"SO YOU WANT TO BE A RETRONAUT?": HISTORY AND TEMPORAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

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In *"So You Want to Be A Retronaut?": History and Temporal Tourism*, I examine how contemporary individuals explore and engage with the past beyond the classroom through nostalgic consumerism, watching historical reality television, visiting historical sites or living history museums, handling historical objects, and, in many cases, participating in living history or historical re-enactment. The phrase "make America great again" taps directly into a belief that our nation has been diverted from a singular history that was better, purer, or even happier. What it ignores, though, is that the past is fraught for millions of Americans because their history – based on generations of inequality – is not to be celebrated, but rather commemorated for those who died, those who survived, and those who made their place in a nation that often didn't want them. To connect to that complicated history, many of us seek to make that history personal and to see a reflection of who we are in the present in the mirror of past. For this project I conducted 54 interviews of subjects gathered from a variety of historically significant commemorations and locations such as the 2013 and 2015 memorial observances at Gettysburg, PA, and sites at Mount Vernon, Historic Jamestowne, and Colonial Williamsburg, VA. I also attended re-enactments at Gettysburg, PA, Conneaut, OH, Huntington Beach, CA, Grand Rapids, OH, and Zoar, OH to observe and interview subjects. From the interviews, four levels of engagement emerged: level 0.5, or nostalgics; level one, or day trippers; level two, or retronauts; and level three, or dual citizens. For each of these groups, the past is a destination that calls to them and they are ready to travel, whatever form that travel might take.

To Michael, Jon, Alex, Kat, Britta, and the multitude of cats we've loved in this house

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PREFACE

I met a time traveler during a visit to Boston in 2012.

I'd visited Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, both sites of significance in early Bostonian history. As I meandered my way back to the subway station, I caught sight of a tall wooden soldier standing at attention on a sidewalk outside of a pub. A group of tourists jostled one another, trying to stand next to the figure for a photograph. At first, I thought little of the crowd or the establishment but, being a good traveler, I decided to take a picture of a quaint figure outside an equally quaint tavern. As I focused the viewfinder on the image, I noticed a figure that most definitely did not belong in modern-day Boston. The man was framed in the window, wearing a black tricorn hat and a handsome red officer's jacket and, as I watched, I saw that he was quite real. He and his wooden counterpart occupied opposite sides of the window frame, with the wooden soldier in the present and, for a moment, the living soldier appearing as a specter from the past.

I took two photos before crossing the threshold of the pub to indulge both my personal and scholarly curiosity. The pub, The Green Dragon Tavern, holds a "revered," so to speak, place in American history as the documented meeting place of Bostonian revolutionaries, but the present Green Dragon is a facsimile of the original that was demolished in 1854. Likewise the British soldier with whom I spoke was also a facsimile, committed to recreating a historical subject – a member of His Majesty's 1st regiment of Foot Guards. When I asked about why he engaged in historical re-enactment, he explained that he sought a way to connect to history, trying to know the people of the past through slipping into their clothes, if not their skin. Like me, this time traveler was filled with curiosity about not only those historical events that make up our national narrative but also about the people who undertook such a pursuit.

So You Want to Be A Retronaut is the culmination of over seven years of research, coast-to-coast travel, and writing. In addition to seeking to understand the motivation of others, I had to satisfy my own curiosity about the past and sometimes that meant being more participant than observer. At Conner Prairie, I was cast as a runaway slave. In Gettysburg, I reconnected to my journalist past, talking with those who choose to explore and interpret history. At Jamestown, I was an academic, observing active archaeology for the first time. At Colonial Williamsburg, I was a traveler, paused in an eighteenth-century coffee house for refreshment. At Huntington Beach, I was a Confederate soldier, taking the field in a desperate and ultimately futile engagement, and lying, injured, under a tree, watching the events unfold.

This was an emotional journey as well as being simply a series of physical and "temporal" experiences. As we all carry histories within us, sometimes they can be brought forward by presentations of the past and sometimes those feelings are what allow us to peer through the temporal distance to see the humans on the other side of time. At each site I had to consider my subject position – white, female, educated, mother – and how those pieces and others of my identity might enhance or inhibit my ability to really understand the various histories into which I ventured. For example, during the *Follow the North Star* program at Conner Prairie, I was interrogated about the number of children I'd had. I stated that I had three children and I was immediately challenged about why I hadn't had more. It was a harsh reminder that, in that scenario, my value was limited to my reproductive capability as had been the case for countless women who lived through enslavement. While my modern identity was a racial mismatch for that of the person or persons represented by the role I was asked to play at Conner Prairie, I could relate on other levels such as being a woman and a mother – and a human being.

When I started this project, I would have classified myself as a level one retronaut or day tripper. At the end, I still do. While I remain fascinated by the past as a subject of study, both academically and personally, I don't see myself going out into the field as a level two, also known as a re-enactor or historical interpreter. I'm also far too fond of technology to ever dive into being a level three or dual citizen. For me, archives, primary documents, living history sites, museums, historical reality television, and documentaries are close enough to the past.

I had the privilege of sharing these experiences with other retronauts. In all, 54 re-enactors, living historians, and facilitators told me their time travel stories. In doing so, they helped me to better understand their connections to the past and just how much the past, no matter how finished it may seem, is still very much present.

- Tiffany Knoell, Bowling Green, Ohio, April 2020

INTRODUCTION

The desire to engage with the past is all over our contemporary culture. We see it in clothing, music, advertising, television, film, and books as well as in politics and rhetoric. The phrase "make America great again" taps directly into a belief that our nation has been diverted from a singular history that was better, purer, or even happier. What it ignores, though, is that the past is fraught for millions of Americans because their history – based on generations of inequality – is not to be celebrated, but rather commemorated for those who died, those who survived, and those who made their place in a nation that often didn't want them. To connect to that complicated history, many of us seek to make that history personal and to see a reflection of who we are in the present in the mirror of past.

So, we search. We travel. We prepare and learn and explore.

In this dissertation I examine how contemporary individuals explore and engage with the past beyond the classroom. Their efforts to connect with the past often involve nostalgic consumerism, historical reality television, visiting historical sites or living history museums, handling historical objects, and, in many cases, participating in living history or historical re-enactment. Many of us seek a connection to and make a claim on history in one way or another. Each attempt, whether undertaken by a group or an individual, is driven by either a longing for control over the narrative or a desire to find a connection to the larger story being told and these attempts come in a variety of guises. For those who seek control over the narrative, regardless of their ideology, the locations of choice are schools, museums, and commemorative sites. For those who feel that historical distance is a distance too far, the suturing of memory from films, books, video games, and exhibits allows explorers to connect to history and co-opt narratives to shape their identity. As historical sites and artifacts become more accessible to the public and as

individuals increasingly customize their relationship with the past, voices often pushed to the periphery of the dominant historical narrative emerge and allow those whose memory is often erased to be reclaimed.

The search for connection drives many people to seek their heritage through genealogy or a better understanding of history through television, books, and lectures, but for an increasing number of Americans, the search for "experiential memory" takes priority. Experiential memory has the advantage of calling on all the senses as opposed to simply sight and encourages "retronauts" of all types to touch, taste, or try on the past.[1] While cognitive and experiential memory can complement one another, there is a trend in exhibit curation and programming toward interactivity and individual experiences as opposed to the more traditional museum experience where visitors simply read their way through an exhibit. For example, museums that encourage hands-on interaction such as Conner Prairie Interactive History Park in Fishers, Indiana , are part of larger trends in not only history education but also within American mass culture.[2] This kind of multi-sensory experience can help visitors not only learn about history, but to also establish a relationship with history itself. If people can physically contact a piece of history in addition to reading a description of it, then that connection is all the stronger.

"So You Want to Be a Retronaut?" explores the desire for connection to and control over not only the narrative but over one's place in it. Individuals' efforts to engage with the past on

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[1] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 131; Chris Wild, "Retronaut," Retronaut, accessed February 29, 2012, http://www.retronaut.co. The term "retronaut" and the tagline "If the past is a foreign country, this is your passport" were created by Chris Wild for his website, How to be a Retronaut (http://www.howtobearetronaut.com), which launched in 2010. This site has since been replaced by Retronaut (http://www.retronaut.com), which focuses less on the "time travel" premise and more on being an archive that allows visitors to, according to the new tagline, "see history."

[2] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 130.

their own terms reinforce Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's research on the uses of history in American life.[3] For many people it is habitual reflex to look to the past as not only a part of their identity but a physically/temporally accessible location into which they can step at their leisure. While temporal tourism may sound whimsical, it highlights individual agency in relation to historical materials. Citizens can choose their own destination and, in a development made all the more apt with the proliferation of travel websites such as Travelocity or Priceline, can do so largely without the mediation of a "travel agent" or professional historian.

Individual exploration of history outside of a classroom may be productively studied by examining various levels of engagement with the past, comparing these to learn more about the events being remembered, and profiling the participants. Understanding why they choose to participate and why they choose the extent of engagement that they do is also critical to this study. This question is echoed in contemporary discourses in public history, memory studies, and cultural studies, but this is also a matter of performance. Each of the performances in historical re-enactment is a choice: participants choose an event, a character, a role, and a reading. Some have been trained through museum instruction, historical study, or theatrical training. Some are casual participants, such as those who visit a living history site and try on an apron and attempt to churn butter or try a spinning wheel. Others are deeply committed to "authenticity" and pursue what is known as "period rush," or the sensation of being transported back in time as described by Vanessa Agnew:

> Re-enactment thus emerges as a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience . . . skills are acquired

[3] Roy Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). *The Presence of the Past* was the culmination of Thelen and Rosenzweig's study of how everyday Americans use and relate to history. Their study also addressed public views of historians and opened new avenues for research on historians' place in a changing landscape of public history and ever-increasing individualized experiences.

> and manual tasks accomplished, fears and aversions overcome, and the body and mind brought into a state of regulation. Once inhabiting this psychological and physiological space, hobby re-enactors describe a condition referred to as "period rush"—a state of complete absorption in the re-enacted event—followed by difficulty transitioning out of the past and into the present. [4]

At the most fundamental level, I ask, "What drives individuals to seek mediated or unmediated historical experiences?" "How do my subjects take up the mantle of historian and how does the plethora of primary sources and archives now available online make it possible to do that?" and "What are their goals while experiencing different levels of historical engagement?" I explored how gender can affect the personal exploration of history in a re-enactment setting. Finally, I asked about the modern-day identities of my subjects and how contemporary bodies match up with the historic bodies they choose to inhabit, with particular attention to questions of the importance of authenticity when trying to explore the past as a living historian or re-enactor.

Rather than traveling with a time machine, some individuals seek to engage with the past through experiential memory—that is, experiences that allow them to come into close contact with a representation of the past. With an emphasis on individual agency, these retronauts choose the extent to which they are willing to traverse into the past. I found four categories of temporal tourism and travel. Level 0.5 are nostalgics, or those who sift through personal or historical nostalgia in an effort to connect to the past. Nostalgics, use pieces of other eras to build their present-day conception of self through consumerism or adoption of older manners, social mores, or cultural artifacts. Level one retronauts are "day trippers," those who want to experience the past but prefer to limit their interaction to watching historical reality television or a trip to a living history museum or site. Level two are retronauts, who are those willing to slip into the

[4] Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 130.

garb and physically re-enact historical events and situations such as battles and camp life. These retronauts often seek "period rush," the sensation that, if even for a moment, they have breached the temporal and spatial boundaries between past and present and travelled in time. Level three retronauts or "dual citizens" are those for whom the present is a matter of when they were born, yet the past is where they choose to live. These retronauts refit their homes and their lives to allow the sense that they are living in another time. While those in this last category are certainly rarer than those in either level one or level two, they represent a class of temporal tourist often disregarded in scholarship.

This study shifts the focus in historical re-enactment and living history study from institutions to individuals and emphasizes the movement toward a less mediated, more "do it yourself" engagement with the past. While scholars such as Richard Handler and Eric Gable, Jay Anderson, Stephen Eddy Snow, Carolyn Goldstein, and David Lowenthal explore historical re-enactment, museums, and other points of public and institutional intersection, there is little that examines the spectrum of individual historical engagement. This study charts this new avenue in discourse through exploration of not only how individuals engage with the past but also why they choose to experience history in the way that they do. I frame this discussion in the language of travel to emphasize the individual agency exhibited through choices in site and extent to which one chooses to experience the past.

Who controls presentations of the past and who is seen as "authorities" on the subject? How do they earn that claim to authority? For the most part, historians credentialed by the academy are regarded as authorities based on their ability to interpret a "canon of evidence" and, as interpretations evolve, to revise historical narratives to reflect the ways in which our

understanding of the past changes.[5] In his piece "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought To Be," David W. Blight articulates the difference between the "recorded past," which is typically the under the purview of the academy, and the "remembered past," preserved and passed down through families and communities.[6] The recorded past is an established and researched historical narrative. The remembered past – memory – is specifically connected to heritage or the identity of a community. It is dependent on individual or collective recollection and is not necessarily supported by a "canon of evidence" or primary sources.[7] In an era of digital access to archives, though, more and more individuals can explore the recorded past on their own terms. They can, in Blight's words, "construct versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and to win power in an ever-changing present."[8]

Scholars such as Jay Anderson and Stephen Eddy Snow established the foundations of the study of historical re-enactment in the 1970s and 1980s, but much of their focus was on museum professionals, experimental archaeologists, and "history buffs." Stephen Eddy Snow advanced the study with his work on Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Massachusetts and the shift from third-person to first-person interpretation.[9] In recent years a prevailing current in the literature is anxiety regarding the future of the historical profession, an anxiety that has been circulating for quite some time but made all the more real by advances in not only the public interest in history, but also public access to archives and primary historical documents. Some of

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[5] David W. Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought To Be," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006), 24.

[6] Blight, 24.

[7] Blight, 24–25.

[8] Blight, 25.

[9] Stephen Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation*, Performance Studies (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 202.

the other currents that run through the field are concerns about memory and who can claim ownership of memory and the consequences, both positive and negative, of historical interpretation by those who are not credentialed by the academy.[10] As the more do it yourself approach to history gains currency with a wider audience, there are new pressures for museum professionals to change tack and reevaluate their relationship not only with history but also with the public.

In "Many Voices, True Stories and the Experiences We Are Creating in Industrial History Museums," Carolyn Goldstein issues repeated calls for a focus on creating visitor "experiences." Drawing on her experience as curator at Lowell National Historical Park, Goldstein provides an accessible and highly sensible analysis of the current state of industrial history museums and, although perhaps not intentionally, speaks to the larger issues facing many museums in the current moment. If "visitors come to museums looking to learn something," then museums must accommodate this desire and do so in a fashion that keeps pace with technological advances and cultural shifts.[11]

Although Goldstein calls for attention to be paid to the crafting of experiences, she is also firm in her declaration that reading, viewing images, and "contemplating three-dimensional artifacts large and small" still have a place in the museum experience.[12] The Disney model—"audiovisual presentations, games, and rides"—does not entirely fit the bill, but it is possible that museums can adapt some of the techniques to their unique needs.[13] Goldstein suggests that

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[10] Ann-Louise Shapiro, "Whose (Which) History Is It Anyway?," *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 36: Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy, 36, no. 4 (December 1997): 1.

[11] Carolyn M. Goldstein, "Many Voices, True Stories, and the Experiences We Are Creating in Industrial History Museums: Reinterpreting Lowell, Massachusetts," *The Public Historian* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 133.

[12] Goldstein, 133.

[13] Goldstein, 132.

museums should use the lessons learned from theme parks to modernize their exhibits and to generate the "visitor experience" that so many museum patrons have been conditioned to expect. With many day-trippers making museums their time-travel locations of choice, Goldstein's assertions may be accurate, although she positions visitors as recipients, not as participants.

If the present is precarious, then the past provides the tools for restoration to a better, purer state of being. It can also drive profits, as increasing numbers of Americans seek a refuge from quickly changing social mores and precarious economic circumstances. Roy Rosenzweig writes, "As [Americans] thought about the kinds of people they wanted to be and the futures they wanted to carve for themselves, they turned to the past to frame their quests."[14] As contemporary stresses increase, the past becomes more desirable as a time when order ruled the day rather than ambiguity. For some, it is an impulse toward traditions, manners, and clearly defined rules of conduct. For others, it is an attraction to a more beautiful past.

Writing in 1985, David Lowenthal observed "Disenchantment with today impels us to try to recover yesterday. That discontent takes many forms: a devotion to relics, the treasuring of antiques and souvenirs, a tendency to value what is old simply because it is old…"[15] For some who seek solace or meaning in the past, that means using past elements to craft present identities. Those who do so begin with historical nostalgia – a wish to understand "how it was" – and then use a cafeteria approach to the past: taking what they want and leaving the rest behind. This look to the past for identity components relies heavily on the second rule of nostalgia: there is something about the present that we find unsatisfying, whereas the past represents a temporal

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[14] Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 37.

[15] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 33.

space in which the world was somehow better.[16] Nostalgia calls on a past "imbued with special qualities," often because of how we perceive it in relationship with the present time we occupy.[17]

Alison Landsberg describes the grafting of pieces of the past into our present experience as engaging with "prosthetic memory." Landsberg defines prosthetic memory as having four characteristics. First, these are "not the product of lived experiences," but are, instead, the result of experiencing a mediated interpretation of the past.[18] Next, these memories are often based on physical engagement rather than solely intellectual or emotional understanding. Dancing the East Coast Swing to popular music from World War II, wearing vintage clothes, or using slang from the Jazz Age are all examples of how to graft the past onto our present identities. Third, Landsberg explicitly draws a link between prosthetic memory and commodity, arguing that mass culture is not simply portioning out the past in easy to swallow "capsules of meaning." As mass culture is consumed, it serves up a banquet of options from which to draw an identity. Finally, prosthetic memories feel real.[19] This feeling of connection helps "condition how a person thinks about the world" in the present.[20]

Malgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska, Robert Burgoyne, and Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams take up the matter of history in the media. McElroy and Williams examine the ways in which audiences and participants shape historical reality television. Using 2007's *Coal House* and 2008's *Coal House at War* as the basis for their study, they examine how a historical reality program functions as a nexus around which communities gather and interact. McElroy and

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[16] Scott Alexander Howard, "Nostalgia," *Analysis* 72, no. No. 4 (October 2012): 642–43.

[17] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free, 1979), 13; Howard, "Nostalgia," 643.

[18] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 20.

[19] Landsberg, 21.

[20] Landsberg, 21.

Williams write that participants – both audience and "actors" – "engage in unpaid media labor to . . . promote their own experiences and interpretations of the show."[21] In this case audiences do more than simply support the program by watching it; they also promote it in a public, if digital, forum and across multiple platforms.

McElroy and Williams define the goal of historical reality television as "seeking to recreate a domestic historical past for contemporary, ordinary participants to experience and, possibly, endure" where the "'big reveal' is (supposedly) the past itself."[22] Because it is episodic in nature, however, historical reality television abides by the conventions of not only reality television but also the television drama genre. Television's hour-long portions and the immediacy associated with airing schedules also create a sense of urgency in consuming programming.

Rymsza-Pawlowska argues that while the programming is, by necessity, mediated for the viewer through editing, post-production, and the slow release of the program over a six or eight week period, historical reality programming is more accessible to audiences than documentaries with their steady stream of talking heads and ponderous narrative voice-overs. Whereas documentaries may be presented as "truth" and are focused on an event, reality programs are more interested in authenticity and the experience of the social actors.[23]

Three authors, Vanessa Agnew, Tony Horwitz, and Stephanie Decker help to define not only what historical re-enactment is but the individuals and groups who engage in re-enactment.

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[21] Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams, "Remembering Ourselves, Viewing the Others: Historical Reality Television and Celebrity in the Small Nation," *Television & New Media* 12, no. 3 (2011): 187.

[22] McElroy and Williams, 189.

[23] Malgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska, "Frontier House: Reality Television and the Historical Experience.," *Film and History* 37, no. 1 (May 2007): 35–36.

While Horwitz and Decker consider unique groups – Civil War re-enactors and members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, respectively – Vanessa Agnew tackles the difficult task of defining re-enactment for an academic audience and does so by drawing on multiple academic disciplines and methodologies. For her, re-enactment offers amateur historians an opportunity to explore the past on their own terms. Those terms sometimes mean different types of engagement. While some may spend a day visiting a living history museum, others will spend not only time but also money to present themselves as historical interpreters or what are more casually known as re-enactors. Agnew discusses that re-enactors not only embrace a "real" past but also introduce a level of historical imagination that serves to fill in the gaps created by the passage of time and the loss of information. Raising issues of class and the desire to seek the sublime or, as Tony Horwitz refers to it, "period rush," Vanessa Agnew's introduction to the Extreme and Sentimental History issue of the journal *Criticism* sets the stage for the conversation and helps to lay out many of its basic tenets.[24] David Thelen argues that today's popular interest in history can only be sustained by reconfiguring the academy's present understanding of history to accommodate a focus on individual experience. The individualizing of relationships to history often runs counter to the "official" narratives supported by government and civic leaders. Furthermore, many Americans view history as "something completed and finished . . . over."[25] If something has been relegated to books, then it is no longer of use or interest.

How can history be made fresh and exciting? Thelen refers back to Marx and Engels for the answer: allowing, even encouraging "individuals [to] make their own histories" and to find

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[24] Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," Summer 2004, 330.

[25] David P. Thelen, "Learning from the Past: Individual Experience and Re-Enactment," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 2 (June 2003): 157.

their own connections rather than simply taking up their proscribed places in the larger historical narrative.[26] In this venture Thelen proposes that history education draw more on the practice of re-enactment. By encouraging participation, museums and history educators break away from the traditional classroom setting of received knowledge and can make history relevant. While it may still fall within the definition of commodity-based action – these programs often require either an entrance fee or tuition of some sort – the opportunities for actually incorporating history into people's experience are many and varied.

Thelen took up this question with fellow scholar Roy Rosenweig in *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life.* Thelen and Rosenweig conducted an extensive study of how everyday Americans make history applicable and relevant on an individual basis. Thelen followed up this study with the article "Learning from the Past: Individual Experience and Re-Enactment." Here he suggests that historical re-enactment should be an integral component of history education, as does Scott Magelssen in his work on second-person interpretation.[27] Magelssen defines second-person interpretation as "Second-person is an emergent kind of living history activity in which museumgoers get to try out being part of the past environment (by performing chores or playing period games), instead of merely visiting it."[28] In doing so, both Thelen and Magelssen introduce alternatives to traditional modes of history instruction (the museum or the classroom) and encourage hands-on participation, allowing students the chance to claim their experience and make it their own. This trend toward more visitor-shaped experiences forces museums to reconsider not only their position as

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[26] Thelen, 159.

[27] Scott Magelssen, "This Is a Drama. You Are Characters": The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's "Follow the North Star.," *Theatre Topics* 16, no. 1 (March 2006): 19–34.

[28] Magelssen, 19.

authorities but also how much latitude visitors should be given to craft their own interpretation of the past.

For some historians, this is a matter of some consternation. Writing in 1993, Susan K. Irwin argued that the popularity of living history sites was on the rise, while also expressing concern about "the impact on the general public and the effect this type of interpretation may have on historical accuracy."[29] The most pressing concern was about the use of such sites "for entertainment purposes" and the fear that living history sites may romanticize history, thereby presenting a diluted and inaccurate portrayal of the time and events that function as the foundation of a site's programming. Alison Landsberg describes a tension between the cognitive and the experiential as "an anxiety about the threat posed to the hegemony of the cognitive by the experiential mode of knowledge."[30] Still others warn of the perils of mistaking history for memory and conflating public and private narratives. Irwin poses a solution to this problem: rather than resigning oneself to the loss of facts and details in "translation" from history book to living history site or television program, she proposes a closer tie between academic and public historians, thus allowing both groups to contribute their particular expertise and develop a more accurate whole.

The popular appropriation of history and the search for a place in it is very relevant to present day academic discourse. As history comes to mean different things to different people and the idea of a dominant historical narrative is challenged at every turn, examining how history is being used and reimagined helps historians to find their footing in a changing field. Historical

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[29] Susan K. Irwin, "Popular History: Living History Sites, Historical Interpretation, and the Public" (M.A. Thesis, Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University, 1993), ii..

[30] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 131.

re-enactments serve to dismantle the obstacles that create distance between us and the past and make history accessible, but at the risk of mistaking history for memory. One of the looming issues is the accidental "destruction of the past (and historical distance) …one of the most eerie phenomena of the late 20th century."[31] As historians and cultural scholars, we need to locate our middle ground. We can either lament about it or we can reinvent ourselves as tour guides. The funny hats might be uncomfortable at first, but no less so than forced obsolescence.

At heart in all of this desire for connection and control is how we choose to remember. It seems a simple enough premise – we make a conscious effort to preserve some memories and to obliterate others. This can happen on a small scale – among individuals or families – or it can rise to a national scale as those memories that are shameful are shunted aside. Traditions are often ensconced within vernacular narratives and it is the tradition that can often start individuals on a path into the past. The romanticizing of some far-flung American past where we were better, stronger, and more honest invites many to seek refuge in this mystical land shrouded in battlefield mists and the dust of forgotten archives. As more materials come to light and more resources become available, increasing numbers of people are accused of living in the past. While time travel has not yet been made truly practical, the suturing of memory and the crafting of personalized historical narratives allows participants to place themselves in the historical record. In *The Presence of the Past*, Rosenzweig and Thelen remark "when faced with authentic objects in the past, many feel transported straight back to the times when history was being made."[32] These transferential spaces opened to us via the mass media and mass cultural sites and

[31] Jonathan Lamb, "Historical Re-Enactment, Extremity, and Passion," *The Eighteenth Century* 49, no. 3 (2008): 241.

[32] Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past*, 12.

events become the conduits to the past where we can receive our grafts. Our bodies become the new sites of memory and, as a result, that memory lives on. The "time traveler" has not only memory but history engraved on his/her skin.

Much of the scholarship to date focuses on institutions, professionals, and re-enactors. However, this dissertation emphasizes individuals and their relationships with and exploration of the past. The more casual retronaut and, on the other end of the spectrum, the more extreme retronaut have not yet received much academic attention. It is my goal to correct this oversight and offer new perspectives on our relationships with the past.

Methodology

For this project, I identified 103 subjects and obtained signed consent from each per IRB protocol. Of that number, I conducted 54 interviews. The most common reason for not being able to conduct an interview is that making contact after events was difficult and sometimes the subjects were non-responsive. I located my subjects by attending re-enactments and living history events as well as requesting referrals from those I interviewed. All interviews were conducted under the auspices of IRB-approved consent forms. Some of the interviews were conducted on-site and some via email, but the majority were conducted by phone or Skype. The interviews were then transcribed.

After the interviews, I sorted the subjects into three groups based on their responses to my list of interview questions. Level Ones are those who take "day trips" into the past through mediated representations on television or during visits to museums, living history sites, or as spectators at re-enactments. Level Twos are "retronauts" who seek to experience the past without institutional mediation or televisual interpretation. Instead, they conduct research, interpret history on their own, and explore the past using their own bodies through wearing historical

clothing and using historically accurate equipment while engaging in recreations of historical activities and events. This group splits into two categories: living history and re-enacting, although several of my subjects participate in both activities. Living historians are amateurs who conduct research into a particular time or historical figure and then present historical impressions of these figures. They interpret history in much the same way that credentialed historians do, but without academic training or the guidelines to which many historians adhere. The third group, "dual citizens," are those for whom the past is a place they can visit and, if they choose, they can pattern their clothing, entertainments, homes, and transportation after an earlier time. As I did not find as many of this type, I chose to set those materials aside for a future iteration of this project. I also found that slippage between the categories does occur as interests wax and wane or as life circumstances preclude activities.

I also identified a fourth type of engagement: nostalgia or Level 0.5. This was the common element in every interview and so it is the subject of chapter one. For this chapter I used nostalgia-themed magazines, specifically *Good Housekeeping's Victoria / Victoria* magazine and the catalogs of the Victorian Trading Company. I compiled my data from letters to the editor from *Good Housekeeping's Victoria* magazine from the second issue (Winter 1987/1988) to the October 1991 issue, for a total of twelve issues. Some of these resources are in the Popular Culture Library archives, while others are from my collection. Within the Victorian Trading Company catalog, both online and print editions, I found evidence of the manufacture of nostalgia through keywords and product descriptions that provide historical context or a backstory as well as evoking either personal nostalgia or historical nostalgia.

For this analysis, I gathered physical VTC catalogs from 2014 and 2015. The company also has a website, but I have chosen to limit my research sample to material artifacts in this

case. The catalogs I'm looking at run from late Spring 2014 through Spring 2015, giving a fairly large sample from which to work. There are sometimes multiple catalogs per season. For example, there were three different mailings for Spring 2015 alone.

The nostalgia industry packages the past and sells it back to consumers. Magazines such as *Good Housekeeping's Victoria* / *Victoria* and mail order companies like Victorian Trading Company focus on the Victorian era with occasional diversions into the Edwardian era or the 1920s. Both publications sell a lifestyle that hearkens to a time when gender roles were clear, as were class and race divisions, but the latter are not mentioned. The past they present is white and, at the very least, middle class – and available if consumers are willing to spend. One other element that emerged with *Victoria* was a community of readers that first expressed themselves in letters to the editor and then later on magazine-hosted online forums. As the Internet opened borders and collapsed even more time, people of similar interests took their love of the past and nostalgia for a better time on the web. This also fostered a sharing of knowledge and a development of a do-it-yourself approach to reaching out to the past through sewing, cooking, and style. A link to the past can be forged if a nostalgic is willing to invest the time and energy into learning.

For chapter two, I watched the historical reality series *Colonial House*, *Pioneer House*, *Texas Ranch House*, and *Victorian Slum House*. In addition to being able to watch other people try to experience the past, there is also the ability to question the way it was through inclusion of women and people of color in narratives in which they are often afterthoughts. There may be also be a conflict between past systems of behavior and modern modes of thought, and participants sometimes balk at the historically accurate action they "should" take. When this

"ethical anachronism" is presented on screen, it asks audiences a question: if I were there, what would I do?[33]

In each, with the exception of *Victorian Slum House,* which was filmed in London and covered the experience of the poor and working class in England from the 1860s to the 1900s, I examined how historical narratives that make up the core of American history and identity up to 1900 were presented, sometimes reinterpreted, and often challenged by narration and casting choices. I also watched how modern identities sometimes clashed with the historical roles participants were asked to fulfill, particularly for participants who were women or people of color.

Chapter three's research into "day tripping" at living history sites and for second-person interpretation required travel. I recruited most of my interview subjects during field research at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; Mt. Vernon, Virginia and the Huntington Beach Civil War Days in Huntington Beach, California. I also conducted research at Historic Jamestown, Virginia; Conner Prairie, Indiana; Fort Meigs, Ohio; the Time Travel Mart in Mar Vista and Echo Park, California; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition in Las Vegas, Nevada. I also participated in second-person interpretation at the Gettysburg National Military Park in 2013, Conner Prairie in 2013, and Fort Meigs in 2015.

During my visits, I spoke with subjects about working at Colonial Williamsburg and observed third-person interpreters at Mt. Vernon. I also drew on my interviews with re-enactors and amateur living historians to better understand if museums or living history were held in

[33] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 489.

higher esteem and why. The most typical response was that living history sites are better because visitors have a chance to become involved with activities and interpreters rather than simply walking through a museum. For them, experiential memory was key. Visitors have an opportunity to use their bodies to understand other times, places, and people, grafting those memories on to their understandings of history. In addition to looking at visits to living history sites like Colonial Williamsburg, I also looked at how carrying an identity card through an exhibition space can guide the visit. I describe this activity as in between simply visiting a living history site and what Scott Magelssen terms "second-person interpretation."

Finally, chapter four is built almost entirely on interviews with living historians and re-enactors recruited during field work in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 2013 and 2015 and Huntington Beach, California in 2013. I identified most of the subjects for this chapter while attending re-enactments and striking up conversation with people in uniforms. I was surprised at not only how willing so many were to talk, but also how many were willing to refer me to others in their groups. Deanna Chirchirillo Fisher and John Spaziani, of the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band and the Civil War Heritage Foundation, respectively, introduced me to their groups and facilitated interviews by bringing people over to speak with me as I conducted interviews on-site.

Family, be it biological or assembled from a group of close friends, was also deeply important to those with whom I spoke for this chapter. I focus on several groups here: the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band, the 18th Virginia Infantry, the Civil War Heritage Foundation, and the 11th Missouri Mounted Cavalry. Each group, although quite different in composition and motivation, sought to explore the past together. The cohesion between group members was

particularly powerful as these groups stayed together in spite of the loss of members to inactivity, relocation, and death.

The tension between the recorded past – that presented as the accepted historical narrative – and the remembered past – the passed-down heritage and identity of a community – persists, particularly when you speak with those who either present historical impressions of or re-enact as members of the Confederacy. I interviewed several members of the Civil War Heritage Foundation during the 4th of July holiday in 2015, which happened to be the week after activist Bree Newsome removed the Confederate battle flag from the flagpole at the South Carolina statehouse. Many of those who performed historical impressions of Confederates hewed closely to the line of "heritage, not hate," which is a common assertion among those that represent the South. Some of those who expressed that point of view also explained that they literally had ancestry that tied them to one side, the other, or, in some cases, both. The one element I did not hear addressed was what the flag might mean to a person of color either then or now.

Gender and the field of re-enactment was a topic that came up often with the women I interviewed. Some find groups that permit women either in the camp or to go out on the field as "cross-dressers." Still others dive into social re-enacting, a field of re-enactment that focuses less on the importance of authenticity and, instead, emphasizes enjoying the aesthetic of the past. However, this practice raises questions about whose stories are not being told in these spaces. I did not find many social re-enactors of color, for example. Furthermore, there is an investment of time, money, and sometimes travel required that can be prohibitive to those who might want to participate.

Although I did not dedicate a chapter to the level three retronaut, their presence in my research should be acknowledged. At the end of an event, regardless of the role played, a re-enactor can shed the uniform and persona and return to the present. However, there are some who prefer to remain in the past. For these retronauts, the present is merely a place they were born – they have no desire to live here. Kim Poovey, one of two level three retronauts among my interview subjects, said "I'm telling you, God started making me in 1865, had to put me down so he could get done with all this war stuff every year, he forgot about me, and then in 1965 went, 'Oops,' and finished me. So I was finished 100 years too late."[34]

Some negotiate this discontent by literally retrofitting their homes. Dual citizens take the structure and its décor back in time not simply as a design choice but in the hopes of creating a time capsule in which they can live. Several examples of this sort of historical renovation have emerged in the past fifteen years. Jo Hedwig Teeuwisse, a historical consultant in Amsterdam, Netherlands who specializes in 1930s-1950s history, chose to live, dress, and entertain as though living in the 1930s.[35] Peter Saunders, a council worker in Nottingham, United Kingdom, turned back the clock on his Victorian home and refit and refurbished it in a fashion appropriate for the working-class family who originally occupied the structure.[36] A third, Stephen Alexander, has also transformed both body and home to fit in the past. In this case, however, he bears a striking

[34] Kim Poovey and Darryl Poovey, Interview with Kim and Darryl Poovey, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Telephone, October 10, 2013.

[35] Jo Hedwig Teeuwisse, "My 1930's House," My 1930's House - a set on Flickr, August 27, 2009, http://www.flickr.com/photos/hab3045/sets/72157600018535309/detail/.

[36] "Living in the Past: Man Spends Six Years Turning Cottage into Victorian Time Capsule," *The Daily Mail*, September 22, 2010, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1314241/Man-spends-6-years-turning-cottage-Victorian-time-capsule.html.

resemblance to General George Armstrong Custer and has retrofitted his home for not only living but also for film crews and tours.[37]

This level of engagement with the past is literally domesticating history, bringing it into the home and living with it. The commitment required to surrender not only space but also current comforts speaks to the dedication of someone who has decided that, if the past is their destination, they must have their passport ready. As a result, they are ready to take on the present – or even the past.

This was both an ethnographic and an autoethnographic project. My primary focus was on my interview subjects and their experiences and responses. Each respondent sought to understand the past because of a love of history, regardless what type of activity they used to explore that interest. However, I became increasingly aware of my subject position in this project with the more research I did, the more places I traveled, and the more encounters I had. As a result, there were several points in the process in which I needed to carefully document my observations to account for myself as an inadvertent subject of my own research.

[37] Steve Alexander, "Steve Alexander Is George Custer!," Welcome to GeorgeCuster.com, 2011, http://www.georgecuster.com/index.html.

CHAPTER I. LEVEL 0.5: NOSTALGIA

The past is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there.

Nostalgia is possibly the most pervasive motivator for temporal tourism. It suggests time travel, where the ticket to a now out-of-reach past is an image, a scent, or a scrap of music. People can be nostalgic for other people, places, or products connected with their own living memory or can call on times they've never known, embracing "an idealized past where lives supposedly were simpler, unhurried, unthreatening – and quaintly charming."[38] This is how temporal tourism starts: nostalgia and an interest in the past, whether it is a past remembered, a past studied, or a past imagined. Nostalgia opens the door to "the past" and advertisers and media programmers invite consumers to step into their carefully-produced version of the past. Sometimes nostalgia calls on us to remember being children; sometimes it requires that we slip into a mindset from another era.

The historical past to which nostalgics refer is one that they have never lived and have only read or heard about -- and likely never existed. This constructed past is built on "historical incidents, romance, role models, aspirational/idealized characters, long ago settings, and sometimes exaggerated tones" and is made all the more desirable because of present-day anxieties.[39] Many of the concerns expressed during interviews were grounded in the continuing evolution of societal roles since the respondents' preferred time period, most often the mid to late nineteenth century. Twenty-first century ambiguity and stressors left some respondents longing

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[38] Fred E.H. Schroeder, "Living History: Getting Beyond Nostalgia?," *The Journal of Museum Education* 10, no. 3: Interpreting Historic Sites & the Built Environment (Summer 1985): 19.

[39] Christopher Marchegiani and Ian Phau, "Away from 'Unified Nostalgia': Conceptual Differences of Personal and Historical Nostalgia Appeals in Advertising," *Journal of Promotion Management* 16 (2010): 82.

for a time where everyone was polite and "knew their place."[40] In other words, for them, "the past is perfect; the present is tense."[41] As a result, several of those interviewed sought ways to not only connect with particular time frames but also sought something of an instructional guide on living in the past to possibly reinforce their interpretation of that time while escaping current anxieties.

In the earliest days of its definition, the medical field described nostalgia as an ailment akin to homesickness.[42] In her article, "You Can't Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History," Susan J. Matt observes those who were subject to bouts of nostalgia were diagnosed as using the past as an escape from the stresses and pressures of the present and the treatment was psychiatric care.[43] This evolved during the twentieth century as nostalgia itself took on a much more positive cast. As our relationships with the past changed, so too did our relationship with mechanism that allows us to look backwards, sometimes to times we've never known. Unfortunately, nostalgia is often fraught because of history itself. While the past might seem warm, safe, and welcoming, it doesn't embrace everyone because not everyone was equally welcomed.

For some scholars, nostalgia is strictly personal or strictly historical. Two of the most notable voices in the field, Fred Davis and David Lowenthal, occupy opposite corners of the debate. Davis, author of *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, is firmly a proponent

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[40] Poovey and Poovey, Interview with Kim and Darryl Poovey. It should be noted that, while some women expressed this sentiment, the subjects that most often expressed this anxiety were white, middle-class males, with class being attributed based on level of education, occupation, and number of years in occupation as reported by the interview subject.

[41] This phrase is fairly common but has no specific attribution.

[42] Susan J. Matt, "You Can't Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (September 2007): 470.

[43] Matt, 492–93.

of nostalgia as personal. Lowenthal, author of *The Past is a Foreign Country*, argues that nostalgia is primarily historical in that it engulfs the entire past.[44] Barbara Stern presents a case that allows the two types to coexist.

Writing in 1992, Barbara Stern identified two types of nostalgia: historical and personal. Historical or simulated nostalgia is temporally situated in "the time before the audience was born," allowing the nostalgia-prone varying degrees of historical distance from the events and lifeways that constitute their focus.[45] It provides an ample inventory from which nostalgics draw culture, manners, commodity, and other aspects of day to day lived experience to build present-day identities and lifestyles. It also serves to reinforce generational stratification, where groups are bound by common experience, cultural references, and commodities. Those who are subject to historical nostalgia are drawn by "the past" as opposed to their own lived past. Historical nostalgia is more universally appealing because it often refers to a shared vision of "the past."

While historical nostalgia is "generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly," personal nostalgia brings things much closer to home.[46] Personal nostalgia is bound by "a personally remembered past" and draws on experiences and recollections from within one's lifetime and can call on elements of one's childhood, connections to family, or to media or consumer goods.[47] Writing in 1985, Lowenthal remarked "More than any previous

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[44] Morris B. Holbrook, "On the New Nostalgia: 'These Foolish Things' and Echoes of the Dear Departed Past," in *Continuities in Popular Culture: The Present in the Past and the Past in the Present and the Future*, ed. Ray B. Browne and Ronald J. Ambrosetti (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 103; Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 8; Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 6.

[45] Barbara Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siècle Effect," *Journal of Advertising* 21, no. 4 (December 1992): 13.

[46] Marchegiani and Phau, "Away from 'Unified Nostalgia': Conceptual Differences of Personal and Historical Nostalgia Appeals in Advertising," 82.

[47] Marchegiani and Phau, 82.

generation, we cram our houses with furnishings that deliberately evoke the past, adorn walls with family photos and mantels with memorabilia, and convert streets into 'Memory Lanes.'"[48] That impulse has not slowed in the intervening thirty years. While antiques are certainly desirable as material objects with authentic links to the past, their scarcity means that they are often reserved for those of financial means. For those who wish to get close to the past but are constrained by economics, the next best step is to find objects with that veneer of authenticity that allow them to "bask in the glory of the past in the hope that some of it will magically rub off."[49]

Nostalgia is cyclical; as a given generation approaches their late thirties or early forties, the reach into the past seems to cast back at least twenty years at a time.[50] Davis describes these waves of nostalgia as originating in "identity discontinuity," or the sense that those experiences that normally anchor a life are in flux or are absent - and, for those entering midlife, looking back to a time of happiness, health, and potential can be comforting in the face of what may lie ahead.[51] In the 1980s this led to a revival of media and products from the 1960s and a 1970s revival in the late 1990s.[52] Now, thirty years later, children of the '80s and '90s can indulge in their childhood and teenaged favorites all over again – although this time they have the income to support those desires.

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[48] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 367.

[49] Belk, 1988, p 149 qtd in Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siècle Effect," 15.

[50] Holbrook, "On the New Nostalgia: 'These Foolish Things' and Echoes of the Dear Departed Past," 86.

[51] Randall Rothenberg, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: Advertising; the Past Is Now the Latest Craze," *New York Times*, November 29, 1989, Late Edition (East Coast) edition, sec. D.

[52] Stephen Brown, "Retro-Marketing: Yesterday's Tomorrows, Today!," *Marketing, Intelligence, & Planning* 17, no. 7 (1999): 363; Rothenberg, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: Advertising; the Past Is Now the Latest Craze."

Advertising provides "direct ways in which history is experienced as something to be consumed, albeit tangentially as connected to product rather than commodity itself."[53] Some examples of this are television commercials around holiday times or the recent trends that position those of Generation X as consumers of large-scale durable goods such as vehicles. A recent advertisement for Honda, for example, blends nostalgia for 1980s-era toys from the Masters of the Universe line with newer model cars as marketing firms try to link personal nostalgia and buying power.[54] It is appealing to the very essence of personal nostalgia --"the way *I* was" -- by associating the days of make-believe with a vehicle that can satisfy some of those same needs for adventure and imagination in adults.

We draft our modern-day identities based on the cultural and social influences around us. That does not change when the source material is drawn from the past. When asking a group of respondents about their conception of history, several cited books, television, film, and music as their source material for their interest in the past. Elements from these sources can then be assembled, remixed, and crafted to shape an individual's relationship with the past and their identities in the present. For example, one could draw musical tastes from the 1930s and then extrapolate that interest into a further exploration of 1930s life. It is in this way that individuals can eclipse the "great man" model of history and engage with the social and cultural history of a time**.**

Nostalgia further complicates by its very nature – it is an idealized past, but not the past – and not everyone finds comfort there. For some, the past is a place of racial or gender-based

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[53] Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 8.

[54] Jason Tabrys, "Skeletor And He-Man's Bromance Is On Full Display In Honda's Latest Commercial," *UPROXX* (blog), December 7, 2014, http://uproxx.com/gammasquad/2014/12/skeletor-heman-honda-christmas-ads/.

discrimination, where their potentials were ignored or utterly denied. These eras are problematic for anyone whose family circumstances may not have fit the "ideal" of the time, particularly for people of color, women, or other minority groups. To make the past more palatable, nostalgia sometimes circumvents historical facts and displaces material objects or ideas from their historical moorings. Advertising makes good use of this aspect of nostalgia. Jerome De Groot writes advertising provides "direct ways in which history is experienced as something to be consumed, albeit tangentially as connected to product rather than commodity itself."[55] Rather than focusing on the negatives of history, advertising and other media demonstrate "just how ingrained in the cultural imagination certain versions of the past are, whether they happened or not."[56] To be nostalgic is to look back at who we think we were.

The past most often identified as the subject of nostalgia and marketed as such is that of middle class, native-born Americans. The nostalgia industry focuses primarily two time periods: the Victorian/Edwardian era and the 1950s. Both of these periods are considered to be high points in American history wherein societal roles were clear, middle-class lifestyles were neatly ordered, and the material culture of the time left consumable (and reproducible) artifacts. When national fits of nostalgia strike, those are sometimes expressed in media. These bouts of nostalgia can also cycle based on anniversaries or significant current events. On a more personal level, nostalgia can be expressed and satisfied through consumerism.

For this chapter I'm looking at how historical and personal nostalgia are evoked in female consumers by lifestyle magazines like *Victoria* and catalogues such as Victorian Trading Company that feature vintage-inspired products. Both types of publications present an ideal of

[55] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 8.

[56] De Groot, 9.

historical white womanhood and have made "big business selling the same surprising product: femininity."[57] While *Victoria* shed its historical focus some years ago due to editorial and ownership changes, Victorian Trading Company has stuck with its original mission.

With my examination of *Victoria,* I am exploring the evolving role of women and the anxiety attached to that evolution in the late 1980s and early 1990s as expressed in letters to the editor. For many readers, the beautiful and uncomplicated past presented by *Victoria* was comforting. I will also look at what version of the Victorian era is presented, where those era boundaries are placed, who is hailed in these magazines, and who is omitted. As for Victorian Trading Company, their number one product is historical nostalgia with periodic bursts of personal nostalgia. In this chapter I examine how they construct narratives to historically situate their products and to generate what Barbara Stern calls "simulated nostalgia."[58] Again, I look at who appears in their pages for clues on who their target audience is and how they present "Victoriana" to their customers.

All The Memory That's Fit To Print: *Victoria* Magazine

If there's an interest, there's a magazine that caters to it. Magazines inform, entertain, instruct, and reinforce elements of identity shaped around an interest or hobby. While the industry's focus is on profits, the attention paid to specific market segments has helped communities to coalesce. Within hobbies and niche interests, community support helps to not only provide social connection, but also historical background and tips for those who engage in do it yourself activities.

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[57] Sue Woodman, "Victoria Reigns...Again," *Working Woman*, September 1991, 77.

[58] Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siècle Effect," 13.

Many magazines on the market are history-focused, but there are a few that are nostalgia-driven. Some, such as *American Heritage*, aim to educate readers. Others, such as *Early American Life*, concentrate primarily on collectibles and restoration of historical properties. Of those that are explicitly focused on nostalgia, several target the historical past of the last seventy to one hundred years. Among them are *Nostalgia Digest*, *Nostalgic America*, *Good Old Days*, *Reminisce*, *Keep Rockin'*, and *Boomer Magazine*. Even within magazines there is a split between personal nostalgia, in magazines such as *Reminisce*, with its focus on memories of the 1940s-1980s, and historical nostalgia, in magazines such as *Victoria*.

Victoria shares several important characteristics with nostalgia magazines such as *Reminisce* and *Good Old Days*: its conversational nature, celebration of the past and of past lifeways, and frequent features showcasing sites rescued and restored to their historic glory. However, each has its distinctive characteristics. *Reminisce* falls squarely in the category of personal nostalgia with their call to readers of "do you remember when?" and "send us your memories," where the consumer provides much of the content for the magazine through story and photograph submissions.[59] *Victoria*, on the other hand, evoked a past outside living memory, thus marking it as historical rather than personal. The personal element comes from readers through connections to family and was originally contained in the letters from the editor pages or the essay at the conclusion of the issue. The most significant divergence is that *Victoria* was not only a nostalgia magazine – it was a lifestyle magazine as well.

> "*Victoria* is truly a first: It is the only modern magazine that treats women with the same respect with which men's magazines treat men. I confidently turn each page knowing that I will only find beauty and that no page will feature anything that is not in the best interests of women. Thank you for recognizing that we are

[59] "We Need Your Stories," *Reminisce*, July 2015.

> women – delicate, sensitive, and feminine." – Rebecca Glantz, Las Vegas, Nevada[60]
>
> "I applaud your publication *Victoria*! In a world that seems intent on stripping women of their femininity, *Victoria* allows me to relish the sentiments and frivolities traditionally reserved for women…My nine-month-old son is now sleeping and I'm anxious to read Spring, 1988 for the third time. Thank you!" – Mrs. Robert Mathes, Newcastle, Indiana[61]

There are many attributes of history that resonate strongly with men such as victories on the battlefield or the sports field and there is an entire genre of magazines that cater to such historical interests. Nostalgia, on the other hand, is often gendered and marketed as female. According to Carolyn Kitch, "[t]wo-thirds of *Reminisce* readers and four-fifths of *Good Old Days* readers are female."[62] Many of men's nostalgic products are focused on traditional men's historical interests – in catalogs, tools and sports or military memorabilia. For women, though, the changing nature of their roles in society is a flashpoint for nostalgic longing. Kitch observes that "gerontologists have found that women look back on their lives differently than men do: 'The process of life review seems to produce a more positive sense of a life career for women than for men.'"[63] The "process of life review," according to several letters to the editor from *Victoria*, is also very family-centric with recollections of not only raising their children, but also being raised by mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives. Dianne Svec of Port Angeles, Washington, an early *Victoria* reader, voiced this feeling in a letter to the editor in the second issue: "*Victoria* made me feel very warm, very soft, and very glad to be a woman. It took me back to the days of my childhood when a summer visit to grandma's garden meant a bouquet of

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[60] "Dear Friends," *Victoria*, June 1989.

[61] "Dear Friends," *Victoria*, Summer 1988.

[62] Carolyn L. Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 145.

[63] Helterline and Nouri qtd in Kitch, 145.

flowers and daisy chains. Hours spent in the attic dressing up in petticoats and dresses. Tall glasses of lemonade and picking berries for pie…"[64]

In his study of the neo-swing movement in the late 1990s, Eric Usner observed that "the common desire to address these losses, to reinstate these 'traditional values' into [participants'] lives, fuels the…nostalgia."[65] Unlike the dancers in Usner's work, who looked for their instruction from the 1930s and 1940s, *Victoria*'s readers cast back to the late 1800s. This field of memory, beyond that of living memory, allowed readers to not only embrace the past but to indulge in the imagined, romantic version of that past. On this point, Kitch writes "Indeed, these magazines illustrate the difference between history and memory, the latter of which has more to do with modern concerns and evolving social identity than it does with the representation of an actual past."[66]

> "With a job, a child, a house, and a 1980s lifestyle, I seem to never have enough time – even to write a simple letter!...I thank you for allowing me to escape everyday 'rigors of living' with your beautiful magazine…" Mrs. Melissa B. Benoit, Ville Platte, Louisiana[67]

In the late 1980s, as the Baby Boomer generation approached their late thirties and early forties, many began to idealize their childhoods, marrying youthful reminiscence with disposable income.[68] For some, that idealization meant turning back the clock for something considered lost: how to fulfill gender roles in a changing society. Lifestyle magazines like *Good*

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[64] "Dear Friends," *Good Housekeeping's Victoria*, Winter 1987.

[65] Eric Martin Usner, "Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present: Nostalgia and Race in Southern California Neo-Swing Dance Culture," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. No. 2, Social and Popular Dance (Winter 2001): 91.

[66] Kitch, *Pages from the Past*, 151.

[67] "Dear Friends," *Victoria*, October 1988.

[68] Rothenberg, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: Advertising; the Past Is Now the Latest Craze."

Housekeeping, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Redbook* provided advice on how to clean and decorate homes, raise children, and manage both career and home life. *Victoria* responded to this cultural moment and provided women information on an identity from the past that somewhat countered the pressures of the present. Rather than simply advising on the state of the modern woman, *Victoria* created a space for readers in which the "feminine arts" such as housekeeping and home-related activities -- gardening, letter-writing, and interior decorating -- were valued. As it did so, it not only linked readers to the historical past, but also connected them to the guiding function of lifestyle magazines in the early twentieth century.

> "I am 26 years old, pursuing a career, and I consider myself to be an independent woman. But the difference is, I do it to please myself and that is what makes *Victoria* so special. *Victoria* is totally dedicated to the pampering of a woman for herself, and the elegance in the beauty that surrounds her…Women have been taught to downgrade their femininity in fear of losing their authority in a man's world. *Victoria* is different, *Victoria* shows women that they can be successful in whatever they choose, but that the most important factor to remember is that you do it for yourself…that is the art of being a woman." – Laura Basili, Astoria, New York[69]

Victoria magazine debuted in 1987 as an offshoot of Hearst Publishing's *Good Housekeeping* and "celebrate[d] old traditions and pastimes," drawing its name from Queen Victoria and the Victorian era.[70] Letters to the editor published in the second issue declared that it was a magazine much needed and that it provided something around which some readers could form social networks and communities. The magazine's taglines -- "return to loveliness" and "a timeless point of view" -- highlighted discontent with women's shifting roles in the 1980s and evoked a "more refined" time. In the Victorian era, roles were more clearly defined and, with that

[69] "Dear Friends," October 1988.

[70] Rothenberg, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: Advertising; the Past Is Now the Latest Craze"; "Victoria's Spirit Lives On," *Good Housekeeping's Victoria*, Winter /1988 1987.

delineation, came fewer choices -- and a supposedly happier populace. In its early years *Victoria* magazine highlighted fashions, interior decorating, historic preservation, and recipes and included features on dances, dinners, and other events that might fall under *Victoria*'s remit. The magazine also includes a marketplace section for vendors at the rear of the publication.

By the second year of publication, *Victoria*'s rapid circulation growth earned industry attention. According to an article from the 29 November 1989 late edition of the New York Times, "*Victoria…* has a circulation of 820,000."[71] This was considerable given that, according to editor Nancy Lindemeyer, only two issues were produced in the first year:

> As I write, we are in the midst of celebrating our third anniversary. So much has happened in a short time, and it is you, dear friends, who deserve the most credit and to whom we are most grateful for our accomplishments. Few magazines have grown as quickly or acquired as devoted a readership as we have…This astonishing record was acknowledged recently when 'Adweek' magazine saluted *Victoria* as the number-one 'hottest' magazine of the year. The best hallmark of our success, I feel, is your letters. Many of you have written to tell us how much *Victoria* has changed your lives – new businesses created, new books read, new celebrations planned, and friendships formed – all inspired by the pages of the magazine….In marking our third birthday, I feel I'm entitled to brag a bit – as you should, too. By believing in *Victoria*, you have made a very special magazine possible. Thank you, dear friends![72]

Although the magazine's profile evolved during the late 1990s and early 2000s to appeal to a changing readership and competition from entities such as Martha Stewart Omnimedia, the early issues are still well-regarded. *Victoria* back issues are still in demand on sites such as eBay and Etsy and tribute sites such as *Remembering Victoria* help to keep the magazine's original spirit alive thirty years after its premier issue.[73]

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[71] Rothenberg, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS: Advertising; the Past Is Now the Latest Craze."

[72] Nancy Lindemeyer, "Dear Friends," *Victoria*, June 1990.

[73] Charm And Grace, "Remembering Victoria Magazine," *Remembering Victoria Magazine* (blog), February 5, 2011, http://rememberingvictoria.blogspot.com/2011/02/fond-reminiscence.html.

> "To my amazement I discovered bits and pieces of myself as I turned the pages [of *Victoria*]. All those special secrets of extravagance we women tuck away in the corners of our thoughts came to life." – Marianne Hansen, London, Ontario, Canada[74]

Lifestyle magazines are not always about the lifestyle one has, but more often about the lifestyle one wants. They instruct readers in how to dress, how to decorate, how to entertain, how to travel. *Victoria* functioned as a historical how-to guide with real-world application. Each article was firmly anchored in the dreamy, romantic, soft-focused worldview that stands in for the Victorian era. As a nostalgic construction, everything from "Dear Readers" letters section to the "Where to Shop and Buy" marketplace relied on reader's belief in the graciousness of times past. The language of *Victoria* was also a powerful tool to bolster this connection to another era. Terms such as "cozy," "joy," "reminiscence," "romantic," "tradition," "bountiful," "yesteryear," "elegant," "charm," and "gracious" were liberally employed in titles and summaries, on the cover, in articles, and in photo captions.[75]

Victoria was as much about show as it was about tell. Most of the articles are accompanied by beautiful, gauzy images of girls and woman in clothing or surroundings that update the lace and softness of the past with the fashion trends of the present. As an example, a Winter 1987 article entitled "Sisters" featured designs by Laura Ashley, who specialized in prairie dresses, socks with lace cuffs, and other clothing inspired by the late 1800s. In the following issue, an article inspired by L.M. Montgomery's island home in Canada instructs readers to look for "clothes cut for today, yet reminiscent of another time…"[76] The settings, like the featured fashions, were softened by snow, filtered sunlight, candlelight, or firelight. A

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[74] "Dear Friends," Winter 1987.

[75] "In This Issue," *Victoria*, Winter 1987.

[76] "An Island Walk," *Victoria,* Spring 1988, 90.

nimbus constructed of light and time seemed to encompass the magazine from cover to cover. It also seemed to extend its light to the burgeoning community forming around it.

As magazines gather readers and the editorial direction takes shape, communities emerge. In the case of *Victoria*, the coalescence of a community was almost immediate. The letters to the editor section in the second issue hailed the magazine's arrival as a haven for women and a source for conversations and inspiration. Helen Blackburn of Des Moines, Iowa, enthused "Thought you might be interested to know that three generations of our family are happily anticipating our subscriptions to *Victoria*. Living in Florida, Iowa, and Colorado… our lifestyles are quite different, but after reading the premier issue, we are delighted and intrigued with the concept."[77] First through letters to the editor, then event announcements, and later through magazine-hosted internet forums that, unfortunately, no longer exist, readers found ways to bond over not only the articles and resources in *Victoria*'s pages, but also with interests that encompassed the broad field of Victoriana. With conversations that ranged from memory to history, about spouses, children, gardens, successes, and a myriad of other points of connection, genuine relationships formed that eclipsed the physical or digital page.

Victoria's commitment to its vision highlights one of the issues of nostalgia: an effort to strip the negatives out of history and leave a shell that can be redressed yet still claim at least a hint of historical fidelity. To do so, *Victoria* neatly avoided any discussion of the many problematic elements of the era from which it drew its name. Readers were presented with articles filled with beautiful clothing and tea tables brimming with baked goods, not discussions of imperialism, racism, poverty, or the consequences of industrialization. One *Victoria* reader,

[77] "Dear Friends," Winter 1987.

Rebecca Glantz of Las Vegas, Nevada, wrote, "I confidently turn each page knowing that I will only find beauty and that no page will feature anything that is not in the best interests of women."[78] If the pages of *Victoria*'s second issue are anything to go by, the "best interests of women" were represented by a Victorian vision that was white and middle-to-upper class. Of the one hundred and thirty-six pages in the issue, there is not a single person of color to be found in any of the featured articles, thus rendering them invisible. The sole depiction of a person of color appears in an advertisement for Lipton's line of "Oriental" herbal teas.[79] The stereotype portrayed hearkens back to the Victorian era, but perhaps not in a fashion intended by the editors. Instead, it helps to cement the exoticization of other cultures in much the same way that advertisements of the late 1800s would have. The stark lines and high contrast colors of the image bleed into the issue's carefully constructed image of the past, but only for a moment as the remainder of the issue snaps the reader back to the floral "joy and charm" of the Victorian era.

> "I am beautifully disturbed by VICTORIA. You have reached my woman's soul. You beckon to a bygone era…when people had time to smell the roses. But my '80s-woman conscience is pricked…Bravo, VICTORIA. But do not ignore the mind-power of romantic women. We smell the roses, but we buy them for ourselves – if need be." Janet Evertsen, Muskegon, Michigan[80]

The version of the past presented in *Victoria* magazine was not only a matter of beautiful imagery and carefully cultivated language. It was also a matter of commodity. Simply reading about the past was not considered sufficient to connect; a tangible object such as clothing, beauty products, or stationary helped readers to step a little closer to the experience of another era. By underpinning this instruction with a reliance on commodity, *Victoria* reinforced the importance

[78] "Dear Friends," June 1989.

[79] "Lipton Introduces Oriental Treasures Herbal Teas," *Victoria,* Winter 1987.

[80] "Dear Friends," *Victoria,* August 1988.

of owning, if not a piece of the past, then something at least bearing the sheen of the past. For some people, that sheen is enough. As Kitch observed "Whether or not the past times and places of these magazines are 'real,' those visions meet some real need of many people…."[81] The need for identity pieces – and the products with which to make those identities complete – often compels nostalgics to source items to bridge the temporal gap between present and past. Fortunately for them, there are companies whose entire existence is motivated by supplying the necessary materials. There's profit in the past and many companies are glad to mine those veins.

The Buyable Past: Companies Selling Us Who We Think We Were

Mail order firms such as Victorian Trading Company, Restoration Hardware, and The J. Peterman Company cater to consumers who feel that the best days may actually be behind them. These companies use keywords to demarcate the line between past and present. Some of these keywords are as direct as "nostalgia" while others are subtler: "retro," "vintage," "inspired by," or "modeled from" and "illustrate just how ingrained in the cultural imagination certain versions of the past are, whether they happened or not."[82] This also applies to nostalgia – an idealized version of the past.

These companies rely on what Stephen Brown terms retro-marketing. Brown distills retro-marketing into three categories: repro-, retro-, and repro-retro:

> Repro pertains to reproducing the old pretty much as it was, albeit meanings may have changed in the meantime. Retro refers to combining the old with the new, usually in the form of old-style styling with hi-tech technology. Repro-retro, on the other hand, involves second helpings of the past, insofar as it revives or reproduces something that traded on nostalgia to start with. Neo-nostalgia, in other words. [83]

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[81] Kitch, *Pages from the Past*, 153.

[82] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 9.

[83] Brown, "Retro-Marketing: Yesterday's Tomorrows, Today!," 365.

For those who wish to get close to the past but can't afford genuine antiques, repro- and repro-retro products come equipped with a veneer of authenticity that allows consumers to "bask in the glory of the past in the hope that some of it will magically rub off."[84] Victorian Trading Company specializes in products with that veneer.

Victorian Trading Company, a mail-order catalog company with a retail location in Lenexa, Kansas, offers consumers the same rose-scented past as *Victoria* magazine. Both emerged in the same cultural moment and in the same year: 1987. Victorian Trading Company (or VTC) specializes in reproductions, vintage-inspired products, and describes itself as a site for "nouveau Victorian gifts and collectibles."[85] The "nouveau Victorian" timeframe expands beyond the 1800s to include the Edwardian era and even beyond the 1920s. Much of their marketing copy uses the word "romantic" to describe not only their products but also the lifestyle to be obtained through use of their products. Their merchandise ranges from beauty products to housekeeping, with seasonal items, clothing, jewelry, furniture, modern items styled as vintage items, and writing materials.

This version of the Victorian/Edwardian era is very specific in showing who is included and who is not. If the 2014-2015 run of Victorian Trading Company catalogs are anything to go by, that world is very white and exclusively female. Based on my sample, people of color didn't exist on the pages of Victorian Trading Company, either as models or on products. It could be argued that period representations of people of color are seldom anything other than stereotypes, so this may have been a tactical choice on the part of the inventory managers at the company. As

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[84] Belk, 1988, p 149 qtd in Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de Siècle Effect," 15.

[85] "About Us: Victorian Trading Co.," *Victorian Trading Co.* (blog), accessed February 17, 2015, http://www.victoriantradingco.com/about_us.

for matters of gender, no men appear in the catalog other than Randy Rolston, one of the co-founders. His last appearance was in 2014.[86]

VTC relies on both of Barbara Stern's types of nostalgia, although appeals to personal nostalgia are deployed less often. Themes used in product descriptions that can trigger personal nostalgia include "familiarity, home and hearth, lifelike incidents, ordinary people, love, nurturance, and identification."[87] In most instances, the parent or grandparent referred to is maternal. Grandparents may be mentioned, but grandfathers are not. For example, the description for Nostalgic Ornaments in Box tells potential consumers that "conjuring memories of a grandparent's attic, this authentically replicated set revisits the romantic war-era holidays."[88] Another holiday item, "Christmas Bells" Nostalgic Tablecloth and Napkin, assures the reader that "recalling visits to Grandmother's cozy home on Christmas Eve, table linens are recreated faithfully from an estate sale find."[89] Beyond simply calling up nostalgia for one's childhood, VTC also homes in on tradition and continuity with products that, in some cases, only have an image of something meant to spark personal nostalgia. The "To My Valentine" tin product copy states: "Mother always believed that the ones with glitter, lace and a handwritten sentiment were more sincere than the store-bought variety."[90] An Easter Bowl is described as "a chunky bowl" that "is encompassed by intriguing imagery of springtime as our great grandmother knew it."[91]

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[86] Randy Rolston ran for Kansas Secretary of State in 2014. "Randy Rolston," Ballotpedia, accessed April 17, 2020, https://ballotpedia.org/Randy_Rolston I suspect his brief appearance in Victorian Trading Company's catalogs may have been connected to that campaign.

[87] Marchegiani and Phau, "Away from 'Unified Nostalgia': Conceptual Differences of Personal and Historical Nostalgia Appeals in Advertising," 82.

[88] "Nostalgic Ornaments in Box," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2014.

[89] "Christmas Bells Nostalgic Tablecloth & Napkins," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2014.

[90] "'To My Valentine' Tin," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2014.

[91] "Easter Bowl," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2015.

On the inside cover of the Fall Sneak Peek 2014 VTC catalog, the founders, Melissa and Randy Rolston included a note. Not all issues contain a note like this and, as time has passed, Randy has disappeared from the notes, leaving Melissa as the sole speaker. This helps to reinforce the premise that this catalog is presented by a woman to other women.

An excerpt of the first note reads:

> My mother refers to certain individuals as "old souls"…those who seemed to possess a sageness that could only be acquired through previous life experiences. Such could be said of this collection of gathered goods with a well-loved countenance. Weathered finishes and hues that seem to have been basking in a century of sunlight pair-up to praise the virtues of imperfection. "Distressed" leather, tea-stained lace, and burnt-out velvet are all fine elements with no apologies needed. Time-worn pieces convey a warmth that brand-new must earn.[92]

In this note, the Rolstons are very clear: they know that what they offer is repro-retro, but the products are granted a provenance through the narratives in their descriptions. In doing so, copywriters at Victorian Trading Company create "a narrative of the past ... [that has] the whiff of authenticity" and tap into historical nostalgia – nostalgia for a time before one's lived experiences.[93] The Goldleaf Roses Sconce is "a grandiose wall perch" that "appears to have been rescued from a European estate. Hand painted faux stone."[94] Another item, the "Daphne Chest," is described as "[p]ossibly an antique find…or a treasured bureau inherited from a favorite aunt? Deceptively new, this chest/nightstand is hand painted and crafted with a carpenter's care."[95] Another promises that a bracelet is decorated with a font "retrieved from type found within a rare

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[92] Melissa Rolston and Randy Rolston, "Untitled," *Victorian Trading Co.*, Late Summer 2014.

[93] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 23.

[94] "Goldleaf Roses Sconce," *Victorian Trading Co.*, St. Patrick's 2015, 12.

[95] "Daphne Chest," *Victorian Trading Co.*, St. Patrick's 2015, 13.

book of days published in 1890."[96] An "enchanting satin handkerchief valet was concealed within an antique dealer's booth and has been replicated to perfection."[97] By using terms such as antique, treasured, rescued, retrieved, recreated, and replicated, consumers are encouraged to make historical connections to products that might not even be as old as they are.

Finally, the "White Star Line Titanic Stateroom Blanket," seen in earlier editions of the catalog as "Titanic Blanket circa 1911", is "[d]ated 1911 and branded with the distinctive White Star Line insignia, a kitten-soft blanket is loomed from a surviving blanket found within the staterooms of the legendary cruise line."[98] These narratives are as constructed as any other fiction and yet draw on some of the same best practices found in advertising and other marketing fields. The only shift is that it relies more heavily on history than on a consumer's current experiences – or even draws on consumer's perceptions of history based on media such as the film *Titanic* or the series *Downton Abbey*. It also can reinforce the identity building of a consumer who finds more appeal in the past than in the present. Buying these products and incorporating them into daily life can give nostalgics a sense of the past. If we are what we own, then that's one way to bring the past into the present.

In 2017, Victorian Trading Company incorporate a voice from the past into their email marketing. I received an email from Isabelle Beeton, a person with whom I was not familiar personally but knew as a historical figure. The message originated from a Victorian Trading Company address, so I trusted the sender and opened the message. It was a rather typical enticement to view new products, but what set this message apart is that the sender was a woman

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[96] "Birth Month Bracelet," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2014.

[97] "Hankies in Nostalgic Pouch," *Victorian Trading Co.*, 2014.

[98] "White Star Line Titanic Stateroom Blanket," *Victorian Trading Co.*, St. Patrick's 2015, 44.

from the mid-1800s.[99] Mrs. Isabelle Beeton was the author of *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, published in 1861.[100] This manual for how to properly run a Victorian-era home was, for many women of the period, as important as anything published by Martha Stewart for modern homemakers. In creating a "dialogue" between the present-day user and a person from the past, this company further reinforces the idea of bringing the past into the present, one relationship – one commodity – at a time by banking on the recipient's knowledge of this Victorian-era figure.

Victorian Trading Company tapped into the fascination with the Victorian era back in the late 1980s and has continued to find way to evoke personal and historical nostalgia in customers since. Some of their more recent products are moving beyond the Victorian/Edwardian/1920s periods and into the aesthetics of the 1950s, which is another wellspring for nostalgia. It will be interesting to see how far the company will move with nostalgia as it cycles and whether they will continue to tap into media connections to historical nostalgia.

Nostalgia is the most common type of temporal tourism. Money isn't always required to evoke a longing, but an emotional buy-in is commonly required. If we don't have a reason to look back to the past, we might be less prone to answering that call. The two types of nostalgia, personal and historical, are generated by our various connections to the past or at least what we think the past might have been. If *Victoria* magazine and Victorian Trading Company's presentation of the past is to be accepted, then it is a very white, middle-to-upper-class past in which people of color, poverty, imperialism, and other societal ills did not exist.

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[99] "Ladies, Pretend You Didn't See This. - Tlknoell@gmail.Com - Gmail," accessed June 12, 2017, https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/15c9251f1eba3829.

[100] Mrs (Isabella Mary) Beeton, *The Book of Household Management*, 1861, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10136.

There are plenty of correctives for that point of view. Historical reality television provides just one of them and does so from the comfort of our living rooms. Rather than simply making the assumption that viewers know their history, historical reality television pushes back against sentimental ideas about the past. Nostalgia might be premised on the argument that the past is perfect and the present is tense, but historical reality television demonstrates that the past isn't quite as perfect as we might think it was.

CHAPTER II. LEVEL ONE: LIVING HISTORY IN THE LIVING ROOM: HISTORICAL REALITY TELEVISION

> You can't miss us, down here at the HTV Paleolithic Village. Well, you can, if you're not careful. What you do is, you come up past the Yorkshire Television hill fort, turn left at the LWT Bronze Age encampment, go straight on past Southern TV's Beaker Folk village and we're next door to the field where some poor bleeders are trying to recreate Stonehenge.
>
> Terry Prachett, "And Mind the Monoliths"[101]

In 2002 the Simpson family was selected to take part in a social experiment. Leaving the twenty-first century behind, they moved into a home transformed to an earlier era in American history: 1895. This family would live, work, shop, and recreate as appropriate for people of that time. Of all the families to audition, the producers selected the Simpsons because they exhibited the most potential for resistance to the experience and conflict with each other. This is borne out and viewers reward the choice with ratings.[102]

While involved with the experiment, the Simpsons are not only being evaluated for historical accuracy in their experience by the producers, but also by others such as their grocer, Apu at the Quik-E-Mart, who checks each of Marge's selected items against an encyclopedia or almanac to verify its period accuracy. The one concession to the modern period was a "confessional booth" and the video camera within, wherein several members of the family vented their frustrations with the experiment and with each other.[103]

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[101] Terry Prachett, "And Mind the Monoliths," *Bath & West Evening Chronicle*, April 3, 1983.

[102] Mark Kirkland, "Helter Shelter," *The Simpsons* (Fox, December 1, 2002).

[103] Kirkland.

Ultimately, the Simpsons' adaptation to and contentment in their surroundings leads to a decline in viewership and the producers turn to reality show stunts such as introducing a new person or even altering the format to reflect another program in order to introduce an element of "drama." While the episode, "Helter Shelter," veers into a critique of the reality television as a whole, it does give a glimpse into how historical reality television intrigued audiences and presented armchair travelers an opportunity to watch others venture into the past from the relative safety of their living rooms.

Historical reality television allows audiences to cozy up on the couch and watch other people dive deep into historical re-enactment. This takes some of that who we think we were of historical nostalgia and puts it to a test of real people being involved in these historically-inspired activities. Historical nostalgia encourages retronauts to seek some better, purer version of ourselves from a far distant past, even when that version isn't as accurate as we think it is. Historical reality television challenges that. The defining aspect of historical reality television is that participants and producers are committed to providing an authentic presentation of the past while sharing the experience with an audience. The genre is a subset of reality television, where voyeurism, competition, and viewers' emotional investment are carefully cultivated. The program research, training, and filming styles have deep roots within BBC historical reality programming from the 1970s with programs such as *Culloden*, a docudrama, and *Iron Age Village*, which capitalized on the "fly on the wall" approach to documentary. Rather than being intimately involved with the participants through direction, producers chose to capture the experience and craft it into episodes, sometimes establishing narrative arcs in post-production.

This style was revived in the 1990s and gained a US audience via PBS. The first of the significant transatlantic series was *1900 House*, which debuted in the United States in the late

1990s. From there several series followed and other networks such as DIY and National Geographic have also dipped into the historical reality television format, sometimes repurposing PBS programming to suit their audiences. These networks followed The Simpsons episode in casting surprises and plot twists, both staples of the reality television format. As interest in historical reality television waned, though, BBC and PBS were able to reclaim the public interest with the most recent entry in the genre, *Victorian Slum House*.

The 2004 PBS series *Colonial House* invited a reevaluation of several of our foundational beliefs and practices as a British colony and proto-Americans. Participants and viewers were faced with some of the contradictions between present-day beliefs and the narratives that make up our early national mythologies. Rather than establishing a colony based on freedom and equality, participants soon discovered that seventeenth-century society was profoundly hierarchal, patriarchal, classist, and religiously strict. As a result, participants faced a disconnect between current identities – gender or race, for example – and the need for fidelity to the historical experiment as articulated by the producers. One of the most profound disruptions of dominant narratives came from the inclusion of Native peoples in the program to not only be able to tell their own stories but also to be seen. Some of the Native peoples involved expressed their discomfort to both the confessional cameras and to the participants themselves. Their unwillingness to assist the settlers in making their colony a success was cathartic for some and a powerful reminder that colonies could fail far easier than they could succeed.

Failure can be as educational as success. For producers, participants, and viewers, the hoped-for outcome is to live authentically according to a historical set of guidelines and to successfully meet the goals laid out for the participants at the beginning of their experiment. For these programs, "winning" is achieving the goals of not only survival, but sustainability in their

particular time frame and circumstances. Participants' success is determined during the final phase of the program: assessment by professional historians.

Unfortunately, failure was far more common than success. Ranches failed, colonies were disbanded by their investors, and homesteaders couldn't endure the five years necessary to solidify their land claims. The persistent element of failure in historical reality television is what helps to make programs not only engaging, but also valuable for audiences as they challenge the received historical narrative of constant success. This is less about can you live as they did and more about, would you survive even if you had?

The current conversation on reality history television tends to split between three foci: participants, audiences, and the question of how "authentic" these depictions of history truly can be. If failure is discussed, the worst offense is being unable to live authentically within the time frame of the respective experiments. It may take the form of a refusal to fulfill the terms of the experiment as identified in earlier BBC historical reality programming by Jerome De Groot, David Lowenthal's concerns about ethical anachronism in *Colonial House*, or of cognitive dissonance per Alison Landsberg's study of *Frontier House* and *Texas Ranch House*.

According to De Groot, "reality television is the lowest common denominator television" wherein audiences are to connect to the "ordinariness of the protagonist."[104] Producers' hope is that audiences will connect with program participants like them, so the casting of "everyday people" is paramount. An emotional connection to the participants is encouraged not only in the narrative framing and editing for the program, but also through the use of websites that offer additional content such as biographies, quizzes, trivia, and video diaries not incorporated into the program.

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[104] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 165.

In historical reality programming, history is presented as rigid, decided, finished. It is only depicted as a living thing through the participants themselves and does not allow dissension or interrogation of the participant's chosen role.[105] It can only be observed as it cannot be changed. David Lowenthal agrees with De Groot in this, as he identifies historical re-enactment television as "animated replay:" from dead history to alive in all the dirt of the time.[106] However, that dirt is merely cosmetic: "The past is adored for being not just different but past, with a finished, coherent truth absent in the messy, ongoing here and now."[107] Not only is the past neatly concluded, we also know how it plays out from the closing moments of a historical reality television series.

These programs provide the cleanest depiction of the past, without the dirt and mess of history, but there are other ways to muddy the nostalgic waters. Among them are the challenges of cognitive dissonance, ethical anachronism, or a refusal to fulfill the terms of the experiment. Each of the series in the PBS co-produced House series faces at least one of these conflicts. In *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, Alison Landsberg observes that cognitive dissonance is a frequent issue for both participants and viewers. For example, the participants of *Frontier House* (2002) demonstrate an unwillingness to re-enact historically-accurate racism: they can't bring themselves to re-enact racism and create a school where one couple's bi-racial future children could not attend.[108] *Texas Ranch House* (2006) presents still another dilemma: "Viewers are encouraged to analyze why it is that whereas

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[105] De Groot, 172.

[106] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 479.

[107] Lowenthal, 485.

[108] Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 129.

racism is less acceptable but has taken on more subtle and covert forms in the present, sexism both evident and not so evident is still to a certain extent acceptable."[109] Landsberg's research shows a pervasive awareness of the harm of historical racism, but less so of historical sexism. It is unacceptable to reproduce racism, but sexism is considered par for the course – something to be accepted as the cost of participation.

In 2015's *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited,* David Lowenthal takes the participants of *Colonial House* to task for ethical anachronism: an unwillingness to embrace "seventeenth-century civic and moral codes" that compromised period accuracy.[110] Throughout the series, Colonial House participants reject rigid "social hierarchy in which one's status, rights, and duties [were] determined at birth, and refuse to cheat Native Americans," and reject "racial superiority, which would have been period accurate."[111] The collective unwillingness to behave as would have been appropriate for the time condemns the project to failure, both as an experiment in living in the past and in the hoped-for success of the colony.

De Groot observes that at least two British series - *The Trench* (BBC1, 2002) and *Surviving the Ice Age* (BBC1, 2001) – concluded with their volunteers walking out and refusing to participate in what was asked of them during the experiments. They were unwilling to commit to the crucial element of pursuing historical authenticity, but it is almost always framed by the narrator in the context of being unable to separate present ideologies from past demands.[112] This unwillingness to commit also appears in *Frontier House* with the Clune family. They may not have walked off the project, as did those from *The Trench* or *Ice Age*, but they repeatedly

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[109] Landsberg, 138.

[110] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 489.

[111] Lowenthal, 489.

[112] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 169.

circumvented the historical confines of the project through smuggling shampoo and soap into the project, starting an illegal distillery, and procuring and concealing a modern box spring in one of the beds.[113] When called out about these details by the historians overseeing the project, the Clunes often gave the defense that they were following in the footsteps of others, pushing an ideology of ingenuity and exceptionalism to justify their violations of historical norms.

The past is replete with failure, but with the received narrative of constant progress, we don't hear about it. Lowenthal identifies a "need for retrospective success" from both participants and audience.[114] This need seeks to turn historical failure into present-day success to maintain the narrative of constant progress. But are participants set up to fail? Alison Landsberg writes "the ways in which participants are made to confront race and homophobia also work to alienate them from the past, to confront the differences between past and present."[115] This is difficult because it's "impossible to fully abandon one's contemporary mindset."[116]

For most of these authors, failure is defined as not being able to live authentically within the time frame of the respective experiments. The lack of presumed survival challenges what many modern viewers believe of themselves and the role of progress. Modern day skills, education, and value systems are only helpful to a point. They create good television and even a good understanding of the collision between past and present mindsets. They encourage viewers to consider how received national mythologies rest uneasily on the history buried beneath.[117] If anything, these programs demonstrate the rarity of success.

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[113] Kristen Brooks, "Frontier House," Broadcast, *Survival*, April 29, 2002; "Frontier House," Broadcast, *The Reckoning*, May 3, 2002.

[114] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 492.

[115] Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, 112–13.

[116] Landsberg, 117.

[117] Landsberg, 123.

A Brief History of Historical Reality Television

The Past: Iron Age Village

In the mid-1970s, the British Broadcasting Company set out to give audiences a different view of documentaries. Rather than relying on the usual formula – programs that showcased archaeologists and historians talking about history – the producers decided to observe a recreation of an Iron Age village.[118] The year-long project, which followed the agricultural year (March to February), aired in 1978 as *Living in the Past: Iron Age Village*.[119] Known as "fly on the wall" television rather than historical reality television, *Iron Age Village* established many of the parameters for casting, training, and filming the participants that later series would follow. It also established a mode of interpretive history that could not entirely leave the present behind – another carryover into contemporary series. While great effort was made to make the settings and activities of the program historically accurate, the participants struggled with trying to regain lost skills and to cope without some of the conveniences of modern life.[120] Nevertheless, the introduction of a "living history museum" directly into British living rooms helped to establish a new television genre.[121]

Historical reality television draws on the *Living in the Past* mode of televised living history and merges it with many of the components of reality television such as the confessional-style video journal and the carefully guided narrative that masquerades as spontaneous. Rather than following a more conventional documentary format, one that foists passivity on the viewer,

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[118] Jay Anderson and American Association for State and Local History, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, Tenn: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 129.

[119] Anderson and American Association for State and Local History, 129.

[120] Anderson and American Association for State and Local History, 130.

[121] Anderson and American Association for State and Local History, 131.

historical reality television engaged viewers, inviting connection with not only the on-screen participants, but also the sometimes-challenging narratives presented.[122] Applying the reality television format to living history and historical interpretation was a new way of bringing history into the home as the century turned. It injected a new vitality to a familiar documentary format and historical reality television capitalized on an audience already familiar with *Big Brother* and *Survivor*.

The Present: BBC and PBS

In the late 1990s PBS sought new audiences as they increasingly faced competition from commercial networks and an ever-expanding cable television schedule. One reliable source of new programming was the BBC with which PBS had partnered since its earliest days on the air. Two of their recent offerings had transatlantic appeal: *1900 House* (PBS, 2002) and *Manor House* (PBS, 2003).[123] Both series were modeled on *Iron Age Village*, although the casting and training periods were included in the broadcast. Historical reality television was no different, as *Manor House* and *1900 House* soon had American relatives.[124] The first of these, *Frontier House* (PBS, 2002), was soon followed by *Colonial House* (PBS, 2004) and *Texas Ranch House* (PBS, 2006).

The nature of these programs – whether they are educational or entertainment – has fueled questions not only from television critics, but also from academics. Some, such as Alison Landsberg and Rebecca Schneider, contend that they are not simply entertainment, arguing that

[122] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 152.

[123] *The 1900 House*, History, Reality-TV, accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0250838/.

[124] Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and Switzerland had their own versions of the "House" series. There were also several UK House series that were not released in the US market.

these programs represent a "historical experiment" and thus provide educational value.[125] Others, such as David Lowenthal, call into question their value in historical education by highlighting the compromises with contemporary life that these retronauts are asked to make.[126] Among these are the *Colonial House* participants' rejection of penalties for misconduct, an inability to check "modern individualism" so as to be able to embrace "seventeenth-century civic and moral codes," a rejection of social hierarchy, and a refusal to assert the "racial superiority which would have been period accurate."[127] Jerome De Groot questions the value of the history presented: "historical reality television is not history and should be distanced from 'academized' television narrative history."[128] For De Groot, the social nature of the experiment is what disqualifies it as a historical presentation, as his concern is audiences are only invested in as much as they can see "characters" who are "like us" within the context of a "dramatic narrative."[129]

Historical reality television capitalizes on the "social and material" aspects of production and performance disparaged by De Groot and it is this social characteristic that allows audiences to feel not only connection, but that they might have a stake in the progression of the program. The reality television approach encourages viewers to relate to the participants and to explore history on their own terms through the additional resources generated in conjunction with the program. When these programs combine with online forums and a larger community of viewers, audiences engage in intellectual discourse on a scale they might have never realized beyond the confines of a classroom.

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[125] Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, 112–13.

[126] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 489.

[127] Lowenthal, 489.

[128] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 167.

[129] De Groot, 167.

The hybridization of documentary and reality television is not necessarily a straightforward means through which to challenge dominant narratives – there are still many issues left unchallenged. By including consulting historians as well as television producers, these programs were still able to open conversations instead of allowing for an unalloyed celebration of history. Rather than reinforce dominant narratives, these programs take a distinctly anti-nostalgic position. Sallie Clement, series producer, explained narrative and production choices: "What I'm hoping is that viewers will see the bigger picture, the bigger picture of what America was founded on. It wasn't founded on a democracy. It was founded on a hierarchy. I want them to see about the journey of religion. About what colonization also actually means. It was devastation of the actual indigenous people that were here."[130]

In casting for these programs, producers looked for as many voices as possible. These programs feature small casts as opposed to larger casts with a few main characters and others who were just background filler, or "glue" in Clement's words. "I wanted to get as many different kinds of people from different backgrounds, different religions, different ethnicities as we could so that there's someone for everyone. So you can pick someone in that group and say 'I relate to them. I'm with them all the way.'" In addition to finding those in whom an audience would invest, Clement and the production team needed to find participants in whom they could invest. For Beth Hoppe, *Colonial House* executive producer, a genuine desire to experience the past was paramount: "We had more than 8000 applicants, some of those represented families, some were individuals, some were groups. And the first and most important thing we looked for were people who were genuinely interested in exploring the history."[131] *Frontier House* producer

[130] *The Making of Colonial House*, DVD (PBS / Wall to Wall Productions, 2004).

[131] *The Making of Colonial House*.

Mark Saben also noted that a strong pull to the time period was important, as their production team had received many applications from "people who felt they were born in the wrong century."[132] With multiple factors to consider, not the least of which was how to keep the audience invested, casting and program creation was a balancing act between education and entertainment.

One element is certain: the producers conceive of these experiments as historical exploration and state as much in the voiceover narration in the opening sequence for each series. For example, the introduction of 2002's *Frontier House* invokes not only the Homestead Act, but also terms such as "virgin territory," "the American Dream," and "pioneer" as the program is situated as an experiment:

> Land in the American West was once advertised as free for the taking. Under the Homestead Act, nearly two million families came to settle virgin territory: the frontier. Their struggle to survive still haunts the landscape. Even today, the quest for the American dream echoes loudly. Now modern families are coming to test themselves. Can they endure the hardships of the pioneers?[133]

Colonial House's introduction strikes a similar tone, but is grounded in dates as well as mythological terms:

> Four hundred years ago, the east coast of America, a promised land. This remote site is home to a new colony. Everyone here is learning what life was really like. They've travelled back to 1628, to the roots of a nation. Can this group of strangers live by 17th century laws and build a prosperous community? What will become of them in this New World?[134]

Texas Ranch House (2006) veered toward not only the mythology of the American West, but also straight for media representations of that era:

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[132] "Frontier House," May 3, 2002.

[133] "Frontier House."

[134] Nicholas Brown, *Colonial House, Episode 01: A New World* (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004).

> Texas, 1867. This is the true story of fifteen brave men and women who travel back in time, daring to live as the early cowboys and ranchers did over 130 years ago. These modern-day adventurers will endure two and a half months of heat and hardship – a test of true grit. But do they have what it takes to success on Texas Ranch House?[135]

By marrying historical documentary and media imagery, creators were able to capitalize on the image of history in the popular consciousness. This merger allowed producers to further connect to audiences, meeting them where they are while also making use of many of the conventions of reality television such as the "construct and contrive situations" approach to create coherent narratives and series arcs.

The formula of these programs consists of four phases: training, journey, experiment, and assessment. Each of these series launched with a measurable goal at the outset of their respective "experiments." While *1900 House* and *Manor House* sought to recreate an era and have participants experience it, *Frontier House* was designed with winter survival in mind. For *Colonial House*, the goal was twofold: build a successful community and make enough profit from natural resources and trade to justify their continued funding from their British investors. Finally, for *Texas Ranch House*, the challenge was to have not only a successful cattle drive and sale, but to also raise enough capital to allow the ranch to continue operations for another year.

Frontier House, nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Reality Program, was set in the Montana Territory in 1883 and challenged the romantic ideals of individualism and frontier life. Three families – the Glenns, the Clunes, and Nate Brooks, his father, Rudy Brooks, and Nate's fiancée, Kristen McLeod – were selected from five thousand applicants and given the task of establishing homesteads in 1883 Montana. While each family's readiness to survive was evaluated at the end of the project (and two of the families found wanting), the implication that a

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[135] *Texas Ranch House*, Western, 2006.

community stood a better chance of surviving a Montana winter than individuals challenged the idea of individualism.

Rather than fitting into the media representation of that time period, *Frontier House* complicated the sanitized West with dirt, insects, hunger, and cold. For the Glenns, there was a fervent desire to embrace a survivalist lifestyle. For the Clunes, the goal was to embrace family togetherness away from the distractions of modern life. Unfortunately, food shortages, weight loss, and lack of private time made it clear that frontier life was far less forgiving than the present. Members of both families lodged frequent complaints about deprivation, labor, and the hardships of living in a simulation of 1883.

Some of these participants refused to let their present go, which generated some of the conflicts during production and airing. The Clune family violated the terms of the experiment on numerous occasions, insisting on breaking the temporal boundaries by smuggling cosmetics and hair care products into their cabin. There was also a rampant disregard for the rules as the Clunes traded with modern-day neighbors beyond the borders of the experiment area. Finally, as they were being evaluated at the conclusion of the program, it was discovered that the Clunes had brought even more ahistorical items into their cabin; in this case, a box spring. The unwillingness to "play by the rules" accomplished two things: first, it demonstrated that their family was ill-equipped physically or psychologically to survive an 1883 Montana winter, and, second, it reinforced a sense of entitlement that was fostered in their twenty-first century lives.

Frontier House injected a multi-cultural perspective into a typically very Anglo-centric narrative. Four participants – Nate and Rudy Brooks, Dale Old Horn, and Ying-Ming Lee – helped to remind both audience and participants of the absences of African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian immigrants in late nineteenth-century American historical narratives. Dale

Old Horn, a historian and Crow Indian, had mixed emotions about the project because the land being used for the experiment used to be Crow land. As the viewer was reminded of the appropriation of Native lands, they were also reminded that some settlers could not have survived without the aid of the Native Americans they had recently displaced. When the Clune family ran low on food early in the project, the Crow Indian tribe came to their rescue with a deer donated for their food supplies. Chinese [American?] historian Ying-Ming Lee fulfilled the role of mercantile owner. As a proprietor, Lee's shop was the only source for canned goods on the prairie. For at least one of the families in the experiment, the lure of canned goods – something with which they would be familiar as a modern item – was enough to drive them to overextend their finances in a push to marry 21st expectations with 19th century realities.

While Dale Old Horn and Ying-Ming Lee were involved in secondary roles, Nate and Rudy Brooks were part of the main cast and their present position often collided with the racialized realities of pioneer life. This became all the more acute with the belated arrival of Nate's fiancée, Kristen. As an interracial couple, Brooks and McLeod would have faced prejudice on the prairie over not only their marriage, but also over Nate's occupation: teacher. The willingness to address issues in our historical makeup allows for a much more thoughtful representation of our national past than that of Hollywood Westerns. Westerns tend to present the past in very binary terms, but Frontier House gave audiences frequent reminders that hostility toward and discrimination against people of color are long-term issues deeply woven into the American fabric.

Colonial House (PBS, via BBC) was set in 1628 and filmed in Maine. As a recreation of an early colony, the settlement was primarily intended as an investment for backers in England. It was a British North American colony, but part of the American historical narrative. The

participants of this series came from a variety of backgrounds: a Southern Baptist preacher and his family, a married pair of professors from California, a graduate student, an educator, a carpenter, a software engineer, as well as others. Of the over eight thousand applicants, the producers chose only seventeen to begin the project.[136] The population of the experiment was expanded to twenty-four in episode four.[137]

The writers of *Colonial House* were, from the beginning of the program, careful to point out that, while colonists came to North America for a variety of reasons ranging from religious to economic, colonies were most often founded as investments rather than on ideological grounds. Over the course of the series, the program invited participants and viewers to confront issues of race – particularly in the case of those participants who were Americans of African descent or a man of half-Native American ancestry. In several episodes, participants are faced with the reality of Native American mistreatment and displacement. Just before the conclusion of the project, participant Carolyn Heinz declares "I've been going along, being an imperialist! I'm re-enacting a whole system I don't believe in and don't approve of, and yet it's the roots of our own nation."[138]

Our national roots and mythologies are again questioned in the series *Texas Ranch House*. Set in post-Civil War Texas, the program explores issues of gender and cultural appropriation while participants also try to manage livestock. The matter of appropriation looms large in this series, as viewers are informed from the outset that the cowboy, that most American

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[136] *The Making of Colonial House*.

[137] Kristi Jacobson, *Colonial House, Episode 04: The Outsiders* (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004).

[138] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning* (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004).

of images, is actually Mexican in origin. The vaqueros and their entire persona was co-opted by Southwestern ranchers and riders and its Mexican connections were largely written off the historical page.

Texas Ranch House hewed much more closely to its reality television roots in the way in which its participants were identified in the opening credits. In previous *Historical House* series, the participants were not identified by name during the opening credits, but *Texas Ranch House* introduced them as "featured cast:" those specifically selected to meet the program's narrative and visual requirements. The shift in terminology from participant to featured cast also calls attention to the mediation or shaping of the narrative. While each of the series was certainly shaped during the editing process, the term "cast" speaks more to this program being a performance than a documentary.

Over the two and a half months of the experiment, fifteen participants cycled in and out of the project. The group was divided between those in the ranch house – the Cooke family and their servant or "girl of all work" – and those in the bunk house – seven cowboys, a cook, and a foreman. The foreman, Stan, was fired in episode two, and the ranch cook, Nacho, was dismissed in episode three. The vaqueros as a company refused to work for Mr. Cooke by the end of the series, helping to consign the project to failure.

Some of the female participants of the project came to refer to *Texas Ranch House* as "sexist ranch house."[139] Maura Finklestein, the Cooke family's girl of all work, decided to break out of the expected gender roles of the time and moved from house maid to horse wrangler,

[139] "Texas Ranch House . Meet the Adventurers . Lacey Cooke | PBS," accessed October 29, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ranchhouse/meet_lacey_cooke.html.

although her efforts were often met with resistance from the male ranch hands.[140] This was, perhaps unintentionally, accurate as some women historically chafed against the limits placed on them and often went against those limits in any way possible, becoming soldiers, sailors, and even cowhands. However, even with these accidental accuracies, there were plenty of other instances where people's inability to understand past social structures/behavior resulted in rebellion.

The *Texas Ranch House* experiment ultimately failed, as the ranch didn't generate enough profit to continue operations. As the participants tried to come to grips with this news, there was plenty of blame to go around, but much of it seemed to come down to gender relations. As Finklestein observed,

> The only thing that I felt people felt comfortable honoring was the gender hierarchy, and so it was infuriating for me because I was only willing to take the package as a whole. I was not willing to have other people decide for me which hierarchy stayed and which hierarchies were left behind and so that was scary in the sense that it seemed to me that race, religion, ethnicity, class are things that we feel very uncomfortable talking about or dealing with, but gender is still something that can have a division. That can have inequality, and that was very offensive for me.[141]

More specifically, the blame centered on the relationship between Bill Cooke, the ranch owner, and his wife, Lisa. "The cowboys didn't seem to understand or respect that my wife and I work together as a team. They were looking more toward me being the ranch owner and her being my wife and a lesser participant," Cooke explained.[142] Rather than relegating his wife to a

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[140] "Texas Ranch House: Episode 5: Showdown at the Cooke Corral," accessed April 9, 2018, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/ranchhouse/about_series5.html.

[141] "Texas Ranch House . Adventurers Take Stock . Maura Finkelstein | PBS," accessed April 9, 2018, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/ranchhouse/stock_maura_finkelstein.html.

[142] "Texas Ranch House . Adventurers Take Stock . Viewpoints: Agree or Disagree? | PBS," accessed October 29, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ranchhouse/stock_viewpoints.html.

subordinate role, as might have seemed historically more accurate, Cooke desired to maintain his 21st century relationship with his wife long after the experiment was over. The ranch hands, in contrast, did not have the same long-term concerns and instead pushed back against Cooke. With the lack of cooperation, there was no way for their experiment to succeed.

From PBS to DIY: How Did That Change the Program and the Message?

Many television series are resurrected via reruns or syndication. However, in 2012, *Frontier House* underwent a transformation before being reintroduced to audiences by the DIY (Do It Yourself) Network. Reedited and given a new, male narrator with a revised script, the program was refashioned into "the ultimate DIY experiment" and billed as "one of the most extreme sociological experiments ever captured on film."[143] Cut down to half-hour segments with commercial breaks from their original hour-long, uninterrupted format, the series shifted from its examination of a "fictionalized, mythologized, often romanticized" period in American history to a valorization of the American ideals of individualism and dominance where the "unforgiving earth" is to be "conquered."[144] The narrator declares "There's no tribal council, no rose ceremony, and no one gets fired," trying to mark out *Frontier House* as a reality show that isn't a reality show. Rather, it is being marketed as a "how-to" program, an interesting twist given the less-than-optimistic assessment of survival odds delivered by the historians at the conclusion of the program.

Audience involvement was encouraged through websites featuring participant biographies, quizzes, unaired video diaries, exit interviews, and follow-ups on the participants' lives after their experiences. Online forums – first bulletin boards operating concurrently with the

[143] "Frontier House" (DIY Network, 2012).

[144] "Frontier House."

original airings, then other outlets over time – allowed audiences to go beyond the programs' websites and provide their own commentaries on the participants and the "plotlines" from each episode. Still other conversations have emerged thanks to the popularity of YouTube as an alternate viewing platform with some programs drawing well over 200,00 views.[145] While the US-produced House series have gone off the air, these episodes appear periodically on YouTube and continue to inspire commentaries: sometimes positive, sometimes vitriolic.

Some of the "where are they now?" features show participants who were unable to leave the experiment behind. For example, following a divorce from his wife and fellow homesteader, Karen, *Frontier House* participant Mark Glenn went off the grid and opted to live close to the land.[146] Others, such as Don and Carolyn Heinz or Nate and Kristen Brooks, were able to return to their lives, taking those experiences with them even as they no longer wanted to live within those circumstances.

Case Study: *Colonial House*

2004's *Colonial House* (PBS/Wall to Wall Media) challenged the participants to not simply survive, but to demonstrate that they could form a cohesive, sustainable, and profitable community: a community that would continue to receive support from their British investors in the years that might follow. During the four-month term of the experiment, the rotating cast of participants managed to create a socially unified community. However, the commercial viability of the colony was much more tenuous and, as a result, the experiment was deemed a failure. In

[145] "Frontier House Part 1 - YouTube," 1, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m7ovkbu7cw.

[146] "Back to the Land: `Frontier House' Alum Mark Glenn Didn't Want It to End," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, accessed November 11, 2015, http://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/back-to-the-land-frontier-house-alum-mark-glenn-didn/article_c1258009-a3ab-5f91-a641-57f9b0100c28.html.

fact, this group of participants failed on several fronts: failure of some participants to complete the project, cognitive dissonance, ethical anachronism, and failure of project objectives.

The major themes in *Colonial House* reflected several defining "American" characteristics: the importance of communities, individuality, economic success, and equality. Equality was a particularly fraught subject, as the seventeenth-century British conception of "equality" did not consider gender or class. Once again, the concessions to the era, although necessary for some semblance of historical accuracy, met with resistance from those who suddenly found themselves at a disadvantage. As a result, the driving themes of the series became not only historical accuracy, but also came to include disruptions in the narrative from people of color, women who refused to stay in their seventeenth-century roles, and servants.

Another omnipresent theme was historical representation – or lack thereof. American history is often told from a white, male, Eurocentric perspective, omitting the histories of people of color, women, and Native peoples. Several participants sought to insert narratives often ignored. Amy-Kristina Herbert pushed to ensure that there are people of color on the screen:

> "Part of the reason why I wanted to do this project as a black woman, a black American, rather, is that this is the beginning of the country I live in. You know, my roots do not come from Puritanism, but this is the beginning of America and I am American. People need to stop thinking of fearless white people when they think of America. They need to see America and think of America and see faces that aren't white and see faces that aren't stereotypical. And this is the best place to do that, you know? Me, a black girl with braids in my hair in a pilgrim outfit. As ridiculous as the image is, it's no more ridiculous than trying to classify who is more American than who [*sic*]."[147]

Danny Tinsdale wanted to reclaim American history as something in which his ancestors also had a stake: "Going through this process, it's already helped me redefine how I talk about

[147] Jacobson, *Colonial House, Episode 04: The Outsiders*.

myself, how I speak about myself. I no longer call myself an African-American, but an American of African descent. This is my history."[148]

According to Taddeo and Dvorak, what sets programs such as *Colonial House* apart is the "total immersion process and length of time the volunteers spend in their historical contexts."[149] For *Colonial House*, the duration was four months. Before entering the experiment, those chosen received two weeks of training on tools, construction, food preparation, and first aid at Plimouth Plantation, a living history site dedicated to recreating the original Plymouth Colony of the seventeenth century.[150] Ruth Goodman, a historical clothing and material culture expert and costuming consultant for *Colonial House*, said of the participants:

> "They're really working hard at trying to pick up as much information as they can…Once you can let go, you're only dealing with the one world. You're dealing with the seventeenth century. Our ancestors were not stupid. They had systems for living that worked and if you can stop fighting it and if you can drop into their systems, suddenly it becomes simple and straightforward. It might still be hard work, but you're not fighting yourself."[151]

Producer Beth Hoppe enthused:

> "One of the things that surprised me the most on *Colonial House* was how quickly they adapted and adopted the clothes of the time because they are so much further from the clothes of today: these funny big pants that the men wear and the sort of blouses that the men wear and the women have these corset things over their blouses, and then wool in the middle of the summer. Well, they all wore these things, unlike some of our other House projects where we had said 'this is what they wore' they would say 'okay, but I'll wear what parts of it I like.' This group was very true to trying to do it right."[152]

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[148] Brown, *Colonial House, Episode 01: A New World*.

[149] Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak, "The PBS Historical House Series: Where Historical Reality Succumbs to Reel Reality," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 18.

[150] *The Making of Colonial House*.

[151] *The Making of Colonial House*.

[152] *The Making of Colonial House*.

The group was off to a promising start even as they were uncertain of each other's capabilities. Amy-Kristina Herbert observed: "The adjustment has been trying to learn everything together but, at the same time, not having any clue who these people are." Others, like Michelle Vorhees, were ready to get into the field: "It's been very intense, it's been just mental overload just trying to learn everything. At this point I'm really just ready to go."

Each participant had access to a video camera for the purpose of recording video diaries. Video diaries – a reality television convention – fulfilled several functions: a confessional, an emotional outlet, a means of documenting events important to the participants but not crucial to the narrative, and a source of insight for the producers and audiences. Freeman Don Wood came to see his video diary as a "kind of surrogate friend on the outside."[153] Their use helped the community run more smoothly because they offered a way to vent frustrations that, perhaps, really didn't need to be said to anyone directly. As Jonathan Allen, the Heinz' indentured servant, remarked, "I grab that diary camera in a moment of frustration or when I'm very livid and I just let go."[154] They also foster a sense of connection between participant and audience because of their mode of direct address – they might be talking to a camera, but it's still meant to be seen by viewers.

Video diaries also helped to explain to the viewer why some participants took issue with the ways in which the project was run. In two cases, this discontent led to departures from the project. While one participant returned from his walkabout a more committed colonist, another left due to increasing ideological conflict. This led to the first type of failure in *Colonial House*:

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[153] *The Making of Colonial House*.

[154] *The Making of Colonial House*.

failure to complete the project or rejection of and, in one case, departure from the project. Dominic Muir opted to leave the 1000-acre boundary established for the program, going into a town and a bar deliberately. According to the program narrator: "These boundaries have been set to preserve the authenticity of the 17th century experiment. The 21st century is off-limits."[155] He returns, although he "refuses to feel guilty" for having broken the boundaries.[156]

Amy-Kristina Herbert and Daniel Tinsdale, both Americans of African descent, left for personal reasons. While Herbert's early departure was planned, Tinsdale's was not. Tinsdale left as a matter of principle. In a video diary, he said:

> Fifty years later [fifty years following the experiment era of 1628], we have slavery, that come out of these colonies that I'm sure evolved from the same kind of complaining we have today about work, about economic ventures, and somebody else doing the work. Cheap labor. And here in a very strange way I'm part of it. This country was created on the backs of people who didn't have choices. As the time progressed during the project, I came to realize this idea of indentured servitude leading to slavery. For me it's a matter of conscience. How do I deal with it and what do I do about it? I've decided that it's time for me to leave.[157]

In the wake of his departure, there is a narrative shift to more closely examine the deeply complicated relationships between Native peoples and white settlers. Where the Passamaquoddy accept the settlers' presence at first, a visit from the Wampanoag Indians toward the end of the experiment brings strains – both old and new – directly to the fore.

While racism was at the forefront of the colonists' minds, there was less concern about sexism as it was considered historically accurate. The example of cognitive dissonance was a sticking point for many of the women in the group, particularly when it came to questions of

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[155] Jacobson, *Colonial House, Episode 04: The Outsiders*.

[156] Jacobson.

[157] Sally Aitken, *Colonial House, Episode 05: Regime Change*, DVD, Colonial House (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004).

leadership. Carolyn Heinz was the most vocal critic of how women in the colony were excluded from governance councils, even going to so far as to convene an informal gathering of the women to discuss "the good of the colony" so suggestions can be passed on to the men's council after being passed over and ignored from the start.[158] From the men's perspective, women had no place in governance and nicknamed Carolyn Heinz as "Lady Macbeth" because of her need to control.[159] Very little was done to combat what was seen by twenty-first century standards to be discrimination. It was simply considered the price of admission to the experiment.

Religion and the role it played in seventeenth-century life is a significant source of conflict for the participants. When church attendance was declared mandatory, the Vorhees family flouted the requirement until husband John was placed on the governing council for the community, at which time he attended, but did not require his wife or son to do so. In the 17th century, the family would have been executed. However, as execution is looked on as less acceptable in the twenty-first century, the punishment was diminished to scarlet letters and a loss of freedom, activity and communication. Almost half of the colony skipped church the following week, at which point the governor abandoned enforcement of the Sabbath for the sake of the workforce. Michelle Rossi-Vorhees also critiqued the enforcement of modesty, taking issue with the rules imposed on the women of the colony while not seeing a comparable rule imposed on the men. When Carolyn Heinz joins her in taking a stand on the law that women cover their heads for modesty, she argues that the precedent has been set for feminist action by the abrogation of the Sabbath observance. Jeff asks her to wear the scarlet letter "M" for her

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[158] *Colonial House, Episode 06: The Shake Up* (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004), 6.

[159] *Colonial House, Episode 06: The Shake Up*.

modesty violation.[160] While speaking to a camera, Heinz states "The community was premised on being free-thinking, 2003 people."[161] She went on to say the group couldn't agree on the Sabbath issue, "so that community has proven to be built on sand. It couldn't hold up against 1628."[162]

Ethical anachronism fueled much of the program, particularly when it came to encounters and trade with the Passamaquoddy and Wampanoag. The colonists refused to assert historically-accurate attitudes of moral and racial superiority over the Native peoples, applying a twenty-first century social ideology instead of abiding by the seventeenth-century philosophies in which they had been educated. As an example, in episode seven, "The Reckoning," a nearby camp of Wampanoag is declared "cool" by Carolyn Heinz.[163] However, the narrator reminds the audience that Native activity close to a colony would be a cause for fear, not excitement.[164] Heinz takes some of their soup to the Native representative, heedless of the anachronism of a woman taking charge of diplomatic contact. For his part, the Wampanoag contact seems amused and even incredulous at the offer or the implication that his group wouldn't have enough food. Native peoples were integral to the success or failure of a settlement and their deeply fraught history with European settlers was carefully considered in a program such as this, although there are still historical missteps. *Colonial House* negotiated that line and challenged not only the participants, but the viewers, to reflect on our historical and present relationships with native peoples. The participants chose to enact a better version of the past and, in doing so, gave the Passamaquoddy

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[160] Nicholas Brown, *Colonial House, Episode 03: City of God* (Educational Broadcasting Corporation and Wall to Wall Television Limited, 2004).

[161] Brown.

[162] Brown.

[163] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning*.

[164] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning*.

and the Wampanoag an opportunity to challenge the cultural narratives about our nation's foundations.

The Passamaquoddy provided producers the land on which the experiment would be staged and were the colony's earliest trading partners.[165] For both groups, the interactions were heavily inflected with historical and present-day tensions. This tension becomes particularly personal for one of the original colonists, John Vorhees, who is biracial and one-half Paiute Indian. "We don't know how anyone reacted back then. We have a wealth of history from the Caucasian side, but we don't have anything from the Indian. I can imagine there being a fair amount of fear from the original people who were here."[166]

In his analysis of the "ethical anachronism" of *Colonial House*, David Lowenthal writes that the settlers "refuse to cheat Native Americans" out of a sense of modern awareness of the historical wrongs done to Native peoples.[167] The question of expansion and encroachment loomed large over the colonists and the Native peoples thanks to the need to build a new house and talk of building a church. In episode four, thirteen additional colonists arrived, bringing the total to twenty-four and the final addition, assessor Jack Lecza, arrived in episode six. The Passamaquoddy grew concerned about the arrival of yet another person in the colony; given their group's history, their track record with colonists hadn't been a good one.[168] Historically, once they allowed new arrivals to stay in their territory, settlers' numbers increased until the tribe was driven off their own land. John Vorhees offered compensation for Lecza's arrival and presence on Passamaquoddy land. It was enough to allay concerns in a way that wasn't merely economic:

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[165] Brown, *Colonial House, Episode 01: A New World*.

[166] Brown.

[167] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 489.

[168] *Colonial House, Episode 06: The Shake Up*.

"…we also enhanced our relationship with them in an honorable fashion."[169] It was a chance to "correct" a historical wrong.

This chance to "correct" a historical wrong also defined the colonists' interactions with visiting members of the Wampanoag tribe. For the Wampanoag, though, this was not simply an opportunity to remind viewers of their historical presence; it was also a reminder that Native peoples are still present and have a story to tell. One of the ongoing tensions for the Wampanoag involved in the project is an accurate perception that their history is neither acknowledged nor told. As one Wampanoag observed, "As long as you don't acknowledge Native peoples, you don't have to acknowledge that you're doing anything wrong to them."[170]

Another potent emotion roiling among the visiting Wampanoag was anger. Stuart Turner (Wampanoag) declared that he would have burned the colony down out of concern for the spread of Europeans into their territory. A fellow Wampanoag said: "Sometimes I think about being born at a different time, you know, like the 1630s, and being around to fight for our people in the 1670s during King Phillip's War, you know, in a time when, you know, when I would have been able to maybe make a more physical difference. Fight for our people. Die for our people."[171] By the end of the encounter, the Wampanoag matriarch, Ramona, finds the discomfort of the white participants to be satisfying, even going so far as to say that she "feels really good" about not helping this village be successful.[172]

It is highly unlikely that the single encounter and failed trade opportunity between colonists and the Wampanoag was enough to lead to the colony's failure. Instead, the failure of

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[169] *Colonial House, Episode 06: The Shake Up*.

[170] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning*.

[171] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning*.

[172] *Colonial House, Episode 07: The Reckoning*.

project objectives was four months in the making. The goal was to create a sustainable, profitable colony. According to the evaluation at the end, the entire group failed. Not only were the colony's rations mismanaged, the work ethic inconsistent, the leadership changed far too often, but the inability to focus on the seventeenth century likely led to the experiment's failure. In the opening narration of each episode, a pair of questions is presented: "Can they live by seventeenth century laws? Can they build a prosperous community?"[173] By the end of the project, the answer to both was no. Tensions between the seventeenth century laws and social conventions and the twenty-first century participants were compounded as several could not give themselves over completely to the experiment and, on that count, the experiment failed. Sallie Clement stated, "It's very hard to come into a project with your twenty-first century individualism and give it all up. I think that's been the biggest struggle for these people."[174]

Temporal distance makes for good television because the distance generates conflict. People change, beliefs and values evolve. And yet, as participant Amy-Kristina Herbert pointed out, "people are people and haven't changed that much."[175] This indication that some qualities transcend time is intriguing, but programs such as *Colonial House* ask viewers and participants if we truly can go back again. If you were of the dominant social group, then possibly. If you stand to lose status such as equal treatment under law or the recognition of your basic humanity, then there will always be a struggle and failure waiting in the wings.

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[173] Brown, *Colonial House, Episode 01: A New World*.

[174] *The Making of Colonial House*.

[175] "Colonial House (Washingtonpost.Com)," accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A27393-2004May14.html.

How Has Failure Been Incorporated Into the Genre? *Victorian Slum House*

Victorian Slum House, which premiered in the United States in 2017 on PBS, is the most recent in the Historical House Series. This series takes the existent formula and accelerates it by including multiple decades and assessing at the end of the week through the use of a landlord. In this case, if the rent could not be paid, the participants were evicted from their tenement and the experiment. *Victorian Slum House* (PBS, 2016, via BBC) focused on an element of history often found uncomfortable by American audiences: class. By examining the London lower-class experience, *Slum House* could acknowledge that many of the beliefs about progress and constant improvement were not as applicable on a micro scale. This program also provided a much wider range of representation than we typically see in dominant historical narratives with depictions of disability, immigration, non-nuclear families, and extended families. Most crucially, though, we also get to see people fail due to health or finances. That element alone could make it difficult to replicate in an American setting as failure is considered a near cardinal sin in a society where success is everything.

One element introduced by *Victorian Slum House* that is not addressed by any of the other series is that of disability. Most participants were vetted and considered healthy in limb and mind before they began their respective experiments as living in the past was not a forgiving practice. Even with some of the older participants in the series, such as the Heinz's of *Colonial House*, there was an expectation that they would be able to physically contribute regardless of their age. While many participants wore period-appropriate eyewear, which may or may not have been available to them given their location and circumstances, none of the previous *House* participants had anything like a prosthetic limb.

One *Victorian Slum* participant, Andy Gardener, came to the project for the express purpose of providing representation for the disabled while also gaining a better understand of the experience of the disabled in the Victorian era. Disability during the Victorian era was both more common and more visible than it is in the present day. During the five-episode series, which focuses on a decade per episode, Andy's fortunes shifted from rent collector and operator of a doss or boarding house to losing the doss house and its revenues when it was shut down. His participation helped to call attention to a time when there were no social safety nets, no universal health care, and no disability payments. If one lost a limb, as Andy did in 2004 when he lost his right leg below the knee, they would be at the mercy of the slum and there was little mercy to be had. In his efforts to gain a better understanding of the physical and psychological experience, Gardner chose to wear a period "wooden" leg.[176] Given the need to accommodate current bodies even in historical circumstances, his prosthesis was made to his precise fit and crafted from fiberglass. It was close, but still met health and safety standards.

The inclusion of bodily representation in *Victorian Slum House* helped to further the links between present viewers and those who lived in the past, but also reminded viewers that failure was just an injury away. Failure is often considered as something that happens to other people, due to their failings. *Victorian Slum House*, on the other hand, reminds us that failure could happen to any of us, at any time, and often without warning.

Where nostalgia wraps us in a narrative that the past was wonderful, desirable, and safe – or, at least, uncomplicated – the genre of historical reality television seems to tell a different story. It gives an indication that, perhaps, the focus on success is simply easier to accept than the historical statistics on failure. It also indicates that we cannot go back again – there has been too

[176] *The 1860s | Victorian Slum House*, accessed April 9, 2018, https://www.pbs.org/video/the-1860s-qhjci1/.

much change in what we consider acceptable in terms of gender, race, class, hygiene, and health, even as there is still such a long way to go.

There are also multiple ways to fail: failure to complete an experiment, cognitive dissonance, ethical anachronism, and failure of the experiment itself are potential pitfalls waiting for historical reality television participants to fall directly into them. Each of the US-produced Historical House programs fails on at least one of these points, but *Colonial House* hits on all four of these metrics. Perhaps it was because this program is set at the furthest chronological distance from the present day and the temporal gap is too great to successfully cross. Perhaps the participants were weighed down by the cultural baggage of guilt and a wish to set things right. Perhaps the loss of privilege and standing experienced by everyone but the freemen in the colony was enough to foment a quiet rebellion that sped along the project's failure. It was likely a combination of these factors.

For viewers, these programs provided follow-along journeys, each accessible from the comfort of their own living room. Forums, program websites, and later rebroadcast allowed audiences to have their say in a space that was not only open to their fellow viewers but could also potentially connect to the participants themselves. PBS encouraged this kind of engagement with website content such as quizzes, unaired video diaries, and follow-up interviews with the participants. The producers wanted audiences to find those participants with whom they connected and, thanks to the supplemental content such as program websites, these programs allowed audiences to dabble in "interactive history" from the relative safety of their keyboards. The support sites for *Colonial House* and *Texas Ranch House* have interactive history sections that include panoramic views of the houses and land of the site (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/colonialhouse/history/panoramas.html), dress-up games

(https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/colonialhouse/history/dress_up_flash.html), a "stock a chuckwagon" game (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/ranchhouse/pop_games/chuckwagon.html), and a three-part "lead a cattle drive" game that tests "knowledge of cowboy slang," how well you can identify your cattle in a herd, and crossing a river with your "beeves."[177] The *Frontier House* support site doesn't have the same "interactive history" component. Instead, the official site focuses more on essays about the time and video diaries than games and other features.[178]

That dabbling is enough to motivate some viewers to leave their couches and keyboards behind and venture into living history sites. Retronauts still want to explore and connect with the past, no matter how difficult historical reality television might make it appear. So why not try your hand at some of the same tasks you just saw on television? Try milking a cow. Try on period attire. Walk the streets of Colonial Williamsburg or the paths at Mount Vernon. It's just a step back into the past – once you've paid your admission.

[177] "Colonial House . Interactive History | PBS," accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/colonialhouse/history/index.html; "Texas Ranch House . Interactive History . Intro | PBS," accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/ranchhouse/history.html.

[178] "PBS - Frontier House: Frontier Life," accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/index.html.

CHAPTER III. LEVEL ONE: DAY TRIPS INTO THE PAST: TEMPORAL TOURISTS GETTING OFF THEIR COUCHES

I need to hang up. I'm going to run into the Yankees in about three minutes.

Overheard at the National Park Service second-person interpretation/reenactment of Pickett's Charge, 3 July 2013

Level one retronauts, or day trippers to the past, seek experience, connection, and knowledge that goes beyond simply feeling nostalgia or watching someone else try to recreate the past on television. They can visit and observe or even participate at museums and living history sites, often those of the institutional type. In these sites, the past is presented as still in progress rather than cleaving to De Groot's vision of a rigid, finished history.[179] This is even more the case when that participation takes the form of "second-person interpretation": when a visitor takes on a role and helps to interpret a past event or historically-situated scenario with and through their own body. Many living history sites present the past through first- or third- person interpretation, but second-person allows the visitor to claim a kind of authority or understanding, particularly in the case of participation because they "experienced" the past.

In this chapter I will primarily examine the experiences available to individuals at living history sites as well as briefly explore the role of guides or historical interpreters in providing the necessary historical materials. I also investigate some of the more complicated issues faced by both day trippers and interpreters, such as the questions of contested histories, the lack of fit between historical and contemporary bodies, and interpretations of the past intimately linked to events and ideologies of the present. What marks this research out as unique in the field is,

[179] De Groot, *Consuming History*, 172.

instead of focusing on institutional operations, as has been the central point for research regarding institutions such as Colonial Williamsburg, I instead rely on observations from the visitor's perspective. My interview subjects spoke about living history visits generally, with occasional mentions of specific sites; the balance of observations are my own through the practice of autoethnography.

For this research I visited a variety of living history sites and museum exhibitions, some more than once. Among them are Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; Mount Vernon, Virginia; and the National Park Service-maintained battlefields in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania over the course of three summers (2013, 2015, 2017). I also visited Conner Prairie in Indianapolis, Indiana; the Titanic traveling exhibit in Las Vegas, Nevada; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC; as well as Fort Meigs Historic Site in Perrysburg, Ohio. These sites represent a cross-section of non-profit, national, local, and for-profit locations, with each presenting history in a way that is not only accessible by visitors, but also keeps within the remit of their particular institutions.

Prior scholarship in this area looked at each element of this chapter– visiting living history sites, seeking experiential memory, and second-person interpretation – separately. I argue that these elements are not discrete and should be examined as existing on a spectrum of engagement. I also expand the scope of second-person interpretation scholarship to include *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*, operated by Premier Exhibitions and the permanent exhibition, *The Holocaust* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and to consider the role played by gender in second-person interpretation.

Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen reported that "the people we interviewed wanted to approach the broader past on their own terms."[180] However, their interview subjects also expressed confidence in museums and their ability to present a trustworthy view into the past. Of the sources presented to study participants – museums, personal accounts from older relatives, conversations with eyewitnesses, college history professors, high school history teachers, nonfiction books, and movies and television programs – museums topped the list with nearly 80% of respondents ranking them "very trustworthy."[181] The general public trusts that museums will present the past to them in a manner that is well researched, accurate, and largely unbiased.

Of those I interviewed for this project, most indicated that they visited museums or living history sites. However, almost half of those expressed a preference for living history and experiential memory. This did not seem to be exclusive to a specific gender or age range. Kevin Knapp, a historical interpreter with the Civil War Heritage Foundation, said "I prefer living history because you have someone sharing a story or a history. In a museum, you have a docent who will touch briefly on subjects as you're walking by. With living history, you get to see it, you get this feeling, you get to smell it. You get to be there. You get to experience it completely."[182] Romy Kinard agreed. "Living history and being outside with reenactors is probably the thing we like the most," she said.[183] Her husband, René Kinard, who is a pastor

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[180] Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 90.

[181] Rosenzweig and Thelen, 91.

[182] Kevin Knapp, Interview with Kevin Knapp, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 5, 2015.

[183] Rommi Kinard, Interview with Rommi Kinard, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 4, 2015.

both in the present and as a historical interpreter, concurred: "I enjoy living history because it's hands-on. Even I learn something every day from living history."[184]

To be both appealing and familiar, reconstructed sites such as Colonial Williamsburg must meet contemporary needs and sometimes "reshape past remains in a fashion strikingly analogous to revisions of memory and history."[185] One frequent observation is that these sites lack historical dirt; they are maintained to a modern standard of cleanliness and are made inoffensive, but also anachronistic. Further, these sites can be ideologically "cleaned" as well to eliminate imagery that has become offensive in a given era. Both Mount Vernon and Colonial Williamsburg have been described as "sanitized for patriotic purposes."[186] In the early days of both sites, nation-building was the primary narrative. In more recent decades, that narrative expanded to bring in a multiplicity of voices rather than a singular, monolithic voice.

Other sites have likewise made efforts toward inclusion of peoples and histories that disrupt dominant historical and cultural narratives. From Southern plantation sites including slave narratives to Monticello acknowledging the role of the enslaved in Jefferson's home as well as on his land, black history is being acknowledged and taught at living history sites and museums. Visitor reactions seem attuned to who is presenting the narrative, with responses ranging from respect to resistance to bald racism. For tour guides like Margaret Biser, a white woman, most of the interactions were positive, although there were exceptions.[187] For black first-

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[184] Rene Kinard, Interview with Rene Kinard, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 4, 2015.

[185] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, xviii.

[186] Lowenthal, xviii.

[187] Margaret Biser, "I Used to Lead Tours at a Plantation. You Won't Believe the Questions I Got about Slavery.," Vox, June 29, 2015, https://www.vox.com/2015/6/29/8847385/what-i-learned-from-leading-tours-about-slavery-at-a-plantation.

person interpreters such as Christy Coleman at Colonial Williamsburg or Azie Dungey at Mount Vernon, "the modern veneer slipped aside and out came racial epithets or crude sexual comments."[188]

Sometimes, although well-intentioned, presentations of inclusive historical narratives lead to discomfort at best and controversy at worst. For a nation steeped in a belief that our number one ideal is freedom, the reminders that our country was built on slavery can be embarrassing, to say the very least.[189] As James Oliver Horton observed, "Our tendency is to turn away from history that is unflattering and uncomfortable."[190] Colonial Williamsburg's African American Department, however, chose to reenact a live slave auction at in fall of 1994. This event placed one of the United States' most enduring issues on display and it evoked support, protest, and anger – and a chance to put a human face on a shameful and enduring legacy. The event, though, has not been staged again.

While the site has been sanitized or sometimes influenced by visitor nostalgia, the history interpreted there has evolved to incorporate many of the voices often left on the margins of books. What may have begun as "entrenched history" that "preserves the status quo" and is as "explicitly constructionist" as it is celebratory has given way to a much more inclusive presentation.[191] The history of the colonial era and American Revolution with which most

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[188] Gregory S. Schneider, "An African American Leader Brings a Provocative Take to Expanded Civil War Museum," *Washington Post*, April 15, 2018, sec. Virginia Politics, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/an-african-american-leader-brings-a-provocative-take-to-expanded-civil-war-museum/2018/04/15/6a7daba4-3db4-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html.

[189] James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 36.

[190] Horton, 36.

[191] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 3,5.

visitors are likely to be familiar is primarily military or political in nature. Colonial Williamsburg branched out from that narrow exploration of the past and now embraces "the whole gamut: history of religion, economic history, women's history, political history, culinary history, and African-American history."[192] "There are also programming opportunities at Williamsburg that really go against the grain of the celebratory, particularly in the African-American programming," as well as programs that focus on the Indians of the area.[193] As Chris Geist remarked, "In those programs there are lots of times to talk about the darker sides of history."[194] Fortunately, it is not all dark: there are other programs that encourage visitors to see people from the past as people rather than as vague shadows of another time.

Museums offer more than information – they also offer experience and living history sites are all about offering experiences along with education. For an increasing number of Americans, the search for experiential memory takes priority. Experiential memory has the advantage of tactility; if people can touch, smell, or taste a piece of history in addition to reading a description of it, then that connection is made all the stronger.[195] While cognitive and experiential memory can complement one another, there are instances where one is privileged over the other. For example, museums such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. are "part of a larger trend in American mass culture toward the experiential as a mode of knowledge."[196] Living history museums and other sites that encourage visitors to connect on a personal level to an era, a specific geographic location, or events historically

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[192] Christopher Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 23, 2014.

[193] Geist.

[194] Geist.

[195] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 131.

[196] Landsberg, 130.

significant or even simply day to day “turn history into personal memory and thus advance the production of prosthetic memories."[197]

According to Alison Landsberg, prosthetic memory is acquired at an “interface between person and a historical narrative about the past at a site such as a movie theater or museum" and creates not just an understanding of the past, but also generates “a deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live."[198] Landsberg identifies certain forms of memory as prosthetic because they are, first, not natural but derived from engagement with mediated representation; second, "actually worn on the body like an artificial limb”; third, interchangeable and exchangeable; and, finally, useful.[199] Further, she observes, “taking on memories of events through which one did not live is not in itself a new phenomenon.”[200] This borrowing and adoption of memory is not unlike the swing dance revivalists and their attraction to the culture and social mores of the 1940s, wherein “engagement with the past helps [them] rethink and reshape [their] contemporary selves.”[201]

In second-person interpretation, participants use their bodies to substitute for someone from the past and, in doing so, can “try on” memory. We might try to understand another’s perspectives, but we can only experience a shadow of someone else’s experience. For some, that’s enough, as they only want to brush by the past. For others, it becomes complicated when the experience offered re-enacts the history of an enslaved and abused group of people. For those

[197] Landsberg, 130.

[198] Landsberg, 2.

[199] Landsberg, 20–21.

[200] Landsberg, 3.

[201] Landsberg, 9.

whose experiences are being presented as roles to "try on," it can be offensive and reductive as they are disconnected from either the past pain or the contemporary consequences of that history. Landsberg voices concerns that this type of prosthetic memory experience "denies the requirement of 'social construction or context'" that would typically be a part of developing a genuine memory.[202] While imagination is required for this type of experience, respect for those experiences with which we are engaging should also be considered necessary.

In his 2006 article, "This Is A Drama. You Are Characters: The Tourist as Fugitive Slaves In Conner Prairie's *Follow The North Star*," Scott Magelssen discusses the potential benefits as well as the potential pitfalls of not only the *Follow the North Star* program but also second person interpretation in general at living history sites. In this program, visitors are asked to take on the role of escaped slaves in 1836 Indiana. During this activity, participants encounter slave catchers, reluctant protectors, a Quaker family, and free blacks. At the end, participants are told their "fate" before being debriefed inside the museum, safely ensconced back in the twenty-first century. As a specialist in performance as historical practice and simulation as a means of connecting to the past, Magelssen focuses on the bodily experience of second person interpretation and its potential to help visitors come to "bear witness" to the lived experiences of those people who were in the past marginalized. To him, "it is the very presence, visibility, and constructed identity of the body that makes living history living, and it is the body that distinguishes the historiographic practices of living history museums from those written modes of historiography in which the body is deemphasized, erased, or silenced."[203] However, there are

[202] Landsberg, 19.

[203] Scott Magelssen, "'This Is a Drama. You Are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star,'" *Theater Topics* 16, no. 1 (September 2006): 20.

still anxieties over whose bodies are the right bodies to interpret certain histories. As Magelssen observes, with regard to Conner Prairie, "while the main characters in the re-enactment are black slaves, most staff and participants in "Follow the North Star' are white."[204]

Through embodied experiences accessed through living history sites and taking part in historical interpretation, day trippers into the past stake their own positions as historians. When that interpretation is second-person or embodied, the prosthetic memory acquired gives the experience a much more personal connection to the past that can "shape that person's subjectivity."[205] While often these experiences are mediated by museums and living history programs, there are others where day trippers take interpretation into their own hands. Rather than foregrounding consideration of the audience, amateur historical interpreters consider their own need to tell a story, to shed some light on a person from the past who is not considered a significant historical figure, or to reconcile the past with their present ideology.

Most of all, the desire to connect to, learn about, or even experience the past is the primary characteristic each retronaut has in common. The decision on how deep to go is what marks out the casual day tripper from someone looking to immerse themselves in a representation of the past.

Day Trips Into the Past

Day trippers who seek out living history sites are visiting "bubbles" of time through the cultivated environment and performance of the interpreters there. This practice differs from watching historical reality television because the experience is actually in the body rather than at

[204] Magelssen, "'This Is a Drama. You Are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star.'"

[205] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2.

a distance. Visitors interact with those providing historical impressions such as workers in the smokehouse at Mount Vernon or staff at the coffee house in Colonial Williamsburg, for example, and those interpreters will maintain their eighteenth or seventeenth century personas in spite of the twenty-first century questions or responses they may receive. At the end, though, the present is still waiting for the visitors. The flow of time has continued in their absence, outside the bubble.

Living history sites are presented as microcosms of the past, presenting experiences that capture everyday life during critical periods in history. In these spaces, museum staff attempt to capture the essence of a daily task, language, and/or cultural practice and present it to the general public in such a way that is educational, engaging, and sometimes thought-provoking. These presentations not only allow visitors to consider the task or practice in its historical context, but also how it may resonate with or even validate their present-day practices or beliefs.

These spaces offer a variety of levels on which visitors can engage. For those who want tours and to simply experience walking through a site, it is simple enough to be a tourist as they would in any modern location. They are free to observe, but mostly choose not to participate. For others, the opportunity to test it/try it/feel it or to even experience an immersive, mediated adoption of a persona for a limited duration is the primary draw. The two living history sites I visited for this portion of the chapter, Mount Vernon and Colonial Williamsburg, offered a range of experiences, from being a casual observer to being able to go "behind the scenes" in historical buildings or even be drafted into a 17th century coffeehouse scenario.

Mount Vernon

Some living history experiences, like those at Mount Vernon, function on historically significant sites. While a few buildings have been moved over time, it can be argued that the site

as the operators represent it is "real." Other sites are smaller in scope, operating within the confines of a museum space. Still other sites are constructed for the express purpose of presenting an interpretation of the past, creating villages or small towns such as Colonial Williamsburg, Sauder Village, or Plimoth Plantation by moving existing buildings to a new geographic location and restoring existent structures.

At Mount Vernon, the authenticity of the mansion and grounds is the primary appeal, rather than the potential for visitors to "go back in time" which is the program focus at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg. Mount Vernon is an authentic site, where the majority of the structures are in their historical location, as opposed to a reconstructed site such as Colonial Williamsburg wherein some buildings were transported to the location or erected on historical foundations. Although some buildings at the site were moved to help create the space, the primary attraction – the house where George Washington lived – is in the same space it occupied several centuries ago. These movements remain within the site to create a narrative structure as well as an approximation of the site's original layout.

In addition to tours of the house, grounds, and additional buildings, Mount Vernon offers several specialized tours such as the Slave Life Tour, Through My Eyes Character Tour, and the *National Treasure* Tour.[206] They also present a theater performance titled "Revolutionary War Theater: 4-D Experience," that includes sound and atmospheric effects to "highlight General Washington's role in the Revolutionary War."[207] The staff provides first-person interpretation – called character interpretation here – or third-person interpretation through docents and guides.

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[206] "Program Descriptions," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed September 25, 2019, https://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-teachers/teaching-institutes-professional-development/residential-programs/summer-residential-programs/program-descriptions/.

[207] "Revolutionary War 4-D Movie," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed October 8, 2018, https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/museum/revolutionary-war-4d-movie/.

This site focuses much more on presentation than interactivity, although the museum at the visitors' center encourages visitors to smell, touch, or listen to various exhibits.

While at Mount Vernon I went on two tours: the mansion tour and the Slave Life tour. The mansion tour, presented by a guide in site uniform, focused primarily on preservation and restoration. At the time of my visit, the dining room was undergoing plaster and paint restoration, utilizing archaeological evidence recovered from the walls to replicate the necessary materials. The outbuildings, such as the cookhouse, carriage house, men's and women's slave quarters, and grounds, including both culinary and flower gardens, have also been restored, although active exploration and excavation is ongoing.

The Slave Life tour was guided that day by Lindsay O'Connell, a historical interpreter with five years of experience at the site. Her presentation focused less on performance and more on education. O'Connell's narrative relied on letters and other primary documents from the period to connect past and present, although she noted that there remained in these the attitudes and beliefs of the era. She also noted that Black voices are largely absent, not because they were silent, but because there were few opportunities for the enslaved, the freed slave, or the runaway slave to create primary documents of their own at that time. The literacy rate among slaves of that era was between 10 and 15 percent, according to the guide. One of the few referenced was an 1840 interview with Oney Judge, Martha Washington's escaped lady's maid.

On this tour, visitors were challenged with the realities of slave life at Mount Vernon: small quarters, little to no privacy, backbreaking labor, and dehumanizing treatment. While there were many families in attendance on the tour, I found a school group's feedback to be the most interesting. The group, largely comprised of black students, showed by raise of hand that the majority were uncomfortable with the experience. Although it could have been a case of

teenagers being uninterested in the past, I was under the impression it was more a matter of unease than boredom. Being confronted with the reality that our first president, so often mythologized as honest and fair to a fault, was a slaveholder could be jarring to say the least.

Like many sites of this type, Mount Vernon must balance accuracy, appeal, and commercialization. To do so, they offer frequent updates on their ongoing efforts in restoration and preservation in addition to creating more means through which visitors can experience the site. As for commercialization, the present intrudes on the past only once via a small, on-site shop amid the historical buildings. It is largely unobtrusive but carries many of the same goods to be found at other NPS or state historical sites. However, the goal at Mount Vernon remains firmly to celebrate George Washington, his contributions to the early days of the republic, and his continued cultural influence – but through mediated experiences rather than independent exploration. This type of daytrip into the past is fairly representative of the experiences made available to living history museum visitors – a first-person or third-person interpretation of the past.

Colonial Williamsburg

Colonial Williamsburg became a mass tourist destination after WWII and since then "has been increasingly operating on the border of mass entertainment and mass education."[208] The ideological focus of the site is summed up in the single sentence of their mission statement: "to feed the human spirit by sharing America's enduring story."[209] Williamsburg, Virginia features prominently in two American stories: the founding of the United States of America and the

[208] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 5.

[209] "Mission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation," accessed October 23, 2018, http://www.history.org/foundation/mission.cfm.

American Civil War. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. wanted to focus on the location's role in the American Revolution rather than its role as the site of the Battle of Williamsburg during the Civil War and chose to validate this narrative by grounding the interpretation in the expertise of historians and architects specializing in the time period.[210]

The overriding message at Colonial Williamsburg is that this site is dedicated to transporting visitors to the colonial era. Travelling back into the past at Colonial Williamsburg is a matter of crossing a bridge that marks the visitor's progression from their home temporal zone to the eighteenth century. The entirety of the locale is a dedicated immersive environment, with the year shifting within the site depending on the location. For example, the presenter in the coffee shop opened his presentation by telling us is the year was (is) 1766. At the Governor's Palace, the guide "snuck us in" to look around while the governor and his family are on the run from angry colonists protesting the Intolerable Acts in June 1775.In addition to the location itself, which is an attraction, Colonial Williamsburg offers demonstrations, living history, and programs that include "general tours of the capitol, the governor's palace, the jail, and a nighttime tour – the lantern tour" in addition to programs presented specifically to school groups, such as "Discovering the Past, an interactive program on historical archeology presented only to school groups."[211]

With an intellectual and ideological scaffolding in place, the next matter for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation was that of authenticity. The Colonial Williamsburg project began in 1926 through the combined efforts of Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and

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[210] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 33.

[211] Andy Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, August 11, 2014.

initially focused on the preservation and restoration of significant colonial-era Williamsburg buildings. Rockefeller "funded the preservation of more than 80 of the original structures, the reconstruction of many buildings, and also the construction of extensive facilities to accommodate the visiting public."[212] According to Christopher Geist, a historical interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg from 1996 to 2013, "Eighty-eight of the buildings are original. There are hundreds of others, small and large, that were built on original foundations where they could and some as recently as a couple of years ago as in the case of the blacksmith shop. They did a lot of work in the early days, gathering up insurance plots and drawings and early illustrations. They tried as best they could to put everything where it was."[213]

According to a 10 April 1994 article in the *Roanoke Times & World-News* titled "Authenticity: Colonial Williamsburg Strives for That 18th Century Atmosphere, Right Down to the Road Apples," "authenticity is Colonial Williamsburg's mission."[214] That mission, though, has been subjected to a fair bit of critique. In an effort to present a historical space that is palatable to contemporary visitors, Colonial Williamsburg has undergone what David Lowenthal calls "eternal gentrification," where "the past, all the parts of it that are dirty and exciting and dangerous and uncomfortable and real" are civilized and sanitized.- right down to the absence of the aforementioned road apples.[215] Williamsburg claims to replicate the past down to the scents, but the version presented reflects contemporary expectations, not the realities of life in the colonial era. The first thing that struck me as a visitor was that it smelled wrong – it was too

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[212] "The History of Colonial Williamsburg," accessed October 17, 2018, http://www.history.org/Foundation/cwhistory.cfm.

[213] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

[214] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 5.

[215] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, xxv.

clean. Handler and Gable wrote in their book *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, that "manure is authentic dirt, an instance and symbol of natural disorder" and that was utterly absent from the streets, regardless of the presence of horses.[216] In fact, even garbage isn't permitted on the streets of Colonial Williamsburg. Marit Knollmueller, a Colonial Williamsburg visitor, observed "If there's a piece of garbage by accident, someone sweeps it up behind you, creating this little perfect world."[217] Another example is the gardens. Geist describes the "original colonial revival" gardens as being "accurate to the period" but looking "too disorganized to the modern eye."[218] As a result, the gardens are kept to a much tidier, more modern standard. The "sanitized for your consumption" approach can lend itself to feeling more like an "attraction," which is a fraught issue in the world of museums and living history sites.

Colonial Williamsburg needs to attract not only first-time visitors, but also repeat visitors. In instances such as these, authenticity takes a backseat to nostalgia. An example is that of the blue paint used in the ballroom in the Governor's Palace. Andrew Schocket, a historical interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg during the 1990s, explained, "that blue was very popular in the mid to late 1930's into 1940s, as Williamsburg Blue as part of the colonial revival. I can't remember if it had since been decided that the walls weren't that color, but because tourists remember it that way, Williamsburg keeps it blue.[219] He further remarked that "it's done because

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[216] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 3.

[217] Marit Knollmueller, Interview with Marit Knollmueller, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Skype, December 26, 2013.

[218] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

[219] Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH.

people love it and pay money to come to Colonial Williamsburg because they love it and they remember it, and Colonial Williamsburg has to make a living just like everybody else."[220]

While the site has been sanitized or sometimes influenced by visitor nostalgia, the history interpreted there has evolved to incorporate many of the voices often left on the margins of books. What may have begun as "entrenched history" that "preserves the status quo" and is as "explicitly constructionist" as it is celebratory has given way to a much more inclusive presentation.[221] The history of the colonial era and American Revolution with which most visitors are likely to be familiar is primarily military or political in nature. Colonial Williamsburg branched out from that narrow exploration of the past and now embraces "the whole gamut: history of religion, economic history, women's history, political history, culinary history, and African-American history."[222] "There are also programming opportunities at Williamsburg that really go against the grain of the celebratory, particularly in the African-American programming," as well as programs that focus on the Indians of the area.[223] As Chris Geist remarked, "In those programs there are lots of times to talk about the darker sides of history."[224] Fortunately, it is not all dark: there are other foci such as an emphasis on material culture and folkways at the site that encourage visitors to see people from the past as people rather than as vague shadows of another time.

While presentations from historical interpreters are among the most frequent types of programming encountered at a living history site, many areas at Colonial Williamsburg

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[220] Schocket.

[221] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 3,5.

[222] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

[223] Geist.

[224] Geist.

encourage visitor participation in either task-based activities or scenario-based activities. Examples of task-based activities are often those household or farm chores that are no longer a part of the present. Scenario-based activities are those where a group participates in a time-limited activity such as drilling on the village green with the Kings' troops or being among those "invited" to try a cup of drinking chocolate in the local coffee house. Colonial Williamsburg offers visitors a program during which they can participate in a reenactment of a session of the House of Burgesses.[225] These presentations and invitations to participate are thoughtful, educational, and experiential and sometimes call upon the visitor to perform.

There are many instances where the visitors are drafted into the presentations or performances. In the Governor's Mansion, the guide presents as part of the exhibit rather than as part of the tour group – steps into the setting, behind the rope, and presents in first person – but only after sneaking the group in while the governor is away. As visitors stand in the palace ballroom, the guide asks for the group to "vote" to toast the king or to toast the colonies and Virginia. In the House of Burgesses, there's a short simulation of the session in which George Washington proposed his first legislation in the House of Burgesses. Schocket, as one of the guides for the House of Burgesses program, recalled "The tourists loved this, because it was a proposal to ban the – or I should say, to prohibit the people from running swine in the streets of Winchester, Virginia. The interpreter would hand out cards – different roles to different people and they'd get up and read this, and you'd have them hiss and huzzah, and bang on the floor. It was fun and instructive, and it was lively and it often engaged tourists in ways that a more static and traditional lecture format did not."[226]

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[225] Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH.

[226] Schocket.

In their efforts to adapt to new interpretations of and evidence from the past and the changing needs and wants of their visitors, Colonial Williamsburg and its team of programming developers and interpreters have shifted their presentations to allow for evolution. For example, "they changed interpretations of Jefferson from the earliest periods and of slavery at Williamsburg as we learn more about the lives of slaves rather than some of the stuff that was around in the 1960s: 'Oh, they were living in the town. They had great lives.'"[227] What could not be anticipated, though, was how strongly some visitors aligned their identities with the earlier, more celebratory narratives. Change did not come without pushback.

When many of the institutions discussed in this chapter were founded, their primary interpretative goals focused on commemoration and celebration. As the new social history movement gained momentum in the mid-to-late twentieth century, tensions arose between the older guard of interpreters and visitors and their modern counterparts. As Handler and Gable write, there is a "fine line between…verisimilitude and besmirching American identity by dwelling on what is dirty about the nation's collective past."[228]

Slavery, Interpretation, and the Public

Slavery was interpreted for the first time at Colonial Williamsburg in 1979, when six African-American interpreters were employed "to present first-person portrayal of slaves."[229] By the early 1980s, African-American inclusion was becoming increasingly common, but still carried the historical and present-day burdens of racism. For example, Christy Coleman, now chief executive of the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia, became a reenactor

[227] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

[228] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 8.

[229] Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," 49–50.

at Colonial Williamsburg in 1982, when she was only 17. As a young woman portraying an enslaved person, Coleman watched as "the modern veneer" of many visitors disappeared in the face of her interpretation. Some visitors felt freed to subject her to "racial epithets or crude sexual comments."[230] In spite of this frequent behavior from visitors, Coleman continued as a historical interpreter, eventually becoming Colonial Williamsburg's director for public history.

Margaret Biser, a former docent at an unidentified historic site in the South, began collecting comments received from visitors regarding the content of her presentation. Biser's responsibility was to lead tours that focused on slavery at the site and, while there were visitors who remained engaged and receptive during her talks, there was a significant amount of pushback from some visitors who saw her as a potential ideological ally because she is white. She eventually shared visitor comments on her Twitter account @AfAmHistFail (originally run anonymously to preserve her employment).[231] Many of the posts echoed comments received by other tour guides and historical interpreters at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg.

Biser's employers gave her the flexibility to correct misconceptions, but also the imperative to keep things professional. Outright aggression was one of the instances in which a visitor could be ejected from the premises, but outright ignorance was to be countered with education and, when appropriate, a bit of humor. That was particularly useful when working with children. "By and large kids respect honesty and hate unfairness," she observed.[232]

For her, the most important aspect of her job is continuing "to tell the story," with an emphasis on the fact that slaves were people, not property, regardless of how laws and society of

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[230] Schneider, "An African American Leader Brings a Provocative Take to Expanded Civil War Museum."

[231] Nicole Cliffe, "An Interview With @AfAmHistFail - The Toast - The Toast," June 22, 2015, http://the-toast.net/2015/06/22/an-interview-with-afamhistfail/.

[232] Cliffe.

the time chose to regard then.[233] To Biser, "[o]ne of the best things a historic site can do is demonstrate the humanity of Africa-Americans… I'd encourage sites to think of black history less as one more block in their interpretive edifice, but more a bright red thread in an interwoven past."[234] Writing three years after the launch of her Twitter account, @AfAmHistoryFail, Biser considered how the landscape of inclusive history had progressed: "Relatively speaking, the move toward inclusive history in museums is fairly recent, and still underway."[235] Rather than simply arguing that inclusive history should be the standard for institutions, Biser recognizes that there are obstacles to overcome and, frequently, they are generated by those who are at a distance from the day to day operations of a site. "Often, sites' biggest barrier to telling inclusive history is not the actual workers or programming but a crusty board of directors or trustees," she explained. [236]

In a 2018 interview with the Washington Post, Christy Coleman explained her long association with Colonial Williamsburg and the importance of providing a "voice to the voiceless."[237] In the colonial era, more than half the residents of Williamsburg, Virginia were of African descent.[238] Despite this, the ethnic and racial composition of the interpreter population is heavily weighted toward white people. Andy Schocket observed, "If you look around [at Colonial Williamsburg], you'll still see the majority of people in costume are white while the majority of people in uniform are still black."[239] This lack of visual parity presents a very

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[233] Cliffe.

[234] Cliffe.

[235] Biser, "I Used to Lead Tours at a Plantation. You Won't Believe the Questions I Got about Slavery."

[236] Cliffe, "An Interview With @AfAmHistFail - The Toast - The Toast."

[237] Schneider, "An African American Leader Brings a Provocative Take to Expanded Civil War Museum."

[238] Schneider.

[239] Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH.

homogenized view of the colonial era and erases many of the more complicated conversations about American history. During one of Coleman's first large events as the director for public history at colonial Williamsburg, a staffer pointed out that a market day in colonial Williamsburg would have included not only the auction of cattle and land, but also of slaves. In an effort to address this erasure, Coleman decided it was time to do something radical.[240] She proposed the staging of a live slave auction. Olwen Purdue notes "The stakes are high for historians in such contexts; they are researching and teaching controversial and contested histories, often with people who have personal or familial experience of violence and intimidation."[241] This was certainly the case when bringing in a piece of history often tucked away in textbooks.

Once news of Coleman's intensions began circulating in the community and in the news, objections quickly arose. One of the largest concerns was that this presentation not cross the line from education to entertainment. In the early- to mid-1990s, Disney considered building a historical theme park in the midst of Virginia and the living history sites and museums in that area were concerned that history would be "Disneyfied:" "commercialized, sanitized, and packaged" with an eye toward profit.[242] Schocket recalled, "the NAACP had understandably wanted to protest and been very disturbed about the possibility of Colonial Williamsburg is going to make some spectacle out of human beings being sold."[243] There was also controversy among the staff about whether the subject matter was appropriate. The argument for the program

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[240] Schneider, "An African American Leader Brings a Provocative Take to Expanded Civil War Museum."

[241] Olwen Purdue, "Controversial Public History," *Historical Transactions* (blog), January 9, 2018, https://blog.royalhistsoc.org/2018/01/09/controversial-public-history/.

[242] Karolyn Smardz Frost, "The Underground Railroad and the Creation of Public Memory," in *Multiple Lenses: Voices from the Disaspora Located in Canada*, ed. David Divine (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 182.

[243] Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH.

came primarily from those interpreters in the African-American program, who did not want to tell only part of the story of colonial Williamsburg.

Colemanput herself on the auction block alongside three other African-American historical interpreters. “Christy, who was the director of African-American programming then, thought it really did what she wanted it to do. She was very positive about it,” recalled Chris Geist. The program was well received and even allayed some of the concerns voiced by the NAACP with its thoughtful, if “bowdlerized” content.[244] However, it has not been repeated. Instead, Colonial Williamsburg expanded their historical interpretation programming with a slate of content focused on the African American experience in early Virginia.

Five years later, visitors’ modern sensibilities clashed sharply with a presentation of the past. Part of portraying slavery at Colonial Williamsburg is also showing one of the more harrowing aspects of African-American life during the colonial era: slave catchers. During his tenure at Colonial Williamsburg, Chris Geist participated in the “Enslaving Virginia” program as part of “a slave catching team, slave chasers. One of the slaves would just slam down his stuff and run, take off, and they call us out and we go all over town looking for them.”[245] In 1999, an interpreter in the “Enslaving Virginia” program saw some evidence to support the hope that inclusive history connected with visitors. During the presentation, “something entirely unexpected occurred. The entire audience…took off after the slave catchers to rescue the slave. It was only by stepping entirely out of role that the interpretive staff were able to prevent serious injury – that mob was ready to kill the hapless historical actor playing the slave catcher.”[246]

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[244] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

[245] Geist.

[246] Frost, “The Underground Railroad and the Creation of Public Memory,” 181–82.

There are other, less fraught, instances of visitors and interpreters at cross-temporal purposes. During my 2013 visit to R. Charlton's Coffeehouse, circa 1766, a first-person interpreter named Fanny asked who was there for leisure and who was on business. I indicated business, which led to questions about my occupation. Without thinking I said 'professor.' Her look told me I'd erred, giving a twenty-first-century answer to an eighteenth-century question. She said she knew of no women teachers and asked if I were from Philadelphia, as if that would be more acceptable there. I nodded, explaining I had received an uncommon education for a woman. The moment served as a reminder to all present that that space was designated as "the past" and that we were just visiting.

Living history sites often encourage participation through consumerism and entice visitors to take a piece of the experience home with the positioning of gift shops at the primary entrance and exit of their locations. Day trippers are invited to take souvenirs home, most often from the gift shop, but also sometimes from "shoppes" interspersed throughout the site carrying much of the same merchandise. Both Colonial Williamsburg and Mount Vernon extend the commercial space into the historical space in this fashion. Colonial Williamsburg goes a step further, though, and invites visitors to rent historical attire to wear within the site itself. By wearing historical attire within the site, visitors are "playing" with the past through dress-up, exploring Colonial Williamsburg in the guise of a person from another time.

At Colonial Williamsburg, it's possible to rent children's period dress and enter the town as someone who belongs to that temporal zone. It's advertised as getting "into character" and that "suddenly, the stories are more relevant and the city more real." Adult costumes are not

available for rental but "may be purchased in certain locations within the Revolutionary City."[247] There are some visitors, though, who come to the site already dressed for the past. Chris Geist recalled "You also encounter some people who do their own clothing, reenactors, who just show up and walk around town. For the average visitor, it's hard to tell them from the employees sometimes."[248]

Visitors can undertake task and scenario-based activities, observe, and even dress up to get closer to the past in living history museums. But this is still at something of a remove. These activities are time-limited, mediated by an historical interpreter, still in the present, and often part of a tour or other guided experience. There are ways to make the experience resonate more with visitors, though. As sites such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* in Las Vegas demonstrate, connecting a historical exploration to a specific person from the past can enhance the experience and the connection. This sort of connection not only taps into our need for experiential memory, but also encourages visitors to engage their historical imaginations to make the temporal leap between present and past.

Intermezzo: Carrying an Identity – Seeking to Make It Personal

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* offer visitors an opportunity to make history personal by giving each visitor the identity of someone affected by the events to carry through the experience. In these cases, the visitor acts as proxy as they move through an immersive environment – they put the living into history. Each exhibit features a series of small vignettes, with the scope and narrative of each broadening

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[247] "Costume Rentals," accessed November 11, 2018, https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.com/shop/costume-rentals In a version of this page captured 11/11/18, the text reads "You and your child can 'get into character' with an 18th-century reproduction costume." The version accessed 09/11/19 reads "Help your child 'get into character' with an 18th-century reproduction costume."

[248] Geist, Interview with Christopher Geist, Bowling Green, OH.

gradually until the full horror of the conclusion is inescapable. These are meant to pack an emotional punch even though we know how it ends.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in 1993 with a stated mission to "advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy."[249] In addition to a focus on the Holocaust as experienced by those in Europe, the museum has also included exhibitions on the American response to the Holocaust as well as special exhibitions on contemporary human rights atrocities such as ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and, more recently, in Syria. I visited the permanent exhibition, *The Holocaust*, during the summer of 2017.

Before entering *The Holocaust*, visitors are invited to carry an identity as a way of remembering those affected. Each visitor can take an identification card containing vital statistics and a brief biographical sketch of a person targeted by the Axis during the Holocaust. The front cover bears the motto "for the dead and the living we must bear witness."[250] The inside cover states "This card tells the story of a real person who lived during the Holocaust."[251] My identification card was that of Eszter Mendel Braun, a Hungarian Jew born circa 1903. The small pamphlet contained a photograph of Braun and her biography, including her final fate in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Carrying this card with me encouraged me to keep her in mind through the entirety of the exhibit and led me to imagine how she might have suffered the terrors of the

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[249] "Mission and History — United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," accessed November 7, 2019, https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history.

[250] "Identification Card (Card #7105)" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

[251] "Identification Card (Card #7105)."

Holocaust. While I experienced an exhibition that encompassed the tragedy of thousands, I was given an opportunity to see the individual in the calamity.

The exhibition's narrative is arranged chronologically, taking visitors from a small home in Germany before Kristallnacht and through the dehumanization and attempted extermination of unwanted peoples in Europe. There are several points at which the exhibit evokes experiential learning, but three are particularly memorable. Close to the midpoint of the exhibit you must walk through a darkened train car to continue into the section involving the concentration camps themselves. This train car helps to highlight the cramped, awful conditions one might encounter in such a circumstance. Next, after you exit the train car, a replica of the entry gate at Auschwitz is among the first exhibit elements you see. Imposing and impossible to avoid, it signals the shift from the outside world to that of a concentration camp. The third element that helps to make the exhibit not only educational and deeply affecting, but also human, is a room of shoes. Different types, sizes, levels of quality, and all empty. With the identification card in hand, I found myself wondering if this is what it was like to see the piles of personal belongings cast aside as their owners were exterminated.

As a "living memorial to the Holocaust," the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum encourages visitors to explore and experience their permanent exhibit with another being in mind. The visitors help to put "the living" into this living memorial. This is similar to the tack taken by *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*, although in this case, it's less of a living memorial and more of a way for visitors to engage not only with the historical fact of the sinking of the Titanic, but also to connect to the tremendous commercial success that was the film *Titanic* (1997, Paramount Pictures and 20th Century Fox, dir. James Cameron).

Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition is owned and operated by Premier Exhibitions, which includes RMS Titanic, Inc. as one of its subsidiaries. RMS Titanic, Inc. holds exclusive salvage rights to the wreck site as of 2018, although bankruptcy proceedings for Premier Exhibitions have invited questions about where the over 5000 recovered artifacts may be housed in the future. For the time being, "more than 250 recovered items from the sunken luxury ocean liner" are featured in each of the four exhibition locations currently in operation.[252] I visited this exhibition in July 2005 when it was housed at the Tropicana Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. The exhibition was at the Tropicana from March 2005 until late 2008, at which time it was relocated to the Luxor Hotel and Casino, where it currently resides.[253]

The primary goal of this exhibition, as stated on Premier Exhibitions' Learn More page, is to tell human stories through "authentic artifacts" from the wreck and "extensive room re-creations" and to "pay honor to the indomitable force of the human spirit in the face of tragedy."[254] To accomplish this goal, "visitors will be drawn back in time to April 1912" through the issuance of a replica boarding pass, the assumption of the role of a passenger, and a "journey through life on the Titanic."[255] Of the possible identities to be assigned to visitors, all of them are

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[252] "Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition (Las Vegas) - 2019 All You Need to Know BEFORE You Go (with Photos)," TripAdvisor, accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g45963-d1501219-Reviews-Titanic_The_Artifact_Exhibition-Las_Vegas_Nevada.html.

[253] "Titanic Exhibit Opens at Tropicana," accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.casinocitytimes.com/news/article/titanic-exhibit-opens-at-tropicana-149413; "The Titanic Docks at Luxor," Los Angeles Times, August 31, 2008, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-aug-31-ca-vegas31-story.html; "Tours Explore Haunting of Titanic Exhibit at Luxor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (blog), October 21, 2012, https://www.reviewjournal.com/entertainment/arts-culture/tours-explore-haunting-of-titanic-exhibit-at-luxor/.

[254] "Learn More - Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition | Premier Exhibitions," accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.premierexhibitions.com/exhibitions/3/3/titanic-artifact-exhibition/learn-more.

[255] "Learn More - Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition | Premier Exhibitions."

male and four of the five were passengers.[256] The fifth option, Frederick Fleet, was a crew member. During my visit to the exhibition, I was assigned the identity of Father Thomas Russell Byles, a second-class passenger. I was not, however, informed of his fate until the end of the exhibition.

During our visit we walked through a replica of various parts of the ship: first, second, and third-class cabins, corridors, and public rooms. There were other portions arranged as an exhibition of some of the artifacts recovered from the wreck itself: a shoe, dishes, a vanity set. As I wrote after my visit in 2005:

> Speaking as one who has long been interested in that period of time and that ship in particular, I found the exhibit very affecting. The recreations of a first-class corridor and a third-class corridor were marvelous, and the other artifacts were fascinating, but I was most moved by the section of the C deck on display. The piece gave me more of a view of the sheer size of the ship. I knew that the ship was titanic in more than name, but the view of a single deck, towering above me, made it all the more real.[257]

Near the end of the exhibition, a replica of an iceberg stands tall, blue, and cold to the touch. We were invited to touch it and, in doing so, imagine what it might have felt like to be trapped in a sinking ship or bobbing in frigid waters as the ship went down. To learn the fate of Father Thomas, I had to scan a board with the names of the passengers to see if he survived. He did not. His entry on the *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* website provides more information about his passing and the effect had on his family.[258]

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[256] "Boarding Pass - Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition | Premier Exhibitions," accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.premierexhibitions.com/exhibitions/3/3/titanic-artifact-exhibition/boarding-pass.

[257] Tiffany L. Knoell, "On My Best Behaviour," *Chickeny Goodness!* (blog), July 9, 2005, https://chickenygoodness.wordpress.com/2005/07/09/on-my-best-behaviour/.

[258] "Father Thomas R. Byles - Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition | Premier Exhibitions," accessed November 12, 2019, http://www.premierexhibitions.com/exhibitions/3/3/titanic-artifact-exhibition/father-thomas-r-byles.

The Luxor exhibition capitalizes on the intersection of history and entertainment in a way that its Tropicana predecessor did not. In addition to the room re-creations, the exhibition now includes a view of a deck and the Grand Staircase, which was prominently featured in the 1997 film, and offers paid photograph opportunities in front of or on the staircase. The gift shop, accessible immediately after learning the fate of "your" passenger, stocks replicas of the artifacts just shown in the exhibit. You can take a piece of the *Titanic* home with you.

The salvage of artifacts from the wreckage of the *Titanic* has been a fraught issue. Robert Ballard, the man who rediscovered the *Titanic* in 1985, chose to leave the artifacts where they were and forego salvage rights to the vessel out of respect for the dead. He was quoted in a 2018 National Geographic article as saying "You don't go to the battlefield of Gettysburg with a shovel and you don't pull belt buckles off the *Arizona*."[259] *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* blurs the line between education and entertainment, remembrance and replicas, human catastrophe and capitalist impulse.

The Holocaust and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* have several characteristics in common. Chief among them is their invitation to visitors to see the experience through individual eyes even as each commemorates tragedies affecting many –those who lost their lives, those who survived, and those whose lives were touched in some way by the calamities. They prioritize primary documents and artifacts even as they feature tableaux of everyday life, be it in World War II-era Europe or onboard a ship. Both are enhanced by the ability of the visitor to engage their historical imaginations and consider how they might react in those circumstances. The difference between the two emerges when the question of profit comes into play.

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[259] "Titanic Artifacts Caught in International Tug-of-War," Science, July 2, 2018, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2018/07/news-rms-titanic-artifacts-shipwrecks-bankruptcy-archaeology/.

Not Just Trying It Out – Trying It On: Visitors and Second Person-Interpretation

Temporal tourists can seek understanding and connection through second-person historical interpretation. Magelssen defines second-person interpretation as an "activity in which museum goers get to try out being part of the past environment (by performing chores or playing period games), instead of merely visiting it."[260] Although visitors may have walked the streets of Colonial Williamsburg or explored the doomed *Titanic*, being able to "try out the past" for longer than the duration of a chore can lend a different type of understanding. The experiences of marching across the fields of Gettysburg in Pickett's Charge, being a British colonist fleeing Fort Meigs, or being a "runaway slave" at Conner Prairie may not literally transport us to another time, but with guidance and the necessary imagination to place ourselves into the footsteps of another, we can develop empathy and appreciation for those people who lived through those circumstances. In these instances, we may not carry a specific historical identity with us through a mediated space, but we still experience through and with our bodies rather than simply being told about it.

We bring our modern identities with us and these can clash with the realities or presentations of the temporal locations we try to "visit." As a result, these can also be emotional journeys as well as fact-based explorations. I brought my contemporary identity with me into the past at Conner Prairie and my 21st century responses were not well-received by performers presenting 19th century Indiana. Even though I knew it was a performance, that I was safe and would not be harmed, I was intimidated by being reprimanded for only having borne three

[260] Magelssen, "'This Is a Drama. You Are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star,'" 19.

children. I was asked what was wrong with me and I had to bite back my 21st century self to not draw more ire.

It should be acknowledged that, while visitors do not have a specific named identity assigned to them, they are nevertheless fulfilling a role. This can make performance problematic, particularly when exploring the lives of people who have been oppressed or enslaved. There are some critics who argue that making an experience like this something that can be "visited" and then left behind makes light of those who had to live it. This is a frequent argument against programs such as *Follow the North Star* that present the plight of enslaved peoples, where "differently raced identities" can be "'tried on' for the purpose of education."[261] As a result we, the participants, need to carefully consider programs such as these and what messages they may be unintentionally sending.

Is it possible to leave our modern selves behind? I'd say no, no matter how good our performance is. Magelssen writes in "'This Is A Drama. You Are Characters:' The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star'" that "what we do is an act of imagination as much as an effort to present 'history' through our performances of the past."[262] Vanessa Agnew agrees: "[B]ody-based testimony tells us more about the present self than the collective past" even as we are "reanimating the past through the body."[263] We might be exploring what we think the past might have been through play and performance, but, short of a time machine, it will firmly remain a place we can't visit.

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[261] Magelssen, 22.

[262] Magelssen, 21.

[263] Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 330, 335.

I took part in second-person historical interpretation at three different sites: Gettysburg National Military Park for a sesquicentennial observance of Pickett's Charge in July 2013; 1813 Patrol at Fort Meigs, Ohio's Commemoration of First Siege in May 2016; and Conner Prairie's *Follow the North Star* program in Indianapolis, Indiana in April 2013. The first two instances were in large groups without individual interaction from event or site guides. The third was in a small group with limited one-on-one interaction, making it a much more intimate encounter.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania – Pickett's Charge

On the afternoon of 3 July 2013, hundreds of participants gathered on the edge of what was once a farmer's field but is now a site of commemoration, a silent battlefield. We massed in groups organized by seceded states, faced toward what became known as Cemetery Ridge. Once the signal was given, we surged forward over mowed-down grasses and tried to remember mowed-down soldiers, lives lost in a futile charge, as we were urged on by a steady drumbeat.

We took on the collective identity of the men who marched against Federal troops in Pickett's Charge. As we walked, the reactions around me varied. I watched and listened as I tried to keep pace with my group, as we climbed over fences and marched through fields in the heat and humidity. The location helped the experience feel concrete and seemed to fuel the children around me. A little boy declared to his sister: "This is the way to learn history - not from books!" Some around me paused periodically and knelt in remembrance. As we approached the ridge, a man wrapped up a cell call: "I need to hang up. I'm going to run into the Yankees in about three minutes."

We were not hailed with gunfire, as those who had marched 150 years earlier would have been. Instead, we were greeted at the road just before the ridge by reenactors and historical interpreters, clasping hands with those just arrived from across the fields. At veterans' events

following the conclusion of the Civil War, Confederate veterans would reenact Pickett's Charge, only to be met by their Federal counterparts who would offer their hands in friendship to help them across the field. I couldn't help but wonder if my surge of relief at the charge's conclusion might have matched what Civil War veterans might have felt during reunions after that terrible conflict.

As a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, we substituted our bodies for those who had been cut down by artillery, as well as those who survived and reenacted that walk during veterans' reunions. It was meant as a remembrance, a way to experience the past in a way far more personal than simply watching a documentary or reading about it. The tactile nature and environmental factors were, perhaps, not unique to that space, but were literally grounded to the past by virtue of being in the actual location and not a reasonable facsimile.

Fort Meigs, Ohio – 1813 Patrol

My friend Elizabeth and I were among 36 refugees being escorted from Fort Meigs in a patrol in 1813, fleeing to points south from Detroit. According to our guide, we were granted the protection of a military escort as we left the fort. We walked into the woods on a well-worn path. Our escort was intent on pushing into the surrounding brush on either side of the path. It seemed that they were checking the surrounding areas for any sort of hostile activity, although all remained quiet except the shuffle of feet and the sounds of a wagon as it labored over the rough ground.

It was quiet until the gunshots rang out. Two shots from our right, then multiple shots ahead as a skirmish between our escort and British and Indian forces ensued. A small child wailed and sobbed until we retreated to the safety of the fort, but many in the group seemed to

view it as spectacle rather than the life and death ordeal it would have been two hundred years ago. It was historical entertainment, a theme park experience designed to give a taste of the past without the peril.

As we experienced a mock skirmish, I couldn't help but wonder: would we have run? Would we have been cut down? How would our clothing hinder our escape? The soundtrack of war cries, distressed children, and gunfire could have been real, but for the lack of people taking it seriously.

In this instance, I was able to consider my gender as a factor. With Pickett's Charge, the assumption is that the participants in the original conflict were male. My body was not a match, but I was game to undertake the endeavor anyway. In the instance of the 1813 Patrol, I could consider how not only my body but also my attire might affect the ways in which I could move through that time and circumstance.

Conner Prairie, Indianapolis, Indiana – Follow the North Star

Second-person interpretation goes beyond simply trying a task or talking to an interpreter. This is getting as close to "the past" as a visitor can get because, rather than simply trying a task, second-person interpreters are asked to take on a role for the duration of a scenario. Colonial Williamsburg had moments of this type of interpretation, but they were also based on the idea that you were still a person in the present who was just visiting a single place of the past: a room or chamber. Conner Prairie's *Follow the North Star* program takes that idea and utilizes the entirety of their site, populating it with first-person interpreters and ensuring that visitors are able to have a full-body experience of the past: running, hiding, and interacting with museum interpreters tasked with treating you, the visitor, as if you were an enslaved Black person in 1836 Indiana.

Of the three second-person historical interpretative events in which I was involved, *Follow the North Star* was not only the longest in duration, but also the most involved in terms of preparation in advance of entering the scenario and then debriefing after its conclusion. Conner Prairie's investment of time and development in this program was quite evident and understandable, given the sensitive nature of the content. The leaflet that accompanied my ticket read:

> Experience what it was like to seek freedom on the Underground Railroad in this award-winning program. Encounter the challenges and perils faced by those on a tumultuous path to independence in this dramatic and powerful reenactment. Come face-to-face with a hunter, see hope in the eyes of a fellow runaway and be encouraged by a Quaker family. Truly experience life as a fugitive during your journey through one of the compelling periods in Indiana's history. ***Follow the North Star*** **is not for everyone.** You should be prepared to take on the role of a runaway slave; you'll be walking outside on rough terrain in all kinds of weather, told to keep your eyes focused downward and spoken to in an abrupt manner.[264]

I knew from reading Scott Magelssen's work on *Follow the North Star* what I was getting myself into. I expected the release of liability waiver as well as the information received by mail that informed me I was about to travel back in time. The programming can be viewed as educational or problematic. In their Frequently Asked Questions on *Follow the North Star*, Conner Prairie asserts that the goal of the program is to "foster greater intellectual and emotional understanding of slavery as it existed in the U.S. and encourages participants to consider how the legacy of slavery continues to this day."[265] The public response, though, has been less than supportive of a program that is seen to promote pretending to be runaway slaves. A critical question arises: does this program go from engendering empathy and understanding to

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[264] "Follow the North Star." Leaflet. (Fishers: Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, 2013)

[265] "Follow the North Star - Underground Railroad Participatory Theater Experience - Conner Prairie," accessed September 22, 2018, http://www.connerprairie.org/things-to-do/events/follow-the-north-star.

capitalizing on the degradation of an entire group of people? Is "sanitizing history" better than not presenting it at all, or does it come with its own set of issues and considerations? [266]

My reservation for the 90-minute program was set for 6:45 pm on 26 April 2013. I was instructed to dress warm, to wear sturdy walking shoes and to wear something that could get dirty and plan for the weather. During the introduction to the scenario, we were given instructions: If we become distressed, use the white strip of cloth given to us to indicate invisibility to the staff and they will not interact with you. There is the potential to be accosted if in small groups. Don't run. Listen to the clues for each place. Remember: You are playing a role. This is how you can learn. I felt there was an unspoken reminder that we should be respectful of those whose experiences we sought to understand.

Other than being aware that it would be cold and darkness would set in while I was in the scenario, I wasn't prepared at all for what I found at this location. It was unlike any experience I have ever had. Upon entering the scenario, our group was divided between men and women with some of us being "examined" or questioned. Once again I gave a 21st century answer to a 19th century question: "how many children have you had?" When I responded with three, I was immediately asked "Why haven't you had more? Is there something wrong with you?" I found myself weighing the potential consequences of asserting myself as I would normally do as a 21st century person versus the consequences that might be faced by my 1836 persona, not to mention how my actions could adversely affect the other people in the group.

We were led from building to building on the site, often running or walking quickly, hoping to avoid being noticed by the "slave catchers" sent to retrieve our group. We were

[266] "Conner Prairie Slavery Re-Enactment Draws Criticism," Indianapolis Star, accessed September 22, 2018, https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2016/08/06/conner-prairie-slavery-re-enactment-draws-criticism/82987036/.

sheltered by different people, not all of whom were kind. Our first shelter was a barn, offered by a pair of sisters who berated us as thieves and reminded us they were hiding us out of a sense of Christian duty - nothing more. Another pair, this time a Quaker husband and wife, not only sheltered us but extended kindness, sympathy, and guidance to the next person who would "help us escape." Our third shelter host was a freed Black woman who told us her story and instructed us on our final steps of the program. Once we reached our last stop, a house along a main road in the "town," some of us were told our fates. Some in the group successfully escaped. Some were recaptured.

At the conclusion of the program, we were ushered into the main building and back into the present. There was no celebration or ease. Instead, several of the other participants looked thoughtful and relieved to be safe and warm. As some in our party were there as a school group, the debrief leader focused her attention on the teenagers, helping to draw connections between human trafficking in the past and human trafficking in the present. The experience in its totality was deemed valuable by those in attendance, but more important was the understanding that slavery continues now even as it shades our past as Americans.

It still took me a moment to return to the present. The comfort zones out of which I had been pushed – physical, emotional (through stress and anxiety), and psychological – were very much in line with what the developers of the program sought to accomplish. Their goal was that visitors would learn something in a way that they could not have achieved any other way – learning through a "walk in the shoes of history."[267] I found that my 21st century identities of woman and mother informed my responses in the scenario. I wanted to protect the others in my

[267] Magelssen, "'This Is a Drama. You Are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star,'" 24.

group. I wanted to defend them. I wanted to protect myself. But I had to keep in mind that what my gut told me I wanted in those moments was likely what the program designers wanted us to feel. Participants were supposed to experience, and thus hopefully empathize with, some of the same types of fear that a Black person of 1836 may have felt. However, I knew that, as a white woman of the 21st century, my understanding would never truly be complete. It simply could not be for reasons that had as much to do with my identity as it did temporality.

As of fall 2019, the Follow the North Star program was placed on hold for an update or "reimagining." According to a press release given to The Herald Bulletin of Anderson, Indiana, as a result of Conner Prairie's "recent designation … as a Site of Conscience by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, we will be partnering with them to rework this program to meet its goals."[268] There are no dates available for the program on their website as of February 2020 and the program is no longer listed on the front page or navigation of the Conner Prairie site.[269]

One thing became clear during my experiences at the reenactment of Pickett's Charge and at Conner Prairie: my body does not fit the historical profile for those people whose roles I might be fulfilling. As a white woman, I cannot reasonably expect my body to fit either historical person. Magelssen is careful to note that historical bodies and present-day bodies do not have a one-to-one correlation with one another; for example the body of a 30-year-old in 1838, when the *Follow the North Star* program is set, is going to be different than the body of a 30-year-old

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[268] "Good Morning: Conner Prairie to Change Its Follow the North Star Program | Short Takes | Heraldbulletin.Com," accessed February 6, 2020, https://www.heraldbulletin.com/news/local_news/briefs/good-morning-conner-prairie-to-change-its-follow-the-north/article_48ecefc8-47f2-50ea-b840-74f2e416fb1a.html.

[269] "Follow the North Star," accessed February 6, 2020, https://www.connerprairie.org/explore/things-to-do/follow-the-north-star/.

in 2018.[270] This mismatch would also be an issue when I took the field with the 18th Virginia Mounted Cavalry in Long Beach, although for more practical reasons; trying to find clothes that would allow me to walk out with my unit was something of a struggle. In that case, it was more a struggle of me not fitting the contemporary attire available because, inexplicably, I fit the physical profile of a Civil War era soldier in all but gender. However, as a second-person interpreter, an act of historical imagination is required.

Each of these sites – living history sites, museums, and second-person interpretive sites - ask the visitor to engage in an act of faith and imagination when they step into an all-encompassing environment. When we cross the threshold of a site, we are transitioning between one place and time and into a mediated representation of sometimes another place, but always another time. For example, at Colonial Williamsburg, the bridge between the visitor's center – the present – and the site – the past – is marked by a series of plaques. As you step over each of these plaques, you are meant to imagine yourself stepping back in time. Once you arrive at the first location on the site, you have travelled to another era and that illusion, while never perfect, because not everyone chooses to "play along", is accepted by those who visit. We, as visitors, trust that the representation will offer temporal fidelity and some level of familiarity.

Sometimes this act of imagination requires collaboration from visitors to maintain the ambience of a site. One of the most requested forms of collaboration is to not use modern technology in a location or for the duration of an event. Large-scale sites and events and commercial sites, such as Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition, Gettysburg National Military Park, and Fort Meigs, make it more difficult to control

[270] Magelssen, "'This Is a Drama. You Are Characters': The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star.'"

anachronisms, as our societal tendency to document and share our experiences may be at odds with our desire to visit the past. In smaller environments and at paid events it is easier to solicit collaboration with a level of expectation that the request will be honored. I experienced this tension during a 2019 visit to the City Tavern in Philadelphia. Diners are expressly asked not to use cell phones or other devices so as to preserve the historical atmosphere for other patrons. That did not prevent some of my fellow diners from Instagramming and Facebooking their meals. On the other hand, I don't recall seeing cell phones or other technology that could break the spell during the Follow the North Star program at Conner Prairie.

Those who take day trips into the past have a variety of options to choose from on how close they get. Whether it's taking a living history tour with a first-person interpreter, visiting an exhibition and carrying an identity, or taking on a second-person interpretative role themselves, there's several ways the casual retronaut can venture beyond nostalgia and beyond their couch to explore another time. Many of these experiences are guided tours of a recreation of past environment, such as at Mt. Vernon or Colonial Williamsburg. Others, like museum exhibitions at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition, ask visitors to take on the memory of someone else associated with the exhibition during their stay. Finally, second-person historical interpretation allows a day tripper into the past the opportunity to take a step closer and use their own body to "perform the past" to gain understanding and insight. Each of these approaches asks visitors to not only engage in an act of historical imagination, but to also consider how their performance may or may not sync up with the lived experience of someone else due to temporal distance.

Some retronauts seek to close that distance. Amateur historical interpreters take a step further into the past and do so with a mission in mind: to educate the public, to gain

understanding, and sometimes to correct what they see as misinterpretation of history. For some, modern historians have lost their authority and it is up to them to step up and set the record straight.

CHAPTER IV. LEVEL TWO: RETRONAUTS: AMATEUR LIVING HISTORIANS AND RE-ENACTORS

> *Terry watched me fire off three caps in succession before deciding to upgrade me to shooting powder. We shot, we advanced. I started to wonder if I'd actually be any good.*
>
> *The call came to start taking wounded hits. The guys around me started to go down, but Casey, the commanding officer of the unit, and another gentleman, Daniel, and I kept at it. Casey instructed me to be certain I "died" in the shade and, when he went down, I finally did, too.*
>
> *As I lay on the grass, watching the sunlight as it filtered through the leaves, my first thought was to stay very still. My second was that my canteen was under me and not readily accessible. I rolled over to face the battlefield and watched, world tilted askew, as the Federal troops advanced on the Confederate line. I saw a drummer boy try to run from the fighting, only to be shot in the back by one of his own. I wasn't transported by period rush, but as I watched what went on around me, I was of two minds. There was the performer, with a thought for the audience, and the historian, wondering about the skewed point of view before me and how it might resonate with someone who laid on a battlefield, wounded, at some point in the past.*
>
> *The surrender sounded and the audience applauded. Casey mentioned the importance of putting on a good performance before we went out on the field. I can only wonder what the audience thinks as the dead rise and rejoin their units.*
>
> *The members of the unit gathered back at their camp and were greeted by their families. I was welcomed into the fold and several children asked me if I had been "in the war." I couldn't help but smile as I said yes.*
>
> - Field notes, Huntington Beach Civil War Days, 1 September 2013

When level one retronauts decide to dive deeper into the past on their own terms, they often choose one of two paths: amateur historical interpretation (also known as living historians in the community) or re-enactment. This isn't just nostalgia. We've watched the historical reality television. We've visited the living history sites as day trippers. This is the next step.

When we discuss historical re-enactment, one of the first images to come to mind is military re-enactment by men. The world of re-enactment has much wider borders, though, and encompasses a past that is more inclusive and more diverse than what we often encounter in

history books. These temporal tourists seek the pasts that we don't read about in school and those that are typically omitted from received cultural narratives and mythologies that comprise our intellectual and media landscapes.

In this chapter I explore how retronauts dive into the past, why they do so, and how identity factors into the choices made. I talk about how the concept of alternate histories appeals to re-enactors, particularly those Civil War re-enactors who represent the Confederacy. I examine the importance of groups in the hobby. I also look at what happens when women tread into places they might not be welcome in the hobby and how, for some, social re-enacting provides an outlet for their interests. I see this chapter as a twining together of the threads from each chapter before, with a look at how history, identity, communities, the past, and the present coalesce.

One of the critical aspects of this hobby is the terminology: living historians, re-enactors, historical interpreters, farbs, hardcore. All of the participants in these activities, regardless of which side they fall on, are amateur historians. Living historians and historical interpreters focus primarily on educating the public about history and present historical impressions rather than first-person interpretation. Re-enactors recreate battles, aesthetics, and other times and events past in an effort to gain an understanding of another time through coming as close as they can to experiencing it themselves. To be labeled a "farb" is to be labeled historically inaccurate in presentation, be it in clothing or performance, and it is one of the worst insults in the re-enactment world. "Hardcores," on the other hand, "didn't just dress up and shoot blanks."[271] For

[271] Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York, N.Y: Vintage Departures, 1999), 7.

them, fidelity with the past in dress, speech, diet, and kit is paramount.[272] To be called "hardcore" is a compliment. Many of their methods are the same, even if their end goals may differ.

In 2004, Vanessa Agnew opened a special issue of *Criticism* with an article asking the question "What is Re-enactment?" For Agnew, re-enactment indulges the intersection of what we see as work and what we see as play.[273] Re-enactment is valuable because it "licenses dressing up, pretending and improvising, casting oneself as the protagonist of one's own research and getting others to play along."[274] It's a way of engaging historical imagination and curiosity about the past while "testing common assumptions about the past" through one's own body.[275] With those tests comes a technical understanding of how a task or practice might have been accomplished in the past. In-depth, particular knowledge like this gives re-enactors credibility in their groups and a claim on that most valued of all re-enactor traits: authenticity. That authenticity can also be leveraged to justify claims of authority, particularly when it comes to matters of history often absent from textbooks.

Through taking part in historical interpretation and re-enactment and the attendant search for knowledge in primary and secondary sources as well as through their own experiences, retronauts stake their own positions as historians. Vanessa Agnew describes this kind of practice as valuable because living history and historical re-enactment provide a view into history "from below… giv[ing] voice to hitherto marginalized positions" as well as "performing political and

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[272] Horwitz, 7.

[273] Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," Summer 2004, 327.

[274] Agnew, 327.

[275] Agnew, 330.

cultural work that is quite distinct from more conventional forms of historiography."[276] David Thelen is not as at ease with the use of the term re-enactment "because for many historians it conjures up images of escapist amateurs playing soldier," but he does agree that this practice allows citizen historians an opportunity to see history as "subject to argument and changing interpretation" as opposed to simply being something finished and, well, past.[277]

Another frequent debate among living historians and re-enactors is "what makes someone a historian?" For David W. Blight, historians are "custodians of the past…preservers and discoverers of the facts and stories out of which people imagine their civic lives."[278] This certainly aligns with how both historical interpreters and re-enactors see themselves. Of those with whom I spoke, the majority of Confederate interpreters and re-enactors spoke of preserving a past sometimes subjected to reinterpretation by the progressive media and educational system. Blight identifies a divide between the recorded past (history) and the remembered past (memory), and this divide became clear as I interviewed historical interpreters and re-enactors. According to Blight, the recorded past is "given authority by virtue of academics and the canon of evidence," while the remembered past is granted authority through being the heritage and identity of a community as passed down within that group. There's also a belief among some amateur historical interpreters and re-enactors that academics' "authority [is] compromised" and a belief that "historians must justify their interpretations."[279] Amateur historical interpretation and re-enactment is viewed as an opportunity "to democratize historical knowledge."[280]

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[276] Agnew, 327–28.

[277] David Thelen, "Learning from the Past: Individual Experiences and Re-Enactment," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 2 (June 2003): 156–57.

[278] Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought To Be," 23–24.

[279] Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," Summer 2004, 329.

[280] Agnew, 335.

The question of "who owns history?" is not new, but with the increasing access to archives as well as the increasingly politicized nature of the past, it is a frequent topic among both professionals in the field of memory and those who are supported in their pursuits not by degrees or training, but by passion for the topic. In her article "Whose (Which) History Is It Anyway?," Ann-Louise Shapiro asks readers to consider the cultural and social production and reception of historical consciousness outside the academy. Shapiro observes that there are dueling narratives about the state of history in the present. On the one hand, there is "considerable worry about historical illiteracy, cultural amnesia, and intractable presentism", while on the other hand "history is everywhere present: the high-profile subject of films, museum exhibits, and theme parks", as well as informing many of our contemporary cultural, social, and political debates.[281] However, for Shapiro, the concern is not that history informs the present but rather that "the wrong kind of history (wrong – headed, or simply wrong) is producing an unfortunate kind of historical consciousness."[282] Several of those with whom I spoke who expressed concern that their stories – their histories – are either not being told or are at risk of being written off the page as no longer useful.[283]

Shapiro acknowledges that the production, understanding, and interpretation of historical knowledge is no longer the exclusive purview of the academy. She identifies academically produced history as something that literally comes out of the professional field of history versus history and historical narratives produced in other genres "that also represent, order, and interpret the past."[284] Some of these genres include documentary, films inspired by true events, historical

[281] Shapiro, "Whose (Which) History Is It Anyway?," 1.

[282] Shapiro, 1.

[283] Shapiro, 1.

[284] Shapiro, 3.

reality television, living history sites, re-enactment, amateur history, family history, and museums, among others. There is also the question of the different kinds – the many voices – of histories and their meanings in the present.[285] History is no longer seen as either a singular, monolithic narrative nor as described by David Lowenthal: something static and complete.[286] Instead, history is dynamic and its production and reception is a group project that is not "the autonomous preserve of any one constituency or guild."[287]

Amateur living historians may feel a commitment to educating the public, but also have their personal bias and beliefs that filter through. Blight expresses a concern about "the ways in which groups, peoples, or nations construct versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and to win power in an ever-changing present."[288] The collision of history, remembrance, heritage, and racial conflict was particularly intense for those in the Civil War Heritage Foundation, who present both Confederate and Union impressions and seek to contextualize a past conflict with respect to another more current and deeply ideological war. This overlap of past and present can express itself in sometimes discomforting ways, as they did during interviews conducted in July 2015. There is a concern that current values and beliefs can be retroactively applied to events and people of the past, resulting in a history untethered from its time and thus able to be used in any number of ways and to support any number of causes. According to Olwen Purdue,

> Past events are frequently called upon and used by individuals and groups to explain and legitimize their positions and their attitudes towards each other, but so often this is in ways that are reductionist, or selective, that pick the particular parts

[285] Shapiro, 2.

[286] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 485.

[287] Shapiro, "Whose (Which) History Is It Anyway?," 2.

[288] Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought To Be," 24.

> of the historical canon that fit the narrative they embrace, that fail to grasp or engage with more complex and nuanced interpretations of the past.[289]

Where Vanessa Agnew argued that living historians and re-enactors are "often avowedly apolitical, purporting not to take a stance vis-à-vis the past," my interviews indicated otherwise.[290] For several of those with whom I spoke in the both living history and re-enactor communities, politics was a profound motivator.

This is history from below in the sense that this is history interpreted and explored by those who are not credentialed, professional historians. Instead, they are private citizens pursuing an interest. In this chapter I examine the hows and whys behind retronauts' need to research and, in turn, share what they learn as educators. I also examine their claims to the title of historian and how that claim is grounded in not only their research into primary and secondary sources, but also looking at how they seek physical experience of past lifeways. We need to look beyond military re-enactment. I look at women in the field, musical re-enactment, and lifestyle re-enactment.

Most of the people with whom I spoke about living history and re-enactment were in one of two locations – Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Huntington Beach, California – and over two different instances of field research, the first in 2013 and the second in 2015. In an instance of serendipitous timing, my interviews with the Civil War Heritage Foundation coincided with the South Carolina State House Confederate flag controversy of June and July 2015, so that event featured prominently in responses from some of those interviewed.

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[289] Purdue, "Controversial Public History."

[290] Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," Summer 2004, 334.

I found, though, that as soon as my intentions with this project became clear to those I interviewed, I received correspondence and offers to be interview subjects from those they had referred to me. People were very eager to share their experiences and to point me in the direction of someone else I should speak to. As I note later in this chapter, networking among the living history groups, military re-enactors, and social re-enactors was helpful in being able to understand how important groups are in this hobby. In all, I worked with four groups: the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band, the Civil War Heritage Foundation, the 18th Virginia Mounted Cavalry, and a family group affiliated with the Missouri Cavalry. I also spoke with a group of social re-enactors as well as several individuals. Finally, I have two subjects in this chapter who granted interviews on the condition that their names not be used. I refer to them as Union Anonymous and Anonymous Social.

Retronauts – living historians/historical interpreters and re-enactors – are those who decide to interpret and explore the past on their own terms rather than through the mediation of a museum or living history site. Both types of retronaut invest time, money, and education into their pursuit of the past. Authenticity is important to both, although the degree to which it matters varies somewhat between the two types as well as within the ranks of re-enactors or historical interpreters. In fact, several of the people with whom I spoke participated in both types of activity because each offers something different to the participant.

With that said, there is a fair amount of divergence between the two types. For example, amateur historical interpreters educate themselves about people and events of the past for the purposes of passing that education on to others at invited talks, commemorative events, or sometimes in conjunction with local historical societies such as the Gettysburg Heritage Center and Museum. Re-enactors, on the other hand, primarily seek understanding and experience for

themselves and other members of their community. They then participate in events that are open to the public, such as the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee's event marking the 150th anniversary of the battles at Gettysburg in July 2013, or closed to the public, such as the tactical battle or non-spectator Battle of High Bridge in Zoar, Ohio during their Battle on the Ohio-Erie Canal Civil War Re-enactment in September 2015.

Several of the people with whom I spoke participated in both living history presentation and re-enactment, but the two should not be viewed as interchangeable. There's a line between living historians and re-enactors and sometimes, between the groups, acrimony to go with it. Living historians and re-enactors have different reasons for diving into the past and bringing a presentation of it back to the present. Living historians often have a strong sense of responsibility to present the past to the public and some seek to do so with other like-minded individuals. Re-enactors are more often committed to enhancing their own understanding while also enjoying the social benefits of a re-enactment group. Both groups have individuals with varying levels of investment of time, research, and resources, but there are always a few on either side of the divide that seek to stir up feelings in the field. For example, while I was conducting interviews with the Civil War Heritage Foundation in July 2015, a group of re-enactors marched past the group of living historians, yelling "Farb!" at them as they passed. The term is often lobbed at living historians as they are seen as being "less authentic" than re-enactors as their reasons for being in the field can mean different points of focus for their efforts. However, of those in the Civil War Heritage Foundation, accuracy in persona as well as in physical presentation was a high priority.

Why did some people choose the unit or affiliation, a persona or an identity? Occasionally there's a resemblance to a historical figure. Don Van Hart provides a historical

impression of Robert E. Lee based on not only interest but also the recommendation of others. "Initially, when people said 'You should do Lee' I was not in favor of it at all. I think that's why I went a lot on the life of Lee instead of the battles and tried to portray the gentleman."[291] Once someone has re-enacted as a recognizable figure, then it's harder to anonymously slip back into the ranks. "Sometimes I'll just go in as a private. The problem is, once I've done Lee, they know me. Even though I have a Union uniform, standing in the Union line, you'll hear people out there saying 'What's Lee doing?' You almost have to follow that along [once you've committed to a role]."[292]

Sometimes the decision is made based on cost. Many military re-enactors focused on lower rank personas or kit – simple equals slightly more cost-friendly. For those who want uniforms, the costs go up significantly. According to a presentation given at the 2013 GAC event, outfitting costs increase significantly depending on how far up the ranks one wants to place their persona and what role someone wants to fill. For example, a member of an unmounted cavalry unit can expect to pay between $350-$400 for uniform alone. Going into the infantry or artillery is not much less expensive, with each estimated at $350. Weapons are another, more expensive story, with pistols starting at $300 and going up to artillery guns which range from $15,000-$40,000. For the lower ranks, particularly on the Confederate side, the lack of consistent Confederate uniform can ease the cost because there's a wider range of acceptable colors whereas the Union blue has fewer variations. For Joseph Esther, who re-enacts with the

[291] Don Van Hart, Interview with Don Van Hart, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 5, 2015.

[292] Van Hart.

Missouri Cavalry, the cost helped him make the choice. To him, it's less expensive to re-enact as a Confederate.[293]

There was a consistent theme among those who identified political ideology as a reason to align with one side of the Civil War or the other: states' rights. For example, speaking in 2015, Jason Klink, a member of the Civil War Heritage Foundation (CWHF), explained

> "As I get older, it's more of a political belief [aligning with the Confederates]. Basically what they sided with at the beginning of the war with smaller federal government and states' rights. Slavery set aside, when the South lost the war, our country lost a lot of founding principles that came with it, that were founded with the Founding Fathers, like states' rights."[294]

Another member of the CWHF, G. Edward Le Fevre said much the same: Le Fevre said "I believe in states' rights. I think thing have got a little bit – no, not a little bit – much too much out of balance. I acknowledge there has to be a central control, as it were, or guidance, but I believe very strongly in states' rights and I wish we could get a judicial branch which would be more in tune to that."[295] Earlier interviews in 2013 at the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee event revealed much the same, with re-enactors like Rob Aiken of Missouri saying that he connects to a Confederate presentation "because of ideology – states' rights, not slavery."[296] It should be noted that my 2015 historical interpreter interviews took place just a few weeks after the attack on a African-American church in which nine members of the Emanuel African

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[293] Randy McGinnis et al., Interview with Randy and Ryan McGinnis, Rob, Taylor, and Ben Aiken, Joseph Esther, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, In person, July 5, 2013.

[294] Jason Klink, Interview with Jason Klink, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 3, 2015.

[295] G. Edward Le Fevre, Interview with G. Edward Le Fevre, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 3, 2015.

[296] McGinnis et al., Interview with Randy and Ryan McGinnis, Rob, Taylor, and Ben Aiken, Joseph Esther, Gettysburg, PA.

Methodist Episcopal Church were killed by a white shooter.[297] At no time in my interviews did white supremacy emerge as a topic, although the selective alignment with aspects of the Confederate ideology was evident.

"Galvanizing" is another way to explore identity as a re-enactor. This is the practice of switching between uniforms on either side of a conflict. In this case, it is not uncommon for individual historical interpreters or re-enactors or groups to bring both a Federal and a Confederate uniform to an event. Some, like G. Edward Le Fevre, are "strictly gray," as he put it.[298] Others, like Lee Houser, has "ancestors, both Confederates and Union, so I like to do both sides. I honor both."[299] Units like the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band also perform as the 17th Mississippi Regimental Band.

For some people, like Ken Cairns (18th Virginia and Richmond Howitzers), the choice to not only re-enact but to galvanize is made to honor family members who fought on both sides in the Civil War. "I guess the thing that drew me to re-enactment the most was I wanted to feel what my grandfather[s] felt," he said.[300] When he re-enacts in the North, he takes the name of his ancestor, Andrew Jackson Shepherd, who fought with the 10th Ohio Cavalry. When galvanizing and re-enacting as his Tennessee-born farmer ancestor, he keeps the Confederate uniform "as absolutely drab as I can possibly get it" In an effort to achieve some measure of accuracy in his portrayal.[301]

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[297] Katty Kay, "Nine Killed at South Carolina Church," *BBC News*, June 18, 2015, sec. US & Canada, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33179019.

[298] Le Fevre, Interview with G. Edward Le Fevre, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[299] Lee Houser, Interview with Lee Houser, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 3, 2015.

[300] Ken Cairns, Interview with Ken Cairns, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Telephone, March 20, 2014.

[301] Cairns.

Living Historians

Once retronauts have established what, how, and sometimes who they will be to explore the past, then comes the choice to pursue living history or re-enactment. While some do both, there are differing approaches, motivations, and desired outcomes. Living history interpreters present impressions of people from the past rather than trying to "be" historical figures in the present as you might encounter at Colonial Williamsburg or Mount Vernon with their actor or character interpreters. They provide historical interpretation but, unlike their counterparts, are not affiliated with a museum on a full-time basis. This lack of affiliation also means that any research conducted for their impression is done without the benefit of institutional support – or limits on the areas in which they can specialize. For interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg, for example, there is training for only the area in which they will be presenting.[302] Amateur living historians must conduct their research, both on their own time and at their own expense, in addition to holding down day jobs. Jason Klink, a member of the Civil War Heritage Foundation, explained that "living history was more history involved than just knowing the strict military end of it. In this we get to know pretty much everything. I have to know almost every little detail of the person I portray versus loading a musket, firing it, and laying on the battlefield."[303]

On occasion, these impressions are developed with the blessing of a historical figure's descendants. For example, Lee Houser of the Civil War Heritage Foundation presents an impression of Confederate Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble. He's worked with Trimble's great-great-grandson to learn everything he can about his life, and shares what he learns with the family. In doing so, Houser has built a relationship with Trimble's descendants. "They think it's

[302] Schocket, Interview with Andy Schocket, Bowling Green, OH.

[303] Klink, Interview with Jason Klink, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

an honor, you bringing their ancestor back to life."[304] Other primary documents such as newspaper reports, military records, letters, and diaries help to bring living historians closer to the past as well. Union Anonymous said "I've been trying to read the diaries of staff officers, trying to get a feel for these guys, because that's generally the direction of my impression."[305] The internet also opened a new venue for research. He went on to explain "This would not have been possible 25 years ago. The internet was absolutely paramount to the effective researcher. I mean, it would not have been possible just through books and manuscripts. Even with that the archives I don't think I could've quite gotten the kinds of research done that is now available, pretty easily and readily via the internet."[306]

When you are a living historian, you've chosen to share your interpretation of the past and impressions of particular historical figures to the public. For them, this is not play as day trips to living history sites or second-person historical interpretation might be – it is something they take seriously. However, for many of these living historians, there's a line between first-person interpretation and performing a historical impression. First-person historical interpretation is the act of staying in a historical character who only has knowledge of the time frame they are presenting and the person stays in character while in the public view. Historical impressions are different in that there is flexibility about presenting in character or presenting as a modern individual. Union Anonymous explained his preferences:

> One thing that I've just kind of shied away from is first person, not that I think I can do it so well, but I actually think it inhibits interaction with the public… I don't know that it was quite conducive to generating questions, and so I don't really do the first person so much. I just, you know, I want their questions, hear

[304] Houser, Interview with Lee Houser, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[305] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Union Historical Interpreter), interview by Tiffany Knoell, Telephone, October 17, 2013.

[306] Anonymous.

> what they want to discuss. Is it the war, is it the uniform, is it the individual, is it the what?[307]

Education is the guiding purpose for most of the members of the Civil War Heritage Foundation, but that educational impulse can lean toward correcting what group members see as deficits in public education. Consistent themes from my interview subjects were "preserving history and the truth about history," "they don't teach about the American Civil War anymore," "they don't teach American history," and "I want to teach history correctly."[308] The desire to correct also fuels Judee Synakowski's impression of Mary Todd Lincoln. "People think bad things about her, but I'm educating them about her and her real life, about her family. I get people coming up to me and saying 'oh, she was crazy,' and I get into it, saying 'No. She was not.'"[309] Union Anonymous put it succinctly: "The point is to make it very real and not so abstract."[310]

Most of the living historians with whom I spoke focused on impressions of military figures and, occasionally, their wives. Several living historians have researched and prepared multiple impressions. John Spaziani, for example, presents impressions of both Confederate and Union officers as well as the third captain of the Confederate submarine, H.L. Hunley.[311] In addition to presenting a historical impression of a Confederate, G. Edward Le Fevre also presents

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[307] Anonymous.

[308] Van Hart, Interview with Don Van Hart, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.; Klink, Interview with Jason Klink, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.; Houser, Interview with Lee Houser, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[309] Judee Synakowski, Interview with Judee Synakowski, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 5, 2015.

[310] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Union Historical Interpreter).

[311] John Spaziani, Interview with John Spaziani, Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 2, 2015.

a Revolutionary War impression as well as a Mexican American War impression.[312] "I have a collection of firearms, so I've built characters around those."[313]

For Jen Ochmann, it's almost all about education. "I see myself as a historical educator to a certain degree because what you're doing, no matter what it is, unless it's vintage dance, and that's for my own personal enjoyment, it has to do with educating."[314] Some of those activities have included a colonial cooking demonstration at a local museum, living history presentations at Civil War re-enactments, fashion shows for her local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter, and different types of programming for her local historical society.[315] "I would say I liked to teach it – do it in this way, because it teaches kids that history is more than just words on a page, these are human beings that lived and breathed and had issues, the same as we do. You realize that when you put those clothes on, and you do those things."[316]

However, several did not fall into this category. Kevin Knapp, who performs a historical impression of Professor Thaddeus Lowe, is a self-described "aeronaut" or Civil War-era balloonist for the Union Army.[317] Period musical groups, including the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band, utilize original instruments and musical arrangements to recreate the sounds of the military bands of the Civil War. Rene and Rommi Kinard, evangelists with Freedom in Christ Ministries, offer period chapel services for at least four eras: colonial, Civil War, World War II, and "cowboy church" or the type of church service that would have taken place in the

[312] Le Fevre, Interview with G. Edward Le Fevre, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[313] Le Fevre.

[314] Jennifer Ochmann, Interview with Jennifer Ochmann, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Skype, January 28, 2014.

[315] Ochmann.

[316] Ochmann.

[317] Knapp, Interview with Kevin Knapp, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

Old West. [318] For them, living history is a way of reaching those living historians and re-enactors who aren't typically in the pews on a Sunday for whatever reason. Rommi and her friend, Joanne Schwarz, who performs an impression of Mary Craig Hunt, see living history as an opportunity to explore the social aspects of history, rather than the martial aspect. Some subjects have cited a desire to understand life as it was, but it's often wreathed in terms such as heritage and honor. Schwarz finds the present coarse and harsh and feels that the past was more refined and longs for a more civilized time like many retronauts. One of her goals is to bring this sense of refinement into the present for not only herself, but for others to learn about as well.

In addition to her other living history activities, Jen Ochmann presented living history from the civilian point of view at the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee event in July 2013. As part of the Union Patriotic League, "we were focusing mainly on home front. That was definitely our impression, because we do not do military, and we are mostly women. We do have a couple of gentlemen, but not too many. So, we focus on the home front, material culture, women's issues, that kind of thing."[319] The group organized their camp to represent different rooms in a house to give a sense of what home front life might have been like.

> It was very educational for the kids because we've got one woman who has got her room set up as a study. She's crazy Aunt Susan. She's going to make a reform costume with bloomers, because she has geodes, and she's cataloguing rocks, and doing all kinds of different things. We have one room set up as a dining room. One room set up as a fancy parlor. People are always interested in the cooking. So – and since there's so many women, and then only two or three guys, what we say is that we're a mixed kind of a family, you know, with the men are all off fighting.[320]

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[318] Kinard, Interview with Rommi Kinard, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[319] Ochmann, Interview with Jennifer Ochmann.

[320] Ochmann.

My field research with retronauts in 2013 and 2015 introduced me to the importance of groups in the retronaut community. Most military re-enacting is organized in units, which can include women maintaining camps, sometimes cross-dressing, sometimes as camp followers with children. Living history tends to be less organized in units, although military bands seeking to recreate a historic unit will still use that designation. While there are plenty of retronauts who explore the past as individuals, I found group or unit affiliation was far more common.

The 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band was founded in the modern era in December 1995. They also re-enact as the band of the 17th Mississippi Volunteers, meaning that they galvanize. This non-combat group blends living history and re-enactment and welcomes musicians of any gender who can play the period instruments in which the band specializes. As a military band, they primarily focus on brass, woodwinds, and percussion. When I met this group over the 4th of July holiday at the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee event, their leader was Lieutenant Rick Long of Hesston, Pennsylvania.

I met one of the newest members of the group when exploring sutlers (merchants) row at GAC, and it wasn't long before she introduced me to the rest of the band. Deanna Chirchirillo Fisher was welcomed into the group after she stopped to ask a question about one of the period instruments the band displays for visitors. "I walked up to the display of antique baritones and grabbed what turned out to be the commander's ear. I said 'Can I talk to you about your horn?'" she recalled.[321] Before long, she had been "sized up" as a musician and invited to play with the group. "I never considered being part of a group like that. Re-enactment was fine and all, but

[321] Deanna Chirchirillo, Interview with Deanna Chirchirillo, interview by Tiffany Knoell, Telephone, October 11, 2013.

you're kind of standing there, watching smoke go by. The musical aspect was more interesting."[322]

Not everyone is in this for the history. Nathaniel Figard, for example, points out that he's "not much of a history person" but that the music and the performances keep him coming back.[323] In addition to appearing at re-enactments, they also perform in parades and give concerts. There are some members, though, who also take the field as combatants. Figard describes these as participating in "both shooting and tooting."[324] The band's size waxes and wanes as people come in or leave. Red Pittman explained "We need all eight or ten of us to make a band."[325] At Figard's count, there were between ten and fifteen members of the band who regularly took the field, some of whom belonged to the three or four families associated with the group. It should also be noted that the unit isn't simply comprised of the band. Additionally, several members of the group function as the Ladies' Aid Society, cooking, mending, cleaning, and caring for the camp. Sara Myers, also known as Sally, impressed upon me that, at heart, this group was a family. Her husband, Bob, was the former unit commanding officer. When he passed away, a small bear was included in someone's kit in his honor every time the unit took the field to play. When I expressed my sympathies for her husband's loss, she smiled. "I didn't lose my husband. I know right where he is," she said, indicating that his spirit still goes out on the field every time the band does.[326]

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[322] Chirchirillo.

[323] Nathan Figard, Interview with Nathaniel Figard, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Telephone, October 10, 2013.

[324] Figard.

[325] Red Pittman, Interview with Red Pittman, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Telephone, March 13, 2014.

[326] Sally Myer, Interview with Sally Myer., interview by Tiffany Knoell, In person, July 7, 2013.

The present can still intrude into the hobby. The symbology of the Confederate battle flag was a frequent topic of discussion during the summer of 2015, as the flag at the South Carolina State House was removed and ideological battles heated up. I met the Civil War Heritage Foundation group at Gettysburg in the first week of July, and one of the first members of the group to speak with me, Lee Houser, performed an impression of Confederal General Isaac Trimble.

> I also have relatives on both Union and Confederate sides, so I belong to both the Sons of the Union and Sons of the Confederates. That was one of the reasons why CBS wanted to interview me on the [Confederate battle] flag issue. What I think about the flag and the thing that's going on with the flag now. I expressed my view from the standpoint of my ancestors. I told them that I have them on the Union side and I have them on the Confederate side, so either way it brought us to the US national war. I support the heritage and the history. That's all it means to me. It's got nothing to do with being a racist or a white supremacist or any of that stuff because two thirds of the Confederate Army never owned slaves including General Trimble, who was a general.[327]

There was a moment during the interview with Joanne Schwarz where a parade of biker-esque Confederate supporters marched down the road carrying their flags. They were followed closely by a troupe in Confederate uniforms, bearing flags. She and I watched them go, the Confederate flag paused at a physical and ideological crossroads just down the road. For some, it is a matter of heritage while, for others, it is mobilized as the symbol of white supremacy and intolerance.[328]

For at least two of the living historians with whom I spoke, re-enacting started out as their primary retronautical activity. Over time, they shifted to living history due to what they saw

[327] Houser, Interview with Lee Houser, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[328] Joanne Schwarz, Interview with Joanne Schwarz, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA., interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, July 4, 2015.

as increasingly "hierarchal" and "politicized" events.[329] Both also expressed discomfort with re-enacting a death on the battlefield. Union Anonymous said "It looks like far too much fun and none of that stuff is fun. I've seen war a little bit up close, and it takes on a very different connotation when you're faced with getting killed yourself. So I've shifted to the living history and I think that's probably where I'll stay. I doubt I'll ever go back to re-enacting, really."[330]

Re-enactors

Re-enactment is sometimes dismissed as dress-up games. For most participants, though, there is a desire beyond fantasy play – there is a desire to climb into the past in the only way presently available to occupants of the twenty-first century: re-enacting. Going back to Agnew's work, this is an activity dedicated to experiencing the past and it requires what Ken Cairns termed "historical imagination" to make that journey. [331] Rizwan Oskoui, a re-enactor with the 7th Maryland Company A, identified three types of re-enactors. "First are mainstreamers, who accept a little temporal cross-bleed, such as modern cooking utensils being out in plain sight in a camp. Then there's the progressives who do the research and try to keep their camp as period-looking as possible. They do things right, but there's room for improvement. Then there's the authentics, who care that all is correct, right down to the underwear they are wearing. Everything is right because they've done the research."[332]

One element of re-enactment became very clear to me during my visit to the Huntington Beach Civil War Days, Huntington Beach, California in September 2013: networking is

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[329] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Union Historical Interpreter); Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Social reenactor), interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Telephone, December 9, 2013.

[330] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Union Historical Interpreter).

[331] Cairns, Interview with Ken Cairns.

[332] Rizwan Oskoui, Interview with Rizwan Oskoui, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Skype, September 20, 2013.

important. One of my interviewees, Ken Cairns, asked if I'd ever gone out on the field to experience what I was asking people about. I admitted I hadn't, but I was open to doing so. Before long, I was swept up to the encampment of the 18th Virginia Infantry, a progressive group.

Cairns introduced me to Casey Duvall, the unit commander, and Chris Tyler, who outfitted me for my engagement. He handed me the smallest cotton shirt and wool pants he could find, a canteen, and a haversack with "bloody bandages," my glasses, caps, and cartridges. I had to go without shoes because my feet were too small for anything they had in their spare kit. I was also outfitted with a rifle for shooting caps, which was foreign to me. Terry, one of the veterans of the group, took me under his wing and trained me on not only firearm safety, but also how to shoot. After marching out to the edges of the field to wait, Casey impressed upon me the importance of giving a good performance. The "battle" was a skirmish, but for some Californians, it would be as close to a Civil War re-enactment as they might get. The entire group appeared to be conscious of this, even as we were at ease. If we were in the public view, we needed to stay "on."

Once the last shot rang out and the smoke began to clear, the "dead" rose amid audience applause. We returned to camp and their families greeted the unit. I was welcomed into the fold and several children asked me if I had been "in the war." I couldn't help but smile as I said yes. I wonder what this is like for the children of re-enactors, for whom history is absorbed into their psyches young.

A family group with Missouri Cavalry helped to further demonstrate how re-enactment can be a family affair. Rob, Taylor, and Ben Aiken, Randy and Ryan McGinnis, and family friend Joseph Esther, turned out with the 11th Missouri Cavalry. Re-enactment gave them an

opportunity to combine horses, camping, and history and to get a glimpse of what camp life might have been during the Civil War. When it comes to history, "you can read it or you can experience it," said Randy McGinnis, who was there with his son, Ryan.[333]

Some re-enactors will push their bodies to extremes in the hopes of being able to better understand the past. Joseph Esther told the story of a super hardcore re-enactor who ate spoiled pork with the intention of developing dysentery "so he could feel closer to history."[334] This echoes stories related by Tony Horwitz in *Confederates in the Attic* wherein he speaks of the deep sense of commitment of the hardcore re-enactors as well as scholarship by Vanessa Agnew in which she writes of being able to touch history through privation.[335]

While most re-enactment is about the recreation of a past event, there is also room to consider what might have been. Re-enactors explore alternate pasts in a way that living historians do not. David Thelen says

> The basic purpose of re-enactment is to challenge the notion that history is about events that are over, closed. Re-enactment becomes a means to open events that look closed, to see possibilities, to frame choices, and above all to help us recognize how individuals, in the past and present, contain within them capacities that we can both uncover and exercise.[336]

David Lowenthal points out that it is typically groups on the losing side that look to "counterfactual replay" as a corrective where the historical event is given a chance to play out differently than it might have in the history books.[337] In "Not This Year! Re-enacting Contested Pasts Aboard *The Ship,*" Anja Schwarz brings up this very issue and cites an episode of South

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[333] McGinnis et al., Interview with Randy and Ryan McGinnis, Rob, Taylor, and Ben Aiken, Joseph Esther, Gettysburg, PA.

[334] McGinnis et al.

[335] Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?," Summer 2004, 330.

[336] Thelen, "Learning from the Past: Individual Experiences and Re-Enactment," 161.

[337] Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, 491.

Park that pokes fun at Confederate re-enactors for suggesting that they get to try to be the victors instead of the vanquished.[338] I heard similar sentiments expressed as I sat in a tent on 4 July 2013 during the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee events outside of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The emcee declared that the re-enactors should "let the South win" Pickett's Charge this time. In case there were any questions about which side of the conflict he might take, he continued his remarks, labeling the Civil War as "the War of Northern Aggression."

However, the GAC events were open to the public and were subject to audience expectations that history would be re-enacted, with the Union winning Pickett's Charge. Tacticals, on the other hand, are private events, closed to the public, and can give participants a chance to "replay" history without an audience. I observed a tactical battle in Zoar, Ohio at the Zoar Civil War Encampment on September 19, 2015. This non-spectator event re-enacted one of two Civil War battles that have been termed the Battle of High Bridge. I was observing from the Confederate side because my host, John Spaziani, was re-enacting as General Samuel Cooper of the Confederacy that day. The tactical concluded early due to an injury – a Union soldier hit a Confederate in the head with the butt of his rifle. While that might have been period accurate, it was not acceptable to the group in terms of the health and safety of their modern participants.

Eventually, re-enactors age and some of them shift into living history once they leave the field. Lee Houser explained:

> I started going to re-enactments and I started talking [unintelligible]. I joined up with the unit and I was going artillery - artillery are the cannons- and so that's my part in the re-enactments. Then I got to an age where I can't go out in the field no more. How do you stay in a hobby that you're still interested in without doing the

[338] Anja Schwarz, "'Not This Year!' Reenacting Contested Pasts Aboard The Ship," *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3 (September 2007): 427–46.

> physical part of it? Well, the next best thing is to take on a character such as Gen. Trimble, research him, and bring him back to life.[339]

When Bodies Don't Fit – Making Spaces For Women

The emcee at the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee event had plenty to say as he warmed up the crowd on 4 July 2013. "We're not politically correct. We demonstrate historical correctness!" he announced to applause. He seemed to lament that women today were not "the same" as they were then in terms of going into combat, with implications of other disruptive changes in gender roles. That also earned applause and a few hollers of approval. It was as Marit Knollmueller told me: "There's not much of a role for women there."[340] If a woman wants to be involved in re-enacting, she sometimes needs to conceal her gender or else be relegated to camp work. During my interviews, my focus narrowed in on gender as that was a recurrent topic among the female subjects. Of the women with whom I conducted interviews, only one identified race as a potential issue and only then as a contributing factor in choice of persona in social re-enacting.

Cross-Dressing and Trying to Pass in Male Units

Red Pittman was drawn into re-enactment first by a love of horses and then seeing a weapons inspection and realizing that books had not prepared her for this. She impressed one of the re-enactors at her first event by being able to handle a musket without preparation and it wasn't long before she was on the field in borrowed gear.

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[339] Houser, Interview with Lee Houser, Gettysburg Heritage Center, Gettysburg, PA.

[340] Marit Knollmueller, Interview with Marit Knollmueller, interview by Tiffany L. Knoell, Skype, December 26, 2013.

She had a good experience with her first group, but a move meant she needed to find a new unit. She quickly learned that all groups were not as welcoming as her first had been. Some prohibited women from carrying weapons or firing artillery, with many in the Midwest being far more stringent in their membership requirements than their East Coast counterparts. Dropping her voice allowed her to pass as a "peach fuzz private," her gender concealed. In doing so, Pittman recreated not only the experience of a young private in the Union army, but also that of several hundred women known to have passed for male and entered the ranks of both sides of the Civil War.[341]

Unfortunately, passing under the radar was never guaranteed. "I have been thrown out," she recalled. "I didn't like it." While any involvement with weaponry was not permitted in some groups, musicians were another class all together. Red had trained as a brass player when she was younger and put that skill to use in the re-enactment community. Finding the 46th Pennsylvania Regimental Band gave her a sense of belonging. "I love it for the people. The outfit that I'm with now, the band, I'm closer to than any group I've been with in my life. We're one family, one campfire, one unit."

I met Deanna Chirchirillo during her first overnight event with the band. She'd been drawn to re-enactment, but only if she can dress and pass as a man. In camp women "cook for us, or they fix the clothes, or they hand out the music. They're just a wife of somebody there. They're not playing."[342] If she wanted to explore the past, she needed to dress and perform in a way that would allow her access. Chirchirillo cross-dresses in public at events because, in her

[341] Pittman, Interview with Red Pittman.

[342] Chirchirillo, Interview with Deanna Chirchirillo.

words, "women don't play. I'm not going to sit around and camp in a dress and not play."[343] To be able to participate on the battlefield, one needs to appear as male, as Pittman learned. Chirchirillo took a different approach; rather than trying to sign on with a military re-enactment unit, she chose to attend events on her own, sticking with day visits rather than overnight camping. "I went to Manassas alone; I went to Antietam alone. It gave me an amount of freedom," as opposed to attending as part of a social event or a specific group.[344] Re-enactment can also encourage learning on the fly. "You just go where they tell you to go and you can learn," Chirchirillo explained.[345] Again, the only price of admission is to pass as male.

Rizwan Oskoui got her start with the Mifflin Guard Civil War Living History Battalion as a vivandière, one of the women who were permitted to serve with men in the early days of the Civil War.[346]It gave her a taste of being able to take the field without needing to cross-dress to get there. She soon learned, though, that the re-enactment community can sometimes be a "very old boys club."[347] At one point she received a cease and desist email from tactical organizers because they had heard through the rumor mill that she supposedly claimed affiliation with their unit. She only said she *aspired* to be in the unit, admiring their standards of authenticity. Still, it was enough to make her cautious around those units that she describes as "authentics."

Social Re-enacting or Vintage Events: History and Aesthetics

Battlefields are much more tied to the stuff of history – names, dates, and places that enter the past into the historical record. Ballrooms, on the other hand, are relics of the past.

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[343] Chirchirillo.

[344] Chirchirillo.

[345] Chirchirillo.

[346] Oskoui, Interview with Rizwan Oskoui.

[347] Oskoui.

Where many historical re-enactors pursue the hobby on battlefields and in military encampments, lifestyle re-enactors picnic, skate, and dance their way through the past to recreate the social side of American history. Vintage events are social events such as balls, picnics, dinners, and smaller dances, and a love of aesthetics compels participants to don ball gowns rather than battle dress. These events also open doors to the past sometimes closed to women; there were few opportunities for women to participate on the battlefield as women, a challenge that reflects both the historical reality and contemporary efforts to achieve authenticity. Social re-enactment allows a facet of American history – social history – to be explored in much the same way that military history presently enjoys. History connotes specific events – names, dates, places – as preserved in the historical record and often transmitted to students in textbooks. The past, on the other hand, is more diffuse, covering much of the lifeways and cultural sweeps relegated to a lesser place in curricula if they are mentioned at all. History is important, providing a context and framework for vintage events, but many participants seek a connection to "a more civilized age."

Like its re-enactment sibling, social re-enactment blends performance and public history with social history and individual engagement, allowing individuals to find a way to connect to the past that personalizes the experience. In a field that benefits from the context and framework of history and the inspiration provided by the proliferation of period drama, social re-enactment steps beyond the everyday of living history sites and the cannon fire of the battlefield and into another age gone by.

According to Anonymous Social, the vintage dance movement in the United States developed in the 1970s not long after the Civil War Centennial (1961-1965) boosted military re-

enacting.[348] The main periods at the beginning were the Civil War, the 1890s, and the early 1900s or ragtime/early jazz eras.[349]

> They would have balls every once in a while, and pick one of those three time periods, and then every year, they would spend a week in Newport, or San Diego, having an entire week of vintage dance. The Newport week was more involved in costume. We would have dance class during the day, but then at 3:00 you'd change for tea, have tea on the lawn, and then change again for the dance event in the evening, which was a costume ball from one of those time periods. There was a grand masquerade ball, and so you'd dress up in a period masquerade costume. Then, after the balls, people would dress up in vintage lounge clothes, smoking jackets and wrappers and things, and then hang out in the dorms, drinking and telling stories 'til the wee hours.[350]

In the years that followed, other types of social re-enactment developed. While there are many that center on specific events such as Armistice Day or the last night on the Titanic, the historical aesthetically-influenced tweed rides are also very popular. Tweed rides debuted in London, UK, in 2009 and have since spread to the United States with regular events in Washington, DC, and Indianapolis among others.[351] These are 1920s-centric activities that are often organized around bicycle rides in period attire – tweed for fall, seersucker for summer.

Authenticity standards are less of a concern with social re-enactment, although the effort is certainly appreciated. Anonymous Social said

> "People tend to be a little relaxed about where the period has to end or begin, so some people will dress a little earlier than that. [At some events] you get a range, which is part of what makes it historically inauthentic, that someone will have their wonderful bustle gown from the late 1870s or 1880s and another person is clearly Gibson girl and then another one is verging on World War I."

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[348] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Social reenactor).

[349] Anonymous.

[350] Anonymous.

[351] "About," The Tweed Run, accessed March 4, 2020, http://www.tweedrun.com/about; "Speed Read: Annual Tweed Ride," Indianapolis Monthly, October 23, 2018, https://www.indianapolismonthly.com/arts-and-culture/speed-read-tweed-ride.

Knollmueller agreed on the flexibility of authenticity standards: "authenticity is not that important. It's really about friendship and camaraderie."[352] One thing is clear with authenticity standards, though: most of the participants in vintage events are focused on representing a specific class aesthetic as appropriate during whatever era they're visiting. Most events are organized around activities that would have only been available to those who were either middle or upper class. If you focus on the ballroom set, you're not going to present an impression from a tenement.

Personas sometimes factor in for social re-enactors, but most of those with whom I spoke don't use one. Anonymous Social doesn't use a persona at events because she's "never been a fan of first person or role playing."[353] Speaking of her previous experience as a military re-enactor, she said "Even when I was re-enacting World War I, I really never had that much of a character. I mean, if I did, it was always something that broke out. Most of that first-person stuff was very tongue in cheek."[354] She experiences the past as herself and, even then, she "never tries to play entirely in period."[355] Knollmueller doesn't focus much on personas at events. During our interview, she teasingly remarked, "I don't sustain a character all night. I don't need to. I've decided I'm the elegant belle of the ball and that's who I am in real life. That's how I do it."[356]

This is more of a community of friends than a formal group as you might have with the Military Band or the Civil War Heritage Foundation. Knollmueller describes herself as drawn by "the type of friends that I make through it. The history is not as compelling as the aesthetic for

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[352] Knollmueller, Interview with Marit Knollmueller, December 26, 2013.

[353] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Social reenactor).

[354] Anonymous.

[355] Anonymous.

[356] Knollmueller, Interview with Marit Knollmueller, December 26, 2013.

me. I do it more for social reasons and the aesthetic and the fashion, as trite as that might sound."[357] In order to maintain those connections, there needs to be some organization off the dance floor. "The internet makes it so much easier to find like-minded people, than, you know, ten or twenty years ago. I don't know how people did it years ago, before the internet," Ochmann commented.[358] She is part of "a loose community of friends that physically met years ago, and found that we liked to do dancing together, and then we found we like to do other things together, but we don't live near each other, so we used email for the longest time, to connect ourselves. We made ourselves – when Yahoo! Groups came along, we made ourselves a Yahoo! Group, which we're still on, some of us don't use it as much anymore, because we're more on Facebook."[359] On the other hand, there are some groups that are more than happy to go old school. The group with which Anonymous Social primarily associates began as a vintage dance community and expanded from there. The group organizes gatherings through "mostly email, phone… not everyone is on Facebook, and we don't have a website because our events are pretty much private."[360] There is an annual Armistice Ball, which is a public event that raises funds for the Thursday Morning Club, a New Jersey-based women's organization, but it's one of the few public events.[361]

There's also the matter of an aging hobby. Much like military re-enactment, which is experiencing what's been termed "the graying of the hobby," social re-enactment groups need to

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[357] Knollmueller.

[358] Ochmann, Interview with Jennifer Ochmann.

[359] Ochmann.

[360] Anonymous, Interview with Anonymous (Social reenactor).

[361] "2020 Armistice Ball," accessed March 1, 2020, http://armisticeball.com/.

continue to grow and bring in the next generation.[362] One way that younger participants are drawn in is through some groups cultivating an interest in steampunk. Much like the counterfactual replay of some military re-enactors, steampunk is presented as a "what if?" past where steam power led to flight, earlier development of computers, and an aesthetic that borrows from the Old West, the Victorian Era, and other close-by historical eras. The "punk" part of the term borrows from the punk music aesthetic of do-it-yourself production or alteration of clothing and materials that are not available through mainstream or mass production. Rizwan Oskoui found a way to merge her Pakistani heritage with her interest in 1890s fashion and Belle Epoque through steampunk. "My focus is more the historical than the fantastical. My current obsession is actually British Raj, India. It married two things: Western historical fashion and clothing that I'm comfortable wearing."[363] While definitely fictional in some regards, steampunk and other blends of fact and fiction can keep interest in the past alive.

For all of their interest in exploring the past, there's no illusion that history is being recreated for Anonymous Social. "I think the main thing with our vintage events is that there is really not much of a feeling of recreating history. We mostly are recreating the clothing, and the food, and the ambience, but we're not really doing history. We want to do things right. We had a Titanic dinner party once, where we recreated the meals out of the book *The Last Dinner on the Titanic*, and it was wonderful. The clothing, the food, the ambience was all right, but we never feel like we're actually back in time."

For social re-enactors, being able to enjoy something beautiful might be the point. However, to focus only on the aesthetic of a period disconnects it from its historical baggage.

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[362] Joel E. Burg, Interview with Joel E. Burg, interview by Tiffany Knoell, In person, May 10, 2014.

[363] Oskoui, Interview with Rizwan Oskoui.

There are some social re-enactors who look back to the past for a time when cultural boundaries and expectations were seen to be clearly articulated, as was the case with nostalgia fueling the swing revival of the 1990s and the ongoing fascination with the 1950s as mentioned in chapter one. For those with whom I spoke, the contemporary community is what ultimately matters, not the history that happened outside the ballroom.

The ways and means through which people "travel in the past" vary based on their goals. Living historians want to educate. Re-enactors want to recreate a past they can visit for the duration of an event, and sometimes like to "replay" history to explore alternate outcomes. Social re-enactors want to dive into past aesthetics, but only in as much as they can draw on the beautiful to make the present a little more like the past. At the heart of all of this is the individual ability to be historians: to research, examine, analyze, and interpret the past, be it for themselves or for others. As volunteers, they do not have the institutional or financial support they might as members of the academy or museum, library, or archive staff. This instills a sense of freedom to tell stories important to them. The potential drawback is that retronauts can be free with their interpretation of history as well, and that means their contemporary ideological and political lenses can shape their representation of the past. This is often justified under the banner of "getting the story right."

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

For retronauts, the number of ways in which they can connect to the past and explore continues to grow. Nostalgia is the most common jumping off point and companies know that, once nostalgia has set in, they can package and sell the past back to consumers. Whether purchasing the past or not, some nostalgics craft contemporary identities based on historical nostalgia for not just the aesthetics, but also the societal rules and roles of another era.

Historical reality television, however, can take some of those societal rules that nostalgics wish for and place a version of them in practice before the viewing audience. A twenty-first century viewer, particularly a woman or a person of color, has a lot to give up in order to explore the past in anything resembling a historically accurate fashion. Places like living history sites and museums offer a space to explore the past, but they are mediated by an institution, and often that institution needs to develop presentations that will speak to as many visitors at once as possible. Sometimes, though, those presentations ask us to consider what it is to have been a person of another time when we take on second-person interpretation of history. When they do, visitors can be confronted with history that might not fit their modern identities or their modern bodies, forcing them to consider their own subject position in relation to someone from the past.

Finally, some decide to take their historical engagement and interpretation into their own hands. Research is easier for the non-credentialed historian because of the internet and a wider access to archives and primary sources. There's a split, though; some use that information for personal research and application in re-enactment, and others use it for presenting historical impressions to educate the public. Gender also influences what role you can play as a re-enactor. Social re-enactment opens the door for additional ways to engage with the past but introduces

other elements for consideration, such as race and class, that are sometimes ignored by those who participate. Based on what I learned, no one wants to play poor in social re-enactment.

The exploration of histories that have often been ignored or depreciated helps to create a deeper sense of connection for many of us. As more history comes to light, as lost stories resurface, there's an opportunity to fashion a more inclusive narrative. Many retronauts believe they are helping to restore something lost to the historical record. However, there is also a caution to be had; as was said in the Gettysburg Anniversary Committee tent in 2013, there's a tension between "politically correct" – that which is seen as inclusive – and "historically correct" – that which could be exclusionary. For some, shifting narratives aren't welcome. They need to be corrected, as I was told by more than one interview subject.

In the time between this project's inception and its conclusion, the world of the retronaut has expanded through use of platforms like YouTube and the internet in general. It is now possible to find resources to aid in the development of historical personas, to sew a wardrobe to help one achieve a specific historical aesthetic, or to explore archives and primary sources that were out of public reach even five years ago. While the re-enactor will likely remain the most visible and recognizable type of retronaut, there are now many more ways to embrace history on one's own terms rather than those set out in a classroom.

If I were to expand the project in the future, there's a fair bit of material culled over the course of development that would benefit from a second look. Early drafts included research into playing history at home with Civil War centenary board games from the 1960s and historical video games like the Civil War game developed by the History Channel; a look into self-guided history tours via smart phones and augmented reality; and ghost tours and the "histories" they tell. Each of these was promising, but they were set aside for a future iteration of the project. An

examination of commerce or sutlery within the world of re-enacting would help to expand the study of the costs of exploring history. While the links between consumerism and nostalgia are well-established, this would be another avenue of the re-enactment experience to study. This would complement a discussion of how race and class are or are not acknowledged in the hobby; it's acceptable for men to "play poor," but women who re-enact are not permitted the same latitude if they are to be authentic in their presentation. An in-depth examination of race, class, gender, and assumptions about how those intersect with historical conceptions of morality in nostalgia and re-enactment would be a worthwhile addition to the field.

Finally, I would also look at the wave of nostalgia since 2013 toward historical aesthetics and how that has fueled an entire field of companies that cater to our need to cast back to another time. For example, Besamé Cosmetics, a company that recreates not only lipstick colors from the past but also makeup like cake mascara, which requires specific tools and technique for application, would be ideal for study. I would also want to look at the rise of YouTube aesthetic consultants like Bernadette Banner, Cathy Hay, Rachel Maksy, and Zach Pinsent and how they use their interest in nostalgia to connect to audiences. Their popularity tells me that their audiences are not only interested, but hungry for as much of the past as they can consume.

This study is particularly timely because it adds to an area of academic inquiry that usually focuses on the institutions presenting the past – universities, museums, media – but leaves out the individuals who engage in self-motivated exploration. It takes on a fresh importance with the increasing availability of archives and primary sources to citizen historians. Rather than earning their credentials through the degree process, their authority rests on their ability to research, interpret, and present the recorded past and the remembered past without mediation or oversight. Ultimately, it is entirely a matter of choice – retronauts select, research,

and explore their desired temporal destination on their own terms. If the past is meant to be explored, these retronauts have already found their passports.

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APPENDIX A SIGNED CONSENTS AND COMPLETED INTERVIEWS

Gettysburg, PA June/July 2013

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
46	25	11	33	2

Mount Vernon, Historical Jamestown, and Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia July 2013

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
7	1	7	0	0

Conneaut, OH (WWII reenactment) August 2013 – Ultimately did not contact as scope of project did not extend past the 1920s

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
12	0	0	12	0

Huntington Beach, CA August/September 2013

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
13	6	3	10	0

Grand Rapids, OH, May 2014

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
5	3	0	5	0

Gettysburg, PA June 2015

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
13	13	0	13	0

Referrals, 2013-2015

Consents obtained	Completed interviews	Level one	Level two	Level three
7	6	3	4	0