

**Pride and Prejudice: The Historic Interpretation of Slavery at the Homes of Five
Founding Fathers**

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Background and Rationale.....	5
Chapter 3: Issues.....	11
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	20
Chapter 5: George Washington's Mount Vernon.....	23
Chapter 6: John Adams' Peace field.....	34
Chapter 7: Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.....	41
Chapter 8: James Madison's Montpelier.....	52
Chapter 9: James Monroe's Ash-Lawn Highland.....	62
Chapter 10: Conclusions and Suggestions.....	67
References.....	83
Appendices.....	85

Chapter 1: Introduction

Museums have always been a source for public knowledge and have a great deal of power in their authoritative presentation of information. After all, museums are some of the highest ranking sources of trustworthy historical information (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998), and historic house museums are no exception.

Many of the homes of historical figures from the American Founding Era¹ have been converted into museums, open for public exploration. Arguably the most popular sites, based on yearly visitation, are the homes of the Founding Era presidents, or Founding Fathers: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. At the homes of these great men, their lives and legacies are celebrated, and the homes themselves serve as important symbols on the American political and ideological landscape.

The American Founding Era was, without doubt, an exceptionally important part of the formation of the nation that we know today. While the study and celebration of the Founding Fathers is certainly an integral part of our national culture and heritage, these men were not the only ones who shaped the nation. Traditionally, at the historic homes of these men, the interpretive information presented revolves around the associated Founder, making it seem as though the Founders were the only, or at least the most important, agents in shaping the fledgling nation.

The Founders themselves all had in common a status of wealthy White male, which is what was (and is still) the hegemonic trifecta of qualities essential for establishing powerful rule in the United States. "Hegemony," according to Orlowski (2012), "refers to the ideal representation of the interests of the privileged groups as

¹ This is a term I borrow from the University of Virginia Press, who uses the term to describe the time period that encompasses both the Colonial and Revolutionary Eras.

universal interests, which are then accepted by the masses as the natural political and social order" (2). The Founding Fathers, as part of the privileged group during the Founding Era, have also had their histories privileged through time, reflected in the relatively isolated style of interpretation at historic house museums. That is, the history presented at the historic homes of the Founders tends to tightly revolve around the Founder himself, effectively isolating him (and his story) from the other people who lived with him.

There were many other people besides the Founding Fathers who lived on their estates, and by extension, actively and equally sculpted the United States. This large group of people that did not have the qualities of the hegemonic trifecta (middle- and lower-class people, people of color, and women), shaped history just as much as the Founders. Though since they were (and are) not part of the privileged group, their histories are, as a result, not as privileged, well-preserved, or well-presented at these historic house museums.

The particular non-hegemonic group of focus for this study are those that were enslaved during the American Founding Era, and more specifically, those who worked on the plantations owned by the Founders.² This entire class of humans was considered chattel, or property to be moved about and used at the owner's will. Being from the lowest class, the histories of enslaved people have traditionally fallen to the wayside, though there has arguably been an increased interest in exploring and reviving these histories as the New Social History emphasizes study of "individuals and groups that were marginalized in more conventional historical studies" (Weir, 2007: 576). Even though the New Social History has increased the interest in the "complexity, nuance, and multiple viewpoints" (Weir, 2007: 576) of historical narratives, I will argue that the

² It is true that John Adams did not own slaves, but slavery was still prevalent in Massachusetts and greater New England. Slavery is indeed interpreted at the home of John Adams, which is the primary justification for including his historic home in this report.

historical interpretations at the house museums of the Founding Fathers have not fully incorporated the perspectives acknowledged by the New Social History, specifically of those people who the Founding Fathers enslaved.

Because the interpretations of slavery at these historic homes of the Founding Fathers are lacking in nuance and complexity, I will further argue that the interpretations may present a skewed version of history for the visiting public, downplaying the brutality and moral, social, and legal entanglements of the institution of slavery. As a result of this skewed history, where the more shameful details of the Founding Era are downplayed, visitors may come away with an unwarranted, rose-colored view of the Era, which could potentially lead to what I will call a false nostalgia for the period.

It is important that this issue be addressed at these particular historic sites (and, by extension other historic sites that interpret slavery) because a false nostalgia for a time period is closely related to and can result in historical amnesia, where the more depressing details of slavery, and the people it affected, remain unacknowledged and highly undervalued to the effect of being collectively forgotten. Historical amnesia creates a great deal of problems, one of which is the undervaluing of the contributions made by those the Founding Fathers enslaved (and their later descendants) in the shaping of the nation as we know it today.

Through an examination of slavery at the homes of the first five presidents, I argue that historic site museums promote historical amnesia and false nostalgia for life during the Founding Era. While such museums may not be purposefully complicit in promoting historical amnesia, it is important that they actively and continuously work toward presenting more inclusive, nuanced histories for everyone who had historical ties to the site. I mean for this study to be a preliminary, proverbial litmus test for the current interpretations of slavery at the first five president's historic homes. It is my hope that it

will call to attention the need for further and more in-depth study into the messages that these sites are sending to the visiting public about slavery during the American Founding Era. By the end of the study, I hope that it will be clear that solutions are needed to address this problem, and I will offer a few overarching suggestions as well as suggestions for each site.

Chapter 2 gives the background and rationale for my project, using Eichstedt and Small's (2002) *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* as the main structural grounding. I explore in more detail many of the topics introduced in chapter 1.

In chapter 3, I cover a range of issues associated with the current interpretations of slavery at historic houses, particularly those of the historically prominent and revered Founding Fathers. I explore some of the ways that false nostalgia is promoted at Founding Era historic sites, arguing that the five historic homes in this study can be loci for this promotion.

In chapter 4, I thoroughly describe the methodology I used to complete the project, discussing the specifics of the questions I am looking to answer in my study.

Chapters 5 through 9 describe my experiences visiting each site, with a chapter devoted to each site. In these chapters, I focus in particular on the interpretive presentations of slavery, analyzing the information provided, and considering if it promotes false nostalgia for the Founding Era.

Finally, in chapter 10, I present my conclusions, indicating whether my hypothesis has been proven or disproven. I also present the limitations of the study as well as give suggestions for changes that the sites could make in order to present a more nuanced and inclusive history of the Founding Era.

The appendices list supplemental information about the sites: yearly schedules and ticket prices.

Chapter 2: Background and Rationale

Ironically, visitors' interests in history is not equaled by their knowledge of history.

- Cameron and Gatewood, 2000: 108

The quote above succinctly states the problems that historic sites face in developing their interpretative programming. As I will show, museums have great power to both display and shape ideologies (see Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp et al, 1992; Handler and Gable, 1997; Conlan and Levin, 2010). Through interpretive presentations, historic sites indicate where they fall on the ideological map and also promote those ideologies (knowingly or otherwise) to the public: "that which social groups or institutions choose to remember, overlook, obliterate, erase, and/or silence is influenced and influences their social order and the socio-political relations that govern their existence" (Buzinde and Santos, 2008: 471). This phenomenon is indeed true for slavery, where the information provided by the site gives a snapshot of its understanding, perspective, and opinion about slavery.

The five sites in this study, as the homes of the first five presidents, all have a great amount of cultural significance bound up in them, involving ideas about the founding of the nation that we live in today, creating the democracy that we participate in today, and serving as a physical reminder (and for some, a type of shrine) of those Founders that put pen to paper, ball to musket, and hoe to earth to form the United States. As such, these kinds of "sites often represent national identities to both domestic and international publics and much like the mass media, serve as a means through which national and international publics learn about themselves and others" (Buzinde and Santos, 2008: 484). These sites tend to be celebratory in nature and serve to reinforce the collective memory of the Founding Fathers as the original patriots. In contestation

with collective memory is "collective amnesia" (Timothy and Boyd, 2006) the same concept as Eichstedt and Small's (2002) "social forgetting," and historical amnesia introduced in chapter 1, where the metanarrative of the founding of the United States fails to seriously or comprehensively include the history of slavery and the enslaved people that were also part of the formation of this nation (also putting pen to paper, ball to musket, and hoe to earth).

However, because collective memory is, in the end, socially constructed, museums take part in that construction through their interpretive presentations, where the Founding Fathers tend to be inflated to a glorified status, generally at the expense of the other people who were also present at the sites. Buzinde and Santos state it more eloquently: "the end result is an engineering of collective memory that discursively manifests within master commemorative narratives, celebrating dominant value systems while concurrently marginalizing subaltern histories" (2008: 470). Orłowski's (2010) definition of hegemony discussed in chapter 1 is related to this idea, where the wealthy White male perspective is universally valued, naturalized, and becomes the perspective by which collective memory is shaped. I would argue that museums reflect and help shape collective memory, which speaks to their great power in being able to perpetuate or change the *status quo* of the valuation of history and memory.

Tourists visit heritage sites for a variety of reasons, "the usual sorts" of which are "fun and relaxation, aesthetic pleasure, and information and knowledge" (Cameron and Gatewood, 2000: 109). However, sometimes visitors also want a more emotional and personal experience, where they can connect on a deeper level with the site (McCain and Ray 2003). Cameron and Gatewood (2000) found that this emotional connection with heritage sites sometimes becomes a "transcendental experience that people can have in contact with a historical site or object at an exhibit," where visitors have "a visceral or emotional response to an earlier event or time," which the authors call a "numinous"

experience (110). In the same study, they also found that the Colonial and Revolutionary War eras are clear favorites among visitors for their preferred sites, as well as homes of famous people. Taken together, these visitor preferences corroborate the high visitation levels of the sites in this study and thus warrant further exploration of their interpretive presentations, due to the sheer numbers of people who come in contact with these interpretations per year.

Cameron and Gatewood argue that the numinous impulse can create nostalgia, where the spiritual kind of view afforded to heritage sites by some visitors creates a sense of awe or reverence for the time period represented at the site. While this motivation may not represent that of all visitors, it is important to consider because it is one of the avenues for the promotion of a false nostalgia for the Founding Era. There are myriad other tourist motivations, but this kind of emotional connection with the site speaks to "the appeal of colonial sites," Cameron and Gatewood say, "for they represent the furthest going back in American history (although not the history of the continent) and, thus, a remote time. That period is also characterized by human-scale communities, artisanal work, and an organic connection with people and nature, features that are viewed as missing in modern life" (2000: 122). Nostalgia is heavily informed by emotion, so it makes perfect sense that looking to emotionally connect with a site could lead to nostalgia for the time period it represents.

It is clear that visitors come to historic sites with motives and reasons for their visit, before even setting foot on the site. Because these "motives and reasons for visiting heritage sites are [are] theoretically linked to the various meanings assigned to the site by individuals," (Poria et al., 2006: 319), those that already have nostalgia for the Founding Era, assigned by notions about its presumed simplicity (by which I mean smaller-scale lifestyles and artisanal pursuits), may visit sites to have their nostalgia reinforced. But I am arguing that this nostalgia is unfounded, false. The Founding Era

was just as socially complex and problematic as our contemporary era; people simply had different problems, "which, from the distance of time, seem less disturbing" (Blomster, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

There is certainly nothing wrong with fondly looking back on a time when communities were on a smaller scale and products and lifestyles were more artisanal, but it must be remembered that the Founding Era was also a time when it was economically and socially acceptable to own other human beings. This feature of the period is a significant part of why I consider nostalgia for the Founding Era unwarranted. The fledgling nation was not a simpler place, especially not for those who had no rights or control over their own bodies or lives. I argue that the way sites interpret the history of the Founding Era, especially in the interpretation of slavery, can promote the kind of false nostalgia I have described.

Over the course of five years, from 1996 to 2001, Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small conducted a study of 122 sites that were historically plantations but are now open to tourists (what they call "plantation museums"), mostly in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana. They were interested in the interpretations of slavery at these sites and sought to conduct "a systematic analysis of the strategic rhetorics that are employed by plantation museums to manage, and in most cases confine to oblivion, the system of slavery and the presence of those enslaved" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002: 2). They found that sites generally fell into four categories of interpretation of slavery: 1) symbolic annihilation and erasure, 2) trivialization and deflection, 3) segregation and marginalization of knowledge, and 4) relative incorporation. A few of the sites were deemed "in-between" if they straddled categories.

Symbolic annihilation and erasure occurs in interpretations that suggest "that slavery and people of African descent literally were not present or were not important enough to be acknowledged" (Eichstedt and Small 2002: 105). The authors enumerate

various interpretive tactics that reflect symbolic annihilation and erasure such as perfunctory inclusion of information on slavery, the use of euphemisms when referring to enslaved people or slavery, use of the passive voice in interpretations, universalizing, and making ahistorical statements. Trivialization and deflection comes in a variety of forms: portraying slavery as a benevolent institution; promoting the tropes of the happy or grateful slave, loyalty after emancipation, and untrustworthy slaves; and valorizing Whiteness by advancing narratives of the good owner, Whites as hard workers, and contemporary Whites as "slaves." When sites have separate tours or exhibit areas where slavery is the focus, Eichstedt and Small consider it a display of segregated knowledge, which "limits the exposure that the public has to this knowledge and reinforces the importance and normalcy of learning only a white-centric view of history" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002: 170). Finally, sites that employ relative incorporation "demonstrate that there has been an obvious effort to incorporate issues regarding slavery and those enslaved throughout the interpretive locations that a visitor might attend at a given site" (Eichstedt and Small 2002: 203).

For Eichstedt and Small, these interpretive tactics serve to "tell a story of American history that centers around whites, males, and elites, and that these sites erase or minimize the presence, labor, and lives of enslaved Africans and African Americans" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002: 4). The resulting distortion of the history of slavery can paint an inaccurate picture of the Founding Era and may cause the false nostalgia described above. I aim to study the interpretations of slavery at the five chosen sites using Eichstedt and Small's analytic tactics. And I will take the analysis one step further than Eichstedt and Small in attempting to determine if the respective interpretations of slavery are promoting a false nostalgia for the Founding Era.

This set of five sites, based on visitation numbers, are some of the most popular historic houses in the United States, especially from the Founding Era. The significant

amount of knowledge production and transmission about slavery warrants analysis, which is why I have chosen to undertake this study. Understanding the contemporary state of the interpretation of slavery can promote awareness for historic sites on how their interpretations are shaping the metanarrative of the founding of the nation.

Chapter 3: Issues

Related to those problems enumerated by Eichstedt and Small in the previous chapter, there are issues that arise from the interpretation of slavery at historic sites. In this chapter, I discuss some of those issues in detail, highlighting how they may affect the message that the visitor takes away and increasing the chance of fostering a false nostalgia for the Founding Era.

The Self-Selection of Historical Data

Historians, archaeologists, and curators have the behemoth task of understanding the layers of complexity of their primary sources.³ Then, they must choose what they believe is important for the public to know about the site and the people who lived and worked there. In both of these tasks, there is a tendency to focus the most research energy on data that relates directly to the planter and his White family members: their house, their possessions, their pastimes, and their lifestyles. Because there is usually so much data about the White owners to be continuously processed and understood, studying data regarding the enslaved people of the plantation may fall to the wayside, thus leaving less interpretive material to be included at the site.

³ In considering primary sources, it must be remembered that the study of history is, effectively, studying what people chose to record. Understanding this phenomenon is important because it negates the view that there is "one indisputable true history," which rests on the framework that "facts" and "artifacts" can speak for themselves, not needing the interpretation of a historian (Nash et al., 1997:11). What people choose to record is informed by a whole host of factors, one of which is the set of ideologies that exist within the person doing the recording as well as the set of ideologies present in his or her particular environment. Historian E.H. Carr somewhat facetiously (though aptly) noted that an historical record can be any number of things: "what the author of the document thought--what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought" (Carr, 1961: 16). The job of the historian is to decipher the intention of the recorder and only then come to a conclusion about the "facts" themselves. Adding another layer, historical "facts" are "restricted by the number of documents that have survived floods, fires, and the trash barrel" (Nash et al., 1997: 9). These proverbial pieces of the history puzzle that are missing make it more challenging to get a complete picture of a historical person, place, or event.

This comparatively small amount of data about the enslaved people at the site may cause the visitor to assume that the White owner and his family lived in relative solitude inside their house, only occasionally needing to interact with those they enslaved. The image of enslaved life on the periphery of White planter life may relegate the enslaved people, in the visitor's conception, to the periphery of American history, creating the image that the Founding Era was an easier, simpler, more pleasant time on which to look with fondness and longing.

When it comes to the historic interpretation at these sites, the lack of information or documentation about enslaved people is sometimes used in interpretation as a way of avoiding talking about certain topics altogether. Rex Ellis clearly states this: "[t]oo often historic sites use the excuse that because they have suggestive, but not conclusive, evidence about a topic relating to minority history at their site, they cannot interpret or comment on the minority presence at all" (Ellis, 2002:67). For the interpretation of slavery, some interpreters will use the lack of information to their advantage in order to avoid potentially uncomfortable discussions about the horrors of human enslavement. Because visitors consider museum one of the most reliable sources for historical information (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998: 91), the interpreter, by extension, is considered an authority on the subjects that he or she discusses. If visitors consistently experiences interpreters who say that there is no demonstrative evidence about a certain aspect of slavery, they may begin to conclude that the information simply does not exist and is therefore unimportant, perhaps even to the larger story of America's formation.

Lack of Activity and the Human Element at the Interpretive Site

Noticeable at most sites is the lack of peopling or human activity, essentially creating a sterile landscape devoid of the human element and character of the time period that is being interpreted at the site. That is, the actual physical activity at the site is created solely by the visitors and employees present. The landscape becomes devoid of

the sights, smells, sounds, and activities that were characteristic of the site at its period of interpretation, creating an unrealistically bucolic version of the site.

The relative invisibility of those who care for the buildings and grounds belies the amount of labor necessary to keep the site running. Congruently, visitors may not necessarily consider the substantial amount of work done by those who were enslaved at the site in the past, effectively and problematically contributing to the historical amnesia about slavery introduced in the previous chapters.

Physical Site Layout

Contemporary historic interpretation at sites must cater to the placement of the buildings, gardens, and pathways that were original to the site, which may cause issues of accessibility. That is to say, a plantation owner may have wished to build quarters or workhouses for the enslaved people that were far removed (or sometimes even hidden) from the main house, and contemporary interpreters must deal with that placement. Because they may be hidden or relatively challenging to access, due to the original builder's plan, visitors may not be willing or able to experience this important piece of the site's history.

At an additional layer, outbuildings meant for use by enslaved people were usually not constructed out of the most sturdy of materials, and they have degraded over time, creating a lack of above-ground evidence (read: contemporary visible markers) of the outbuildings' existence. In the rare case that the outbuildings are intact at these historic sites, they are usually not the dwellings of the enslaved laborers but the buildings where the labor took place, such as a kitchen or a laundry house. And in the even-rarer case that the original dwellings are intact, they tend to be atypical of the dwellings that were common in the time period, being built from sturdier materials similar to those of the main house. I will elaborate more on this issue in the chapters that follow.

The number of outbuildings at the site may belie the amount of people who

worked the landholdings of the planter and his family. It must be remembered that when the Founding Fathers were living at these sites, the properties were significantly more expansive, many times comprised of thousands of acres. Over time, the original landholdings of the sites have significantly decreased due to various causes: the sale and purchase of tracts of land originally part of the plantation, the growth of trees and other natural elements, and the continuous construction of man-made structures. Because the historic site's total area has decreased through time, it may be a challenge for the visitor to understand that the main house and the proximal outbuildings were merely the main hub for these plantations. With those few thousand acres came the need to care for them, requiring many outbuildings scattered across the property, housing large numbers of enslaved individuals that remained effectively hidden (in the past and the present) from the main area of the house.

For this set of phenomena relating to site layout listed above, the problem arises when the visitor may not be aware of or able to see the outbuildings in which the enslaved people lived and worked. It may present the issue of "out of sight, out of mind:" if visitors cannot physically see or understand the interactions between the buildings (and thus lives) of the enslaved and the enslavers, they may come away with a distorted sense of the physical and historical landscape of the American Founding Era and a lack of understanding of the significant contributions of enslaved people to the shaping of the site, and by extension, American history. In addition, if visitors are not given the opportunity to fully comprehend the number of people laboring at the site solely to provide an elite lifestyle for the Founding Father in question, they also may not be able to consider the profound effect that slavery had on the majority of Black Americans in the Founding Era.

Making the Visitor Comfortable

At a very basic level, visitors are customers of the historic site's foundation that they visit. One of the responsibilities on the part of the historic site is to gain and retain its customer base. A way to accomplish this task is to make the visitor want to remain at and come back to the historic site, and making the visitor comfortable is part of that task. I will consider three levels of comfort that the historic site must take into account in order to create a pleasant experience for the visitor and influence repeat visits: physical comfort, mental comfort, and emotional comfort. Physical comfort for the visitor includes considerations such as the length of the tour, the site layout, accessibility, and the ease of movement through the main house. Mental comfort includes the amount of information provided to the visitor during an interpretive experience, whether guided or not. And finally, emotional comfort deals with the type of information provided during the interpretive experience. Each of these areas of comfort can be problematic and lead to a false understanding of the Founding Era.

In order for anyone to be able to take a tour at an historic site (including seniors, children, people with physical disabilities, people who are not able to stand for long periods of time, etc.), the tour cannot be too long. As such, the time allotted for interpretation during the tour is limited, which does not leave much room for discussing larger themes and concepts like slavery or its many intricacies. During the guided house tour, if the interpreter mentions slavery, it tends to be fleeting and related to an object or activity associated with the White family who owned the house (Eischstedt and Small, 2002).

In addition to the physical length of the tour, the tour movement through the house also has a bearing on the interpretive possibilities. The furnishings in the house are placed by the curators in a way to mimic where they would have been during the time that the owner was living there, but this placement of the objects must also

accommodate the tour through the house, leaving much more negative space than would have been in the house when it was actively being lived in. As such, there tends to be a rather sterile, simplified version of what it would have been like for the members of the household while they were living there. Similar to the quiet atmosphere created outside the house and across the grounds discussed earlier in this chapter, there is the same effect inside the house: if a visitor is not able to imagine the many sounds, smells, and activities inside the house (that intimately included enslaved people), it may lead to a sense that life during the Founding Era was much simpler, quieter, and generally more peaceful, potentially further leading to a false sense of nostalgia for the time period.

If the physical length of the tour limits the depth of information given on a tour, so does the human capability for information storage. When considering the mental comfort for visitors, the interpreter must understand that there are limits to how much information humans are able to process and remember in the amount of time allotted for a tour or site visit. Because of this, interpreters are often encouraged to use larger themes to weave a memorable narrative rather than simply listing a string of facts (Hamm, 1992). This results in a lack of opportunity to cover the complexity of the intertwined lives of those enslaved at the site. And once again, this lack of complex information about slavery may lead visitors to believe that it was not all that important to the functioning of the household -- and, writ large, to American history itself.

Finally, when viewing the visitor as a customer, the historic site's management understands that visitors come to historic sites not just for a learning experience but also for a leisure experience (Packer and Ballantyne, 2002). Quite frankly, when enjoying a leisure activity, people generally do not want to experience discomfort, and, by extension, emotional discomfort is something that visitors probably prefer to avoid when at an historic site.

The topics of human slavery and bondage cause emotional discomfort for many of the people who visit historic sites for a whole host of reasons. When viewing the visitor as a customer, it is usually not a goal to make him or her emotionally uncomfortable and risk losing future patronage. Thus, if the topic of slavery makes visitors uncomfortable and discomfort may lead to loss of customers, historic sites may be wary to delve very deeply into the topic of slavery, leaving out important details and information, possibly causing a lack of understanding about all of its complexities that created and shaped our nation. And when the past is perceived a less complex place, it is easy to have nostalgia for it, even if that nostalgia is unwarranted.

Interpretive Inconsistencies

At historic sites, the interpretive strategies regarding slavery vary, many of them potentially leading visitors to a sense of false nostalgia for the Founding Era.

While touring the main house, there is rarely any verbal indication that the White owners could live in the splendor that the visitors see *because* of forced slave labor. In addition, in an effort to bring the visitor into the narrative by using the tactic of indicating what they would have done had they been visiting during the time that owner of the house lived there, the interpreter tends to say phrases beginning with "you would have" or "if you were here" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002).

This tactic, what Eichstedt and Small call "universalizing," takes the perspective of a person who has the qualities of the hegemonic trifecta introduced in chapter 1: the wealthy White male. This use of "you," does not take into consideration that the people who do not have the trifecta of qualities "would have had" a completely different experience had they visited the site during the Founding Era. Using the hegemonic perspective to relate to visitors does not acknowledge the historical and contemporary complexities of race, class, and gender and leads to a simplified view of the past, which can further lead to a false nostalgia for a presumably simpler period in history.

When there is a separate tour offered that interprets slavery in greater detail, there may be an extra ticket fee, the tours may only be offered at certain times of day or certain seasons, or visitors may have time constraints (or any combination of the three) which decreases the ability of visitors to access a more complete understanding of life at the site. Additionally, while separate, more-focused tours do have their merits, they can problematically lead to a false view of history on the part of some visitors. Namely, separate tours about the lives of enslaved individuals at a site tend to self-select their participants. That is, a visitor who does not wish to acknowledge the brutality and complexities of slavery will more than likely not attend a separate tour about enslaved life or visit the designated outbuildings, decreasing the opportunity for understanding how slavery was a significant part of American history and increasing the opportunity to look back on the Founding Era with nostalgia.

The actual interpretive vocabulary used at the historic sites is also problematic. Eichstedt and Small note that using passive voice to describe labor tasks done by enslaved people is quite common at historic sites. This interpretive tactic minimizes and renders invisible the enslaved people who did the work being described, even if unintentionally.⁴ In addition, the actual words to describe enslaved people often seem to mask or improve the image of their circumstances; using words like "servant," "worker," or a more-ambiguous euphemism like "person," "woman," "man," "boy," "girl," (or similar) instead of "enslaved person" or "slave" is problematic because it "symbolically annihilates those who were enslaved and erases the reality of their experience" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002: 133). Use of this kind of softened interpretive vocabulary may cause visitors to assume that the experiences of enslaved people were not that

⁴ Eichstedt and Small do note that the use of passive voice is very common in the English language, which may have to do with its extensive use in historic interpretation.

terrible, which in turn causes a false understanding about the history and hardships of slavery and the Founding Era.

There is a general lack of complexity and depth when interpreting slavery, which leads to a lack of complexity and depth in being able to *understand* slavery. Just a few of the problems include (many indicated by Eichstedt and Small) only interpreting slavery at the specific historic site, avoiding the need to make any statements about the institution of slavery as a whole; framing slavery in terms of the specific Founder who owned the site, causing slavery to fall out of interpretive focus and serve as a mechanism for boosting the image of the particular Founder; the lack of discussion on the geographic and regional influences on the lives and culture of the enslaved people; and discourse focusing on resiliency and resistance on the part of enslaved people or individuals while avoiding the worst details.

As will be seen in the next five chapters, these issues find their way into each of the sites included in this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

I began my dedicated field research in the fall of 2012 and continued through the spring of 2013. Before that time, I had never before visited Peace field, Montpelier, or Ash-Lawn Highland. However, I had visited Mount Vernon on two previous occasions, and I worked as an historic interpreter at Monticello for nearly a year in 2011. Thus, I had done some informal and experiential research before beginning the dedicated fieldwork at the five sites, and I had also visited many other historic sites both before and during this study. My experience working at Monticello and also visiting other historic sites (both from the American Founding Era and otherwise) gave me an insight and institutional knowledge that proved useful in making comparisons, contrasts, and conclusions throughout my project.

My fieldwork took shape based on the question: "does the interpretation of slavery at the five study sites promote a sense of false nostalgia for the American Founding Era?". But that question was not formed all at once -- I arrived at it in various stages. As I learned more about museum interpretation, knowledge production and consumption, inclusive histories, systematic and institutional oppression and racism, American hegemonic ideologies, and the social production of race, gender, and class throughout graduate school, I began to re-evaluate my previous experience as an historic interpreter at Monticello. I started to understand that, while working as an interpreter, I had shouldered an enormous burden that I had never altogether appreciated: I had the power to shape visitors' ideas about incredibly broad and significant topics like American history and, thus, contemporary American and global society. And I also knew that Monticello, among other historic sites from the era of slavery, was once considered tight-lipped when it came to discussing slavery (though, as I will show, that is now changing rather rapidly).

I began to make the connection that not giving slavery its due attention in museum interpretation and the wider discussion of American history has helped shape perceptions about American history itself. Since ideas about American history directly translate into ideas about contemporary American culture and society, that was the moment when I understood that interpretations at historic sites have an impact on how visitors view and understand American history. More specifically, that the interpretation of slavery (or lack thereof) may produce a skewed understanding of, and potentially a false nostalgia for, the American Founding Era.

For this study, I wished to discover the amount and type of information (or, again, a lack thereof) about slavery provided during the average visitor experience at the five study sites. In order to study the average visitor experience, I had to become the average visitor. Thus, my project mostly relied on participant observation, where I visited the sites, took the main house tour, and participated other interpretive experiences where available (self-guided tours of outbuildings, galleries, films, brochures, etc.) which I discuss in further detail in the chapters dedicated to each site.

Because their study was structurally similar to mine, I modeled my fieldwork after Eichstedt and Small's (2002) project. However, where they wanted to visit as many sites as possible in order to gather statistical and quantitative data to supplement their qualitative, ethnographic data, I wanted to delve more deeply into a much smaller number of sites and understand how their entire narrative shaped the visitor experience. More specifically, Eichstedt and Small did a good deal of counting how many times a docent mentioned slavery or said a certain word, and while that tactic was useful in advancing *their* argument, I needed a slightly different tactic in order to advance *my* argument. I attempted to understand the bigger picture of the visitor experience at each site and how that could shape perceptions and understanding about slavery within the American Founding Era. Thus, I modeled my fieldwork on certain parts, not all, of

Eichstedt and Small's: visiting sites more than once in order to appreciate differences in content based on the guide, taking advantage of the varying interpretive experiences offered at each site, and avoiding engagement with interpreters, particularly about slavery in order to experience the "regular tour" (Eichstedt and Small 2002:19).

I visited each of the sites in Virginia at least twice and Adams' house in Massachusetts once, sometimes with a friend and sometimes alone. All of the sites have different guides giving each tour, and at most of the sites, the tour content differs considerably based on the particular interpreter. By visiting each of the Virginia sites more than once, I gained better insight into the average visitor experience.

During each site visit, I took notes and photographs (where allowed), attempting to capture the details of my experience, including direct quotes from interpreters or interpretive materials. Similar to Eichstedt and Small's experience, I did not particularly stand out while taking notes, since note-taking seems to happen fairly often at the sites. Simply stating that I was a graduate student tended to satisfy the inquiring minds that chose to ask or comment about my note-taking, and if probed further, I indicated that I was studying the interpretation at historic house museums. Taking notes may have affected the interpreter's tour to some degree, but I do not consider it to have been a serious limitation. I discuss the more serious limitations to my study in chapter 10.

In the following chapters, I describe my experiences at each of the sites in the study and note the places where the issues that I presented in chapter 3 manifested during my visits. For the most part, I paraphrase what interpreters said, but there are also times where I use direct quotes. This indicates when I captured a word or phrase that I considered particularly telling or representative of the kind of information that visitors experience. Occasionally, I also use photographs where they give a more accurate picture of what I could describe just with words.

Chapter 5: George Washington's Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, located in Mount Vernon, Virginia, about fifteen miles southwest of Washington, D.C., is the historic home of George Washington. Based on visitorship, it is the most popular site in this study, receiving about a million visitors a year (Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2013). It was restored and is maintained and operated by the non-profit organization, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, founded in 1853.

The main attraction of Mount Vernon is, of course, touring the house that George and Martha Washington lived in with their family. To tour the house, there is an \$18 fee for a single adult. On the signs that advertise the ticket prices and the other interpretive experiences offered, it is encouraged that the visitor also purchase an audio tour for \$6 and the official Mount Vernon guidebook for \$10, available at the visitor center's small merchandise area and also the much larger gift shop.

I purchased the guidebook on one of my visits, right before leaving the site, since it had a large amount of interpretive material related to the house and grounds. I noticed that in the guidebook, some of the information was exactly the same, if not very similar, to the information provided on the interpretive plaques across the grounds as well as the topics covered on each tour "stop." I wanted to use this information to make some conclusions about the interpretation of slavery at Mount Vernon, since the guidebook, due to its relatively low price compared to the amount of information included within, seemed like an item that many visitors would purchase and use. The audio tour is for use exploring the grounds, but I did not purchase it because, due to the amount of visitors that I could see using the audio tour, it did not seem to be part of the average visitor experience.

Before the House Tour

Visitors must have a ticket to enter the orientation center, which leads the mansion grounds. The orientation center's purpose is to, as its name indicates, orient visitors to the opportunities offered at the site. There are maps, an information desk, restrooms, a small gift shop, and two theatres in which the film "We Fight to be Free" is shown. The ticket has a house-entry time printed on it, which helps control the amount of people going through the house at any given time.

It is recommended by the staff working in the orientation center that visitors watch the "We Fight to be Free" film before going on the house tour, as an introduction to the themes and topics that will be presented in the house. Right before the film, a docent speaks to the seated audience about what they will see: a five-minute orientation from Pat Sajack for what visitors can do during their day, and a twenty-five-minute "action-adventure" segment centering on Washington's military endeavors.

Sajack's segment is actually more about what visitors can *buy* disguised by a presentation about what they can *do* during their visit to Mount Vernon. He is sure to highlight the features of the site that require additional spending, especially the Mount Vernon Inn restaurant, the gift shop, and return visits. During the segment, the sentence that most exemplifies my concern about the portrayal of slavery during the Founding Era, was one in which Sajack describes the other activities that are available, saying not to "miss the large brick building that housed slaves on one side and tropical plants on the other." In just this one statement, there lies the message that visitors should give the same level of consideration to slavery as they would to inanimate objects, "tropical plants on one side and tropical people on the other" (van Balgooy, personal communication, April 22, 2013). This is one of the rare mentions of slavery in this segment, other than the opportunity to visit the "serene slave memorial" and other visual cues of people dressed in period clothing and portraying enslaved workers. Sajack boasts that Mount

Vernon is really a "home to all of us," insinuating that everyone should feel a connection to and a sense of reverence for this home of the original Founding Father of our country.

The action-adventure segment is a dramatic short film that, like Sajack's portion, also symbolically erases and trivializes slavery. The entire point of the film is to celebrate Washington's military legacy and his subsequent rise to power as a leader of the nation, and slavery is not particularly emphasized because of the close, biographical focus on Washington himself. Actors portraying enslaved people are interspersed throughout the short film but are most prominent during the domestic scenes that are more oriented around Washington's family and romantic relationships. There is no vocal interaction with the enslaved people on the part of the White characters, even when Washington gives his coat to an enslaved butler or has a drink poured by an enslaved waiter. They are mostly shown standing in the corners of the rooms and walking around the mansion grounds: only enough to show that they were part of life at Mount Vernon, but lacking on any wider discussion of the highly complicated and contextual nature of slavery during the American Founding Era.

But enslaved people aren't the only marginalized group of color in the film. Though a detailed investigation is beyond the scope of this study, I find it important to briefly note the portrayal of Native Americans in the short film. At one point, there is a flashback to a battle of the French and Indian War, where Washington's troops join forces with British troops and Washington ultimately takes command of all the forces. The Native Americans, who Washington's troops are fighting against, surreptitiously lurk in the trees, waiting to attack. Once they do, their war calls ring out, and they fight against the rifles of Washington's forces with their own firearms and handmade weaponry. They are dark, savage, and wild, not portrayed as defending their homeland, but as viciously attacking the undeserving White forces. At another point in the film, Native Americans serve for one of the very few moments of comic relief: in a domestic

scene at a family gathering of Washington's White friends and family, a young boy asks about Washington's military prowess that he has heard about, saying with intrigue in his voice, "Have you killed Indians?" This got a laugh from the audience.

The title of the short film, "We Fight to be Free," comes from an impromptu speech by Washington, with his voice playing over dramatic and patriotic music and showing recreated scenes of the Revolutionary War. He claims, "There will be no defeat. This is *our* land; *our* country. Ours. It is for that which we fight. We fight to be free." This weighty quote serves to show Washington in all of his patriotic glory, but there are undertones of irony that are unfortunately drowned out by the louder patriotism. Who is Washington including and excluding when he says "our" and "we?" Who exactly gets to be "free" if the battle is won? Is the land for which this distinct group fights really theirs?

Once the film concludes, the audience is directed toward the door that leads to the path to the mansion and grounds. Because of the volume of visitors, the line to get into the house is usually quite long: on both of my visits, I waited approximately twenty minutes to go into the house once I entered the line.

Waiting in line gave me a good opportunity during each visit to observe the demographic makeup of the visitors. As might probably be guessed, the great majority of visitors are of European descent, and many come in family groups or adult couples of varying ages. I will discuss the implications of this demographic makeup as they relate to various parts of my experiences at the site.

The House Tour

The visitors are in a state of constant movement throughout the house tour, and the interpreters stand at stationary points and repeat the same commentary every few minutes for the newly entering visitors to hear. There is not much time to have questions answered because of the constant movement of the tour. However, since the movement of the tour is rather slow, it is not uncommon to hear the interpreter's commentary up to

three times in a row. There is very little variation each time the interpreter speaks, to the point that he or she will even use the same jokes each time through the approximately two-minute interpretation. It is clear that the interpreters use a basic script that they can vary slightly, but the amount of repetition that the interpreters must undergo causes many of them to use monotone and disinterested vocal expression.

Even though the house is so large with twenty-one rooms in all, the visitor actually sees very little of it, being able to physically stand in three of the dedicated rooms, mostly moving through foyers and having to look briefly into roped-off, furnished rooms while the interpreter speaks about them.

The first stop was an outbuilding to the left of the main house, and visitors travel through a sparsely furnished room and then move into the other room of the outbuilding, where an interpreter stands. On one occasion, the interpreter did not say how the building was used but instead indicated what visitors would be seeing next on the tour, mentioning the usual preservation rules, such as no candy or gum, photography, etc. A different interpreter described the room as the "Servant's Hall" and asked, "When you visited Mount Vernon, where would you stay?" The answer that visitors gave and that she supported was "in the house," which prompted her to add that "your servants would stay here, such as your coachman, butler, or personal maid." The interpreter's statement demonstrates several of the problems that I outlined in chapter 3.

First, the use of the word "servant" figures prominently in this part of the interpretation, most obviously from the name of the building, the "Servant's Hall." The interpreters do not make it clear whether this is an historical name for the building or not, but that fact hardly matters when the word "servant" is used in the contemporary interpretation of the building, symbolically annihilating the institution of slavery.

Second, the interpreter is attempting to bring the visitor into the narrative of the house function by describing what "you would have done" but uses the current

hegemonic visitor (wealthy, White) to make the connection. Eichstedt and Small call this tactic "universalizing," and it disguises the fact that there were indeed many people who would *not* have had the experience of having their "servants" stay in the Servant's Hall while they stayed in the house, which aids in painting a rather romanticized view of life at Mount Vernon but also during the American Founding Era.

Third, using neutral euphemisms like "coachman" or "personal maid" also fails to bring attention to the fact that these "servants" were most probably enslaved and serves to further symbolically annihilate slavery. It leaves it only to chance that the visitor might imagine that the coachman or personal maid were enslaved rather than explicitly stating this probability.

The tour then moves into the main house, where there are but few other mentions of slavery. In the upstairs foyer, for example, the interpreter spoke about the large number of guests that stayed at Mount Vernon and the work required to take care of them all. According to the interpreter, there were "ten to twelve slaves in the house: Molly and Caroline were two ladies who worked on this floor," and they "did your laundry, stoked your fire," and took "care of you in any way they could, keeping in mind there is no plumbing or air conditioning." Just in this short interpretation, there are several problems.

For one, the interpreter only uses the first names of the enslaved women, which contrasts with the use of both firsts and last names of all of the White people mentioned during my tour(s). The use of first names only for enslaved people is actually a bigger problem than just during the interpretation inside the house, and I will mention other examples later. But only giving the first names for enslaved individuals diminishes and trivializes them as people with arguably the same historical significance as those whose last names are given.

Secondly, the interpreter's use of the neutralizing euphemism "women" when describing Molly and Caroline, which serves to deflect the truth of their enslaved status.

Thirdly, similar to the interpretation in the Servant's Hall, the interpreter's use of "you" is a tactic that universalizes the experience of the visitors, masking the fact that not everyone from the pool of contemporary visitors would have had the same experience had they visited Mount Vernon during Washington's time.

Finally, failing to elaborate in detail on the conditions under which the enslaved people worked, namely with "no plumbing or air conditioning," trivializes their experiences and does not paint the picture of the extreme hardship that enslaved people had to endure solely for the benefit of their White owners and can create an unrealistic and incomplete view of the past that promotes a false nostalgia for the period.

On a tour in April 2013, slavery was mentioned only once the entire time inside mansion: in Washington's office, the last room in the house tour, the interpreter gestured toward his desk, where Washington "wrote his fifty-page will" in which "he freed his slaves and left an endowment for them to be educated." And her very next sentence began, "But that was his original presidential chair..." Aside from failing to elaborate on what happened to Washington's slaves after he died, which actually turned out to be inconsistent with the requests in his will,⁵ the interpreter used slavery as a way to instead valorize Washington, characterizing him as generous and honorable enough to free his slaves and provide funds for education. Giving one sentence, and actually a clause, to slavery in the entire tour of the house serves to symbolically annihilate it writ large: relegating the entire institution of slavery to a clause of a sentence out of the entire

⁵ The docent made it seem as though Washington freed all of those enslaved at Mount Vernon and also provided funds for each of them to be educated. However, Washington was only able to free a portion of the slaves at Mount Vernon: those that he and his wife owned, but not Martha's "dower" slaves since they had been owned by Martha's deceased first husband (Lipset, 1998). It is unclear what kinds of provisions were made for those slaves that Washington freed and if the enslaved people benefited from them.

tour narrative may give the visitor a sense that slavery only served the function as a clause to the American Founding Era.

Grounds

Once the house tour is over, visitors are free to guide themselves through the grounds. The site layout of the grounds presents an important issue. If visitors, upon leaving the house, turn *left* (which is also downhill and thus easier to physically negotiate), they will be able to explore about ten outbuildings, including the smokehouse, wash house, coach house, and stable. Once at the bottom of the hill, there is a direct path leading to the education center that houses all of the galleries and exhibits. However, if visitors turn *right* (which is uphill and thus more challenging to physically negotiate), they will return back to the front lawn of the main house. Continuing in that same direction past the lawn (where the ground returns to being mostly level), there is the "Upper Garden," which includes the area with the dwellings for the enslaved people who lived and worked at Mount Vernon.

While there were certainly visitors milling about in both areas (to the left and to the right), visitors must take the initiative to backtrack uphill and past the mansion in order to see the slave dwellings. It is much easier to take the downhill path, and because there are outbuildings on the way down this path, I imagine that it is also easy to be unaware that there are other buildings to see in the opposite, uphill direction. There is the far from negligible chance that visitors may not be willing, able, or may be unaware of the opportunity to go back uphill to see the Upper Garden with its physical markers of slavery in the form of dwellings. This could cause a skewed picture of life at Mount Vernon, where visitors may fail to understand the proximity and closeness that the institution of slavery shared with the main house, both physically and socially.

At the outbuildings, there are a number of interpretive issues, mostly in the form of panel wording. In the smokehouse, the work is described by using the passive voice

("the meat was hung," etc.), which effectively erases the identity of the people doing that work, most probably enslaved. As a contrast, the panel in the wash house is written in the active voice, but the actors in the sentence are "the women" and "the washerwomen," euphemisms that disguise the fact that these women were likely enslaved. In the stable and coach house, when individual enslaved people are mentioned, they are only called by their first names: "Peter...oversaw feeding and grooming the horses, cleaning harnesses and saddles, and collecting manure for later use as fertilizer," and "slaves, including Joe, a driver, and Jack, a wagoner, took care of the Mount Vernon vehicles" (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, n.d.). This phenomenon happened in the house tour as noted above, and only using first names when speaking about enslaved individuals (in contrast to the use of first *and* last names for White historical figures), results in trivializing the experiences of these people by giving them an almost placeholder, character-like status in American history. Perhaps the last names of these enslaved people were not known, but that was never indicated in the interpretations.

Inside the Greenhouse Slave Quarters, the panels focus on the interpretations of enslaved life at Mount Vernon. They discuss how the enslaved people spent their time within this structure or around it when they were not working their long and wearying hours. The panels indicate that the enslaved people enjoyed music and communal time, were allowed to have their own garden plots, and supplemented their rations by hunting, trapping, and fishing in their spare time. The picture is painted not with a brush that shows these activities as a means to help survive extreme hardship, but with one that paints these activities as almost leisurely or hobby-like. It must be remembered that the spare time that these people had was after sundown and after an entire day of forced labor for the benefit of someone else, or on Sundays, which Washington gave as a day off (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2000) and may have been one of the only times to visit with family members.

The physical aspects of the quarters also deserve some attention in the way that they lead to a false sense of slavery during the Founding Era. Because these quarters housed the enslaved people that worked inside or in close proximity to the mansion, and because these enslaved people were generally treated relatively better than those who lived and worked further from the house (for many reasons, the greatest of which has to do with the perceived image of the White enslaver), the Greenhouse Slave Quarters are made of brick, have large fireplaces, and have brick floors. As such, this structure is atypical of slave quarters found in the area during the eighteenth century, most of them being made of wood and had dirt floors and in a family-style dwelling rather than Mount Vernon's barracks-style (Neiman, 2008). While the building itself is an historically accurate recreation, the atypical, higher-quality design of the quarters may end up serving for visitors' imagination as a representation of all historical quarters for enslaved people, possibly leading to a skewed understanding of the lives of enslaved people.

During one of my visits, there was a period-costumed, first-person interpreter playing the part of George Washington's personal valet. He was standing outside of the quarters in a grassy area speaking to a crowd of about fifteen visitors, some of which who would come and go at various intervals, creating a relatively informal situation. What drew my attention to his interpretation and held me there for about twenty minutes was his commentary on how "here at Mount Vernon, compared to other estates, life is better for us slaves." He elaborated on the different areas where Washington showed "compassion" and "humanity" toward those he had enslaved, including the recognition of marriages even though they were not recognized under the law, and his level of care for the enslaved people who became ill.

The guests who were listening when I came upon the group were all White men and women of varying ages, including some children. We all intently listened to the interpreter's commentary, for which he employed an inconsistent accent and frequently

made mistakes, lost his train of thought, or made ahistorical statements inconsistent with his character (discussing events after the year that was being interpreted, 1798, etc.). Some visitors asked him questions. After the group began to dwindle and disperse, he walked around the area near the dwellings so that visitors could engage him individually if they wished.

This first-person interpreter was clearly deploying what Eichstedt and Small call the "happy or grateful slave" narrative introduced in chapter 2. This narrative is problematic for two main reasons. First, the topic of slavery is actually being used to valorize Washington and bolster his image, fashioning him as more humane and tolerant than other enslavers during his time. Second, using the happy or grateful slave narrative trivializes the brutal nature of the institution of slavery and may foster racist attitudes, where "people of African descent are seen as childish, simple, and unable to care for themselves" (Eichstedt and Small, 2007:151). The actor's interpretation was tightly focused around Washington rather than standalone accounts of the valet's life or lives of the other enslaved individuals on the plantation.

This is the kind of interpretation that may cause contemporary American visitors to relieve some of the collective guilt they may feel toward the blemish of slavery in our nation's past by seeing that Washington, the original Founding Father, showed some "compassion" to those he enslaved. The pattern of describing Washington as "an enlightened slaveholder" (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2000: 182) carries through Mount Vernon's interpretive experiences, from the house to the grounds, and into the education center. And this pattern serves to create a version of American history on which visitors are more likely to look back to with a sense of nostalgia rather than hindsight-fueled caution and sorrow.

Chapter 6: John Adams' Peace field

The historic home of John Adams is located at Adams National Historic Park, in Quincy, Massachusetts outside of Boston. There are four Adams-related sites at the National Historic Park: John Adams' Birthplace, John Quincy Adams' Birthplace, the Old House at Peacefield, and the Stone Library. Each of these places can only be accessed by a guided tour, and it is common to take a two-hour, guided full-park tour. There is the option to take tours of the Birthplaces and the Old House (which includes the Stone Library) separately. Tours of the houses are offered only from April 19 to November 10. There is a fee of \$5 to enter the park and the ticket to the park is valid for seven days after purchase. There is a small visitor center within walking distance of the Old House, and it is here where visitors buy tickets and negotiate the logistics of their chosen tour. Within the visitor center is a gift shop, and there is also an area where visitors can watch the twenty-seven-minute short film called "Enduring Legacy: Four Generations of the Adams Family."

Because I have chosen to focus on the first five presidents, it is most appropriate to do a close study of the interpretation at the Old House rather than the Birthplaces, since Adams, on the occasions when he was actually at home, spent most of his politically-active adult life at the Old House. Indeed, the interpretation at the Old House focuses more on Adams' political life, whereas at his Birthplace, the focus is more on his early life, adolescence, and family history. Additionally, the Old House is the most well-known and recognized of the sites, partially due to the popularity of the HBO miniseries *John Adams* (2008). During Adams' many political appointments, this is where Abigail Adams and the Adams children lived and where John Adams found respite from the stresses of political life.

Adams was not a slave owner. He was opposed to the institution, choosing not to own his own slaves, though slavery was still prevalent in Massachusetts and the other states of New England during Adams' active political life (McCullough, 2001). Even though Adams did not own slaves, it is important to include him and his house in this study since he is such a prominent Founding Father, and our collective ideas about the Founding Era are partially shaped by his life and legacy.

There are some fairly common misconceptions about slavery in New England (and the North in general) that I have encountered during my time as an historic interpreter and student of history. Some of these misconceptions may be informed by the fact that John Adams is one of the most well-known New Englanders of the Founding Era, where he may serve as a representative of all Founding Era New Englanders in the minds of many Americans. That is, because he is one of the more prominent Northerners from the Founding Era, many Americans may believe that his lifestyle was representative of the Northerners of that time period. And perhaps because he did not own slaves, the misconception that slavery did not exist in the North is surprisingly common.

Quite the contrary, slavery not only existed in all of the northern colonies and later states, but even the smallest state in New England, Rhode Island, was one of the corners of the eighteenth-century "triangle trade" as well as one of the most significant North American exporters of enslaved people: "in all, about sixty percent of slave trading voyages launched from North America -- in some years more than ninety percent -- issued from tiny Rhode Island" (Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, 2007: 10). It is clear that New England was a significant participant in the institution of slavery, contrary to any misconceptions about the region.

Because the Adams family did not own slaves, there is inevitably less interpretive material on slavery at this site. However, slavery is still mentioned, and in more fleeting fashion than I would have expected. The level of engagement with the topic of slavery

undoubtedly affects the visitor's take-home message at any site, as true for Adams National Historic Park as any other site dated to the Founding Era. Therefore, I thought it important to include the information from this particular site in order to explore in greater detail the kind of message that a dearth of information on the topic can send to the visitor.

Before the House Tour

The "Enduring Legacy" film, typically the first interpretive experiences that visitors to the national park have, is an historical reenactment of various points in the Adams' family history, narrated by Laura Linney and Tom Hanks, with other notable voice-overs from Paul Giamatti and Edward James Olmos. The film opens with Henry Adams, the fourth Adams included in the "Four Generations" of the film title, reflecting on the previous generations of his family, where a series of flashbacks help describe the sequence of events in the four generations, starting with John Adams. During the flashbacks to the lives of John and Abigail Adams, various moments are highlighted, particularly the ratification of the Declaration of Independence, John's European diplomacy, Abigail's maintenance of the Adams home while John is away, the drafting of the Massachusetts Constitution, the Adamses' move to the Old House at Peace field, and John's vice presidency and presidency.

Slavery is mentioned only once during this particular flashback segment, in connection with the Massachusetts Constitution: "the document contributes to the end of slavery in Massachusetts and becomes a model for the U.S. Constitution." An indirect indication that the Adamses were not slave owners occurs when Abigail and her children are shown tending the farm while John is away. The scenes make it seem as though Abigail and her children single-handedly cared for the farm, which would have been impossible due to its size of "108 acres of farmland," regardless if it was a time when "farmhands were scarce" (Keinath, 2010: 9). Once John returned from Europe, the

Adamses moved into the Old House at Peace field, the main residence that is featured in the HBO miniseries. And in the miniseries, during scenes that show Abigail caring for the house while John is away, it also seems as though she is doing all of the housework alone, from scrubbing the floors and educating her children, to caring for animals and working the farm. It is hardly believable that she would have been able to do all of this work by herself without any help.

In fact, Abigail, with the supplemental advice of John, did hire farmhands, though there is little historical indication of the color of the hired help (Levin, 2001). Regardless of the racial or ethnic background of the farmhands, the lack of their visual presence in both the "Enduring Legacy" film and *John Adams* miniseries draws silent but blatant attention to the fact that the Adamses did not own slaves. Images of the Adams family working their own land could affect a sense of reverence on the part of the viewer or visitor, who might see it as the Adamses rather caring for their farm themselves than choosing to use any kind of labor assistance, forced or hired. While there is no problem in admiring a person for *not* owning slaves, there is the possibility that the experience of the Adams family could influence a synecdochical image of New England or "the North" as being void of slavery, as stated above, related to the common problem of conflating the North:South::Anti-slavery:pro-slavery dichotomies of the Civil War Era with the Founding Era.

There are very few other mentions of slavery in the rest of the short film, and they occur during the biographical discussion of John Quincy Adams' life. First, during his time in the House of Representatives, he "submit[ted] hundreds of petitions from abolitionists, calling for an end to slavery," (Johnson, 2008) and second, John Quincy defended a group of Mende people who had been captured as slaves and mutinied against their captors on their journey into slavery, eventually winning the case, typically known as the "*Amistad* Incident." Both of these mentions of slavery serve to valorize

John Quincy and his politics, and while at first these mentions of slavery may not seem relevant to my study because they fall outside of its historical scope, I would argue that the generational, legacy-focused approach of the interpretation at Adams National Historical Park may cause a conflation of the ideas presented about each member of the Adams family. That is to say, even though there is no outright mention about John Adams' views on slavery, a synecdochical phenomenon may occur here as well, where visitors may conflate John Quincy's politics and actions with his father, John Adams, and thus valorize John Adams as a staunch abolitionist in the same way that John Quincy is valorized by his abolitionist actions. This conflation could result in an even rosier view of John Adams and his politics, New England, or the Founding Era writ large.

The House Tour

When touring the Old House, there is a maximum of ten people on each tour, and it takes about forty-five minutes to get through the house and the Stone Library. The tours are spaced thirty minutes apart to promote a richer interpretive experience for the visitors. In fact, before the tour begins, the interpreter spends a few moments getting to know the group and their interests, subsequently shaping the tour based on the information gathered from the visitors.

There were very few mentions of slavery on my tour. One of them was during a discussion about the Constitution, where the interpreter indicated that Adams, while he had respect for individual rights (which means he would have identified more with the anti-slavery side of the aisle), he believed that getting the political factions to compromise was more important, which led to maintaining the institution of slavery. Slavery was also mentioned in connection with John Quincy Adams, who lived in the Old House for part of his life (warranting him some interpretive time at the Old House), and the interpreter told the story of the *Amistad* Incident noted above and also in the "Enduring Legacy" film. Again, as stated above, these discussions of slavery are used to

actually speak about the Adamses, aggrandizing their lives and legacies, rather than about slavery itself.

The printed guidebook, *Adams National Historical Park* (2008), is available in the visitor center as a supplement to the interpretations at the site, and it has historical, biographical, and contemporary information about the national park. In it, not surprisingly, the topic of slavery is a rarity, and it is only mentioned in connection with John Quincy Adams, also not surprising given the interpretive patterns stated above. The guidebook has a recurring theme of highlighting the "strength of character and determination" of the Adams family, giving historical evidence of the Adamses' morality, strong will, and service to their family and country (Keinath, 2010: 6). And these two phenomena are not unrelated: displaying the strengths of the Adamses' "core values" and "moral compasses" while also highlighting the family's abolitionist beliefs creates an ennobled image of the Adamses (and I would argue John Adams especially, since he is the most well-known), serving to place them in stark contrast with their contemporaries who were slave owners (Keinath, 2010: 4). And that ennobled image carries through on a larger scale, creating a picture of the Founding Era as one of a simpler time when people could follow their "moral compasses" to become "independent thinker[s] who would be led not by the majority, but rather by the law" (Keinath, 2010: 6). With this picture in mind, it is no wonder that there is nostalgia, however false, for the American Founding Era.

Simply speaking, lack of discussion and larger context of the issue of slavery symbolically annihilates it. As indicated in chapter 3 and also by Eichstedt and Small, some sites will focus on slavery only in the context of their own site, and in the case of the Birthplaces and the Old House where enslaved people were never used for their labor, it is easy to virtually avoid the topic altogether. However, as indicated above,

slavery was still prevalent in the region while the Adams family lived at the Birthplaces and the Old House, and it was an incendiary political issue during the Adamses' lives.

It is a wonder that Adams' opposition to slavery is not explored more in the interpretive experiences offered at the site. If there was ever an opportunity to bolster the image of John Adams, noting his distaste for the institution of slavery would be an ideal *modus operandi*. However, despite his presumably anti-slavery rhetoric and beliefs, it also must be remembered that Adams and his cohorts did not attempt to abolish slavery, "expect[ing] that a later generation would devise a solution to the problem that they could not solve themselves" (Bernstein, 2009).

The abridgement of the history of slavery may foster a skewed sense of the Founding Era for visitors, possibly leading to a sense of false nostalgia for the period. By the general avoidance of the topic, the Adams National Historical Park does indeed "miss out on making connections to larger significant stories," (van Balgooy, personal communication, April 22, 2013) related to the site. In the last chapter, I will present specific suggestions for Adams National Historical Park in interpreting slavery at a site where the actual enslavement of humans did not occur.

Chapter 7: Thomas Jefferson's Monticello

Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, is located in Charlottesville, Virginia, the same city as The University of Virginia, which Jefferson Founded in 1819. Monticello is preserved and run by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, a non-profit organization.

Visitors must purchase their tickets at the visitor's center in order to gain entry to the mansion grounds, but there is no ticket required for exploring the visitor's center. The adult ticket is \$24, which makes it the most expensive fee in this study. There are various interpretive experiences at the visitor's center, including exhibit galleries and an orientation film. The gift shop and instructional classrooms for school groups are also located at the visitor's center. The entry tickets have printed times on them, which are strict, especially during the months with heavier visitation. Visitors are encouraged to watch the fifteen-minute introductory film before visiting Jefferson's mansion.

Before the House Tour

The short film, called "Thomas Jefferson's World," opens with images of the Virginia sunset, where superimposed quotes fade in and out. They all have the common topics of equality and freedom, with the first being from Euripides: "equality is a man's natural law." The second quote, attributed to Horace, is "Who then is free?," and the third is "The care of every man's soul belongs to himself," from John Locke. As the last quote fades, the narrator says that "Thomas Jefferson believed human freedom was the surest path to human progress." This is seemingly an opportunity to discuss Jefferson's lifelong contradiction of devoting his life's work to freedom while still owning slaves, but the topic of slavery is not broached until more than five minutes into the film: an actor, playing a presumably enslaved Black man, leads an ox cart down a path while the narrator speaks about the "five thousand acres and two hundred people" that comprised the Monticello plantation.

The narrator describes Monticello as home to the Jeffersons and freed and enslaved Black workers, which serves as a segue into a discussion about slavery and the lives of those enslaved at Monticello. The tasks performed, the families involved, and the lives they created "independent of Jefferson" are all touched upon in a section lasting approximately three minutes while short clips of actors portraying enslaved people perform historical plantation tasks. As the section comes to a close, the actor portraying Jefferson says, "Nature intended me for the tranquil pursuits of science by rendering them my most supreme delight, and the narrator begins a discussion about Jefferson's service to the nation both at home and abroad.

Following a discussion about Jefferson's significant contribution of the Declaration of Independence, the narrator identifies the "glaring contradiction" within the Declaration: Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal" while enslaving humans his entire life, only freeing five people in his will. Of those enslaved people that Jefferson freed were some of Sally Hemmings⁶ children, and the narrator speaks about Jefferson's relationship with Hemmings and their resulting children, though vocally emphasizing that the relationship occurred *years* after Jefferson's wife's death. This is the last outright mention of slavery in the entire film, where the narrator indicates that Jefferson could not see how to abolish the "deplorable entanglement" of slavery, then moving on to speak more about his other accomplishments, such as the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the Louisiana Purchase, and the founding of The University of Virginia.

Important to note is the narrator's statement about how Jefferson's accomplishments, particularly the Declaration of Independence relate to the world we live in today: "To this day, these rights have not been fully achieved," indicating that we still have a ways to go in truly fulfilling Jefferson's statement that "all men are created

⁶ There are two accepted spellings of the last name, "Hemings" and "Hemmings" both of which are used by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, but I have chosen to consistently use "Hemmings" out of personal preference.

equal." The film ends with a montage of historical moments that all had the common kindling of the Declaration of Independence: the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804; the Gettysburg address, in which Lincoln used the phrase "all men are created equal;" the Women's Right to Vote of the 1920s; the 1967 March on Washington, and other moments leading up to Inauguration Day, 2009.

As much as the film continuously returns to the theme of equality, liberty, and freedom, slavery surprisingly finds a relatively small place within the film's overall discourse. While the topic is well dealt with at the points where it is discussed, the bounded, topical nature of the discussions do not reflect the complexity of slavery that was continuously interwoven into all aspects of Founding Era life.

Access to Monticello from the visitor center is provided by shuttle buses, which depart the visitors center at regular intervals in order to facilitate punctual arrival for tour times. Once "on the mountain," visitors must wait for their tour to begin, and the wait time is directly related to the visitation season. The ticket technically gives the visitor access to the mansion grounds, so if the wait time is significant, visitors are encouraged to explore the grounds or visitor center on their own, take one of the shorter, topical tours or explore hands-on activities that occur during the busier seasons.

Tour groups are capped at twenty-five per tour, and they are separated by ten-minute intervals, five during the busier seasons. An interpreter comes to greet his or her tour group and leads them up the main path to the front porch of the house, where they begin the tour. The total tour lasts approximately forty-five minutes and travels through seven of the eight rooms on the main floor of the house.

The House Tour

With my experience as an historical interpreter at Monticello, I have a significant amount of insight about the tour operation and composition. Interpreters, as a culmination project at the end of their rigorous training period, generate their own tour

from scratch. They are encouraged to follow a theme or narrative throughout the house, but are virtually allowed to say anything during the tour. However, during the year that I was an interpreter, in 2011, there were two topics that all interpreters *must* include in their tours: that the Levy family began the restoration process of the house and subsequently sold it to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation in 1923, and that there is DNA evidence that indicates Jefferson's paternity of one, and likely all six, of Sally Hemmings' children. Interpreters may choose to elaborate on each topic as they see fit, but it is not required. Based on my recent experiences as a visitor, that rule is still in effect.

The problem with trying to study the average visitor experience at a site like Monticello is that the tours have incredible variation based on the interpreter, and even the interpreter probably never gives the same tour twice. It follows, then, that when it comes to discussing slavery, there is also incredible variation. Commonly, interpreters discuss slavery early in the tour, in the small parlor where there hangs on the wall an engraving of the original Declaration of Independence, noting Jefferson's contradiction in writing that "all men are created equal" at the same time as owning slaves. For a very small number of interpreters, this is one of the only mentions of slavery, at which point they will also include the information about Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemmings and will not bring up slavery again unless prompted by a visitor. For the majority of interpreters, slavery may be woven through the house tour narrative but usually in small snippets, given the time allowed for interpretation and questions from visitors. For example, there are moments where interpreters are able to point to an object that was crafted by a particular enslaved person (a clothes press or chair, for example), which serves to open a wider discussion of the profusion of slavery at Monticello.

On my most recent tour, the guide spoke about slavery on every stop of the tour, constantly incorporating it into his overall narrative. His first significant broach of the

subject occurred when he spoke about the Declaration of Independence, a common place in the tour to speak about the topic, as stated previously. The guide rarely fell into any of the interpretive traps enumerated by Eichstedt and Small: he only once made a universalizing statement, indicating what "you" would have done on a visit to Monticello, and he spoke about the labor done by the enslaved workers in the passive voice only a few times.

One of the interpreter's most notable mentions of the realities of slavery was his discussion of Joseph Fossett, one of the five slaves freed by Jefferson in his will. Upon Jefferson's death, Monticello was sold to help mitigate some of his lingering debt, and with the sale of Monticello came the sale of many of the enslaved people who worked there. Even though Joseph was free, he had to watch his wife and children be sold to various owners, splitting up their family and causing Joseph to seek paid work at each of the plantations where his family members went, to both spend time with his family members and earn money to eventually buy each of their freedom. Many of the visitors in my tour group were visibly moved by this anecdote, solemnly shaking their heads and making audible noises of grief.

The visitors in my tour group also actively asked questions about the topics that the interpreter was discussing, particularly slavery, and this was probably due to his skill in creating a comfortable and open environment for discussion during the tour. His tour was an excellent example of how to demonstrate the complexities of slavery at Monticello while still remaining respectful to and informative about Jefferson and his life on the plantation and beyond. As such, he did not paint a rosy picture of the Founding Era that could lead to false nostalgia, showing that it is indeed possible to acknowledge the intricacies of the institution of slavery in relation to the Founding Fathers.

The tour typically ends on, essentially, a side porch of the house, where the interpreter can point out the other activities offered "on the mountain." There are two

main supplemental (and optional) tours that run multiple times a day, but they are seasonal: the Gardens and Grounds tour and the Slavery at Monticello tour. Visitors may choose to guide themselves through the gardens, grounds, and Mulberry Row, the main area for the interpretation of enslaved life at Monticello. Each of these areas has interpretive plaques to assist with the self-guiding process that I will next analyze in turn.

Grounds

Much of the underground area of the mansion is available for visitor exploration, and The Thomas Jefferson Foundation calls this area the "Crossroads" because of the high level of interactional activity between Monticello laborers and the Jefferson family in this cellar area. The Crossroads exhibit, according to Monticello's website, can give visitors "a sense of the constant interaction and activity required to keep Monticello running" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2012). Interpretive information about the lives of some of the individuals that would have frequently used the Crossroads passageway is included in the central area of the exhibit. The displays are mixed with contemporary exhibit materials and historical artifacts related to the people that the exhibit discusses.

The Crossroads at Monticello.

The Crossroads exhibition is a high-traffic area for visitors, so I consider it part of the average visitor experience at Monticello. Truthfully speaking, the content of the exhibit probably isn't what first draws many of the visitors, but the promise of an air-conditioned solace from the sun and the fulfillment of self-guided exploration (of an area that could potentially be full of secret passageways, a common topic of intrigue among Monticello visitors). Regardless of the reason for visiting the Crossroads exhibit, visitors do tend to engage with the interpretive material provided in the exhibit, seemingly taking away the messages presented in the material as they interact with it.

The different rooms of the underground passageways, or "dependencies" as they were historically called by Jefferson, are interpreted in a traditional way, with interpretive plaques describing each room's use. Some of the rooms in the dependencies are the beer cellar, the wine cellar, the kitchen, and the "ware room," each with their own story interpreted on the plaques. The Crossroads exhibit is in the main area where the two dependencies meet, and the focus of the exhibit is to personalize the work done by both the family members and members of the enslaved community.

The language on the plaques occasionally falls into some of the interpretive traps enumerated by Eichstedt and Small, especially use of the passive voice. Occasionally, euphemisms are employed, such as explaining how Jefferson's daughters, in their duties of overseeing plantation operations, "distribut[ed] daily ingredients to the cooks" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, n.d.). Even though this kind of interpretive language is evidence of trivialization and deflection, slavery is mentioned on every single interpretive plaque within the dependencies. The prevalence of (realistic and unapologetic) information on the topic of slavery mitigates that trivialization and deflection, and the use of passive voice on Monticello's interpretive plaques should simply be understood as a reflection of its commonality in the English language, as stated previously.

Larger than life-sized cutouts of the historical figures associated with the Crossroads are accompanied by deep descriptions about each of their relationships to the dependencies (and sometimes each other). Most of the cutouts are people who were enslaved at Monticello during Jefferson's life there, such as Burwell Colbert, Priscilla Hemmings, Betty Brown, and Israel Gillette. Additionally, Martha Jefferson Randolph is represented in a cutout, and her life and work at Monticello is also described, particularly how she "coordinated the running of the household with Burwell Colbert" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, n.d.).

The sheer amount of information about slavery in the dependencies of Monticello is highly commendable, especially given the fact that so many of the visitors who go on the main house tour engage with the material within the dependencies. Because the topic of slavery is broached on every interpretive plaque (and, again, in a realistic and unapologetic way), is it almost impossible for a visitor to come away with a skewed vision of Monticello's history of slavery. But it also must be understood that the information provided is still separate from the main house tour, where it is possible that many visitors will not be willing or able to engage with the topics presented in the interpretive texts of the dependencies.

Mulberry Row.

Another area that visitors are able to explore on their own is Mulberry Row, a site adjacent to the mansion that was the historical location of about twenty outbuildings and served as the "industrial hub" of Monticello, including a smokehouse, a joinery, a nailery, and dwellings (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2012). Most of the contemporary tangible evidence of structures on Mulberry Row is in the form of stone foundations, where visitors must imagine what was once there. The interpretive plaques along Mulberry Row help visitors with this process.

The introductory plaque to Mulberry Row suggests the complex nature of labor at Monticello, where "enslaved people, indentured servants, free blacks, and free white workmen lived and worked as weavers, spinners, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, nail-makers, carpenters, joiners, gardeners, stablemen, and domestic servants" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2011). It also helps the visitor combat the possibility of thinking that Monticello was as quiet as it is today (a problem stated in chapter 3) by encouraging the visitor to imagine "the sights and sounds of 200 years ago -- the small log, frame, or stone dwellings and workshops; the smell of wood and charcoal smoke; the sounds of

hammers and saws, carts carrying firewood, chickens and barking dogs, and the conversations of scores of people" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2011).

The other plaques highlight the different buildings and their uses that would have been on Mulberry Row during Jefferson's time. As a general trend, noticeable because of the contrast with some of the other sites in the study, the plaques all describe the work done in active voice, where the agents of the sentences are denoted with their status (enslaved, free, etc.), and euphemisms are avoided. Another noticeable trend is that the interpretive information emphasizes that the people living and working on Mulberry Row were laboring so that Jefferson could lead his elite lifestyle. Most of the enslaved individuals, when named, are called by their first and last names and are very rarely only indicated by their first names. This contrasts with Mount Vernon's use of first names for enslaved people and mostly reserving the use of last names for White individuals.

Three pieces of interpretive information, in particular, are good examples that show that The Thomas Jefferson Foundation is working toward a more realistic presentation of slavery, decreasing the chance that visitors will come away with a sense of nostalgia for the Founding Era. First, on the plaque regarding textile production, it is noted that "workdays were based on sunlight and varied from nine hours in January to 13 hours in July" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2011). While the common trope at historical sites about an enslaved person's workday is left at "sunup to sundown," to describe the length of time worked, this statement on the plaque further contextualizes that common trope, probably helping the visitor compare his or her work day to that of an enslaved person at Monticello. And as Lloyd (2002) shows, making personal comparisons and connections such as this can help visitors better understand and internalize information.

Second, on the plaque describing the smokehouse and dairy, there is information about the weekly rations for enslaved adults. In order to further contextualize the ration

amount (which is probably hard for a contemporary visitor to imagine or visualize since we tend not to think in quarts of cornmeal and half-pounds of pork), there is a note that "in 1811, Jefferson's household consumed about as many hogs as did 115 slaves" (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2011). Going beyond simple, factual information can make a point more clear to visitors, giving them a level of tangibility and understanding not achieved by simple statements like ration amounts.

Third and finally, one of the plaques discusses Jefferson's treatment of the enslaved people on the plantation, a question that many visitors have when they visit the home of a man that they know to be one of the most intelligent and influential Americans to ever live:

"My first wish," Jefferson wrote to his son-in-law in 1792, "is that the labourers may be well treated." He struggled to balance humane treatment of slaves with the need for profit at Monticello. Jefferson tried to mitigate the coercion and violence of slavery; he asked his manager to refrain from whipping the boys in the nailery except "in extremities." Jefferson's instructions lessened, but did not eliminate, severe punishment. On occasion, he ordered a whipping for repeated misbehavior as an example to other slaves. (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2011)

This realistic description of Jefferson's treatment of his slaves perhaps disappoints Jefferson fans who imagine him as or wish to learn that he was a good master, an inherently an oxymoronic notion in the first place. However, the inclusion of this information further contextualizes the complexity of slavery at Monticello and may make the visitor reconsider the ideologies surrounding Jefferson's life and legacy. The Foundation could have easily avoided including any of the information included in these three examples, but they chose to risk shaving some height from Jefferson's pedestal in order to provide more accurate and contextualized information, the preentation of

which, still remains, in my view, entirely respectful to Jefferson while factually and inclusively discussing life on the plantation.

While all of these examples are indeed less likely to cause a sense of nostalgia on the part of the visitor, the problem occurs when thinking about *where* the information is located. Mulberry Row is an area that most visitors will likely see because of its proximity to the house, the inclusion of Jefferson's large historical garden, and the incredible views of the surrounding landscape. But there is no guarantee that visitors will travel the entire length of Mulberry Row *and* read the interpretive plaques. There is also the added problem of self-selection noted in chapter 3, where some visitors, at the mention of slavery, shut down their information receptors and ignore the information. I have many times seen visitors stroll by a plaque on Mulberry Row, pause for a moment to read it (not long enough to have read the whole thing or even a significant part of it), and then continue strolling as if the other plaques or physical markers of slavery are non-existent on the landscape.

This phenomenon speaks to the larger problem that Eichstedt and Small call segregation of information. The information on slavery is there (and quite detailed and complex at that), but it is in a separate location from the main house nor well-incorporated into the main house tour. If the material is not seen or heard by a visitor, then it is the same as not including it at all, and there is the chance that visitors may still come away from Monticello with a false nostalgia for the Founding Era. Of course, it is impossible to make visitors listen, read, see, or understand everything interpreters would like, but I will provide some suggestions in the final chapter about how to potentially mitigate some of these issues.

Chapter 8: James Madison's Montpelier

Montpelier, the home of James Madison, is located in Montpelier Station, Virginia, adjacent to the town of Orange, and approximately twenty-five miles northeast of Charlottesville. Montpelier's hours are actually rather challenging to grasp, particularly in the off-season (see Appendix B). Generally speaking, the house is closed on Mondays year-round and on Mondays and Tuesdays during the off-season. A single adult ticket is \$18 and grants access to the mansion and grounds. For supplemental tours and activities, there are additional fees.

Upon arrival to Montpelier, visitors come first to the visitor center to purchase tickets, explore exhibit galleries, visit the gift shop, and watch the introductory film. I visited during the off-season, and tours, approximately thirty-five minutes long, were running every half hour. After purchasing my ticket, I had ample time to explore the visitor center before watching the fifteen-minute introductory film, which is shown before each tour and ends with enough time for visitors to walk the third of a mile to the mansion to begin the tour.

Before the House Tour

The main gallery space, the Grills Gallery, is quite small, about thirty square feet. It has on display the "Treasure of Montpelier," various artifacts from James and Dolley Madison, most notably, according to the website, "Madison's spyglass, a brace of pistols, snuff box, Dolley's engagement ring, and James Madison's walking stick, a gift from Thomas Jefferson" (The Montpelier Foundation, 2013). In this small exhibit area, I found no mention of slavery, though Madison did own slaves. Because the visitor center is so small, the staff are able to notify those visitors about the start of the introductory film. One of the staff members speaks to the seated visitors in the theater, briefly stating that the film gives a history and background of James and Dolley Madison at Montpelier.

Throughout the short film, there are various mentions of slavery. Within the first few minutes, the narrator speaks about the Madisons' move to Montpelier, moving their family "and slaves," as the screen pans over an historical painting of enslaved quarters, possibly Montpelier's. Then, during a discussion about Madison's participation in the Constitutional Convention, the narrator says that "putting slavery aside made it possible to unite the states," which acts as a segue into a topical discussion of slavery, the "great paradox of the time." There is a brief discussion of the relationship between masters and the people they enslaved, and no smooth segue into Madison's work on the Constitution.

However, probably the film's most notable comment on slavery was the statement that there was an incredibly large number of enslaved African Americans at Montpelier "all working for the benefit of one White family," succinctly putting into perspective the nature of slavery's structuration. The only enslaved individual named in the film is Paul Jennings, whom it was noted in the film that he not only helped Dolley Madison save objects in the White House while it was burning but also attended to James Madison at his death. The video is summed up by describing how the Constitution works today and its relationship to the document that Madison wrote and asks the viewer to think about the things that "you" can do "thanks to James Madison."

As short as the video is, it incorporates the topic of slavery throughout, suggesting the inalienable nature of the topic to Madison's life and the Founding Era. There were only a few relatively problematic issues in the film. First, the justification for the continuation of slavery is worded in such a way so that continuing slavery seems like the only reasonable choice in order to "unite the states." Second, only mentioning Paul Jennings and no other enslaved individuals may skew an understanding about how many enslaved people actually lived and worked at Montpelier or that Jennings was the most important or the only individual that really mattered, which trivializes the experiences and lives of other large numbers of people that Madison enslaved. And the

discussion about him actually serves the greater discussion about James and Dolley Madison themselves, rather than on Jennings' own terms and additionally places him into Eichstedt and Small's category of the loyal slave. Third, using the word "you" in an interpretation, as stated in chapter 3, is inherently problematic because it assumes the same experience for each visitor. Not everyone included in that "you" currently has the same rights under the Constitution, so perhaps it is premature to be told to "thank Madison."

The House Tour

After the film finishes, visitors are directed to a path that leads to the front porch of the mansion, where an interpreter meets the group. The target date for the restoration of the home is 1820, and that is the period that is interpreted during the tour. On one of my tours, the interpreter tended to use the phrases "plantation workers" and "servants" when describing enslaved people at the beginning of the tour, though he did use "enslaved" and "slave" further into the tour. Sometimes he employed ambiguous euphemisms or passive voice, saying "they would withdraw the furniture for dancing after dinner," or "dinner would be served." In the dining room was where the interpreter discussed slavery in more detail, partially prompted by life-sized, illustrated cutouts of dinner guests seated at the table. There was also a cutout of a young African American man, said to represent Paul Jennings, standing to the side of the table as an attendant. The interpreter discussed some of the dinner guests that had dined with the Madisons, pointing to the image of the Marquis de Lafayette, "an abolitionist," and asking the visitors to imagine his dinner discussions with Madison, a slave owner.

The interpreter then spoke more about Paul Jennings, gesturing to the cutout: "of course he couldn't speak his own mind when in the presence of guests," so it is hard to know how he felt about the Madison family. Though, the interpreter did indicate that Jennings was with James Madison at his death (which, of course, changes the subject

from Paul Jennings and slavery back to Madison himself). When moving from the dining room to the "New Library," visitors walk past a stairwell that leads to the kitchen below, and the doorway is blocked off with a life-sized photograph of a light-complexioned Black woman (presumably enslaved) carrying a tray up the stairwell, but the interpreter did not comment on the image on either of my tours.

In Madison's bedroom, each of the interpreters discussed Madison's death, again indicating that Paul Jennings was with him when he died. They also both played an audio clip of a voice-actor playing the part of Jennings and describing Madison's death. The voice actor, in contrast with the first-person interpretation of Washington's personal valet done by the actor at Mount Vernon or the voice-actor representing one of the young men that was captured and taken aboard the *Amistad* in the Adams family short film, for example, did not have an overly-contrived accent.

The interpreters then spoke about Paul Jennings' later life, having been freed by Daniel Webster, one of his subsequent owners. On my second trip, the interpreter indicated that Webster negotiated a federal job for Jennings once he was freed and that Jennings was relatively well-known for having worked "with the Madisons."

On one of my trips, a visitor asked about how many enslaved people lived and worked at Montpelier, and the interpreter's answer indicated that there were about one hundred enslaved people at any given time at Montpelier and about thirty working in the house. He then added that it was "not easy working here," and that "domestic slaves had it just as bad as anything else, so don't think otherwise."

The tour continues where the focus is more on Madison's authorship of the Constitution, and after the tour ends, visitors are welcomed to explore the other rooms of the upstairs, set up with museum-style exhibit plaques. This self-guided portion has a rotating temporary exhibit, broken up so that each room covers a few topics, and at the time of my visit(s), the exhibit was called "A Young Nation Stands: James Madison and

the War of 1812." Most of the people on my tour did not visit the exhibit for long, if at all, and the exhibit included a fair amount of information regarding slavery and African Americans (as well as Native Americans) during the War of 1812. There was also an interactive touch-sensitive map to learn about how the war affected different areas of the country.

Grounds

After exiting the house, visitors are free to explore the cellars of the mansion and the grounds, where there is interpretive information available on plaques. The cellar area and the "South Yard," where there are full-sized, framed-out wooden structures representing the buildings where some of the enslaved community lived and worked, are the two main areas of the grounds that discuss the topic of slavery.

The Cellars.

There are two different parts of Montpelier's cellar that visitors can explore on their own: the Montpelier Foundation calls one side "Dolley's" and the other "Mother Madison's." Each side has its own kitchen interpreted through plaques, though Dolley's side has significantly more information than Mother Madison's. The reason for the difference is simple: based on information provided by a guide on one of the tours that I took, Dolley used her side of the cellars more than Mother Madison, so there is more to interpret.

On Mother Madison's side, there are very few interpretive plaques, but all of them discuss slavery, many of them being entirely about different enslaved people on the plantation. There is, for example, a very large plaque dedicated to interpreting the life of Paul Jennings, and there is also a smaller plaque about Ailsey Payne, "an ex-slave cook," whose quote from a newspaper is used to describe "the preparation for General Lafayette's 1824 visit to Montpelier" (The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.).

One of the best quotes on the plaques within Mother Madison's cellar is on the plaque that introduces the space, artistically noting:

The cellar walls provide the foundation for the house, just as the slaves, who labored within these walls, supported the household and the Madison's renowned hospitality. Slaves worked in the cellars preparing meals, preserving food, spinning cloth, and conducting the activities necessary for running a plantation home. (The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.)

Even though the side of the cellar is called "Mother Madison's," it is clear from this that the cellar was, in reality, the domain of those enslaved at Montpelier.

The other side of the cellars, Dolley's side, has more interpretive material, with two main rooms. First is Dolley's kitchen, where, according to the plaques, most of the food served at Montpelier was prepared. The kitchen is set up with historically accurate cookware and artificial seasonal foods on display. The plaques in the space are clearly geared toward a family audience, indicated by a less formal font and interactive elements. In particular, there is a set of plaques that have moveable wheels on them, where visitors can see the tasks required by the "kitchen slaves" per season at Montpelier. The number of tasks required during each season provides a glimpse into the considerable amount of year-round work for those enslaved at Montpelier and gives a realistic look into the many expectations that were placed on them, "all for the benefit of one White family," as the introductory film reminds visitors.

The second space in Dolley's side of the cellar seems to be more of a storage area, though its use is not indicated on any of the plaques within the space. The information in this space explores Madison's connection to slavery and slavery at Montpelier. Each of the plaques covers a different aspect of the topic, with headers like "surviving," "liberty," "labor," "culture," and "the African American story." The plaques present powerful and poignant content about the lives of those that Madison enslaved, and deals

unapologetically with the fact that Madison remained a slave-owner all his life, constantly reiterating the fact that Montpelier could not have successfully run without the use of slave labor.

Of particular note was the plaque entitled "Surviving," and considering the plaque in full can give a better understanding of the message that The Montpelier Foundation is working to promote:

Visitors often reported that the Madisons were good masters, but such accounts belie the reality of slavery. No matter how kind the owner, slavery denied African Americans the right to a life of liberty and the pursuit of happiness as provided by the Constitution. Living conditions usually included d--- housing; those working inside the main house slept on threadbare mats on the floor so that they could respond quickly to their master's needs. Surviving required an inner strength, which was often misrepresented as quiet acceptance. However, beneath stoic faces emotions boiled -- frustration, anger, and fear -- for slaves knew that they could be sold at any time and separated from their family and friends.

(The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.)

In this one plaque, so much valuable information is presented. It speaks to the common misconception that there is such thing as a "good master," the complex relationship present between enslaver and enslaved, some of the less-often-explored feelings about slavery from the perspective of those who were enslaved, and the recognition that there are multiple angles from which to look at attitudes toward slave labor. This is an excellent example of the kind of information that can *impede* false nostalgia.

On both of my trips, I noticed that the visitors engaged with the space in different ways. There were some that paused to presumably read every word of every plaque, some that lingered long enough at each plaque to skim the content, and some that engaged

with the printed material very minimally, if at all. The same problem that occurs at Monticello's Mulberry Row occurs in this space at Montpelier. That is, even if there is more-than-adequate material on slavery, the placement of the material is still separated from the main interpretive area of the house, where visitors must self-select to explore the area in the first place. This important and powerful information is thus not available to all visitors, and missing this kind of information could foster a false nostalgia for the Founding Era.

An interesting element of this underground space is the inclusion of the "Children's Getaway," a play area for the children of Montpelier's visitors. The placement of the space next to emotionally heavy material regarding slavery can be seen as either positive or negative, depending on the observer's perspective. Negative because it may seem disrespectful to place a play area in an area meant for serious reflection (see Eichstedt and Small, chapter 4 for other examples), and positive because guardians of the children would have to stay in the immediate area of the play space, where there is a heightened opportunity to engage with the material about slavery in the adjacent space. On a final note, one of my visits, I heard a visitor telling the person she was with that it was unclear whether the Children's Getaway was an historical space or a contemporary one.

The South Yard.

The plaques in the South Yard cover topics such as the kinds of work the enslaved people did and what their lives were like while on the plantation, and the plaques each have titles such as "A Landscape of Servitude," "In the Shadow of the Big House," and "The Montpelier Community." Each plaque has a large amount of information included, and related information is visually grouped together for easier absorption. There is a general trend of speaking about the work of those enslaved in the active voice: for example, "Most of the adults labored as cooks, scullions (kitchen helpers), maids,

waiters, porters, seamstresses, laundresses, footmen, and errand runners. Waiting on the Madisons and their visitors kept the household servants busy morning, noon, and night" (The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.). Using the active voice in interpretations about enslaved workers makes the tasks and who did them transparent and unapologetic.

Similar to the interpretive plaques at Monticello on Mulberry Row, the plaques in the South Yard use the visitors' frame of reference in order to make more compelling statements. For example, in a section called "A Lifetime of Work," the familiar topics of children and family are used to promote internalization: "[e]nslaved children, some as young as nine, began their lifetime of work fetching water and wood, and helping around the kitchens. The domestic servants' own families, meals, and gardens had to wait" (The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.). However, similar to the interpretation at Mount Vernon, enslaved individuals tended to be referred to only by their first names, with the exception of Paul Jennings. The only other individuals mentioned on the plaques are Sukey and Fanny, and their last names are not given. Failing to use last names (with no explanation as to why, such as if they are unknown) contrasts sharply with the use of last names for White individuals and that contrast trivializes the lives of the enslaved individuals.

The topic of Madison's view of slavery also is included on one of the plaques, under the heading "The Peculiar Institution:"

Throughout his life, Madison relied upon enslaved individuals to look after his every need. Slaves cooked for him, cared for him, cleaned-up after him, and traveled with him. As a politician, he noted that slavery was "a blot upon our republican character" as well as one of the most "deep rooted and wide spread evils." As a farmer, he once told an overseer, "to treat the Negroes with all the humanity & kindness consistent with their necessary subordination and work." Indeed, Madison wrestled with conflicting

feelings of economic dependence and moral abhorrence of the institution
all of his life.(The Montpelier Foundation, n.d.)

This statement, even though it transparently presents the fact that Madison was a slave owner while unhappy with the institution of slavery, is somehow different than the statement given on Mulberry Row about Jefferson's views on the treatment of his slaves. Perhaps the difference comes from the way the information is presented. Here, the statement focuses more on the fact that Madison was troubled by the forced enslavement of people, and the statement ends, rather than essentially saying that while he may not have liked slavery, he still enslaved people over the course of his entire life. Just that small addition would go a long way in realistically contextualizing Madison's views of and feelings about slavery.

During my trips, there did not seem to be much interest in the cellar or the South Yard: visitors tended to minimally engage with both. They were generally more interested in taking photographs with the life-sized statues of James and Dolley Madison adjacent to the cellars and the South Yard. In comparison to the amount of visitors at the site, virtually none of them stopped to read the plaques in the South Yard or even to look at the structures themselves. Like Monticello, the information is available (and well-presented), but ultimately ineffective if visitors do not engage with it. Overall, though, it is clear that The Montpelier Foundation is actively working toward a deeper understanding and presentation of slavery at Montpelier and during the Founding Era.

Chapter 9: James Monroe's Ash Lawn-Highland

The historic home of James Monroe, Ash Lawn-Highland, is in Charlottesville, Virginia, two-and-a-half miles from Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Out of all sites in this study, it is the smallest, both physically and operationally, seeing the least amount of visitors per year. It is owned and operated by the College of William and Mary and is only closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

A single adult ticket is \$12 and includes access to the house tour and the self-guided grounds. During the peak season, other hands-on interpretive events and "workshops" such as candle making, paper quilling, or colonial games, are available for an additional fee.

Before the House Tour

Visitors purchase tickets at the small visitor center, which is actually more of a gift shop, located less than one hundred yards from the main house. Tours are scheduled every half hour and there are generally about 10-15 people on each guided tour, which lasts about 30-35 minutes. There is no introductory film like the other sites, as visitors leave the visitor center and let themselves directly into the house, where they are greeted by their guide in the foyer. While the guide waits for the group to assemble, visitors are welcomed to explore the small foyer that has display cases with Monroe-related artifacts as well as a larger room off of the foyer that also has displays of period artifacts and descriptive panels. These two rooms, as noted by the interpreter, are not part of the original house but are part of a later, post-Monroe addition.

The House Tour

The first quasi-mention of slavery on one of my tours occurred in the drawing room, which is the first stop after the foyer. In the room, there is a bust of Charles Fox, a "British abolitionist," whom the interpreter said that James Monroe admired. The

interpreter did not elaborate any further. The second time slavery was discussed (and the first time on another tour) was a bit more substantial. In the dining room, the stop after the drawing room, there is a mannequin outfitted with a reproduction of an enslaved woman's ensemble, but no context was given as to whether it was typical of the clothing worn by the enslaved women at Highland, Monroe's original name for the estate. For both of my tours, the mannequin's presence served as a prompt to talk about slavery at Highland.

One interpreter spoke about Hannah Hemmings, sister of Sally (enslaved at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello), who was enslaved by Monroe at Highland and would have helped with meal preparation and service. The other interpreter noted that there would have been between twenty and thirty enslaved people at any given time at Highland and then used this opportunity to discuss how Monroe wanted to see slavery come to an end but believed that the decision was for the states themselves. After these brief statements, both interpreters quickly turned the subject toward the kitchen, which they indicated was directly below the dining room and would have helped with keeping the floors of the room heated in the winter. Finally, during the discussion of transferring food from the kitchen to the dining room above, one of the interpreters described how "someone would be waiting" in the dining room for the food to be delivered, using a euphemism instead of directly stating that that "someone" would have been an enslaved person.

One of the interpreters mentioned slavery one other time while inside the house, and it was on the last tour stop, in Monroe's study. There, in a discussion of Monroe's accomplishments, the interpreter noted the Missouri Compromise, which halted the westward expansion of slavery. She discussed how Monroe felt about slavery, describing how his writings reflect his distaste for the institution, in which he suggested that slavery was evil. But still, she noted, Monroe enslaved about fifty people, though Thomas

Jefferson said that these enslaved people were some of the most well-kept he had ever seen. The interpreter also added that Monroe attempted to keep families together when making his transactions. The discussion then moved to Monroe's dedication to state's rights, which kept slavery in place, right after which the interpreter asked if there were "any questions about Monroe's presidency," essentially barring any subsequent questions about slavery.

The guided tour continues outside the house, stopping at the historical entrance of Highland, the one the Monroes would have probably used as the main entrance, and finally through the "Service Yard" to the entrance of the kitchen mentioned earlier in the tour. One interpreter noted that Hannah Hemmings and her sons would have slept on the dirt floor of the kitchen in order to watch the fire. Both times, the interpreters pointed out the reconstructed dwellings that are "very nice inside" (per one interpreter) for the enslaved persons that worked in the house, some of which were subsequently (and presumably) "nice" enough that they were turned into guest rooms. They also both pointed out the overseer's cottage and noted that it would have been comparable to an average middle-class family home, neither of them indicating that it would have been a *White* middle-class family home. At the end of the guided portion of the tour, the interpreters welcomed the visitors to explore the buildings in the Service Yard at our leisure.

Grounds

In the areas underneath the house, including the kitchen and other rooms for working and storage, nearly all of the interpretive material that describes the work done is written in the passive voice, deflecting attention away from the fact that enslaved people were doing the work. A few examples out of the many are: "the iron (or press) was inserted directly in the coals to heat it, and then the batter was poured in;" "first, the sheep was sheared;" or "camphor was added to the tallow to keep mice from eating it"

(The College of William and Mary, n.d.). Worse still, some of the material is written to the effect of portraying the objects themselves as doing the work: "the pestle ground and mixed herbs, as well as sugar, in the mortar;" and "the wooden grinder has metal teeth most commonly used to grind pork to mix with herbs for sausage" (The College of William and Mary, n.d.). These all fall into Eichstedt and Small's category of deflection, which serves to call attention away from the fact that this work was being performed by enslaved laborers.

One of the signs inside the Still Room does indicate, in the active voice, that "the house servants and slaves, under the direction of Elizabeth Monroe, performed various tasks in the Still Room which contributed to Highland's self-sufficiency" (The College of William and Mary, n.d.). However, in contrast, on this same sign, there is a photograph and a description of a human yoke: "Placing the yoke across one's shoulders, a person could easily carry two filled buckets and have his or her hands partially free to balance or to carry more water" (The College of William and Mary, n.d.). Aside from promoting the idea that using a human yoke to carry water was in any way "easy," this quote is another good example of the use of euphemism, where "one," "a person," and "his or her" disguise the fact that the "person" doing the carrying was most probably enslaved.

The other outbuildings, including those that would have served as dwellings for some of the enslaved people at Highland, have interpretive plaques inside of them describing the buildings. One of the plaques indicated that "three families who attended to the Monroe household's needs each had a large room with a fireplace and a sleeping loft overhead," and were staged with "hand-made and second-hand objects as it would have been while inhabited by a multi-generational enslaved family between 1799 and 1816" (The College of William and Mary, n.d.). While the rooms are anything but large, the plaques fail to mention that this dwelling, with its stone structure and chimney and wooden floors, would have been atypical of the housing for enslaved people, even on the

rest of Monroe's plantation, and perhaps even historically inaccurate. In fact, according to Sara Bon-Harper, the newly installed Executive Director at Ash Lawn-Highland, indicated at a seminar that I recently attended that the slave quarters at Ash-Lawn Highland were reconstructed in 1985, based on a 1908 photograph and not much archaeological excavation. This kind of atypical structure can lead to a false sense of relief on the part of contemporary visitors, who may think, based on the structural amenities, that slavery wasn't all that bad. While I was exploring the outbuildings alongside other guests, I saw a couple leaning over the barrier ropes at the entrance of the dwelling to check if they "at least had fireplaces."

As problematic as the interpretations in the Service Yard are, visitors did not stay long to explore, usually peeking into various rooms and moving on to the next one. It was very rare that I saw visitors engaging with the interpretive material. Though the material presented provides information about the experience of enslaved people at Highland, it may be sending the wrong messages to the visitors, generally portraying slavery as a benevolent institution that really wasn't so bad, especially those at Highland who were (per one interpreter) the most well-kept Thomas Jefferson had ever seen. This kind of message promotes and reaffirms a nostalgic view of the Founding Era.

Chapter 10: Conclusions and Suggestions

Because of the popularity and visitation numbers at the five historic sites in this study, their respective discussions of slavery represent much of what the public learns about the topic at historic sites, especially considering their overlap in visitorship (by which I mean that visitors of Monticello are likely to visit Mount Vernon or Montpelier, for example). By studying the interpretation of slavery at the sites, we can understand some of the museum metanarratives that are being created and reinforced to the public.

For this study, I aimed to determine if that wider message being sent promoted a nostalgic view of the American Founding Era as an easier or less complex time. And, based on my experiences and the numerous examples that I have provided, there are indeed patterns of interpretation that could lead to a false nostalgia for the Founding Era. Many of these patterns come from the larger categories of interpretive tactics enumerated by Eichstedt and Small, like trivialization and deflection, symbolic annihilation, and segregation. And while I am not suggesting that any of these sites purposefully or maliciously incorporate these tactics into their interpretation, I *am* suggesting that these tactics have larger consequences for the collective memory and contemporary ideologies of Americans.

When the interpretations of slavery at sites do not present the institution of slavery as a deeply complex, contextual, and integral part of the American Founding Era, it can give visitors a skewed vision of United States history. Visitors may not understand that the Founder's home that they are admiring completely relied on slavery in order to have been built and operated, that slavery was a system that stripped other humans of their personal rights for the gain of others, or that the institution of slavery created hierarchical social and structural regimes that have carried through to today. The sites in this study have the power to share these messages, and while some are indeed working

toward incorporating these messages into their interpretation, they are all guilty of using interpretive tactics that may lead to a misunderstanding about the realities of slavery, causing some to look back to the Founding Era with misinformed nostalgia.

General Analysis of Each Site

Mount Vernon is probably the biggest culprit in sending this kind of message, running the gamut on the interpretive tactics that are, as I have shown, directly related to promoting a false sense of nostalgia for the Founding Era. From segregated information and trivialization of the lives of enslaved people to a happy and grateful slave/good master narrative and discussions of slavery that are used to valorize Washington, Mount Vernon sends the message that slavery was not so bad and that those enslaved may have actually benefitted from their enslavement. These ideas can send a whole host of complicated messages to the visitors, which have bearing on the contemporary social issues surrounding racial stereotypes, systematic and institutional racism and oppression, and other topics that are incredibly important, but unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. And as the site with the most problems, Mount Vernon is also by far the most visited, meaning that this skewed messages reaches the most people out of any of the sites in the study.

The Adams National Historical Park, and the Old House at Peace field in particular, are really only problematic in the avoidance of discussions of the topic of slavery even though it was an intrinsic part of New England's capitalist system. While John Adams was not a slave owner, he still had to, as a politician and a wealthy, elite White man, come into constant contact with the institution of slavery, which his writings and personal correspondence prove (McCullough, 2001). Avoiding discussions of slavery during the interpretation at Adams National Historical Park symbolically annihilates it and can also perpetuate the common misconception that slavery did not exist in New England or "the North," effectively (though falsely) relieving some of the "White guilt"

(Steele, 2009) felt by some Americans and also helping to perpetuate historical amnesia. And the sheer fact that Adams (and his later family that is also interpreted at the site) did not own slaves may cause Americans to automatically see him as an abolitionist, which he was not necessarily,⁷ and certainly not on the same level as his son John Quincy. However, because both John Adams and John Quincy Adams are interpreted at the same time at Adams National Historical Park, the chance for conflation of their politics is significant, and this could cause a misinformed, nostalgic view of Adams and his views or actions.

In 2002, Eichstedt and Small considered Monticello an "in-between" site, moving "beyond the first three categories [of symbolic annihilation and erasure, trivialization and deflection, segregation and marginalization of knowledge,] but do[es] not yet fall into the fourth [,relative incorporation]" (Eichstedt and Small, 2002: 11). More than ten years after Eichstedt and Small categorized Monticello as in-between, I argue that it has transcended relative incorporation into full incorporation, with some limitations.

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation presents a large amount of detailed and contextualized information about slavery at Monticello and in the United States, though much of the information may only reach a self-selected portion of the total amount of visitors to the site. The Foundation still sometimes falls into the interpretive traps that may foster a skewed understanding of the institution of slavery, but these are usually interpreter-specific. There are also significant indications that Monticello is moving to the forefront in its exploration of the topic of slavery and its presentation, not only seen by the extensive research being undertaken by The Thomas Jefferson Foundation at the site itself, but also its collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution in the creation of

⁷ I would argue that Adams' disinterest in owning slaves did not, as a matter of course, make him an abolitionist. There is no indication that Adams attempted legislation to abolish slavery, or even took abolition into his own hands by assisting freesom-seekers.

the popular traveling exhibit called "Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty."

Montpelier, along with Monticello, is one of the better examples of how an historic site can reflexively examine its presentation of slavery and continuously incorporate changes in order to tell a more complete story. Even though it still has a few problems that tend to be interpreter-specific, such as some level of trivialization through euphemism or symbolic annihilation, the Montpelier Foundation makes contact with the topic of slavery unavoidable. In the average visitor experience that I was attempting to emulate for the study, contact with slavery is the most frequent at Montpelier, through its incorporation into the orientation film, the narrative of the house tour (and the exhibit devices such as the life-sized illustrated cutout of Paul Jennings and the life-sized image of the enslaved woman coming up the kitchen stairs), and the framed structures representing the buildings in the South Yard. While there is much more that The Montpelier Foundation, and any other historic site for that matter, can do to incorporate a more realistic and complex representation of slavery (which I will discuss later in the chapter), it could serve as a model for some of the ways to grapple with this complex topic.

Ash Lawn-Highland falls into many of the interpretive traps that lead to a misrepresentation of slavery. The biggest issues at the site are the reconstructed outbuildings that do not indicate that the structures are atypical (and possibly ahistorical), the extensive use of passive voice when describing tasks done by enslaved laborers, and the partitioned, topical treatment of slavery during the house tour. The available resources to Ash Lawn-Highland, the smallest site in the study, are probably a significant barrier to making changes toward greater and more contextualized incorporation of slavery on an institutional level, however there are some suggestions

that I will make later in this chapter that may be immediately accessible for Ash Lawn-Highland and some of the other sites as well.

Limitations

This project was designed as a preliminary study of the state of the interpretation of slavery at the homes of the first five presidents. Much more information and further study is needed in order to fully understand the visitor's experience with and exposure to the topic of slavery at these sites. I came across various limitations that could have affected the outcome of my study, and further exploration into this topic would help mitigate those limitations.

I conducted site tours mostly in the winter of 2012 and the spring of 2013. This is the off-season for historic sites, where there is a decreased level of visitation compared to the late spring, summer, and early fall. The sites in the study tend to limit their programming during the off-season when there is less visitation, which is not exactly representative of the average visitor experience that I was aiming for. That is, I did not have access to many of the interpretive experiences that may potentially incorporate slavery into the site's historical narrative, such as supplemental tours about the lives of enslaved people or live-action interpretations. In response to this limitation, however, I would argue that those supplemental kinds of interpretive opportunities are actually not part of the average visitor experience anyway, based on my earlier argument about visitor self-selection when deciding to take opportunities geared directly toward discussions of slavery. Year-round data collection would be much more representative of the average visitor experience.

It must also be taken into consideration that at all of the sites except for Monticello, I had no way of knowing if the interpreters were working from a script, an outline, a set of guidelines, or a list of necessary talking points (such as at Monticello). I could only make inferences based on my experiences, so the challenge lies in, frankly,

knowing who to hold accountable for the interpretations, whether it is the specific interpreter, the director of the site's education department, or higher management. My discussions about specific interpreters' use of the interpretive tactics that may lead to a false nostalgia are not aimed at blaming specific interpreters for promoting these messages; it may be a problem with lack of oversight that I will address later in the chapter.

Another limitation that may have affected my data collection is my physical presence while on tours. In chapter 4, I indicated that my method was to take notes during the tour and avoid asking questions that may prompt the interpreter to discuss slavery more than he or she otherwise would. I do not necessarily think that my taking notes affected the interpreter's tour narrative very much, though there was another elephant in the room while I took my tours. I tended to be the only person of color on my tours (including the interpreter), and I do believe that my presence may have affected some of the tour narratives. At times there was palpable tension during discussions of slavery, though I believe it may have actually been partially mitigated by the fact that I was taking notes and I looked as though I was academically detached from the information. However, one particular experience at Montpelier made me realize the possibility of my presence being a limitation to experiencing what an interpreter would normally say on a tour, and that was when my interpreter reminded us that house slaves had it just as hard as field slaves, adding that slavery was a terrible institution (see chapter 8). I could not help but wonder if the interpreter would have said the same thing had I not been on that tour. Eichstedt and Small had similar limitations, noting that each of them (Professor Small as a Black man with an English accent and Professor Eichstedt as a White woman from the northwest) encountered differences in tour narratives based on race, gender, nationality and other factors (2002: 19-20). Additionally, the interpreter's use of "plantation worker" or other euphemisms may have been influenced

by my presence, where the interpreter may have felt discomfort in using the word "slave" or "enslaved person" for any number of reasons that are all assuredly arbitrarily fabricated. Of course, I can never know if this is true, but I must consider it as a possible limitation.

The breadth and amount of information presented at these sites would give a researcher a lifetime of data to analyze. I attempted to limit my data collection to what would be encountered on the average visitor experience, but even with that limit imposed, there was a great deal of data to collect. My use of the word "average" is also probably misleading, since I was only able to visit each site twice (and Adams National Historical Park once) for dedicated research, due to time and financial constraints. Two sets of data is, of course, nowhere near what an acceptable "average" would be for a data set, which is why I am framing this as a preliminary study with an understanding that more research is needed in order to come to more definitive conclusions.

A limitation that is essential to note is that the interpretations at these sites are constantly changing, and my data only represents a relatively small moment in time for the sites included in this study. This is why it is important for these kinds of sites to be continuously reflexive in studying their interpretive tactics in order to narrate a more inclusive history, which includes the history of slavery. I conducted this study in order to understand the current state of the interpretation of slavery at these sites, and the sites themselves could employ this same kind of research to evaluate the messages that they send to the public about slavery, or any other topic. Even though sites are continuously changing, a visitor may only once visit a site like those in this study, which may serve in that visitor's mind as a static representation of that site. It is therefore incredibly important that historic sites are representing the best possible and most inclusive history for the visitor who only will visit the site one time.

Though I have indicated a number of limitations on this study, the study itself remains a contribution to the field of museum interpretation and research. I have been able to take the interpretive tactics enumerated by Eichstedt and Small one step further in order to describe how they may lead to a false sense of nostalgia for the Founding Era. In response to this, and now that I have seen some of these issues in action at the sites, I am able to offer some suggestions or possible solutions to some of the problems that I indicated in chapter 3.

Suggestions and Solutions

Overall, it is clear from this study that there needs to be more contextualized interpretation of slavery during the main house tours. After all, the houses could not function and the Founding Fathers could not have lived their elite lifestyles without relying on the labor of others. An interpretive approach that promotes this kind of message would be ideal. Asking visitors to imagine the numbers of people who worked for the benefit of the family who lived in the house (similar to the statement made in Montpelier's orientation film; see chapter 8), or the ratio of enslaved individuals to the family that lived in the house could help visitors internalize the message of the highly systematic and pervasive nature of slavery. This message could be implemented at all of the sites, especially on the house tour.

In addressing the physical site layout, interpreters or interpretive plaques could call attention to the actual placement of the outbuildings, noting that their placement is indicative of how the owner of the main house felt about the display of slavery. George Washington, for example, preferred that the quarters for those he enslaved be hidden and made landscape alterations to achieve this (Manca, 2012), and Thomas Jefferson, as a contrast, placed his outbuildings on Mulberry Row, which was the main thoroughfare to reach the house and on which numerous Monticello visitors would travel. This placement was likely due to necessity of proximity, but also probably a form of "cost

signaling" (Neiman, 2008), where Jefferson was effectively displaying his wealth (in the form of enslaved people) to incoming visitors.

There is also the opportunity for a discussion about why the structures in which enslaved people lived and worked usually do not exist today, which additionally opens the possibility for discussing reconstructions, why they are or are not on the landscape, and whether or not the reconstructions are typical of outbuildings during the time period. Montpelier, with its framed structures that signify the size and placement of the outbuildings is an excellent example of how a site can call attention to the outbuildings while not disturbing the valuable archaeological material in the foundational area. Additionally, it avoids the issue of risking visitor misinterpretation when the structures are obviously not an attempt at recreating reality.

In considering the comfort of the visitor, the most important fact that interpreters must understand when speaking about slavery is that the topic is uncomfortable for most people. Coming to terms with discomfort is an important learning tool, and it may be beneficial for interpreters to acknowledge visitors' discomfort in order to have a more meaningful discussion about the brutal and dehumanizing nature of slavery. One of the interpreters that was my colleague when I worked at Monticello always pointed out that slavery is an uncomfortable topic, and it should be, since it was a horribly inhumane and oppressive system founded on arbitrarily stripping other humans of their rights for the benefit of others. Putting slavery into those terms seemed to somewhat mitigate the palpable tension during this interpreter's tours and is a good model for one way to deal with visitor discomfort with the topic.

As stated before, spending more time during the house tour incorporating details about the constant interaction of the owning family and those they enslaved may help to paint a more accurate picture of life inside the main house. So, only bringing up slavery

at one (or maybe two) dedicated time(s) in the house, such as at Ash Lawn-Highland, does not do justice to the realities of the system. In order to reinforce the pervasive nature of slavery, interpreters could attempt to mention slavery or enslaved people throughout the tour, similar to my most recent house tour at Monticello.

Additionally, if interpreters were more conscious of speaking in the active voice about tasks performed in and around the house, it would be easier to discuss slavery more often. Avoiding euphemisms could also help with reinforcing who was doing the work in and around the house. Finally, it is important for interpreters to be aware of the difference in discussing slavery and enslaved people on their own terms versus as a tool to speak about the Founding Father who owned the house. Both of these tactics have their place in order to gain a better understanding of slavery, and one should not be valued over the other.

If the resources of the historic site allow, interpreters should use paid professional development programs designed around the interpretation of slavery. These programs could address topics such as conscious phrasing and vocabulary use, how to succinctly and appropriately answer challenging or complex questions, or how to better incorporate slavery into the main house tour. If resources are limited at sites, interpreters should be introduced to these topics during their initial training. They should also be encouraged to explore and research interpretive methods similarly as they would be expected to conduct research and reading on the other topics in the interpretive scope of their tour. It is important that staff are held accountable for the information they present, as well as how they present it, and it would be prudent for the management to create interpretive principles or guidelines for the interpretation of slavery. It is also necessary for management to maintain oversight to ensure the continued compliance with these guidelines.

While specialized programming is needed in order to delve more deeply into a topic, too many times the topic of slavery left to its own, more-focused tour and not interpreted in much detail on the main tour. Sites must incorporate more ways for the public to, frankly, be forced into confronting a topic that was such a significant part of our nation's history. At Colonial Williamsburg, for example, there was a program during 1998 called "Enslaving Virginia," part of which included "an enactment of enslaved people plotting to run away, running away, and being chased by slave hunters. These enactments were designed to interrupt the regular tours; whether or not individuals chose to learn about enslavement, there was a likelihood that the knowledge would be thrust upon them" (Eichstedt and Small 2002: 202). While the words "forced" and "thrust" may be a bit more violent than the idea I am going for, I do believe that making the topic of slavery unavoidable for visitors should be an avenue that historic sites to explore. Too many times, visitors are able to self-select out of learning about slavery, which not only reaffirms and promotes nostalgia, collective amnesia, and social forgetting, but also has multiple implications for the perpetuation of contemporary systematic and institutional racism and oppression, which, as stated previously, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

A final overarching suggestion for the interpretive tactics at these sites is informed by Marstine's (2011) notion of "radical transparency," which "not only describes but also analyzes behavior and considers its significance. It is a mode of communication that admits accountability--acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions" (14). Historic site museums have an opportunity to be much more clear about their interpretive treatment of slavery as well as slavery itself, and radical transparency can help with that clarity. A radically transparent statement about the use (or non-use) of surnames for enslaved individuals, for example, could speak to the fact that not all of the surnames of enslaved people are known and might describe

some of the historical reasons behind our contemporary lack of information, or stating that surnames are used in interpretation only when they are known for certain. Another example would be an explanation of the use of vocabulary at the site, such as the conscious uses of the words "enslaved," or perhaps "slave," rather than words like "servant" because of the dangers in deflecting attention from reality. There are opportunities for radically transparent interpretations throughout these historic sites, especially in the interpretation of slavery, opening up the possibility for discussion about why sites may lack particular information and what they are doing to gain deeper understanding into the topic.

Site-Specific Suggestions

In order to decrease the chance that visitors will come away with a false nostalgia for the Founding Era, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association must overhaul their interpretive messages in all areas of the site, including the promotional and informational materials such as the official guidebook. Generally changing the narrative from the happy or grateful slave/good master will require significant re-evaluation of the interpretive programming, but has the potential to considerably reshape understanding about American slavery, and by extension, the metanarrative of American history. Monticello and Montpelier are good examples to the kind of realistic discussions about slavery to which Mount Vernon could similarly orient their programming.

Changing the route of the house tour could create an opportunity for visitors to exit at the current point of entry, which is closer to the Upper Garden area that includes the Greenhouse Slave Quarters, increasing the chance that more visitors would see the area. The accessibility to the Upper Garden would also be easier, since visitors would not have to go uphill to see the area as they must now. Additionally, if visitors see the Upper Garden area first, then the rest of the outbuildings would be on the same level or downhill and also lead to the visitor center.

There are ways to address the difference in use of last names for those who were enslaved, both inside and outside the house. As indicated above, interpreters could note *why* the last names of the enslaved people they speak about are not used, even if briefly, and other interpretive materials such as plaques, gallery labels, or the guidebook could do the same.

Even though slavery did not exist at John Adams' Peace field, Adams National Historical Park misses the opportunity to speak about the wider context of slavery in Massachusetts and New England, especially during John Adams' lifetime. Delving into a discussion about *why* John Adams did not own slaves could open a wider narrative about the historical context of slavery.

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation and the Montpelier Foundation already have a high level of incorporation when it comes to information about slavery. However, they both have the same guide-specific interpretive issues, some problems in language use on interpretive materials, and an approach that provides richly detailed information about slavery in an area separate from the main house tour. A re-evaluation of the interpretive print materials to address issues of language would be ideal as well as professional development to help guides with interpretive tactics to better incorporate slavery into their tours. Additionally, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation should explore options for re-creating one or some of the buildings on Mulberry Row, particularly the domestic dwellings. The framed structures at Montpelier may be a good starting point while the feasibility of more permanent structures are considered.

Ash-Lawn Highland, similar to Mount Vernon, would benefit from an overhaul of their print materials, especially the plaques in the Service Yard buildings. Many of these plaques are word-processed documents that could benefit from an easy update to address the extensive use of passive voice and general deflection of agency on the part of those enslaved. For the plaques inside the buildings that represent the housing for those

that were enslaved at Ash-Lawn Highland, it would be helpful to add a statement saying that the buildings may not be an accurate representation of how the enslaved people lived at Montpelier. Additionally, the site should also work to help guides incorporate the realities and complexities of slavery throughout their tour.

The foil to many of my suggestions is, of course, "the challenge of maintaining a plantation museum in a tourist-based economy which often dictates how a tour is designed" (Hadley, 2004: 71). While it should not be an excuse that impedes any change, I do understand that site museums are, essentially, businesses that need to cater to their customer base. However, I believe that the needs of the customer base are changing and that site museums have the opportunity to continue to cater to that customer base while incorporating my suggestions, many of which seem to track with what visitors, when viewed as customers, want to experience. Incorporating more richly presented and contextualized information about slavery is entirely feasible given the recent trends.

Interest and reception on the part of visitors of this kind of inclusively-focused information is on the upswing, given the number of community and identity museums that are increasingly appearing across the world. The recent popularity of entertainment media that focuses on slavery is telling of the public's heightened interest level in the topic. *Sally Hemmings: A Novel* (2009) and the film *Django Unchained* (2012) are just two of the many sources of mainstream entertainment available that have slavery at their core, and while their popularity suggests an American penchant for dramatic stories of scandal, it also shows that the public wants to know about American slavery. Another, related indicator of the heightened interest-level in "servant culture" is the popularity of the currently-running television program *Downton Abbey*. Although it takes place in England and is not about slavery, it has promoted a shift in perspective in considering what it takes for an elite family to be successful, and it is usually founded on the work

done by those who labor for that family, which is indeed directly related to slavery. The historic sites in this study, and others that date to the Founding Era, should take advantage of this heightened interest in order to give a more detailed and nuanced presentation of slavery.

Finding the balance of presenting a critical history and remaining respectful (but not reverent) to the Founding Fathers is indeed challenging, though, I believe, possible. Monticello and Montpelier, through the presentation of information on some of the plaques that I quoted in chapters 7 and 8, are good examples of ways to begin to achieve this balance. It is important to consider these men not only as products of their time but also as humans with flaws. We need not discredit these Founders' great accomplishments, but it should be understood that these great accomplishments were facilitated by the lifestyle afforded by slave labor. Historic sites should attempt to emulate this kind of balance in their interpretive material, written or spoken, in order to present a more realistic historical narrative. And dealing realistically with slavery can increase understanding about this complex topic and may decrease the chance that visitors become nostalgic for the Founding Era.

It is not enough for sites to acknowledge the presence of slavery. As I have shown, the *ways* that slavery is interpreted has direct bearing on the message that the site sends to the public. Mount Vernon, for example, acknowledges slavery but presents it overall as a rather benevolent institution. In order to avoid trivialization of slavery at historic sites, quality over quantity should be a rule for its presentation. Historic sites must also be careful when considering what exactly constitutes an inclusive history since it can be easily misrepresented. There is the danger that the topic of slavery may be referenced in many parts of the entire interpretive experience but treated at a relatively shallow degree, making it appear as though the information is incorporated throughout the site.

Achieving both breadth and depth should be the goal for the interpretations of slavery at these historic sites.

It is my hope that through this study, I have made it clear that there are larger implications for sub-standard interpretations of slavery at historic house museums. By building on Eichstedt and Small's study, I have attempted to provide information that may be used in order to work toward more equitable and accurate interpretations at these sites and others from the Founding Era. Incorporating my suggested solutions into the interpretations at these sites may help to clear the path toward a more self-critical perspective of the history of our nation and may eventually translate into a more holistic and fair treatment of all those who call themselves American, both in the past and present. Pride and prejudice need not go hand-in-hand.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Yearly Operation Schedules (as Indicated on Respective Websites)

Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens

Open daily, year-round

April - August: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
March, September, and October: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
November - February: 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

The historic area of Mount Vernon remains open for approximately 30 minutes after the posted estate closing time. The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center remains open for one hour after the posted closing time.

Adams National Historical Park

The park grounds are open year-round. The historic homes are open for tours April 19 through November 10, seven days a week from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Thomas Jefferson's Monticello

Open daily, year-round, except Christmas.

The open-hours of the gates change seasonally and depend on the month and day of the week. Monticello's website has an interactive calendar where visitors can select a date and view the open hours. The gates open anywhere from 8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. and close anywhere from 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

James Madison's Montpelier

Open:

Tuesday - Sunday, April 1 - October 31
Wednesday - Sunday, November 1 - January 1, and January 16 - March 31
December 31
January 1

Closed:

Every Monday year round (except holidays)
Mondays and Tuesdays from November 1 - March 31
January 2 - January 15 for cleaning and maintenance
Thanksgiving and Christmas

Hours:

April 1 - October 31: 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
November 1 - March 31: 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

James Monroe's Ash-Lawn Highland

Open year-round, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day

April - October: 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

November - March: 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

APPENDIX B:
Admission Fee Schedules

This schedule reflects general admission prices only. It does not include group or member rates, specialized tours and activities, or multiple-visit passes.

Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens

Adults	\$17
Seniors ages 62+	\$16
Youth ages 6-11	\$ 8
Children under 6	Free

Adams National Historical Park

Per person (valid for seven days)	\$5
Children under 16	Free

Per-person fee for a visitor traveling on foot, bicycle, or individuals traveling together in a vehicle as a non-commercial, organized group.

Thomas Jefferson's Monticello

Adults, Mar. 15 - Oct. 31	\$24
Adults, Jan. 1 - Mar. 14, Nov. 1 - Dec. 31	\$18
Children 6-11	\$8
Children under 6	Free

James Madison's Montpelier

Adults	\$ 18
Children 6-14	\$7
Children under 6	Free

James Monroe's Ash-Lawn Highland

Adults	\$12
Seniors (60 and older)	\$11
AAA Members (with ID)	\$11
Children 6-11	\$6
Local Residents	\$5
Children under 6	Free