximately six pm. The majority of these programs took place at the Governor’s Palace, the Play Booth Center, behind the Coffeehouse site (on Duke of Gloucester Street), or at the Kimball Theatre. Other programs included a series of walking tours.

The programs hosted at the above locations predominately focused on the lives and trajectory of Colonial Williamsburg’s white population. In fact, in many of the day programs, there is no mention of slavery; in the rare instances when slavery was addressed, the topic was briefly discussed or the topic was evoked in an effort to transition into a reenactment or discussion among historic-interpreters enslaved people.
In the few instances when members of the enslaved population were present during these reenactments, the re-enactors did not focus on the enslaved community. For instance, during the reenactment entitled “The Gale From the North,” the dialogue was monopolized by the white re-enactors. The re-enactors of African descent who posed as slaves did not participate in the discussion; rather, they were on the periphery of the staged scene as if they were listening in on the conversation as audience members. 79

While the locations for many of the day programs are historically accurate, the layout and locations of others are problematic. For instance, during the colonial era, while white members of Williamsburg held conversations publically, enslaved people of African descent were often forced into having clandestine meetings as they were prohibited from meeting in large groups. 80 Today, many reenactments among the re-enactors posing as white colonial townsmen are held in public spaces; those which reveal the experiences of the enslaved population are carried out in discrete locations. Although the locations of these discussions are historically accurate, they pose many problems. The location of the conversations amongst the white population and the enslaved population allows for messages about the experiences of the latter to be placed in the background. More specifically, reenactments among the white planter class and the aristocrats are made obvious, while those among the enslaved population are hidden. In attempts to achieve/capture historical accuracy, the physical layout and racial dynamics of

79 These observations were taken during my visit to Williamsburg, Virginia.
eighteenth-century Williamsburg informs contemporary Williamsburg—specifically the
ways the stage should be set and how certain conversations should be engaged by its
guests.

The Implications of Location

The location of the day programs have indirectly determined which sites are
sought out and which are automatically viewed by guests. For example, a talk given by a
re-enactor posed as Gowan Pamphlet, a black Baptist pastor who purchased his freedom,
exemplifies how guests are indirectly discouraged to participate in certain discussions
due to location. “Gowan Pamphlet: My Fortress and My Strength” is a day program
which engages guests about the implications of the American Revolution for the enslaved
community. Whereas reenactments included in “Revolutionary City,” took place on or
just off the Duke of Gloucester Street, Pamphlet’s program did not fall into a sequence of
events, nor did it take place at a conspicuous location. In fact, if a guest wanted to attend
the program, he/she needed to seek out the time and the designated location of the
presentation. 81

81 When reflecting on my visit to Williamsburg, and my attempt to attend Gowan Pamphlet’s talk,
I remember being at the right location, the Carter House, but not knowing where exactly to go. As the
discussion was to start in 20 minutes, I still did not know where exactly the talk was to take place, so I
decided to purchase some ice cream at the parlor located next to the Carter’s House at which time I
overheard a father was telling his 3 children that they were headed to see Pamphlet. With time to spare, I
sat on a bench at the Carter’s porch next to an older woman and her two grown children. As I sat there, I
noticed a young couple, with a toddler, walking around and I saw other people walking around the house as
if they were looking for something or someone. I then proceeded to ask the elderly woman sitting next to
me if she was waiting for the Pamphlet program to begin, she replied “no” and continued by saying that she
was simply cooling down in the shade. Immediately the question popped in my head: “Had the location of
the program been more obvious, would she have made an attempt to attend the event?” A couple of minutes
before the program was to start I saw an older man crossing the grass, someone that I assumed to be
The conversation with the re-enactor posing as Gowan Pamphlet was located behind the Carter House, and was hidden by a group of trees—in what is known as a “brush arbor.” Four trees located opposite of each other to form a square, came together at their peaks to create a dome-like enclosure. “Brush arbors,” also known as “hush harbors,” are critical spaces in the interpretation of the geography of slavery. Particularly, these sites were tucked away out of white planters and slaveholder’s site, and they served as clandestine meeting spaces for freed and enslaved people for religious purposes.  

Toward the beginning of the evolution of race-based slavery, some slaveholders encouraged their slaves to adopt Christianity while others were against allowing their slaves to embrace the religion. For those who encouraged conversion to Christianity, they believed that the religion would encourage their slaves to embrace and accept their enslavement—as some white preacher presented sermons on the importance a docile, loyal, and obedient slave. On the contrary, some slaveowners discouraged, and even forbade, their slaves from attending any type of church service or religious gathering. Particularly, these slaveowners believed that Christianity would promote ideas of brotherhood and equality. Moreover, these slaveholders were convinced that if large numbers of enslaved people were allowed to congregate, they would make plans to

Pamphlet because of his attire—he was wearing long white socks, black shoes with a large buckle, round glasses, a straw hat, a knee length black coat, an undercoat/vest, and black knee length trousers. He carried a walking cane, white sack, and white towel that he used to wipe his face. As he approached the Carter House, the couple that I mentioned earlier including myself began to follow him anxiously to an area that housed lots of trees and bushes. As the program began, I looked for the father and children that I overheard in the ice cream parlor minutes earlier; however, they were not there. I assumed that they were unable to find its location.

82 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 212.
conduct uprisings against their masters. Since the latter idea was widely accepted by many slaveholders, enslaved people began to meet in secretive locations to hold their religious meetings. These meetings would take place in clandestine locations, and to guarantee discretion, slaves would do a number of things to drown out the sound of praise, singing, and dancing. When in the seclusion of “hush harbors,” or their living quarters, enslaved people would wet quilts and blankets and place them over those present; they would speak over pots filled with water; and in some cases, they would even turn a pot or hang kettle upside down to “mute” the sound.83 If caught holding a religious gathering, many enslaved people were severely punished by their drivers, overseers, or masters.

Although the site of Pamphlet’s discussion is historically relevant and accurate, its location is not inviting nor is it easily accessible to the guests of Williamsburg.84 Specifically, while the program about Gowan Pamphlet is held in a space that is historical applicable, today this location calls to question: “What is at stake?” Because Pamphlet’s talk is located in a “brush arbor,” many visitors miss and are not encouraged to attend or hear narratives about slaves’ religious experiences during the late 1700s. Although “brush arbors” are secretive in nature and secluded from the gaze of the white planter class, today, the experiences of enslaved people are still placed in the background. Unlike other programs, where guests intentionally or unintentionally stumble upon certain

84 During my observation of Gowan Pamplet’s talk, the people that attended Pamphlet’s talk seemed interested in what was being said, and they readily and actively participated in the discussion; thus, it is fair to assert that the few guests present were there because they had a genuine interest in the information that was being presented.
conversations because of their public location, those who attended Gowan Pamphlet’s talk made a conscious decision and effort to seek out his narrative. For others, due to the inconspicuous location of the talk about Pamphlet and the daily lives of enslaved people, a guest could easily visit Williamsburg and leave without knowing about Gowan Pamphlet and the risks enslaved people took in efforts to congregate.

The location of the program about Pamphlet and the lives of enslaved people reveals how history and Williamsburg have decided for its guests which programs to attend. While it is not suggested that the museum relocate Pamphlet’s program, since it is important to maintain historically accuracy, it would be beneficial for the museum to more seemingly integrate the experiences of people of African descent into the larger narrative of the site. When informing guests about the plight of enslaved people, the museum should take more of an active role in making certain narrative that are secretive in nature more accessible by directly and indirectly encouraging their guests to seek out those programs. It would be inappropriate for Williamsburg to have Gowan Pamphlet’s talk in the open; however, it would be appropriate to make such conversations accessible to Williamsburg’s guests. Specifically, in an effort to avoid having certain narratives overlooked, historical interpreters could build clandestine talks into their programs whereby touring groups could intentionally “stumble” upon these conversations during group tours and/or during various reenactments. By “stumbling” upon such conversations, the historical interpreters play a role in balancing the narratives received by their guests.
While the location of programs and reenactments either invite or disinvite guests to learn about certain experiences, the messages delivered during these programs and reenactments are equally important. Both the location of a program and the message delivered at the site influence the ways that history is remembered and/or silenced at historic sites. The “Revolutionary City” is a program which spans two days whereby historical interpreters reenact conversations and events leading up to and during the Revolutionary War. Day one, “Collapse of the Royal Government,” focuses on the years 1774-1776—the series of events hosted on this day sheds light on colonial Virginians’ efforts to formulate independent, self-governing state. The events of day one include seven conversations; however, only one dialogue, “Dunmore’s Proclamation: Liberty to Slaves!” reveals the sentiments of enslaved people. During this reenactment, re-enactors gather to reconstruct conversations amongst enslaved people about the royal governor’s offer of freedom for those who were willing to take up arms with the British against their rebel masters, the Patriots. Specifically, this reenactment reveals the debate on whether, or not, men should leave their families, and risk their lives for a chance at freedom. This reenactment also reveals how enslaved people questioned whether, or not, the governor would honor his offer; and the possibility and consequences attached with being captured during the war and returned to their masters.

85 I have not had success at locating the original pamphlets for the “Revolutionary City” during my visit. Thus, I have turned to Colonial Williamsburg’s website as a source. Colonial Williamsburg, “A Colonial Williamsburg Adventure: Revolutionary City,” Colonial Williamsburg, http://www.history.org/visit/planYourVisit/revCity/ (accessed July 28, 2009).
The second day, “Citizens at War,” address the years between 1776 and 1781. Specifically, day two’s reenactments consider the events and discussions that occurred during the birth of the Declaration of Independence before the end of the revolutionary war. The series of events during this day focuses on the challenges that the white planter class faced during their attempts to create a new government. Similar to day one, day two also includes seven dialogues; however, two of these discussions focus on the enslaved population—“Running to Freedom,” and “The Promise Land, or A Matter of Faith.” While the series of reenactments on days one and two follow a chronological order, each day address two different sets of themes and they stand alone. Therefore, it is not necessary for a guest to view the reenactment of day one in order to understand day two, or vice versa. Moreover, the dialogues on both days take place on the Duke of Gloucester Street, either in front of the Raleigh Tavern, Capitol, or the Wig Shop. The dialogues that addressed the concerns of the enslaved community took place behind the Coffeehouse Archaeological Site—just off of the Duke of Gloucester Street.

Responses to the Dunmore Proclamation: The Implications of History, Memory, and “Rememory”

The Dunmore Proclamation had many implications for the white planter class, and freed and enslaved communities. The American Revolution reflected a fight between English settlers in colonial North America and Great Britain for control over Virginia economic gains. As British settlers sought to break their political and economic ties with England, Great Britain sought to dictate the political and economic trajectory of the
 Differences of opinions resulted in the American Revolution. In an effort to expedite what was believed to be Britian’s defeat over the rebel planters, on November 7th 1775, the Governor of Virginia and Earl of Dunmore, John Murray, released a proclamation that declared martial law and promised for the enslaved people who joined the British troops to assist with the defeat of the Patriots. Specifically, Lord Dunmore stated: “And I do hereby further declare all indentured servants, Negroes, or others, appertaining to rebels, FREE, that are willing and able to bear arms; they joining his Majesty’s troops, as soon as may be, for the purpose of reducing this colony to a proper sense of their duty to his Majesty’s crown and dignity.” This proclamation stirred up many conversations among the white planter class, and the enslaved and freed black population.

Two sequential segments of the “Revolutionary City” are compared and contrasted to explore how history and memories of the Dunmore Proclamation (for the white planter class and people of African descent) are re-interpreted and packaged for guests of Williamsburg. The first reenactment is a discussion amongst white planters about their disdain for the proclamation; the second is a conversation among enslaved men and women about their hopes for freedom if the Governor held true to his promise.

The release of the Dunmore Proclamation stirred up fears among the white planter class about the possibility of a slave uprising. Although Black codes, the 1705 Act, and other laws were established to limit the number of blacks that could congregate at any given time, and to constrict the activities that slaves could engage in, the Dunmore
Proclamation still generated much fear and panic among white planters and the aristocracy.

White elites and planters responded in a number of ways to the Dunmore Proclamation. While few expressed how the proclamation was unbalanced, many expressed their discontentment with the decree. An anonymous Virginian suggested that the proclamation was selfish because it did not consider the loyalty of planters to Great Britain and the well being of all slaves. Specifically, with respect to the slaves, the Virginian argued: “To none, is the freedom promised, but to such as are able to do Lord Dunmore, service. The aged, the infirm, the women and children, are still to remain the property of their masters; masters who will be provoked to severity, should part of their slaves depart them.” In this instance, the Virginian claimed that the promise of freedom had many faults because the Dunmore Proclamation did not encompass all slaves. Particularly, the Virginian contended that the possibility of freedom was not accessible to all enslaved people because of physical and emotional limitations and restrictions. For this Virginian, the likelihood of freedom for all enslaved persons was dubious.

Individuals such as Patrick Henry, the governor of Virginia after independence who professed “give me liberty or give me death,” advocated against Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation. In response to slaves and their potential freedom, Henry claimed that the proclamation “is fatal to the publick safety.” For Henry, enslaved people posed as a threat to the safety and physical well-being of white colonists. If freedom was granted,
white colonists believed that their former slaves would turn brutal; these fears manifested themselves in newspapers and came to be known as “anti-Negro propaganda.”\textsuperscript{86}

Performance and Participation

For this study on Williamsburg, the terms “performance” and “participation” are employed to investigate how site administrators shape guests experiences, ideas, and memories about slavery with regards to the Dunmore Proclamation. “Performance” defines the ways that different reenactments are physically set up.\textsuperscript{87} Specifically, “performance” explores the location, and the tangible and intangible features of a reenactment. In addition, “performance” investigates how topics, people, and themes are prioritized during various reenactments. “Participation” refers to the ways that all “parties” are included, or excluded, in the discussions and reenactments.\textsuperscript{88} For the purposes of this study, the definition of “participation” has been expanded to include the verbal and non-verbal cues historical-interpreters use to encourage guests to think about their connection to Williamsburg during the revolutionary era. Together, “performance” and “participation” are investigated to explore how historical interpreters invite the guests to participate in reconstructing the past.


\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 222.
Scene #1: “A Great Black Shield of Human Flesh”89
Performance

Hosted on the Duke of Gloucester Street, the reenactment that recaptures the conversations among white planters and the elite about the implications of the Dunmore Proclamation engaged the audience in a unique manner. A noteworthy feature of this reenactment is the re-enactor’s attire. The primary historical-interpreter who posed as “Archie” was well dressed and therefore appeared to be a legitimate person to address the audience. Archie’s cane further underscored his authority. In general, the overall appearance of the re-enactor projected a sense of supremacy which posed him as an authority figure on the consequences of the Dunmore Proclamation. In addition to the way that Archie was dressed, the semi-circle that the guests formed around Archie, who stood on a platform, also reinforced his authority. Lastly, the tone of the scene was very serious and urgent. Specifically, the re-enactor delivered his talk in a way to make the audience feel as though the Dunmore Proclamation would have posed a serious threat to their safety if they lived during the colonial era.

The language used to illustrate the irrational actions of enslaved people can be identified as coming from a white male slaveholder and patriot. When the re-enactor makes reference to enslaved people, he poses them as volatile and unpredictable. He states: “not only do you have to worry about your throat getting cut in the middle of the night by somebody you used to trust.”90 Here, the re-enactor establishes a dichotomy between the colonists and enslaved people where he identifies himself as rational, and

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89 See Appendix B.
90 Ibid.
enslaved people as irrational. As a rational individual, the re-enactor implies that he considers the intent and well being of everyone both white and black. In this reenactment, the re-enactor perpetuates the misconception that enslaved people are loyal andgentile, but also have the tendency to be violent. Moreover, the re-enactor does not provide a context for why enslaved people would be violent or angry; instead, he simply presents them as irate and untrustworthy. The dichotomy that the re-enactor creates between the white planter class and the enslaved population leave guests with the impression that enslaved people were violent and militant for no reason.

Not only does the historical-interpreter present slaves as two-faced and treacherous, he also objectifies them. The re-enactor states: “he’s gonna have a great black shield of human flesh before him.” Once again, the re-enactors portray people of African descent as militant, and he also makes reference to slaves’ bodies as if they are objects. Now, the subjects become objects, and they are dehumanized—as a group of people are minimized to a “great black shield.” The re-enactor’s language irrationalizes the assumed actions of enslaved people in an effort to rationalize the sentiments and behaviors of the white planter class and the elite. The portrayals of people of African descent in this transcript underscore Stuart Hall’s idea of “inferential racism” whereby “apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether ‘factual’ or ‘fictional,’ have racists premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set

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91 Ibid.
of unquestioned assumptions.” In this scene when the re-enactor creates a dichotomy between the behaviors of the colonists and slaves by situating them as binaries—rational versus irrational, and humane versus inhumane.

Participation

The staging of the scene informs the ways that guests are encouraged to engage with the narrative being conveyed. The most notable feature about the audience in this scene was that they were standing. The audience was standing fairly close to the re-enactor who played Archie, and another planted was in the audience. Since the guests were standing, they were mobile, and therefore more ready and able to participate if called to do so during the reenactments. Standing fairly close to the re-enactors created an intimate setting between the re-enactors and members of the audience, it further reinforced the intimacy of the scene. Moreover, since Archie stood on a step, his authority and assumed knowledge about the Dunmore Proclamation was reinforced and his positioning forced the audience to look up into the re-enactor’s face. The audience was forced to look up and situate their gaze in the face of the elevated interpreter.

Another important feature of the scene to consider is the ways that guests were encouraged to participate in the scene via call and response. The re-enactor posed as Archie beckoned the guests to join him in displaying a disdain for the Dunmore Proclamation through call and response. First the re-enactor shouted “boo” upon reading

the Proclamation, next, he looked around the audience and waved his hand to encourage them to repeat the “boo” sound. By reacting negatively to the Proclamation, the re-enactor set the tone for how the guests should also respond and feel about said the decree. No longer prompted to respond in a certain way, reversed beckoning then takes place. After the first “boo,” which was directed by the re-enactor, the audience was no longer urged to participate; rather, they voluntarily participated in the scene. Given that the tone was set early in the reenactment, for the duration of the scene, the guests responded to the re-enactor’s questions and comments with confidence. When the re-enactor posed the question: “has anybody here been offered money to end a contract or sell a slave?,” the guests quickly responded with a “no.”

Not only was the audience encouraged to participate through beckoning and reverse beckoning, the re-enactors also used pronouns as a linguistic resource to make the guests feel included in the reenactment. The re-enactors used words such as “you” and “your,” when referring to the all white audience, and terms such as “them” and “they,” in reference to the enslaved population. This technique established a sense of camaraderie in experience and sentiments amongst the guests, re-enactors, and historical actors. Through such language, the guests were made to feel like they too had something to lose or gain if the Dunmore Proclamation was enforced. In addition, the re-enactor coupled his usage of pronouns with gestures. For instance, the re-enactor posed as Archie used his cane to scan and vigorously point towards the audience to add emphasis to the terms “you” and

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93 Ibid.
“your.”\textsuperscript{95} Stressing how he and the audience were one in the same, the re-enactor pointed to himself and the guests to further reinforce how their safety and livelihood was at stake.

The setting and the ways the guests were included in the conversations positioned them as active, or “ratified,” participants.\textsuperscript{96} In this scene, the guests were positioned as direct recipients of the information conveyed because they were purposefully included in the reenactment—via language and gestural cues. As active participants the guests were encouraged to feel like they were able to influence, or even shape, the conversation and the trajectory of the Dunmore Proclamation. This scene—which recaptures the white planter class and aristocracy’s response to the Dunmore Proclamation—reveals how touring groups’ memories of the Dunmore Proclamation and slavery can be shaped by language and their relative inclusion into a reenactment. Moreover, this scene also allows for guests to actively engage in the narrative about the ways that white colonists felt about and responded to the Proclamation. As a consequence of their participation, the guests’ ideas about slavery and the Proclamation are shaped by the ways that the re-enactors encouraged them to participate in the reenactment.

Scene #2—“This Here Proclamation be Freedom Paper”\textsuperscript{97}

The discussion following the one described above is also about the Dunmore Proclamation; however, this scene addresses the perspective of enslaved people of African descent and their hopes for freedom that the Proclamation might bring. Taking

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{95} Appendix B—lines 9, 16, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{97} See Appendix C.
\end{itemize}
place directly after the scene that captures the sentiments of the white planter class in response to the Proclamation, the guests are informed about a subsequent reenactment when re-enactor who is planted in the audience yells: “Archie, Archie, as we speak the slaves are meeting down at the coffeehouse. Let’s go down at the coffeehouse and hear what they’re up to.” The scene amongst members of the enslaved community contrasts the ways that guests were encouraged to engage in the prior reenactment.

Performance

The stage for the reenactment expressing the concerns of the enslaved population differs tremendously from the first in many ways. Unlike the first talk, which took place in front of the Shields Tavern on the Duke of Gloucester Street, this discussion took place behind the Coffeehouse Site. Upon entering the area designated for the reenactment, one immediately notices the presence of benches—which took the shape of a horseshoe—for guests to sit during the presentation. Also, the tone of the conversation contrasts starkly from the first. In this scene, there is laughter from a male re-enactor—which gives the impression that the Dunmore Proclamation is a subject which was taken lightly amongst slaves, and that times, his tone insinuated that freedom was not as important or urgent for enslaved people as it is for white colonists.

98 See Appendix B.
Participation

Not only did the presence of benches create a different stage, it also had a tremendous impact on the ways that the audience were positioned to participate during the reenactment. Although sitting gives the impression of comfort, it created a separation or division between the audience and the re-enactors. Instead of being mobile, and therefore, easily able to participate if called to do so, sitting encouraged the guests to be mere spectators who gazed upon the historical-interpreters.

Another factor that is imperative to consider is the gaze of the guests. Unlike the first reenactment, where one historical-interpreter was situated on a platform and the other positioned amongst members of the audience, the re-enactors of the second scene were not positioned on a platform. Rather, as the guests sat and stood around the re-enactors, they were not forced to look up into the faces of the re-enactors. Since the guests were seated, they were on the same level as the re-enactors. In fact, their gaze was straight—meaning that they are not looking in the faces of the re-enactors—and their stare was fixed on the bodies of the actors. Given that the guests’ gazes were on the bodies of the re-enactors, the re-enactors as subjects became objectified.

An exploration of the transcript of this scene reveals how the re-enactors’ language did not encourage the guests feel included in the conversation. Instead of using pronouns, or terms that created a sense of commonality between the re-enactors and the guests, a line was drawn between the stage and audience. In lines three and four of the transcript, a re-enactor used the term “yall” when referring to the audience. Moreover, the
same re-enactor waved her hand in the direction of the guests when saying “yall.”99 When referring to people of African descent, the re-enactor used language that was limited to her fellow re-enactors who also vocalized the feelings and sentiments of enslaved men and women towards the Dunmore Proclamation. Phrases such as “for all us Negroes,” coupled with a glance towards the other re-enactors, further emphasized a distinction created between the primarily white audience—who were just called to envision themselves as members of the white planter class in the previous reenactment—and the historical interpreters who were rehashing the sentiments of enslaved people who resided in colonial Williamsburg.100 The re-enactors’ use of pronouns and gestures, made it clear when they were referring to the guests—as spectators—and when they are referring to themselves as representatives of the enslaved community. The non-inclusive language illustrates how the guests were excluded from the reenactment and restricted from being able to participate and empathize with the enslaved population.

Given the exclusive language, coupled with the ways that the audience was encouraged to sit around the re-enactors, the guests that attended the second scene were encouraged to remain distant and aloof from the concerns of enslaved men and women with respect to the Dunmore Proclamation. As spectators, the guests did not partake in the reenactment; rather, they were simply bystanders. The term passive, or “un-ratified,” participant best describes the guests’ involvement, or lack of, during in the second

99 See Appendix C.
100 Ibid.
The guests were not participating in the conversation; rather, they were positioned as overhears.

The most important feature of both scenes is the historical-interpreters’ failure to capture the audience’s attention regarding issues related to race and slavery at colonial Williamsburg. While both types of participation—active and passive—do different types of work in determining how guests engage in discussions; they indirectly inform guests how to identify with white colonists, and not with enslaved black people through location, language, and gestures. For these reasons, histories and memories about slavery in colonial Virginia are silenced and placed in the background of the entire museum.

Whereas the first scene encouraged guests to empathize with the colonists’ in their quest for freedom from Britain and safety, the second scene encouraged these same guests to remain distant and apathetic about enslaved peoples’ hopes for freedom.

While the goal of the reenactments is to capture the language and sentiments that emerged within different communities during the Revolutionary era, the histories, memories, and “rememor[ies]” of each groups are shaped in such a way that informs guests how orientate towards topics and themes in different ways. Specifically, the ways that guests are implicitly encouraged and discouraged to participate in various reenactments not only speaks volumes to the intended and targeted guests of the museum; these factors inform guests how to identify with the white planter class and enslaved communities. Through location, language, and gestures, Williamsburg ultimately places

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101 Goffman, Forms of Talk, 131.
the concerns and memories of the white planter class in the forefront and the enslaved community’s issues on the background—both literally and figuratively.

From the above discussed reenactments, two assessments can be made about Williamsburg as a historical and contemporary site of memory. Colonial Williamsburg reveals how enslaved people were not only excluded from participating in discussions about the future of the colony, the site also exposes how they were also barred from the decision-making processes that would shape their life’s trajectories. Williamsburg today reveals how the narratives of people of African descent are continually absent from the forefront, passively addressed, and rarely noticed by contemporary guests. Both scenes reveal how the conversations that took place at Colonial Williamsburg have and continue to perpetuate and encourage ideas of difference.

When considering Colonial Williamsburg as a historic site, it is necessary to keep in mind the ways that enslaved people of African descent and white planters viewed themselves and others. When studying Williamsburg today, it is also necessary to understand how the site administrators discuss past phenomena in racialized terms. Moreover, when assessing how ideas about slavery are co-constructed at Colonial Williamsburg, it is imperative to consider how history, memory, and “rememory” shapes what and how guests orientate towards topics and themes. Moreover, the ways that guests are implicitly encouraged, or discouraged, to participate in various reenactments not only speaks volumes to the intended and targeted guests of the museum, it also places the concerns and memories of the white planter class and the enslaved community in the forefront and background, respectively—literally and figuratively.
On the eve of the American Revolution, about half of Williamsburg’s population consisted of free and enslaved black men and women. This number is an important because it demonstrates how blacks certainly would have been present, even if silenced. Today however, half of the re-enactors of at Williamsburg are not of African descent. Thus, there is a mismatch in what was versus what is. Specifically, the ethnic demographics and diversity of colonial Williamsburg is not illustrated nor accurately depicted in Williamsburg today. Given this discrepancy, the history presented at Williamsburg about the colonial town creates a distorted understanding of the past. The absence of black re-enactors as slaves further undermines the experiences of enslaved communities—the contributions that slaves made, and their visibility in Williamsburg on the eve of the Revolution. Historically, people of African descent were excluded from the conversations because of their imposed status as slaves not because they did not have a presence, Today, the voices of blacks are still silenced because of the museum’s failure to better incorporate the presence of black re-enactors

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CONCLUSION

On July 11th 2009, President Barack Obama delivered a powerful speech at Cape Coast Castle about human cruelty and the “possibility to overcome” past atrocities. With the Atlantic Ocean, and black cannons juxtaposed against whitewashed walls as his background, President Obama’s brief but profound talk was about the implications of Cape Coast Castle for his immediate family, the African Diaspora, and the entire world. President Obama’s visit to Cape Coast Castle not only reflects a real and symbolic return to the continent, his speech also reveals his interpretation of the implications of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. President Obama’s black and white background, coupled with his conceptualization of the events that transpired at Cape Coast Castle, echoes the objective of this thesis—an exploration of the contemporary narratives delivered at Elmina Castle and Williamsburg about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in early North America.

In an effort to understand how guests of Elmina Castle and Williamsburg are encouraged to learn about and understand the past, an assortment of reenactments, tours, multimedia sources, and written material distributed at these locations were studied to gauge how the site administrators re-interpret, package, and convey narratives about
slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade for their guests. In an investigation of the ways that guests of Elmina Castle and Williamsburg are invited to learn about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, four major themes have emerged over the life of this project. While the intersections of history, memory, and “rememory” serve as the theoretical framework for this thesis, the implications of tourism—simulated by regional and national interests—as well as the involvement of local, national, and international agencies are explored to understand the preservation process and the formation of narratives about the slave trade and the daily realities of enslaved people of African descent.

The interplay of histories, memories, and “rememor[ies]” of the past have manifested themselves in a number of ways at Elmina Castle in Ghana, and Williamsburg, Virginia. At Elmina for instance, memories of the past are informed by local, national, and international agencies which either silences the past or give voice to the individuals and groups that were impacted, both positively and negatively, by the slave trade. At Williamsburg, however, histories and memories of the experiences of enslaved people are lost due to the location of the reenactments, and the language that historical interpreters employ to encourage guests to learn about the past. The voice and the daily realities of enslaved people are marginalized and silenced at Williamsburg.

The agencies—local, national, and international—that have invested in Elmina Castle and Williamsburg shape the narratives conveyed about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the experiences of enslaved people in many ways. For instance, local and oral narratives, in comparison to the national and international messages delivered by
stakeholders who have invested in Elmina Castle differ tremendously. While local people who live in and around the Elmina Township, and throughout Ghana in general, tend to neglect the slave trade, national and international agencies acknowledge the slave trade along the Atlantic coast of Ghana. Moreover, even though Williamsburg has one primary stakeholder, the Rockefellers, the monies that have been donated by this organization have larger implications for the narratives conveyed about the history of the revolutionary era and slavery in colonial Williamsburg.

Not only do various stakeholders influence the narratives conveyed throughout Ghana, tourism also shapes the messages told at historic sites throughout the country. Unlike local and oral narratives, which neglect to acknowledge the emergence and development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade along the Atlantic Coast of Ghana, as of 2007, the Ghanaian government has begun to speak about the implications of the trade. In fact, in 2007, Ghana celebrated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the international slave trade (1908), and the 50th anniversary of Ghana’s independence from Britain (1957). As a part of Ghana’s year-long celebration, the Ghanaian government encouraged Diasporic Africans to visit the land from which their ancestors were displaced. Paralleling the narrative of the Biblical actor Joseph, to the experiences of Diasporic Africans, the Ghanaian government not only encourages Diasporic Africans to visit Ghana, they also suggest that Diasporic Africans should financially support the country, as Joseph supported his family upon his freedom. Through the Joseph Project, the Ghanaian government utilizes history in an effort to stimulate the Ghanaian economy.
Unlike the Joseph Project, which integrates Ghana’s political and economic objective to stimulate Ghana’s economy via tourism, Williamsburg is primarily funded by the Rockefellers. Thus, the objective of the agency invested in preserving Williamsburg does not seek to intentionally stimulate the local and/or national economy. Rather, the individual investor aims to make sure that specific narratives about the nation’s “forefathers” are maintained. More specifically, Williamsburg stands to recreate the discussions that took place on the eve of the American Revolution among the white planter class, and enslaved communities.

Although the international slave trade and slavery in the U.S. were abolished in 1808 and 1865, respectively, various aspects of these phenomena are reconstructed throughout the Atlantic World in many ways. However, regardless of the narratives told, at Elmina Castle and Williamsburg, these sites reflect contemporary memories about the past, and are therefore, frequented by people from North America and from throughout the African Diaspora for a number of reasons. Atlantic Africa and the American South represent mental and metaphorical pilgrimages into the past, therefore, these places reflect the intersections between history, memory, and “rememory.” Moreover, these sites produce more than a historical recalculation about the past, they also engage in cathartic, intellectual, and theatrical methods for engaging the past. While visiting Elmina Castle and Williamsburg, the sites’ guests are encouraged to learn about the past by what they are shown, told by site administrators, and also by what they feel once information is revealed to them.
This thesis provides many explanations for why and how narratives about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are constructed at Elmina Castle and Williamsburg. First, this thesis has explored the ways that various agencies—local, national, and international—throughout Ghana and Williamsburg target different audiences and guests for very different reasons. Second, this project has demonstrated that through the lens of history, memory, and “rememory” as devices to understand that past, tourism is inextricably linked to contemporary understandings and interpretations of the slave trade and slavery throughout the African Diaspora.

As international and national travel to historic sites along the African littoral and the American South stimulate the economy of those respective regions, future studies should explore how tourism intersects, supports, and/or undermines notions of history, memory, and “rememory.” A study on tourism could also include an investigation of the ways identities of continental Africans, who live in and around these sites, and the identities of Diasporic Africans who visit these locations are also impacted and influenced as a consequence of their visit. An exploration of the impact of tourism can yield a generative discussion about tourism can either serve as a detriment or benefit to the historical actors, contemporary narratives, or visitors of the site. Also, future research can be extended to include an assessment of alternative ways that sentiments and reactions to the slave trade and slavery manifest themselves throughout the Atlantic World—including the Caribbean and Latin America.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TOUR GUIDES AT HISTORIC SITES IN GHANA
1. What does your position entail? What are your roles and responsibilities?

2. What does the training process to be a tour guide entail?

3. How long have you worked at Elmina (or Cape Coast) Castle?

4. What made you decide to seek a job at Elmina (or Cape Coast) Castle?

5. Given the limitations of time, how do you decide what to tell and what not to tell during your tours?

6. During your tours, what is the most important message that you want your visitor to take away?

7. How familiar are you with the guests that visit the site?
   - Who primarily visits Elmina (or Cape Coast) Castle?
   - In your opinion, why do people visit Elmina (or Cape Coast) Castle?

8. What are some of the challenges you face?

9. From your point of view, how receptive are patrons to the different narratives that you tell?

10. Do you gauge the impression that the castle has on visitors? If so, how?
APPENDIX B:

TRANSCRIPT OF REENACTMENT ON WHITE COLONISTS’
REACTIONS TO THE DUNMORE PROCLAMATION
Archie: {that are able and willing to bear arms…

{{(reading from paper)}}

they joining} the Majesty’s troops.

Re-enactor #2: {booo~}

{{(looks towards the audience)}}

Guest: booo~

Archie: now you think about that for a minute…

{you think about that for a minute

{{(scans and points cane towards the audience)}}

there are more - than TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND slaves that live in this colony…

that’s not countin’ all the indentured servants} and (predecessors).

and HE has seen fit to (compensate) them!

YOUR PROPERTY

{all they gotta do is leave YOU and go to} {him!}

{{(points cane towards the audience)}}{{(points south)}}

has anybody {here been offered money…

{{(opens arms towards the audience)}}

to end a contract or sell a slave?

Guests: n/o]

Archie: //no{}

{it has been ceased by the government.}

{{(points cane vigorously in the direction of the audience)}}

now…

{you} listen to this…

{{(quickly points cane towards the audience)}}

not only do you gotta worry about your THROAT getting CUT in the middle of the night by somebody you used to trust…

{but think about the dire position he’s put} {them} in!

{{(holds up cane)}}{{(quickly points cane towards the audience)}}

imagine these slaves and indentures going up to {Norfolk}…

{{(points south, towards Norfolk)}}

told they will get freedom.

i’ll tell {you} what’s gonna happen.
{((points cane towards the audience))}

well {his red coats are going to be up there…

{((points in the direction of Norfolk))}

(hes) gonna to put} a gun in their hands alright…

but then they’re gonna sent them out {in front of ‘em}

{((opens his arms))}

when {that British army marches out of Norfolk} to kill {us}…

{((points towards Norfolk))} {((point at himself))}

{he’s gonna have a great black shield} {of human flesh before him}

{((waves cane across the audience))}{((hold cane in right hand and extends arm))}

{Archie, Archie, as we speak} {the slaves are meeting down at the coffeehouse

{((appears from the left side of the screen and shakes finger at Archie))}

{((points

towards the coffeehouse))}

Lets go down at the coffeehouse and hear what} they’re up to

Audience Member:(Umh)

(Child in audience):I know where the coffeehouse is.
APPENDIX C:

TRANSCRIPT OF REENACTMENT ON ENSLAVED PEOPLES’ REACTIONS TO THE DUNMORE PROCLAMATION
Hanna: what’s this all about?
William: yuh-yuh-yuh-yeah Kate?
Kate: well…{yall all remember}…April last when the governor take the gunpowder don’t you?
{waves left hand across the audience)}
Audience: yeah
Hanna: Kate {everybody remember that, said he took the gunpowder because of some Negro insurrection
{(body and hands a towards the audience)}
Kate: well…{yall all remember}…April last when the governor take the gunpowder don’t you?
{(waves left hand across the audience)}
Audience: yeah
Hanna: Kate {everybody remember that, said he took the gunpowder because of some Negro insurrection
{(body and hands a towards the audience)}
Kate: Ms. Hanna…but then he said he’d arn the Negroes and burn this {city to the GROUND}
{(points at the ground)}
William: yuh-yuh-yuh-yes Kate
well wa-wa-wa-wa-we all know that, that aint new-new news
Lady in Audience: ((faint laugh))
Kate: no William…but…but {this is}…
{waves copy of proclamation
William: what?
Hanna: =what’s that?
Kate: {this here}…a PROCLAMATION
{(looks at paper)}
Will, Isaac, and George…well they bring it back from (Warren) county with them
{(points towards the audience)}
they said lord Dunmore declared a {…} [Martial LAW]
{(looks down)} [raises hand]
Hanna: what’s martial law Kate?
talk talk (please/plain)
William: Hanna…martial law means that the gentlemen aint the law no more
Lady in Audience: ((faint laugh))
William: SOLDIERS is the law
but what that got to do with US AND FREEDOM?
Kate: well William…if…if what Eve say is true
{this here proclamation be FREEDOM PAPER}
{(looking at proclamation)}
33 William: ((faint laugh))
34 Kate: [for all us Negroes] and the indentured in this here county
35 William: ((looks towards other Black re-enactors)) ((points towards the audience)))
36 William: =told you
37 Kate: {why…I wouldn’t be surprised if Negroes from Maryland} to the Carolinas makin’ their way to Norfolk
38 William: ha ha ha ha…WHOOH
39 I KNEW IT
40 I KNEW IT
41 I KNEW that this day would come
42 I TOLD YOU it would (become seen) that the British be givin’ us free
43 and if this mean (be)