THE POLITICS OF THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE:

REMEMBERING SLAVERY AT MUSEUMS AND PLANTATIONS

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Contents

Introduction

Imagine walking back into history. What sights, sounds, smells and feelings arise? Perhaps views of nineteenth century mansions, embellished with polished wood and elaborate chinaware manifest. Do you see lush gardens, and elegantly dressed men and women sipping a cold drink from a crystal glass to cool down from the heat of the summer? Or maybe, witnessing the Atlantic slave trade, the crash of waves against ships voyaging from Africa to North America sound as the chains and moans of enslaved men, women and children harmonize together in a tragic song. Or it is possible that the cracks of a whip echo throughout the air, followed by the cries of a family separated from their loved ones by sale. A modern-day witness to these latter historical scenes would certainly feel uncomfortable and horrified. How would these experiences affect how that observer remembers the American past? And specifically, how would the witness now think about slavery?

Because the institution of slavery is entrenched into United States history, narratives of slavery in public history sites have been emerging across America. These historical sites engage visitors with their past, by attempting to immerse tourists into history through experiences as described above. Therefore, public history plays a significant role in connecting Americans with their past. Many scholars have accounted for this responsibility of public history and how slavery appears in historical sites.

Historians struggle to precisely define public history. However, the National Council on Public History declared that it is the practice and study of history, but "its practitioners embrace

a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public."[1] In other words, public historians especially focus on presenting history to general audiences. Because public history actively seeks to engage with the population, it is an important factor that informs the collective memory of slavery. As such, American slavery has become more visible in historical sites, like museums and plantations. Scholars have accordingly analyzed how narratives of slavery play out in such locations.

As James Oliver Horton specifically points out, the audience actively interacts with history at these sites, generating a variety of responses which are usually dependent on race. Depictions of slavery evoke feelings of discomfort, resentment, or degradation among the audience. For instance, white visitors faced difficulty confronting the history of slavery, as they used the diluted term "servants" when referring to slaves.[2] By utilizing the word "servants," these white guests intimate the historical narrative that slavery was a benevolent institution. "Slave" has brutal connotations of force, chained people working in the fields and an overall sense of harshness while "servant" brings to mind a domestic worker and implies more humane treatment. Therefore, the white audience was uncomfortable facing the history of slavery and disassociated its severity by using a sugarcoated term. In his survey of Monticello visitors, Horton discovered that white men were the most likely to be unsettled with slave narratives.[3] This demonstrates that race is a weighty factor in public perception of slavery. Moreover, Horton found resistance to the history of slavery in National Park Service Civil War sites

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1 "Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?" Perspectives on History, American Historical Association (1 March 2018). https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2008/defining-public-history-is-it-possible-is-it-necessary#note7

2 James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff on Public Memory,* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 48.

3 James Oliver Horton, "Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff on Public Memory,* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 141.

emerging from predominately white groups, such as the United Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy.[4] As whites primarily comprise these organizations, Horton again shows the racial aspect of audience reactions to public history sites, as whites are more likely to resist those sites detailing the history of slavery. Public presentations of slavery can also produce feelings of humiliation. Again, Horton's studies revealed that African American visitors felt pain while discussing slavery.[5] Even more, Black Richmond city officials protested the history of slavery in public sites because the topic "revoked a sense of powerlessness and shame," Tyler-McGraw explained in her research.[6] Public history sites about slavery therefore elicit responses of pain and victimhood from African American audiences.

Additionally, scholars discovered historical sites push the narrative of slavery to the margins. In his study of plantations, John Vlach accounted for an absence of complete slave narratives as "out of 122 plantation sites in 4 southern states, 118 accounted for lives of slaves with deflection, trivialization, or erasure.[7] This is to say that the majority of public history sites do include slavery but present the history benevolently to the comfort of audiences. More specifically, researchers have noted a lack of slave narratives but an abundance of portrayals of heroic whites. For example, Christine Buzinde and Carla Almeida Santos noticed that the Hampton Plantation concentrated on the political and economic successes of whites in its historical narrative.[8] Therefore, the story presented by the plantation ignored the slave

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[4] Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," 44.
[5] Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," 49.
[6] Marie Tyler-McGraw, "Southern Comfort Levels: Race, Heritage Tourism and the Civil War in Richmond," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff on Public Memory,* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 157.
[7] John Michael Vlach, "The Last Great Taboo Subject: Exhibiting Slavery at the Library of Congress," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff on Public Memory,* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 58.
[8] Christine Buzinde and Carla Almeida Santos, "Representations of Slavery," *Annals of Tourism Research* 35, no. 3 (2008): 469-488.

experience but portrayed whites in a favorable manner. This appeases white audiences. John Carroll furthermore found that a slave memorial in Savannah, Georgia did not connect how slavery impacted whites.[9] Even more, this site exemplifies how public history locations can further create a historical narrative which distances slavery from its deeply entrenched role in society and its impact on white Americans. Joanne Melish explained the "containment strategy," used at numerous historical sites where slavery is limited to certain areas of the site.[10] Suitable spaces to discuss slavery included the slave quarters, the kitchen, or even separate tours with slavery as the focal point. Again, containing the discussion of slavery to specific areas allows the site to disconnect slavery's presence and magnitude in daily American life and history.

Public history sites are significant because they involve history and memory to influence how Americans remember the past. Collective memory differs from historical memory and public history, but often their dividing lines become blurred, as memory and history intermingle. Fortunately, scholars have marked the differences while also recognizing the subtleties. Maurice Halbwachs defined collective memory as individual memories of the past that come together and represent the memory of a whole society.[11] Ana Lucia Araujo, a leader in memory studies, described historical memory as the "way societies or groups in a specific society recover, recreate, and represent the past to themselves and to others in the public sphere."[12] Therefore, historical memory accounts for how groups organize their past. She further explicated however, that historical memory can dominate over collective memory "in societies marked by traumatic

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[9] Brian Carroll, "Monumental Discord: Savannah's Remembering (and Forgetting) of Its Enslaved," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2018): 156-167.
[10] Joanne Melish, "Recovering (From) Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell the Truth," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff on Public Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 114.
[11] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[12] Ana Lucia Araujo, "Memory as a Response to the Problem of Slavery," A Historian's View (30 January 2016). http://www.historianviews.com/?p=224

events like the Atlantic slave trade."[13] As a result of American involvement in the slave trade, historical memory and collective memory are at an interplay.

Collective memory and history also differ. David Blight offered distinguishing elements by explaining how memory travels through generations, and manifests into public sites and memorials. On the other hand, history is more neutral as it "is interpreted, revised, and seeks to understand contexts in all their complexity."[14] Specifically, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur saw history as correcting collective memory in the direction of truth, as it consists of dates, people, and an overall coherent narrative.[15] Ron Eyerman echoed these explanations. He characterized collective memory as a myth, because groups remember historical events according to their interests. History, rather, is subject to follow certain academic criteria, rendering it "more objective and universal than group memory."[16]

The difference between collective memory and history can also be seen in how the U.S. remembers slavery. Despite the growing discipline of social history in the 1970s, Americans continue to associate slavery to the South exclusively during the antebellum era and view it as an aside to American history, not a principal feature. As Thomas McCarthy pointed out, there is "a significant gap between academic and public historical consciousness of these matters."[17] Thus collective memory and history are different.

Scholars also look at collective memory and history in the context of nationhood. Blight defined collective memory as national memory when it served as a collective identity for a

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13 Araujo, "Memory as a Response to the Problem of Slavery."
14 David 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 on Public Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 24.
15 Paul Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 392 & 396.
16 Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7-8.
17 Thomas McCarthy, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of Memory and Slavery," *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (2002): 634.

country.[18] Similarly, Ricoeur situated history "within the framework of a nation."[19] Nations utilize history to create a national identity, which unites citizens through sharing a collective memory. In the U.S., slavery is remembered in a manner that reconciles the differences between the North and the South. Particularly, Eyerman noted that America broadly thinks of slavery as a benign and civilizing institution.[20] Portraying slaves as content absolves American history of racial conflict and results in a collective memory appeasing to whites and the U.S. as a nation.

Researchers have concluded that collective memory in the U.S. does not fully include the histories of all citizens. The exclusion of specific groups also depends on race. For example, in Margo Minardi's study of the memory of slavery in New England, she found the historical narrative revolved around the region as a place of freedom, because many slaves were emancipated.[21] The history of slavery and free blacks fell to the margins in the collective memory as a result. Even more, Minardi observed that the most common histories of African Americans consisted of submissive historical people, or those "who knew their place," in the white world. Minardi likened the subjugation of African Americans in the past to the present day, as the purposeful absence of black history in collective memory portrays an American nation in which African Americans submit to their white counterparts.[22] Simply put, collective memory can be used to reinforce political and social goals.

Similarly, collective memory is used by groups with authority. Blight designated memory as "an important modern instrument of power."[23] Martha Norkunas explained that "the

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[18] Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," 23.
[19] Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting,* 394.
[20] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma,* 4.
[21] Margot Minardi, "Making Slavery Visible (Again): The 19th Century Roots of a Revisionist Recovery in New England," in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space,* ed. Ana Lucia Araujo (New York: Routledge, 2012), 95.
[22] Minardi, "Making Slavery Visible (Again)," 103.
[23] Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," 25.

ruling class carefully controls the form and content of historical re-creations and tourist landscapes, legitimizing itself by projecting its own contemporary sociocultural values upon the past."[24] In the case of the U.S., white Americans, or the "ruling class," have framed slavery in a benevolent and paternal light, justifying the subjugation of African Americans which continues today.

Clearly, the U.S. does not have a shared collective memory of slavery. Rather, it is incomplete. Public history sites are important because they contribute to the obstruction or the fulfillment of understanding slavery in collective memory. Furthermore, collective memory is significant as it impacts how America grapples with or fails to wrestle the history of slavery and its enduring legacies.

Therefore, how do historical sites, such as plantations and museums, shape the collective memory of slavery in the United States? I will explore this inquiry through the perspective of the visitor experience. Particularly, I will ask, what content do the sites offer in their historical narratives or in the scripts of tour guides? How much time do guides devote to discuss slavery, and do they encourage visitors to think critically about the past? Where are slavery exhibits physically located? Do visitors feel comfortable and reaffirmed, or unsettled when they leave? How do visitors understand American identity after their visit? These questions will reveal the experiences that visitors have at these locations and inform how this experience affects collective memory.

I will focus on certain public history sites in order to answer my research question. Specifically, I will utilize my personal experiences at the following plantations and museums as case studies. First, I will investigate the historical sites of U.S. presidents, including Thomas

[24] Martha Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 97.

Jefferson's Monticello, James Madison's estate at Montpelier, and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. These sites play a unique role in collective memory because not only did they function as plantations, but also because powerful men who shaped the nation lived at them. Tourists likely visit these locations to learn about the founding of the U.S. and American politics. Therefore, presidential sites impact how the U.S. remembers its past in terms of national values and identity, and how America as a nation squares these principles with the history of slavery. In contrast, no American president called Shirley Plantation home. This plantation, however, offers guided tours to showcase the history of the Carter-Hill family, dating back to the sixteenth century. Accordingly, Shirley Plantation serves as an example of a typical wealthy Virginia estate. The collective memory produced here holds no stigma of Founding Fathers, thus giving a sample of an ordinary plantation. The final plantation which I will consider is the Whitney Plantation. Focusing primarily on slavery, this historical site in Louisiana serves as a valuable case study. With slavery sitting at the center of its historical narrative, the Whitney reveals how a visitor experience centered exclusively on slavery influences American collective memory. Next, I will examine the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), as its lower section is dedicated to the history of slavery. Located on the National Mall and a part of the Smithsonian Institution, a multitude of visitors look to NMAAHC for a consensus on African American history. As a consequence, this museum shows what an African American perspective brings to the collective memory of slavery. Finally, the Legacy Museum, a project by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama, is the last public history location. Opened recently in 2018, the museum traces the historical legacy of slavery throughout U.S. history and into the present day. The Legacy Museum differs from other sites as it encourages visitors to reflect upon the legacy of slavery and even consider how memory shapes contemporary racial

relations. As a result, EJI demonstrates how a museum invoking memory and modern consequences impacts collective memory.

Throughout chapter 1, I investigate how plantations and museums frame American identity and values. In other words, I ask, what do guests think about the U.S. after their visit? I pay particular attention to how the historical sites discuss the American contradiction: Founding American principles championed freedom and equality, but the U.S. constitutionally protected and sustained the institution of enslavement. Therefore, I inquire if visitors' collective memory about the U.S. is challenged or supported at the public history sites. Chapter 2 encompasses the physical and mental experiences tourists undergo at museums and plantations. These encounters with history deserve examination because they shape how visitors understand the past and what they remember. Focusing on how the sites present the history of slavery, I scrutinize the impact of tokenism on collective memory. In the conclusion, I consider the importance of the collective memory produced by public history sites and take into account the modern-day significance.

Chapter 1

"The Paradox of Liberty"

Standing on the steps of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, the tour guide recited the infamous words of the Declaration of Independence, known to define the origins of the American nation: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." However, she continued, Jefferson did not intend liberty and equal rights, for *all* people. "Wait, he didn't?" an elderly gentleman asked, visibly confused at the idea that a Founding Father could contradict American principles of freedom and equality that are etched into the identity of the U.S.

This visitor believed what most Americans believe, that the founding of the U.S. embraced the unconditional right of all people to pursue a free and happy life. Also embedded into the collective memory of American nationhood is the concept of democracy, or that the consent of the people authorizes the government to protect their rights. Therefore, the American government operates for the interests of its people. The historical narratives taught in schools, adopted in popular culture, exploited by politicians and presented in historical sites help establish these values as prominent characteristics of the U.S. As established in the introduction, collective memory is "a mode of memory carried out by social groups and societies."[25] Museums and plantations of presidents can reflect collective memory in the U.S., as they are spaces which relate stories that constitute national identity. Some sites champion elements of American political thought while others deny them. If these historical sites do not address the

[25] Araujo, "Memory as a Response to the Problem of Slavery."

inconsistencies in American values and only uphold one type of historical memory, then collective memory will similarly fail to wrestle with the contradictions.

The privileging of just one side of history is evident on the Monticello steps. Invocations of America's establishment readily celebrate its appreciation for freedom, equality and democracy. The memory of slavery consisting of captivity and inequality, however, becomes absent in collective memory. Accordingly, the present-day U.S. still has not grappled with the history of slavery because it is not fully remembered in the same way in which Americans honor the first few sentences of the Declaration of Independence. In addition to investigating how the paradoxes of liberty appear or are avoided in collective memory, this chapter will explore through the perspective of the visitor how historical sites reinforce or challenge the collective memory of American principles. Particular attention will be placed on the type of content that encourages visitors to contemplate the paradox, as well as the content which evades that exploration. Consideration will also be given to the role tour guides play in prompting critical thinking of cherished American values. More broadly, what causes a visitor to experience the unexpected, or wrestle with the paradoxical? This chapter addresses these inquiries.

Replying to the shocked visitor, the Monticello guide explained that Jefferson referred to white, property-owning men when writing that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence. She capitalized on his confusion and further introduced the "House Tour" as an exploration of Jefferson's conflicting role as a champion of freedom and equality but also as a slaveholder. Thus, the guide immediately began to call the idolizing of Jefferson into question. "Why does Jefferson matter, why does Monticello matter, why do people come to Monticello?" she asked the tour group. With these questions, the guide prompted tourists to consider the

historical legacies of Jefferson and Monticello in contemporary society. Perhaps visitors might refocus their understanding of Jefferson from a dignified statesman to a slave master, and Monticello from an architectural masterpiece to a plantation. Consequently, such a reexamination would dispute the collective memory of how Americans remember the Founding Fathers.

The guide discussed Jefferson's conflicting ideas in his library, the intellectual space of the house where he generated ideas about freedom and democracy. She pointed to the framed copy of the Declaration of Independence that hung on the wall and invited guests to estimate how many of the men who signed the proclamation owned slaves. Guesses ranged that half to all of the signatories enslaved other human beings, suggesting that visitors possessed an awareness of slavery's entrenchment in colonial society. Revealing that 41 out of the 56 Declaration of Independence proponents were slaveholders, the guide highlighted the paradox between original American values of freedom and the reality at the time of their manifestation. This point in the tour furthermore encouraged visitors to reflect on America's founding principles and its collective memory. Additionally, she expounded Jefferson's belief in a racial hierarchy in which whites ranked superior to blacks. This racism, the guide reminded the group, still has present day legacies. Talking about Jefferson's overtly racist convictions breaks down his glorified status in U.S. history. Even more, the connection of Jefferson's racist ideas to persisting modern racial inequalities stimulates a reassessment of the collective memory that America was founded on equality for all. Monticello motivates visitors to critically think about collective memory and American standards.

Given Jefferson's enormous role in the creation of the U.S. and his involvement with slavery (most famously his relationship with his slave Sally Hemings and their biracial children),

Monticello could offer much more attention to this paradox. Out of the whole "House Tour," the instances recounted above were the only occasions when the guide analyzed the inconsistencies between Jefferson's words and his actions. The "Slavery Tour," advertised as an exploration of Monticello with an African American perspective, proposed no analysis besides a last-minute suggestion to watch a five-minute video about Hemings. Putting on the "Slavery Tour" gives the impression that Monticello consists of diverse narratives but ultimately, the sidelining of the Hemings narrative did not invigorate visitors to interrogate Jefferson. While Monticello invites rethinking American values and collective memory, it does so in a limited way. However, this theme will be covered in more detail in the next chapter about tokenism.

Travelling less than an hour northeast from Monticello, one arrives at Montpelier. Here, the tour guide wrapped up the "Signature Tour" of James Madison's home in his study. Bookshelves lined the walls and papers scattered across the desk overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Virginia landscape. Fostering a spirit of intellectualism, this scene and the guide reminded tourists that they stood in the birthplace of Madison's ideologies adopted into the U.S. Constitution and American identity. "Are these original?" a visitor asked, referring to the staged books and collectibles. Confessing that the site recreated Madison's books, the guide incidentally revealed how Montpelier worked to highlight Madison's education and intellect. This demonstrates how the site carefully constructed an admirable image of Madison. For context, she explained the development of the Constitution including how Federalists like Madison argued for a strong central government while Anti-Federalists defended state authority. She recited a moving sermon that despite these differing arguments, the Founding Fathers compromised to create the document that represented America and its principles of democracy,

freedom of speech and liberty; values that modern day Americans continue to champion. Accordingly, the guide not only reiterated American collective memory but glorified it. The imagery of the study painted Madison as a learned and enlightened man while the inspirational speech emphasized the most honorable elements of American values. Even more, she suggested that the U.S. maintains these morals in the present day, thus giving a positive assessment of the nation. Therefore, Montpelier's "Signature Tour" provided an encouraging portrayal of American nationhood and history to the collective memory of the U.S.

This conclusion advanced a one-sided picture of Madison and the Constitution and did not prompt any critical analysis of their role in U.S. history and collective memory. For example, the guide did not prod visitors with questions such as, *Has the U.S. upheld ideals of democracy, freedom of speech, and liberty? Has the U.S. done anything to divert from these standards?* The lack of any analytical evaluations eliminates the possibility that flaws could exist in Madison, the Constitution, or the U.S. as a whole. Additionally, the guide's discussion of Federalists and Anti-Federalists provided background information for the historical arguments surrounding the writing of the Constitution and ultimately saluted the Founding Fathers' ability to compromise. However, she failed to mention Constitutional disputes over slavery and its subsequent protections in the Constitution. These include the rendering of slaves as three-fifths of a person when calculating Congressional representation, requiring that both Northern and Southern states help to capture fugitive slaves and allowing the international slave trade to continue until 1808.[26]

Earlier in the tour, the guide revealed that Madison owned about one hundred slaves. She clarified that although he opposed the institution of slavery, he did not believe that blacks and

[26] Howard Gillman, Mark A. Graber and Keith E. Whittington, *American Constitutionalism: Powers, Rights and Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 122.

whites could live together peacefully. Thus, Madison rejected racial equality. This belief of Madison did not find its way into the guide's description of Madison's ideologies when developing the Constitution. Madison's slave ownership tarnished his reputation and the guide's inclusion of his racist theories further disrupted an idolized memory of Madison. However, her failure to consider how his prejudice influenced his Constitutional thinking and subsequent American values only advanced the collective memory of Madison as an ideal man in U.S. history.

Throughout the "Signature Tour," the guide devoted much of the historical narrative to Dolley Madison. In fact, the guide expressed a particular admiration for Dolley and even characterized her as "a rockstar." While James Madison possessed a demure disposition, the guide explained how the charismatic Dolley sat at the head of the dinner table in order to best socialize with her guests. Dolley's charisma welcomed visitors to their home and the White House, and her sociability and popularity established her as America's first "First Lady." With these glowing descriptions, the guide revered Dolley Madison's distinguished role in U.S. history and collective memory. As author Marie Jenkins Schwartz has pointed out however, these feasts and parties hosted by the Madisons required a large number of enslaved staff, especially because Dolley ensured that each guest had their own assigned enslaved attendant.[27] In the dining room, Montpelier staged what a dinner party would look like with life-size figures of guests like Thomas Jefferson and Marquis de Lafayette. A single slave, Paul Jennings, was portrayed. Minimizing the presence of slaves at typical social gatherings, the site again left visitors with a more agreeable impression of Madison and Montpelier. Still regarded as the first "First Lady" and celebrated for her patriotism, Dolley Madison retains her position as a heroine

[27] Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Ties that Bound: Founding First Ladies and Slaves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 272.

in American collective memory. Accordingly, the guided tour at Montpelier contributed to preserving a favorable and patriotic memory of Dolley Madison.

In contrast, the "Mere Distinction of Colour"* exhibit at Montpelier extended the understanding of history at the plantation with an explicit focus on the African American experience. This exhibit disputed the collective memory of James and Dolley Madison as exemplary historical figures. For example, an interactive screen posed the question, "Was Madison a good slave owner?" Such an inquiry stimulates a re-examination of Madison as more than a President and Founding Father. Positioning Madison in a less attractive light as a slave master, the "Mere Distinction of Colour" provoked visitors to question collective memory and American principles which deify Madison and the nationhood of the U.S. Therefore, the exhibit challenged mainstream collective memory.

Additionally, the "Mere Distinction of Colour" screened a video told from the perspective of an enslaved girl. The young woman cried as she recounted that Dolley Madison unsympathetically sold the girl's mother away from her. Evoking feelings of loss and grief, the short film communicated the pain of familial separation and portrayed Dolley as heartless and apathetic. In complete contrast with the tour guide's characterization of her as a warm and caring hostess, this exhibit with an African American perspective, opposed an respectable memory of Dolley Madison. Clearly, the "Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibition supplied visitors with a slavery narrative. Schwartz explained the consequences of portraying Dolley as great. Such "myths impede our ability to ask questions that can help us expand our understanding of the past."[28] Therefore, Schwartz acknowledged how historical sites like

* The title of "The Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibition utilizes an eighteenth-century spelling of "color" in order to refer to James Madison's quotation: "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man."

[28] Schwartz, *Ties that Bound*, 280.

Montpelier promote a certain historical memory that in turn shapes collective memory. Restricted to the cellars of the mansion and pushed outside to an adjacent field, however, Montpelier segregated this presentation of slavery away from its white inhabitants. Regardless of these features that make room for African American history and disrupt the noble memory of the Madisons, the exhibit's detachment from the main house also separates African American memory in the collective memory of Montpelier. As a result, the site essentially endorsed the virtuous image of the Madisons and Montpelier.

In conclusion, the "Signature Tour" of Montpelier sustained an honorable image of the Madisons in American collective memory. The tour guide celebrated James Madison as an intellectual and Founding Father while glorifying Dolley Madison's brilliance as America's first "First Lady." Furthermore, the guide highlighted the virtuous American principles that Montpelier represents, positioning the U.S. in a positive light. On the other hand, the "Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibit presents a memory of the African Americans involved in Montpelier's history. This exhibition counters the collective memory of the U.S. with the incorporation of historical narratives told from the perspective of enslaved people at Montpelier. Nonetheless, the marginalization of the "Mere Distinction of Colour" distanced Montpelier's involvement with slavery to promote an ideal image.

Moving southward to Tennessee, a visitor encounters Andrew Jackson's Hermitage and sees banners that revere him as a "Legend," "Hero," "General," "Statesmen," and "President." One specific exhibit described Jackson as the "New American," as he embodied courage, independence, self-reliance and pioneering. From the start of the visitor experience,

The Hermitage formulated a celebratory memory of Jackson that emphasized his representation of founding American ideals as well as his establishment of new American qualities.

Despite the generational differences between Andrew Jackson and Founding Fathers Jefferson and Madison, the historical narrative of Jackson's Hermitage also placed him in the context of the establishment of the U.S. Pointing out that he was nine years old at the signing of the Declaration of Independence and highlighting his patriotism with the fact that he fought in the Revolutionary War at age thirteen, the Hermitage involved Jackson with the genesis of the nation. As a result, this creates a collective memory in which he is associated with the original American principles of liberty and democracy.

The Hermitage, however, afforded greater attention to Jackson's role in the War of 1812 in order to showcase his representation of American values in collective memory. This discussion ignored slavery's influence on the War of 1812. Giving historical background, the exhibit explained that southern states supported war against Britain due to British blockades of ports that restricted the South from selling cotton. A small illustration of African Americans harvesting cotton served as the only elucidation that enslaved people sowed the seeds of an economy based on their labor. Economic historian Edward E. Baptist illuminated just how crucial of roles cotton and forced labor played in the U.S. economy: "Enslaved African Americans were the most efficient producers of cotton." Its production rose so rapidly during the nineteenth century that it soon became one of America's main exports.[29] The Hermitage fails to represent this. Additionally, the exhibit presented no commentary on how Britain offered freedom to slaves who fought for their cause. As John N. Grant pointed out, many African Americans took advantage of the opportunity and fought for the British army in order to escape

[29] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 113-114.

enslavement.[30] The deprivation of these African American experiences in the War of 1812 clearly demonstrates that the Hermitage cast aside the history of slavery in its production of collective memory.

Exhibits at the Hermitage also conveyed Jackson's expansion of the U.S. "Creating an American Empire" described his efforts to expand American dominion through intimidating and forcing Native Americans to surrender their land, in addition to the expulsion of Spain from Florida. As a consequence, Jackson greatly broadened America's territorial domain. Other features at the Hermitage elaborated on the cruelty Native Americans faced at the hands of Jackson and his troops. Thus, including the brutal consequences of American expansion on Native Americans puts his actions into a negative light in collective memory. The exhibit left out exactly *how* Jackson acquired Florida from the Spanish, however. As Daniel Rasmussen has clarified, Jackson violated international law by crossing into Florida to push out Native Americans and capture escaped slaves who found refuge there.[31] The absence of this detail accordingly contributes to a better image of Jackson and American occupation in collective memory.

Regardless of the inclusion or omission of the effects of American imperialism, the Hermitage fundamentally celebrated Jackson's endeavors in the War of 1812. One exhibit classified Jackson as an "American Rockstar;" the same label the Montpelier tour guide termed Dolley Madison due to her popularity and celebrity status amongst Americans. Justifying this title, the Hermitage detailed the adoration of Jackson expressed by citizens through parades and other commemorations. Americans worshipped Jackson as "he had restored the nation's

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[30] John N. Grant, "Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815," *Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 3 (July 1973): 253-270.

[31] Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 183.

dignity" against "the British [who] had threatened America's independence and, with the burning of Washington, had dealt a punishing blow to its pride," the exhibit read. As a result, Jackson was "an honorable man, a hero, and a true leader," in the eyes of Americans. The Hermitage clearly depicted America's victory over the British in the War of 1812 as a triumph. Specifically, the description of Jackson touts him as a defender of valued American ideals of liberty and democracy. Referencing Jackson as a representation of these favorable identifiers of American nationhood, the exhibit interprets both the U.S. and Jackson righteously in collective memory.

An examination of voting rights during 1824 and 1828, the presidential election years of Jackson, supplied insight into the diverse experiences of historical people. For both election cycles, the exhibit reported that the Constitution considered slaves three-fifths of a person in order to increase representation in the federal government, but that they "could not vote until the abolishment of slavery in 1865." This aspect of the Hermitage included the role of slavery in the Constitution, further placing the institution into collective memory and challenging an ideal portrait of a "free" U.S. Similarly, incorporating the fact that enslaved people could not vote contradicts the idea of democracy as an essential feature in American nationhood. The exhibit presented an inaccuracy, however. While the 13th Amendment did abolish slavery in 1865, the measure did not directly grant the right to vote to former enslaved African Americans. Rather, the 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, guaranteed suffrage to African Americans. This small oversight demonstrates a misunderstanding of a non-white facet of U.S. history and suggests a lack of regard. Even though African American history is present at the Hermitage, the site pushes this perspective into the margins, just as slavery falls to the wayside in American

collective memory. Therefore, the Hermitage contributes to the limited collective memory of slavery in the U.S.

Other parts of the exhibit at the Hermitage positioned a more critical lens on Jackson and his role in American collective memory. For example, a panel confessed that while he championed democracy for the common people, African Americans, Native Americans and women did not have representation in the government. In this case, the Hermitage created space to involve more diverse historical perspectives into U.S. collective memory rather than restricting it to the sidelines.

Within the indoor section of the Hermitage, the curators only mentioned Jackson's relationship with slavery in a few instances. The panel revealed that Jackson believed in racial differences, had no issues about owning slaves and even "as President, he used his power to quiet the voices of those who did [oppose slavery]." Thus, the Hermitage provided an unrepentant report on Jackson's unflattering attitudes towards race and slavery. Such a description diverts from American collective memory that honors the virtuous values and achievements of presidents like Jackson. Yet simply mentioning this antidote does not explicitly urge visitors to interrogate collective memory. Rather, it can reinforce Jackson's sanction of racial inequality as an accepted part of his life and legacy that some continue to commemorate.

"Do you think Andrew Jackson was a great President?" the exhibit asks its visitors. While this question does encourage the audience to consider the past, it implies to visitors that Jackson was indeed a great President, leaving little room for a critical analysis of him. As a result, the Hermitage promoted a revered perception of Jackson in collective memory that Americans still memorialize today. Other propositions, such as "Which of Jackson's policies do you agree or disagree with?" similarly espouse visitors to interpret him pleasantly in collective

memory if they concur with his actions. Again, this puts forward a positive image. Conversely, disagreements from visitors might invite scrutiny and contest the way in which the U.S. remembers Jackson. The exhibit additionally acknowledged Jackson's controversial legacy due to his barbarity as an American leader, implying that the Hermitage interrogates its visitors to reassess Jackson's role in American history. However, this is not the case. Utilizing a quote from Theodore Roosevelt that read, "Jackson had many faults… but… with the exception of Washington and Lincoln, no man has left a deeper mark on American History," the Hermitage vindicated Jackson's significant rank in collective memory. In other words, the exhibit intimated that in spite of his expansionist pursuits that disparaged Native Americans, in addition to further entrenching slavery and racial inequality, Jackson deserves recognition in collective memory due to his influential role in U.S. history. Even though this site does prompt some consideration of Jackson's controversies, it ultimately justified his prominence in American collective memory.

If a tourist tires of visiting plantations or prefers to engage with the American past at a museum, perhaps they might find themselves in Washington, D.C. at the National Museum for African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). In this location, a visitor runs into the six feet and two-inch-tall Thomas Jefferson, who would have towered above his contemporaries in the eighteenth century at that height.[32] Some utilize Jefferson's domineering stature to represent his prominent leadership role in the establishment of the U.S. However, NMAAHC challenged this portrayal. A wall of bricks engraved with the names of slaves at Monticello loomed above the statue of Jefferson in the "Paradox of Liberty" exhibit. The visual presentation displayed Jefferson meagerly in comparison with the almost 700 men, women and children who he

[32] "Jefferson's Height," Research and Education, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-height

enslaved[33]. The unavoidable mountain of bricks implicated Jefferson in his involvement with slavery, serving as a massive visible reminder that the history of slavery and Jefferson are inextricably linked. As a result, NMAAHC included slavery into the collective memory of America's founding.

In its description of the Revolutionary War, the museum additionally gave consideration to the African American experience in the American Revolution. For example, a panel acknowledged that "the Revolutionary War was waged for independence from Britain in the name of equal rights for men, although nearly one-fifth of the colonial population was enslaved." This explanation situated slavery directly into the narrative about the American Revolution, thus adding an African American point of view to collective memory. Furthermore, it addressed the contradiction between American founding principles and the reality for enslaved people. Highlighting the inequality, NMAAHC also challenges American collective memory that memorializes liberty as a feature of American history and identity.

Like other sites, NMAAHC discussed the purposes of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in laying the foundational standards and laws for the American nation. This museum most directly considered the role of slavery in these texts. For instance, NMAAHC explained how abolitionists seized upon the vows of freedom and equality as pledged in the Declaration of Independence in order to push for an end to slavery. These antislavery activists recognized the contradiction that American society proposed certain ideals but failed to apply them to African Americans. Consequently, they poked holes in the image of the U.S. as a nation adhering to principles of liberty and justice. With this presentation of the Declaration of

[33] "Slavery FAQs – Property," Slavery, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. https://www.monticello.org/slavery/slavery-faqs/property/

Independence, the museum showed how American collective memory, represented by the language of self-autonomy in the inaugural document, is challenged by the oppressive institution of slavery that completely denied such concepts to African Americans. Clearly, American collective memory ignores the African American experience. NMAAHC nevertheless adds to collective memory by accounting for the role slavery in U.S. history.

Moreover, the museum expounded the relationship between the U.S. Constitution and slavery. "Yet the Constitution upheld the institution of slavery even as it expanded liberty," the exhibit reads. Furthermore, this display listed specific examples of slavery's appearance in the Constitution, including the Three-Fifths Clause, the Fugitive Slave Act and the authorization to extend the Transatlantic Slave trade. NMAAHC confronted the hypocrisy of a Constitution that protects principles of freedom and independence while also legally sanctifying the denial of those rights to enslaved people. Contending collective memory again, the exhibit's inclusion of slavery in the context of the Constitution shatters the idea of a just system of laws as a part of American identity.

Taking a step further than most sites, NMAAHC included examples of how Africans and African Americans interpreted the concepts of freedom and independence for themselves. For instance, a display described how Rhode Island, desperately seeking servicemen, guaranteed emancipation to slaves who served in the Continental Army. As a consequence, "all-black companies joined the First Rhode Island Regiment," showing how African Americans similarly valued liberty and even willingly risked their lives to fight in the Revolutionary War. The case of the First Rhode Island Regiment places African American history into the broader narrative of American history. Therefore, NMAAHC broadened the scope of collective memory to include African American participation in the founding of America. The museum additionally paid

special tribute to Elizabeth Freeman. Commemorating her through a statue replica, the exhibit described her pursuit of self-determination as she "was one of the first [enslaved] people to successfully sue for her freedom…" Freeman embodies the fact that African Americans practiced agency in order to claim their own liberty. By highlighting the self-autonomy of enslaved people, the exhibit not only humanizes but also legitimizes African American history. Here, the lives of slaves are not diminished into a rudimentary narrative or pushed to the margins, as happens at other sites. NMAAHC rather positions the history of slavery into circumstances regarding the fight for liberty, an ideal championed in American values.

In the "Paradox of Liberty" exhibition, NMAAHC bestowed ample space and attention for deliberating the American Revolution, slavery, and collective memory. Explicitly highlighting that the tenets of American independence entirely contradicted the slave society operating in the U.S., the exhibit contested American collective memory. The consideration of the institution of slavery breaks down traditional collective memory that commemorates the struggle for freedom. Moreover, the exhibit reminded visitors that "this paradox was embedded in national institutions that are still vital today." This reminder points out that the legacies of such inequality still exist. While NMAAHC does not directly provide examples of modern-day racial disparities, it still cues visitors to bear in mind that the past carries consequences in the present. Furthermore, the museum offered an analysis of memory explaining how remembering this historical inequality "spurs the American people to wrestle constantly with building a 'more perfect Union.'" Thus, referring directly to collective memory, NMAAHC encouraged visitors to grapple with the fact that the U.S. promotes an image of liberty and equality yet enslaved millions of African Americans. In other words, NMAAHC prompted its visitors to debate if the U.S. adheres to its values that are presented in the collective memory of American history.

Further exploring museums, a visitor would learn how EJI takes seriously the historical legacies that impact contemporary racial issues. Connecting the past to the present, EJI's the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, not only presents the history of slavery in the U.S. but also explicitly encourages visitors to think about *how* this history shapes the nation today. As a result, the Legacy Museum most directly interrogates American collective memory.

Almost immediately upon entering through the doors of the Legacy Museum, the exhibition begins and immerses visitors in the history of slavery. An overview of Montgomery's involvement in the institution of slavery orients the tourists to their historical surroundings: The display reveals to guests that "the site where you are standing" operated as a warehouse to hold and confine enslaved people awaiting their sale in the lucrative Montgomery slave trade. From the start, the Legacy Museum entangles visitors with the past. Tourists then follow a dark hallway leading to holding cells with holograms of enslaved men, women and children trapped behind metal bars. Approaching the cells causes the individuals, and history, to come to life and personally address visitors. Particularly, a holographic young woman recounts the torment she felt after witnessing slave traders separate her sister, mother and herself from one another. "God will have wrath on this guilty nation," she asserts. Incriminating the U.S. for its abuse of African Americans, the enslaved woman contradicted American collective memory that embraces a just and free nation.

The Legacy Museum points to more ways in which the U.S. used law and politics to uphold the institution of slavery. For instance, one display read that "black people's lifelong and inescapable enslavement was defended by legal, political, religious and scientific institutions as

justified and necessary…" However, this museum focused less on highlighting the paradox of liberty and more on reckoning with slavery's effects in modern America. "Today, the role of slavery as the foundation of this nation's wealth and prosperity and the way it shaped the modern political economy are largely overlooked," an exhibit concluded. The Legacy Museum acknowledges the absence of slavery in collective memory but reasserts the magnitude of the institution into American society. Additionally, the museum prods its visitors with questions such as, "should the Supreme Court of the United States acknowledge its role in authorizing and sustaining the enslavement of black people and apologize for overtly racist rulings?" This inquiry recognizes how the American government maintained slavery and the inequality of African Americans, enhancing collective memory to include the entrenchment of slavery in the U.S. Furthermore, the museum suggests a national reconciliation with slavery that would make its significance even more apparent in American collective memory.

Evidently, historical sites of American presidents employ a historical memory that shapes national understanding of the U.S. as a nation. Ultimately, the plantations of Jefferson, Madison and Jackson propose these men as champions of the people, liberty and equality. The tour guide at Monticello undoubtedly analyzed the differences between Jefferson's ideals and his participation in slavery. However, she sidelined the contradiction to only a small portion of the tour. Montpelier's tour guide scarcely afforded attention to the paradox of liberty. She spent most of the tour reiterating what visitors already understood about the Madisons: James Madison was an intellectual architect of the U.S. while Dolley Madison epitomized a patriotic First Lady. Exhibits at the Hermitage failed to challenge visitors to critically rethink Jackson. Instead, glowing descriptions celebrated his Americanness and even justified this opposition with his

racist policies and actions. The tours and content offered by these Presidential sites meagerly challenge visitors' knowledge about the history of the U.S., if this process is not entirely foregone. Collective memory, as a result, is deficient in an all-encompassing interpretation of the founding of America and its values.

On the other hand, locations such as NMAAHC and EJI's the Legacy Museum disabuse visitors from those dominant historical memories. Highlighting the contradictions between American foundational principles and the history of slavery, these museums work to fulfill collective memory. Their presentations of history explicitly call the idolized images of Founding Fathers into question by implicating them with the inconsistencies between enslaving human beings and fighting for freedom and equality. NMAAHC further pointed to the American contradiction by exhibiting African Americans' own claims to liberty. As a result, visitors are confronted with content that makes them re-contemplate how the U.S. is as a nation. EJI especially facilitates a reassessment of America and calls upon guests directly to consider the paradox of liberty in contemporary society. With this prodding, EJI encourages visitors to take an extra step beyond simply thinking about the paradox and to take action for a reconciliation of slavery in the U.S.

This chapter has examined the national concepts that museums and plantations reinforce or challenge. Visitors' experiences revolve around raising their consciousness about American values and accordingly, guests passively receive ideas of nationhood from the scripts of tour guides or museum exhibitions. Still, this impacts how visitors feel about America once they leave the museum or plantation. The next chapter will inquire deeper into the visitor experience, considering how their physical exposure and engagement with the sites shape what guests take away to inform collective memory.

Chapter 2

Token Slavery

In the twenty first century, most historical sites discuss slavery. Nevertheless, the extent to which sites afford discussion, space, attention and resources to illustrating the history of slavery varies from place to place. Locations such as Monticello, Montpelier, the Hermitage and Shirley Plantation primarily focus on the prominent whites who resided at these estates. Because each site functioned as an operating plantation, slavery does appear in their historical narratives. But their limited representations of slavery at these plantations highlight that the sites use tokenism to describe this history. Employing only a few emblematic slave narratives, they attempt to demonstrate diversity and avoid allegations of racism.

Explained by Martin Luther King Jr., tokenism "is recognizable because it is an end itself. Its purpose is not to begin a process, but instead to end the process of protest and pressure."[34] In other words, token slave narratives do not diversify and enrich the historical narrative, but rather allow the sites to put up a facade of inclusion. As King also pointed out, tokenism eliminates the capacity to substantially include the African American experience. If the historical sites incorporate at least some mention of slavery, then they dodge condemnations of racism and the need to create thorough and inclusive exhibits and tours. The results are perfunctory acknowledgements of slavery that lack nuance and details about the slave experience. Simplifying slavery into a single experience or concept ignores its complexities and denies it a significant role in U.S. history and collective memory. Accordingly, token slavery

[34] Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 2000), 17-18.

further perpetuates the marginalization of this history and reinforces enslavement as a minor element in American collective memory.

The historian Annette Gordon-Reed is the expert on the Hemings family, who lived at Monticello as slaves, evidenced by her Pulitzer Prize in History for her book, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. Since 2004, Gordon-Reed has been involved at Monticello through the Advisory Committee for African American Affairs. In 2020, she joined Monticello's Board of Trustees.[35] The existence of a separate delegation exposes the detachment of African American history and memory from the principal interests of Monticello. While this division importantly offers an African American point of view on Monticello, through work such as the scholarship of Gordon-Reed, it does not guarantee its full integration into the historical narrative. Even more, Gordon-Reed's recent induction onto the Board of Trustees reveals that her expertise about enslaved people at Monticello became integrated into the site's primary vision only a short time ago. Nonetheless, this symbolizes a beginning step to thoroughly incorporate the history of slavery into Monticello and the collective memory it helps to construct.

While tourists wait to ascend the small mountain up to the main house of Monticello, staff encourage visitors to explore the Robert H. and Clarice Smith Gallery that puts forward the very first description of the site as "the home of Thomas Jefferson." Introducing the historical site as a "home" rather than a plantation, this outlook immediately indicates the principal historical narrative revolves around Jefferson and overlooks the enslaved people who also lived and labored at Monticello.

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[35] "Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Gordon-Reed and technology entrepreneur Dengel to join Monticello's Board of Trustees," Press, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (14 January 2020). https://www.monticello.org/press/news-releases/gordon-reed-and-dengel-join-monticello-board/

Mulberry Row serves as one of Monticello's showcases of slavery on the plantation. Several small buildings filled with exhibitory panels line a dirt path adjacent to the main house. Susceptible to weather conditions, these open and drafty structures jeopardize the likelihood that a guest might spend a lot of time and attention here to learn about slavery at Monticello. Rain or extreme temperatures, for example, could result in visitors completely skipping over Mulberry Row's descriptions of slave life involving housing, textile and nail production, spinning and weaving or biographies of individual slaves. Therefore, Monticello does not ensure that visitors heed the history of slavery. The presence of Mulberry Row gives the impression that Monticello represents diverse histories, thus functioning as a token slave exhibit. But as long as its value and placement is outside and subdued to the margins of the plantation, Monticello actually underplays slavery. "The Passage" also dedicates the tunnel underneath the house to presentations of enslaved people and their lives. Monticello obviously commits space and resources to addressing slavery, allowing the site to come across as inclusive to African American history. As tokens of slavery, the presence of these exhibits absolves Monticello of any charge of racial discrimination even though these commitments to slavery are shallow.

Monticello's "Slavery Tour" takes place on Mulberry Row. Accordingly, the guided experience also falls vulnerable to weather limitations and the consequential disregard of slavery. Furthermore, Monticello advertises the "Slavery Tour" as placing an African American lens on the site. Implying the involvement of slavery in its historical narrative and memory, Monticello utilizes the "Slavery Tour" as a symbol of its inclusivity of African American history. However, the tour delivered a superficial presentation of slavery. The guide summarized the economic activities slaves undertook in producing commodities such as textiles

and nails. She only briefly described the agency that slaves practiced by purchasing items like ceramics with the money gained from selling crops from their gardens to the Jefferson family. Ultimately, the "Slavery Tour" centered on Jefferson by describing the work enslaved people executed that contributed to his wealth. Making no mention that Africans and African Americans resisted enslavement through maintaining African traditions and developing new cultures, as explained by Walter C. Rucker, and the many other methods enslaved people adopted to defend their human dignity and survive indefinite servitude, the guide fell short in narrating a comprehensive history of slavery.[36] As a result, the "Slavery Tour" makes Monticello appear racially conscious and inclusive. This tour is yet another token of slavery at Monticello. By only explaining how slavery related to Jefferson and his economic endeavors, the site bypassed an in-depth and humanizing interpretation of the institution of slavery and the people it exploited. The surface level account of slavery devalues its nuance and significance in U.S. history.

Returning to Montpelier, their website dedicates a considerable amount of space to acknowledging slavery. For instance, the short signature reads that Montpelier is "a memorial to James Madison and the Enslaved Community…"[37] The website also mentions slavery in almost all of its pages: It provides information about enslaved African Americans at Montpelier, considers slavery and the Constitution, as well as detailing Montpelier's efforts to weave the lives and records of enslaved people into its primary historical narrative. Clearly, this website portrays Montpelier as an inclusive and diverse historical site. Once physically at Montpelier,

[36] Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).
[37] "Our Work," Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. https://www.montpelier.org/

however, visitors undergo an experience that deviates from the virtual image of Montpelier. Thus, the token of a slavery-conscious website inadequately brings slavery into the collective memory produced at Montpelier.

Throughout the "Signature Tour," the tour guide made sure to refer to slavery at least once in each room of the mansion. But these remarks about enslaved people and their circumstances lacked depth and instead operated as perfunctory comments that present Montpelier as all-encompassing on the surface. For example, while exhaustively narrating the mishaps of John Payne Todd, Madison's gambling and alcoholic stepson, the guide spoke about slaves as they became collateral when Todd sold them away in order to pay off some of his many debts. Discussing slavery in Todd's bedroom demonstrates that Montpelier integrated slavery into the main house tour. Nonetheless, this superficial explanation passed over the tragic and painful experiences enslaved people underwent when separated from their family members through sale. Delia Garlic, an enslaved woman in Alabama described the agony: "Babies was snatched from their mothers' breasts and sold to speculators. Children was separated from sisters and brothers and never saw each other again. Course they cry; you think they not cry when they was sold like cattle? I could tell you about it all day, but even then you couldn't guess the awfulness of it."[38]

In the bedroom of Dolley and James Madison, the guide discussed slavery the most. Implicating the Madisons with the institution of slavery in such an intimate and private space of their lives, the "Signature Tour" shows a willingness to involve slavery with the central historical narrative. However, the discussion of slavery remained at surface level. The guide simply recited facts about how the Madisons related to their enslaved people. For instance, she

[38] Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 21.

disclosed that Madison did not free any slaves upon his death. Leaving it at that, the guide still centered on Madison and failed to provide any further consideration to slavery and manumission. A significant feature of slavery, freedom was achieved through owners' vowing to free slaves in their wills, the purchase of their own freedom or of family members and sometimes escape.[39] By neglecting a richer description of slavery, the tour involved any mention of slavery as tokens. Also during the "Signature Tour," the guide randomly stated that "slaves were individuals with families and interests." While this statement attempts to remind visitors of the humanity of enslaved people, it is shallow, and accordingly, a symbol of tokenism. Slaves established their own African American culture to express their humanity with food, clothing, religion and other African-rooted traditions. The film, *The Language You Cry In,* specifically traces how the Mende language travelled from Sierra Leone across the Atlantic Ocean and into the African American Gullah culture.[40] Such an example of identity and humanness would enrich the historical narrative of Montpelier with a fuller understanding of slavery. Serving as a token to appease Montpelier's promise of a well-rounded historical narrative, such comments let Montpelier bypass deeper discourses about slavery.

The "Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibit comprehensively presents the history of slavery through a slave perspective. Asserting their identity and humanity, this component listed the names of all of the known enslaved people at Montpelier and elaborated on their community and family-building as ways to survive enslavement. Furthermore, panels described their daily lives: "Enslaved men, women and children spent hours preparing the Madisons' meals and

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[39] Art Budros, "The Antislavery Movement in Early America: Religion, Social Environment and Slave Manumissions," *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 955.; Shawn Cole, "Capitalism and Freedom: Manumissions and the Slave Market in Louisiana, 1725-1820," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (2005): 1010.
[40] Vertamae Grosvenor, *The Language You Cry In,* DVD, directed by Angel Serrano and Alvaro Toepke, California Newsreel (1998).

tending fires to smoke meat. Even when they found time to plant their own gardens or sew their families' clothes, they remained alert for the Madisons' summons." Using active verbs like "preparing" and "tending," and referring to these people as "men, women, and children," "Mere Distinction of Colour" accentuated the agency of enslaved people as human beings. Even the language chosen to describe history matters, as Horton pointed out.[41]

Montpelier did not launch the exhibit on its own accord, however. Iris Ford, the granddaughter of an enslaved man at Montpelier, highlighted the absence of African American history after her visit to the site in 2007.[42] Calling attention to the one-sided historical narrative, she pressured Montpelier to include the history of slavery. Because Montpelier did not take slavery into account until Ford's provocation, its presentations of slavery were tokens to satisfy her demands. Any reference to slavery, regardless of its depth or triviality, indicates that Montpelier represents African American history. These nominal mentions of slavery allow the site to avoid criticisms for its lack of diversity. Efforts to embrace slavery also involved the Montpelier Descendant Community who participated in research and archaeology to uncover African American history at Montpelier. Involving descendants with storytelling connects the past with the present and attaches significance to slavery as it still holds legacies today. Still, Montpelier farmed out this endeavor to the Montpelier Descendant Community and did not directly take it upon itself to display the history of slavery. Montpelier's detachment further shows its tokenism of slavery.

Furthermore, the physical layout of the historical site does not suggest that the history of slavery is entirely embraced in Montpelier's historical narrative. Small signs point to the "Mere

[41] Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," 48.
[42] "A More Complete American Story," Enslaved Community, James Madison's Montpelier (10 February 2017). https://www.montpelier.org/learn/a-more-complete-american-story

Distinction of Colour" exhibition which sits underneath the main house. Extending into reconstructed cabins that stand adjacent to the mansion, "Mere Distinction of Colour" also endures exposure to cold temperatures, rain, snow and other weather conditions that might dissuade tourists from visiting the exhibit. Additionally, the tour guide and other staff members did not encourage guests to explore these displays either. Despite its thorough interpretations of enslavement and its connection of the historical legacies of slavery, "Mere Distinction of Colour" still falls to the wayside at Montpelier. As a result, this exhibition serves as a token of slavery. The presence of such an exposition does not suffice to intertwine slavery completely into Montpelier's historical narrative and the collective memory it creates. Rather, its detachment permits Montpelier to continue to prioritize James and Dolley Madison, in addition to the Constitution and the founding of the U.S., as its foremost historical narrative.

Back in Tennessee, the tour guide at the Hermitage discussed enslaved people throughout the "General's Tour." In the foyer, he related that visitors to the Hermitage would have been greeted by an enslaved woman, Hannah. A young man named George and bound by slavery, assisted Jackson as a "body servant," the guide explained in the bedroom. Including these enslaved people, the Hermitage brings slavery into its historical narrative, but only as tokens. Providing no further in-depth information besides their names and occupations, the inclusion of enslaved people fails to fully integrate slavery into the "General's Tour" and demonstrates its use of token slavery.

Alfred Jackson played the role of the token enslaved person at the Hermitage. Numerous specifics about him appeared to develop the character of Alfred. During the "General's Tour," visitors learn how the son of the Hermitage's cook Betty, and an enslaved carpenter Ned, lived

his ninety-eight years on the plantation. Illuminating elements of Alfred's life such as his job as the wagoner, his symbolic wife Gracy (enslaved people were not considered citizens and therefore had no legal rights to formally marry[43]) and their children Augustus and Sarah, the Hermitage depicted Alfred outside of the context of enslavement. This characterization did not describe him as an enslaved man, always subject to the orders and violence of whites. On the contrary, the Hermitage fashioned Alfred only as a figure with a name, job and family, removing him from the historical environment of slavery. Tokenism therefore blankets social and racial hierarchies with the personalization of people like Alfred. Also, he was the only person to have his experience of enslavement recounted in such detail. Providing a particular focus on just one enslaved person highlights that Alfred served as the token slave. This, along with the personalization of him as a character in the Hermitage's story, does not fully capture slavery. Even more, Alfred's grave sits next to Jackson's tomb. This placement suggests that slavery is fully intertwined in the narrative of Jackson. Involving just one enslaved person with Jackson inaccurately represents the hundreds of others that he enslaved. Consequently, Alfred symbolizes tokenism at the Hermitage.

The Hermitage offers many detailed panels about the experiences of enslavement on the plantation. This whole exhibition took place outside and stretched across muddy paths for over one mile. Pushed to the outskirts of the historical site, the presentation of slavery was plainly not integrated into the Hermitage. Additionally, visitors might not investigate this portion of the plantation beyond the main house due to weather conditions or accessibility issues brought on by the extensive walking required to see the whole exhibition. Accounts of slavery here informed

[43] Darlene Goring, "The History of Slave Marriage in the United States," *The John Marshall Law Review* 39 (2006): 299.

visitors of daily life in enslavement. For instance, slave cabins depicted how enslaved people lived while archaeological evidence pointed to the agency of slaves to hunt, fish and own possessions. The exhibit also explained how enslaved people withstood bondage through means of resistance, built communities and families, in addition to maintaining African spiritual traditions. Despite these comprehensive illustrations of the enslaved experience, the slavery exhibit is visibly segregated from Jackson's mansion and accordingly is token in comparison with the historical narrative presented at the Hermitage.

The museum portion of the Hermitage barely raised the topic of slavery throughout its exhibitions about Jackson, but when it did, the presentation celebrated Jackson and Southern culture in the end. While these few descriptions may seem token as they afford slight attention to slavery in the historical narrative, they do not actually intend to tell the history of enslavement. Rather, the commentary accepts slavery as a part of everyday historical life and exonerates Jackson from his involvement. For instance, a panel listed an assortment of facts about the former President: In between noting that he was the second U.S. president to be photographed and how his pet parrot spoke profanities at his funeral, the Hermitage included that Jackson never freed any of the people he enslaved. Situated in the middle of these insignificant details, slavery becomes reduced to a minor element in Jackson's life. Even more, the Hermitage acknowledged how "slavery remained a pervasive part of American society… under Jackson's presidency. Nevertheless, Jackson helped to inspire a uniquely American sense of promise and hope – that anyone could succeed through hard work and natural ability, rather than through unearned power and privilege." The Hermitage again addressed the institution of slavery but without the intentions to actually include it in the historical narrative. This interpretation referred to slavery not as a token to illustrate the inclusivity and diversity of the Hermitage.

Quite the opposite, it fundamentally commemorated Jackson as a national idol, vindicating his enslavement and oppression of other people. Southern culture continues to be celebrated as a result of such exhibits.

All historical sites in the U.S. do not necessarily involve Presidents. If tourists wish to learn about American history devoid of politics, they might visit Shirley Plantation in Virginia. Before entering the mansion, the guide began the visit on the steps. She explained the origins of the house, including that enslaved Africans and indentured servants built the structure, in addition to the neighboring brick buildings used as a smokehouse, icehouse, kitchen, and accommodations for enslaved people. Immediately, she acquainted slavery with Shirley Plantation. But only mentioning the existence of slavery and simply pointing to slave dwellings does not fully address the experience of enslavement at the site. Once inside, she painted a historical scene: Where visitors stood in the foyer, the family welcomed their guests through the front door. "The enslaved" used the side door, to enter and exit the house. Again, remarks about slavery emerged throughout the Shirley Plantation home, but these comments remained perfunctory. Additionally, the reference to enslaved people as "the enslaved" simplifies the experience of slavery. It strips away the identity of slaves as individual humans and reduces them into a homogenous group.

Centering on the white families who lived and resided on Shirley Plantation, the tour takes visitors through the mansion, stopping in each room to discuss the lives of the people whose portraits hang on the wall. At the painting of Dr. Robert Carter, the guide revealed that he rejected Shirley Plantation as his inheritance because he refused to own slaves. Thus, Dr. Carter served as the token family member opposed to personally owning other human beings. Whether

he condemned the institution of slavery as a whole or identified as an abolitionist is unclear, but nonetheless, the site attempted to diversify its historical narrative by including this anecdote about a man who objected enslavement. This fact demonstrates to visitors that Shirley Plantation tries to be inclusive. However, the cursory mention of Dr. Carter's opposition to slavery left out the broader history of abolition and other ways in which people fought against slavery. Briefly noting Dr. Carter gives some attention to slavery but ultimately does not fully include slavery into Shirley Plantation's historical narrative. Rather, it is another example of tokenism.

The exhibit dedicated to slavery at Shirley Plantation further highlights its desultory inclusion. Located in a drafty brick building with clear indications of weather damage, visitors might choose to opt out of exploring this presentation of slavery. Some panels with information dotted the walls, but the bulk of the information detailing the experience of enslaved people at Shirley Plantation was found on 8.5 x 11-inch computer paper, laminated and placed into a plastic, three-ring binder. Clearly, the site afforded a small amount of resources to telling the history of slavery. The existence of this exhibition suggests that Shirley Plantation does incorporate slavery into its historical narrative, while the physically uncomfortable environment and lack of care devoted to presenting slavery discourages visitors from actually looking at the exhibit. As a result, the exhibit serves as a token of the slave experience.

Discussions of slavery are fleeting at Shirley Plantation and therefore they may all seem token. However, deeper consideration exposes how these descriptions of slavery uphold narratives defending Southern culture. For example, the tour guide paused at the portrait of Charles Carter to explain that he owned the most slaves in Virginia at one time, by enslaving almost 200 men, women and children. She stressed the economic value of enslaved people but failed to provide a human or social aspect of slavery, centering the narrative on Carter.

Accordingly, this was not an effort to enhance Shirley Plantation's historical narrative with the history of slavery. Instead, the reference to enslaved people simply helped to emphasize the great wealth of the slave owner. Fixating on his profits and economic status in Virginia, the site commemorated Carter's success despite its basis in the exploitation of slave labor. As a consequence, this historical narrative championed Southern culture. Descriptions of life in enslavement, offered in the binder at the slave exhibit, similarly use Lost Cause language to illustrate slavery as a benevolent and paternal institution. For instance, one page read that "slaves were provided basic provisions such as shoes, blankets and food. Hill Carter also encouraged his slaves to supplement their allotments with their own garden plots, fruit trees, and laying hens." This account portrays Hill Carter as a caring slave master that supported the well-being of the people who he enslaved and puts slavery in a less cruel light. However, Eulanda A. Sanders summarized how the cheap and uncomfortable textiles for enslaved people both physically irritated them in addition to marking their degraded status as slaves in the social hierarchy.[44] Also, Frederick Douglass recounted how slave owners issued insufficient food rations. "I have often been so pinched with hunger, that I have fought with the dog – 'Old Nep' – for the smallest crumbs that fell from the kitchen table, and have been glad when I won a single crumb in the combat," he revealed.[45] As a result, African Americans in bondage were forced to grow or raise their own food in order to survive. Evidently, Shirley Plantation's interpretations of the slave experience engage with a Southern charm narrative and dilute the harsh realities of slavery. Beyond tokenism, such historical narratives celebrate Southern culture at the expense of the people it subjugates.

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[44] Eulanda A. Sanders, "The Politics of Textiles Used in African American Slave Clothing," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* (2012): 6.
[45] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan: 1855), 75.

Journeying into the Deep South, visitors can experience other historical sites that center exclusively on the history of slavery. The Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, as an example, devotes itself entirely to educating visitors about the historical origins of slavery throughout the world and relating the lives and experiences of enslaved people. This plantation frankly makes its central subjects known: When a visitor wondered about the white people who lived in the main house, the tour guide replied that he would not discuss the big house because the Whitney revolves around slaves. Even further, the guide recognized the marginalization of slavery and tokenism at neighboring plantations. He told visitors how many of these sites, a few located just down the road from the Whitney, emphasize the beautiful mansions and employ portrayals of Southern charm while diluting the presence of slavery and referring to enslaved people as "workers." The Whitney's presence, the guide asserted, forced other sites to be more truthful and inclusive in their presentations of slavery. Accordingly, the site takes it upon itself to undo the subjugation of the history and memory of enslaved people at plantations.

The Whitney utilizes the slave narratives gathered by the Federal Writers' Project, a division in the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a New Deal era program which employed reporters to interview and record the experiences of formerly enslaved people. As a result of the wealth of these testimonies, the Whitney is filled with the voices of slaves. For instance, visitors receive passes that include excerpts from the African Americans who related their time in enslavement to the Federal Writers' Project. Wearing these lanyards around their necks, visitors carry these firsthand accounts with them throughout the guided tour and even off of the plantation as souvenirs when returning to contemporary society. In addition, numerous statues of enslaved children are dispersed across the entire plantation. It is difficult to be out of sight of

one of these "Children of the Whitney," representing the enslaved people who were children when the U.S. formally abolished slavery in 1865. Consequently, visitors are continuously reminded of the central theme of the Whitney-- telling the stories of enslaved people.

The Whitney delivers a comprehensive and nuanced presentation of slavery. "The Wall of Honor," a monument made of granite slabs and engraved with the names, birthdates and origins of slaves on record, reveals diverse African heritages. For instance, visitors learn that Bernard, born in 1769, belonged to the Kiamba Nation while Sam, born ten years earlier, came from the Soso Nation. Expanding on the humanity of Africa, the guide elaborated on the skills enslaved Africans brought to the U.S. As expert rice growers, Mina people transferred this knowledge to the rice fields of Louisiana. Similarly, members of the Paula Nation brought their livestock expertise across the Middle Passage. Referencing these African origins and facilities, the guide reminded visitors that Africa was not simply a "dark continent," comprised of unsophisticated societies. In contrast, he highlighted the skillfulness Africans practiced over Europeans in certain sectors of agriculture and farming. Additionally, the various nations and ethnic groups reinforced the humanity of enslaved Africans and their descendants, as they each connected to different cultures and traditions. The Whitney therefore deeply explored slavery in its guided tour.

The historical narrative also included tragic stories to relate the experience of enslaved people. Utilizing the WPA slave narratives, the site described how the domestic slave trade caused African American women to become targets of rape and sexual assault, in order to multiply the enslaved population and meet the human demands that plantations required to operate. A quote from a former slave, named Pauline read: "My ma had fifteen children and none of them had the same pa. Every time she was sold she would get another man." She laid

bare how enslaved women endured gendered violence, as a result. Furthermore, Mrs. Webb recounted the brutality of her time in enslavement. She remembered how one master would "place a disobedient slave, standing, in a box, in which there were nails placed in such a manner that the poor creature was unable to move. He was powerless even to chase the flies or sometimes, ants crawling on some parts of his body." Mrs. Webb provided a candid story about the cruelty of slavery. Consequently, the Whitney does not shy away from such narratives, but rather emphasizes them as first-hand accounts that let formerly enslaved people tell their perspectives of slavery.

No part of the Whitney utilizes a slave experience as tokenism. Rather, slavery is entrenched in its historical narrative as the exhibits and tour centrally revolves around enslaved people and their diverse lives.

In conclusion, Monticello's "Slavery Tour," the disconnect between the "Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibit and Montpelier, Alfred of the Hermitage and the three-ring binder at Shirley Plantation have all demonstrated the facets of tokenism as described by King. Tokenism in the visitor experience has diminishing impacts on collective memory. For instance, slavery displays are cast off to the margins or hidden below the domain of the white and Presidential families. Such physical sidelining shows the exclusion and disregard of slavery in the collective memory constructed by the plantations. In addition, visitors can easily bypass their interaction with these exhibits. The removed locations of presentations of slavery not only physically distance visitors from this history, but also detach the history of slavery from collective memory.

Even more, perfunctory comments about the slave experience lack the scope to fully illustrate slavery. Often these remarks minimize slavery to its connection to the Presidents or white proprietors of the plantation, reinforcing the relegation of slavery in collective memory. Additionally, personalizing and focusing on just one token enslaved person inadequately represents the entire institution of slavery. Visitors walk away with an extremely limited understanding of life in enslavement, as a consequence.

Token slavery allows plantations to put forward a pretense of a diverse historical narrative. As King clarified, the use of token slavery eliminates any pressure against the sites to insert African American history. The slightest mention of slavery or an enslaved person is enough to satisfy the appearance of inclusivity, despite how superficial or thorough the description. Therefore, tokenism allows sites to get away with shallow representations of enslaved life that reinforce the marginalization of slavery in collective memory.

Consequently, visitors of these sites unknowingly re-learn what American collective memory has already taught them. This highlights the dangers of tokenism. Tourists encounter slavery in the historical narratives of the plantations and accordingly believe their understanding of the past has been amplified with the history of slavery. However, because tokenism works as a guise, visitors do not realize the limits of the information they absorbed from the tour guide or the exhibitions. Visitors then think that their work is finished, as they have enhanced their understanding of slavery and like King explained, can end the process of attending to the topic again. Once the door is closed on slavery, reckoning with this ugly period in U.S. history is also cut short. Therefore, tokenism halts any endeavors to truly wrestle with the history of slavery and eventually reconcile with it.

Avoiding tokenism, The Whitney Plantation purposefully fixated on the history of slavery. The tour guide honestly defined the site's motive to exclusively tell the lives and experiences of enslaved people: "This history is not taught in school. It's glossed over. So, tours like this are important," he said, revealing how the Whitney attempted to bring slavery into American collective memory. Furthermore, the guide implied that this perspective was important because it also encouraged a reckoning with slavery, something that the U.S. lacks. The next chapter will consider why this point is so important for collective memory.

Conclusion

After the guided tour at the Whitney, a visitor felt unsettled by what he had just learned. He articulated his discomfort to the guide and asked, "How do you do this? How do you tell all these terrible stories?" The guide replied, "I do this because people need to know this history. The people who come here and know the least about slavery are Americans." With this response, the tour guide recognized several themes. He first identified the role of museums and plantations to influence visitors' understanding of the past. Secondly, the guide acknowledged slavery is largely absent from American collective memory. Finally, he expressed an urgency to candidly confront the history of slavery.

Forming collective memory involves more than simply thinking of the past or learning about history in the classroom. Museums and plantations construct a historical memory that in turn influences the collective memory of its visitors. Therefore, the visitor experience—the physical and mental experience of engaging with and walking back into history at historical sites—has significant consequences for how Americans remember the past and think about who they are as a nation.

This thesis has accounted for three types of collective memory emerging from visitors' experiences at museums and plantations. One category transpires from places such as the Hermitage and Shirley Plantation. These sites commit the bare minimum attention to the history of slavery. If slavery is addressed, the comments are brief in number and detail, its exhibits physically sit on the peripheries or the benevolent and paternal narratives justify enslavement. Accordingly, the Hermitage and Shirley plantation subdue slavery in collective memory. They instead make room for celebrations of the Southern "way of life," a culture based on white

supremacy that considered the convention of slavery and its subsequent inequalities necessary for society.

Sites like Monticello and Montpelier work a little harder than the Hermitage and Shirley Plantation to incorporate slavery into their historical memory. For instance, the Monticello tour guide especially pushed visitors to rethink Jefferson and his involvement in the paradox of liberty. Montpelier's "Mere Distinction of Colour" exhibition thoroughly interpreted enslaved life and the institution of slavery, and even reminded guests of its lasting and contemporary legacies. Both Presidential sites do not explicitly honor Southern culture, either. However, Monticello and Montpelier tell celebratory stories of these Founding Fathers. Discussions about slavery in guided tours are fleeting and superficial while exhibits depicting the experiences of enslaved people are cast off to the margins as second thoughts. In the long run, slavery is sacrificed so the sites can relate the genius of Jefferson and Madison as the underlying historical memory. These in-between sites rank close to intermediate on the scale of incorporating slavery into the collective memory of Americans. Without a doubt, visitors walk away understanding slavery as a conflicting feature of U.S. history, but the token slave narratives cause this understanding to be minimal, and thus, diminish slavery in collective memory. Additionally, Jefferson and Madison are ultimately commemorated as champions of the American nation founded on principles of liberty and equality. Tourists comfortably leave with the reinforced belief that the U.S. epitomizes freedom and justice, reflecting that narrative into collective memory. As a result, collective memory is one-sided and upholds whiteness as the standard for remembering the past.

Finally, NMAAHC, EJI's Legacy Museum and the Whitney Plantation challenge hegemonic whiteness and fully integrate slavery into American collective memory. Their

historical narratives center around African American experiences and perspectives almost exclusively. These sites urge visitors to reconsider how the U.S. is as a nation. For example, historical accounts of African Americans interpreting liberty for themselves highlight how American values of freedom and equality do not necessarily apply to all people, weaving the paradox of liberty into collective memory. Furthermore, the sites contradict narratives depicting slavery as a benign and paternal institution. Numerous stories describe the mental and physical traumas of life in enslavement, including the painful separations of families, sexual assault and bodily punishment. The collective memory which manifests includes thorough recollections of slavery. In addition, visitors cannot escape the history of slavery throughout these museums and plantations. Its omnipresence materializes in guided tours, exhibits, artistic representations; it is everywhere. Consequently, the inextricable presence of slavery extends into collective memory, as NMAAHC, EJI and the Whitney fasten the history of slavery into U.S. history. Even more, these unavoidable reminders of slavery press visitors to come face to face with this history. The sites embrace the uncomfortable subjects in order to prompt its guests to honestly reckon with the history of slavery. NMAAHC, EJI and the Whitney do not want tourists to return home and wash their hands of slavery, but encourage them to bravely recognize the harsh details of the institution, its historical legacies, and then to reconcile with the history of slavery.

As this thesis has demonstrated, historical sites create a visitor experience that shapes how its guests understand slavery and informs the collective memory of slavery in the U.S. Collective memory matters because it communicates the identity and obligations of the American people today. Based on the past, Americans determine the values they adhere to and how to follow through with them. How the U.S. remembers its history, or what shows up in collective memory, therefore influences present-day America. Even more, Blight recognized

how memory is "an important modern instrument of power."[46] Accordingly, collective memory carries consequential influence with its ability to foster, defend or combat the actions of contemporary society. And groups exercise this power by employing a certain historical memory to advance their motivations, as Norkunas pointed out.[47] Consequently, this memory translates to a biased collective memory, as just one group sustains their values. Places such as the Hermitage and Shirley Plantation have such one-sided and harmful effects. Honoring Southern culture at the expense of the history of slavery, the plantations justify and even motivate a narrative grown out of white supremacy that has dehumanized and oppressed African Americans. Furthermore, the historical memory of these sites acquiesces to or endorses structural inequality and racism today.

At Monticello and Montpelier, visitors think they learned about slavery and understand it. These plantations do not cause tourists to feel uneasy in their visitor experience or thoughts, but comfortably reinforces limited comprehensions of the enslaved experience. Such lack of knowledge and the subsequent collective memory deficient in slavery carry implications into the present day. This is why there is a disproportionate number of African Americans living in poverty, incarcerated, suffering from health issues and being killed at the hands of the police. These sites maintain Americans' ignorance that inequality is built into the structure of the nation. Delegates to the Constitutional Convention argued over slavery and eventually, the institution was codified, though not by name, into America's legal foundation. Moreover, slavery was such a significant feature of American life that the Civil War erupted because the U.S. could not agree on its social, economic and structural implications. South Carolina's 1860 Ordinance of Secession plainly vindicated its withdrawal because of "an increasing hostility on the part of the

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46 Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," 25.
47 Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory*, 97.

non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery…"[48] But due to slavery's absence in national collective memory, Americans do not see modern day inequalities as consequences of history. Furthermore, Americans do not feel obligated to address these injustices as such.

Evidently, the United States lacks a reckoning with its history of slavery but urgently needs one. That is why historical sites like NMAAHC, EJI and the Whitney are crucial to encouraging visitors to wrestle with the history of slavery, recognize its modern-day legacies and take action against them. By candidly embracing uncomfortable stories, the sites explain how contemporary inequalities did not happen by chance, but rather, historical decisions created the world in which we live in today. EJI specifically calls for a national reconciliation with slavery. Intimately reconciling with this history and all of its ugliness, America can begin to address inequality and offer solutions based on historical contexts. Perhaps this also motivates to visitors consider their role in creating history and inspires them to move through the world with consideration to the historical legacies their actions will leave.

[48] Gillman, Graber and Whittington, *American Constitutionalism*, 326.

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