

REENACTMENTS:
EMBODIED ENCOUNTERS WITH THE U.S. SOUTHERN PAST

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Erin Rebecca Stoneking
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Erin Rebecca Stoneking, Ph.D.
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Between 2015 and 2019, U.S. Americans began attending to the lingering divisions, memorials, and legacies of the Civil War with a renewed sense of urgency. What is it about this moment in our politics and culture that draws our attention back to the Civil War and the post-Reconstruction South? These memorials, regional affinities, and legacies have always been with us: why address their longevity and abundance now? Working at the intersection of theatre studies, performance studies, cultural studies, and American studies, this dissertation responds to contemporary national conversations around race, region, cultural memory, and political ideology through an examination of four distinct performance practices that “reenact” the South.

Reenactments explores the multiple historic and contemporary U.S. Souths evoked by Civil War battle reenactment, lynching protest performance, plantation tourism, and contemporary theatre. Drawing on the anthropology-influenced methodology of performance studies, this dissertation is informed by my field research on each of these case studies as a participant-observer, or, in the words of activist theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, a “spect-actor.” This thesis examines how the chosen case studies remember and reanimate different U.S. Southern histories in the present, engaging their participants physically and affectively. As performance practices, the case studies also re-member the past: participants use embodied performance to make the past real in the present and to bring the purportedly dead past into relation with living bodies. *Reenactments* argues that these Southern reenactments, though often deployed in the service of preserving hegemonic memory and meaning-making, in their liveness have the capacity to upend that preservation and produce new, potentially radical meanings.

Building on the work of performance studies scholars such as Rebecca Schneider, who have written about reenactment as a performance practice, this dissertation intervenes in the undertheorized gap between the fields of U.S. Southern Studies and performance studies and posits and theorizes reenactment as specifically a Southern performance practice. Moreover, this project, in response to the New Southern Studies field, examines how national monolithic images of the South are produced and reproduced, investigating not just the region in its own context, but in the context of the national imagination.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erin Stoneking earned a B.A. in Dramatic Arts and English Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2010. After working as a freelance dramaturg in New York City and completing artistic apprenticeships with American Opera Projects and New York Theatre Workshop, she went on to earn an M.A. in Performance Studies at New York University in 2013. In addition to her doctoral research, she provided production and development dramaturgy for the Performing and Media Arts department's season, including *Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play*, *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, and the Ten-Minute Play Festival. While completing her dissertation, Erin worked as resident dramaturg and teaching artist with the English Theatre Düsseldorf in Düsseldorf, Germany. She has presented her research at meetings of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), the European Association for American Studies (EAAS), the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC), the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA), and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE).

DEDICATION

For Hal, Carole, Sarah, Shelby, Mary Grace, and for Matthew

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Introduction

In Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's 2003 experimental sung-through musical *Caroline, or Change*, the everyday life of a black maid, Caroline, employed to cook and clean for a middle-class Jewish family in Lake Charles, Louisiana, plays out against a backdrop of broader social and political upheaval in 1963. As the title suggests, the musical's almost obsessive central leitmotif is change: change in the form of personal and national loss, change in the form of the struggle for civil rights, change in the form of loose coins left in a little white boy's pockets, which in turn manifests change in Caroline's ability to afford small luxuries for her own children. Caroline, mired in her own painful past and numbed by the menial sameness of her life as a domestic servant, is not only melancholically resistant to change, but deeply skeptical of it. After all, the only meaningful change she has experienced in her life has been the trauma of divorcing her abusive ex-husband, leaving her dependent on a dead-end, underpaid job to support her three children: all change, in other words, is not necessarily positive. Caroline's reactionary attitude reflects less a political ideology than a survival strategy, a coping mechanism in the face of a monolithic past and a lifetime of disappointments. Ultimately, Caroline's most climactic moment of personal change occurs when she decides to violently suppress her own hopes, dreams, and memories, metaphorically ironing herself "FLAT": "Now how bout that then? / "That what Caroline can do! / That how she rearrange herself, / that how she change!" (118). Removing herself from the flow of time by deciding to deny both her past and her future, Caroline suspends herself in a state of perpetual stasis, rendering her more like the anthropomorphic appliances she spends her days with than an agential human. "Caroline is a woman who loses her mobility," Kushner explains, "She can't stop grieving over losses, and, like [Walter] Benjamin's angel, her face is turned to the past" (qtd. in Goldstein 34). Benjamin's

“Angel of History”-- in turn inspired by artist Paul Klee’s print “Angelus Novus”-- famously inspired the Angel who appears in Kushner’s two-part play *Angels in America* to announce that humanity must cease all progress. Benjamin’s Angel is blown violently backwards toward the future by the storm of progress, but can only see the enormous, chaotic wreckage of the past. He does not cheerfully face the future, assured of its brightness by the forward tilt of progress, but is pitched into it, even as he attempts to reckon with the growing, broken jumble of the past.

Change, here, is broader than the scope of one person’s life: it accrues, aggregates, sets off chain-reactions, constituting the stuff of human history, and propelling humanity-- whether we like it or not-- forward in time. The shifting scales of change and various characters’ reactions to it throughout *Caroline, or Change* represent the musical’s central questions: what remains from the past, and what changes? Who will be forgotten, immobilized and lost under the weighty clutter of the past, and who will be swept up in the storm of progress? Caroline’s rejection of change is juxtaposed with her teenage daughter Emmie and Caroline’s friend and fellow domestic servant Dotty, who both believe fervently in the power of social and personal change to transform their lives. Emmie is politically engaged and determined to fight for her rights, a passionate activist-in-the-making; Dotty attends night-school after work and follows the news to glean evidence of change nationally and locally. It is through Emmie and Dotty that we encounter the framing off-stage action of the play: a local Confederate soldier statue has been removed from outside of the local courthouse, prompting outrage from white citizens. In three scenes at the beginning, middle, and end of the musical, Dotty and Emmie share developments in the Confederate monument’s removal. In “Dotty and Caroline,” Dotty informs Caroline of the statue’s disappearance, triumphantly concluding that “things change everywhere / even here” (32). In “Dotty and Emmie,” Dotty and Emmie discuss the statue, which has been discovered,

headless and wrapped in a Confederate battle flag, sunk in the mud of the bayou. Finally, after Caroline has resigned herself to denying her dreams and returning to her job with the Gellman family, Emmie has the last word of the musical. In “Epilogue: Emmie’s Dream,” Emmie divulges that she was one of the activists who beheaded and removed the Confederate soldier statue: “your time is past now, on your way / Get gone and never come again! For change come fast and change come slow, / but everything changes! And you got to go!” (126). The past reverberates unceasingly through the lives of the play’s characters, but their orientations to that past-- and the ways that they choose to react to it-- vary significantly. History writ large shapes the everyday lives of Kushner’s everyday characters, but, conversely, history itself is the stuff of the mundane.

Written in 2003, Kushner’s musical seems to eerily presage the current moment-- roughly 2015-2019-- in the United States, as the nation debates its own racist legacies in the form of public monuments, streets, courthouses, schools dedicated to the memory of enslavers, Confederate soldiers, and segregationists. Like the Angel of History, we find ourselves suddenly oriented toward the past, eyes open in awe as we try to grapple with the chaos that no longer tidily marches in an organized train of progress. The past, that is, no longer seems so entirely *past*, but colors and disrupts our violent tumble into the future. Inevitably, the question arises: To what extent are we defined by our history? To whom does the past belong? Where does the past lead us-- how do we shape a present and future informed by history but not bounded by it? This debate has frequently manifested in the defacing, removal, or destruction of Confederate monuments specifically, but the aforementioned questions at the core of the debate exceed the inanimate, suggesting the very real ways in which cultural memory and the legacies of racism bear upon the lived experiences of contemporary Americans. Cultural memory and the past, in

other words, persist across living bodies, recurring and more specifically *reenacted* in the present. I open this dissertation with an example drawn from the theatre to intervene in and reframe a conversation that has, thus far, tended to focus largely on the inanimate traces of the past-- the statues, building names, plaques, and flags-- and in order to limn the stakes of embodied encounters with the Southern past. Current debates around memorialization, focusing as they do on fixed and inanimate symbols of the persistence of cultural memory, fail to account for the ways that the Southern past recurs and animates through live performance and embodiment. Performance, as a live and adaptable-- albeit enduring in its citationality-- cultural object, offers the opportunity to more clearly understand the nuances of how the U.S. Southern past is lived, enacted, and contested in the present. Performance, moreover, as a broadly defined category in the vein of performance studies scholarship, allows us to consider a wider range of lived and embodied experiences, including everyday life, performance art, drama, activism, hobbies, and leisure activities. Working at the intersection of theatre studies, performance studies, cultural studies, and American studies, this dissertation responds to contemporary national conversations around race, region, cultural memory, and political ideology through an examination of four distinct performance practices that “reenact” the Southern past in the lived and present moment.

Reenactments explores the multiple historic and contemporary U.S. Souths evoked by Civil War battle reenactment, lynching protest performance, plantation tourism, and contemporary theatre. I examine how the chosen case studies remember and reanimate different U.S. Southern histories in the present, engaging their participants physically and affectively. In particular, these different Southern histories articulate differing relationships to racism, slavery, and lynching, remembering the South with, respectively, the magnolia-strewn nostalgia of

antebellum romance and the violent trauma of race-based discrimination, forced labor, and violence. While Civil War battle reenactment and plantation tourism often belie their own ideological investments, characterizing themselves as either pleasurable pastimes or rigorous educational or research opportunities, the performances they elicit frequently lay bare a conservative instinct to maintain or return to hierarchical racial and gendered systems. The remaining case studies-- lynching protest reenactments and contemporary theatre-- more explicitly intervene in such preservationist narratives, dramatizing what is at stake in the continuing circulation of national and regional myths by emphasizing the past's reverberations in the present. As performance practices, the case studies also re-member the past: participants use embodied performance to make the past real in the present and to bring the purportedly dead past into relation with living bodies. *Reenactments* argues that these Southern reenactments, though often deployed in the service of preserving hegemonic memory and meaning-making, in their liveness have the capacity to upend that preservation and produce new, potentially radical meanings.

The national debate around symbols of the Confederacy began, in fact, with a horrific reenactment performance in its own right. On June 17, 2015, white supremacist Dylann Roof entered the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina and murdered nine black worshippers out of racist hatred. Roof's commingled deployment of both the symbols of white supremacy and the U.S. Confederacy made clear that he intended his act of murderous violence as a return of the racist violence that characterized lynchings and slavery. His desire in staging such a return-- as multiple news outlets reported, from his self-published manifesto-- was to incite a race war that would finish what Southern secession had started in the nineteenth century. What Roof's massacre did accomplish, in fact, was a searching

national debate over the display of the Confederate flag. Proponents of the flag argue that it represents Southern culture and respect for Southern history and heritage; opponents argue that, as illustrated by Roof's violence, the flag represents the white supremacist racism that undergirded the institution of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and white Southerners' vitriolic (and sometimes violent) resistance to federal policies like public school integration and voting rights for black Southerners. Ten days after the Charleston Massacre, artist and activist Bree Newsome climbed the flagpole outside of the South Carolina Statehouse-- where, since a compromise with the NAACP in 2000, the state has flown the Confederate flag instead of on the capitol building itself-- and removed the Confederate flag, an act of civil disobedience for which she was immediately arrested. The Confederate flag reappeared in front of the statehouse within hours. Although the South Carolina House of Representatives voted to permanently remove the flag from the statehouse grounds on July 9, the debate over how to reckon with the continuing and present traces of the Civil War, slavery, and Jim Crow persisted in local and national headlines. In the intervening years, the South and its past-- primarily crystallized through public discourse around flags, statues, and streets and buildings named after historical figures with ties to the Confederacy or slavery-- have become the stage for a larger national debate over history, memory, and legacy in the United States.

In the years since I began researching this project, the debate over how to reckon with the Southern past that began with the Charleston Massacre has ricocheted into a sprawling and divisive discourse, battled out in local letters to the editor, on the local and national political stage, in judicial courts, in protests in town parks and streets, and, occasionally, in violent conflict. In my home state of North Carolina, protracted and bitter public protests (both for and against) and acts of vandalism led to the removal of Confederate monuments from the grounds of

my alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (where supporters of the Confederate monument also urinated on and defaced a memorial to the enslaved with racist epithets); from a courthouse in nearby Durham; and from Forsyth County Courthouse in Winston-Salem, some thirty minutes' drive from where I grew up (Moody, Zaveri, "Update," Hampson). My current institution, Cornell University, opted in 2016 to change the name of its "Cornell Plantations" to "Cornell Botanic Gardens" to eliminate any association with the antebellum South, and more specifically, with slavery. In Florida and Mississippi, universities have added contextualizing signs to their Confederate monuments while navigating the legal procedure of removing statues; such efforts represent attempts to work around existing and in some cases recently passed laws that prohibit the removal of Confederate memorials (Haney, Dunkelberger, Ellis). Indeed, Mississippi state representative Karl Oliver suggested in 2017 that anyone who supported the removal of Confederate memorials should be lynched, a comment that recalls the mostly but not exclusively Southern late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practice of extrajudicially murdering black citizens deemed to have overstepped their place as a form of racist intimidation (Royals). Several politicians and elected officials have apologized for recently unearthed photographs and videos depicting them wearing blackface makeup, Confederate or Ku Klux Klan garb, or posing with the Confederate battle flag (Robertson, Stracqualursi, Kilgore). The city of Memphis, Tennessee, removed Confederate cannon replicas from a downtown park and a statue of Confederate president Jefferson Davis (Mickens). The Texas state preservation board voted in 2019 to remove a "Children of the Confederacy Creed" plaque declaring that the Confederacy did not fight the Civil War in order to "sustain slavery" from the state capitol house (Samuels). Atlanta, Georgia changed the name of its Confederacy Avenue to "United Avenue"; Austin, Texas, in addition to renaming multiple streets, parks, and

landmarks, is also still considering-- as of the time of this writing-- renaming the city itself due to namesake Stephen Austin's pro-slavery ideology (Pendered, Eustachewich). The re-naming, removal, and recontextualization of Confederate or racist monuments (over one hundred renamings or removals have occurred since June 2015) are not, moreover, limited to the geographic South: similar efforts have taken place as such memorials have drawn criticism in Montana, Idaho, Indiana, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York ("Whose Heritage?"). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which launched a study cataloging Confederate memorials in the United States after the 2015 Charleston Massacre, there are over 1,700 such symbols in public spaces; the number continues to grow as lesser known memorials are discovered and, unbelievably, new memorials are constructed, as in Abbeville, South Carolina and Crenshaw County, Alabama. While the majority of the memorials, roads, and institutions that still retain their Confederate or pro-slavery names and imagery are located in what was the Confederate South, dozens are dotted through other geographical regions, including in California, Iowa, New York, Nevada, and Arizona (*ibid.*).

While the national focus on public symbols representing the Confederacy or pro-slavery stances seems to concentrate the debate over cultural memory, legacy, and racism on the geographical South, the erection of such symbols outside of the Confederate South suggests that, rather, the memorials cleave to the contours of ideological, racial, or political affiliation as well as regional. Certainly, even in the states that formed the Confederacy, the bulk of these memorials were dedicated not immediately following the Civil War, but in the years of Jim Crow in the early 20th century, and in response to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Since 2015, the debate over these symbols has fallen not necessarily along regional lines, but along ideological ones: in a 2017 poll, while a slim majority of respondents favored leaving

Confederate memorials standing, the responses were sharply split along racial and partisan affinities. Republicans and whites were more likely to support the statues, whereas Democrats and people of color were more likely to support their removal (Kahn). The split reflects a broader and growing trend of political polarization in the United States: according to the Pew Research Center, in the twenty years between 1994 and 2014, the number of Americans holding consistent or uniform ideological opinions has more than doubled (“Political Polarization in the American Public”). These ideological divisions are also more closely aligned with partisanship, and, in turn, the starker division between political parties has engendered greater political animosity between opposing partisans than previously recorded. The overlap between an increasingly ideologically divided nation and the debate over the preservation of the Southern past came to a boiling point in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017, when avowed white supremacists and far-right activists organized the “Unite the Right” rally to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee from a public square. The rally was met by counter-protests, and when the two sides clashed, the event erupted in violence. Jacob Scott Goodwin, Alex Ramos, Daniel Borden, and Tyler Davis were convicted in the brutal beating of counter-demonstrator Deandre Harris, and James Fields was convicted of murdering counter-demonstrator Heather Heyer when he plowed his car into a crowd of anti-racist activists (“Fourth Man”). In the aftermath of the deadly violence, President Donald Trump publicly dismissed the national outrage over Heyer’s death and Harris’s beating, claiming that there were “very fine people on both sides,” a claim that he has repeated and defended as recently as April 2019 (Coaston). The president’s remarks, part of a larger pattern of excusing or openly espousing alt-right and white supremacist ideologies, validate and create space for such reactionary politics to play out in the mainstream, where they had previously been confined to the margins of the

political public square. Suddenly, seemingly endless think-pieces, opinion pieces, conspiracy theories, and even Twitter memes proclaimed or played on the “second American Civil War,” warning, at their most ominous, that the nation is so divided that violent conflict is imminent (Solnit, Truscott, Hanson, “Second Civil War Letters”). According to some, that war is already ongoing: “Trump,” journalist Julian K. Truscott IV went so far as to venture in a November 2018 piece in *Salon* magazine, “has embraced a new confederacy, and he is their Jefferson Davis, and a new civil war has been joined.” In a 2011 poll, 56 percent of Americans thought the Civil War was “still relevant to American politics and political life,” and in a 2018 poll, 31% of likely U.S. voters thought it was probable that a second Civil War will happen by 2023 (“Civil War at 150,” Miller).

Certainly, individual artists, activists, historians, and organizations have long pushed back against the nostalgic Lost Cause narrative that would characterize the Confederacy as a noble and just albeit doomed ideal. The NAACP, for example, sought to ban the overtly Lost Cause film *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, and more recently waged a fifteen-year economic boycott against the state of South Carolina in protest of the flying of the Confederate battle flag on state capitol grounds. Yet, as the above brief sketch of the last five years demonstrates, the past and its legacies have launched into renewed relevance, urgency, and presence in the broader contemporary public discourse in the United States. In many ways, the national conversation is an attempt to begin a long overdue reckoning that was postponed in the rush to reunite the sundered nation and reintegrate white Southerners into the body politic. To be sure, the South-- where most of the Confederate monuments, holidays, and flags are to be found-- is at the center of the discussion. Constructed as the Lost Cause narrative is on a South that is romantic but doomed, steeped in tradition and deeply tied to its past (and as widespread and insidious as this

characterization is), the South as it figures in the American cultural imaginary is already a place of haunting and history. While the debate over Civil War memorials and the display of Confederate flags is certainly grounded in the very real specifics of geography and history, the South exceeds its regional meaning and comes to stand in for different national divisions and identities, contorting into a kind of indexical catch-all concept at the expense of nuance and complexity. This symbolic South, moreover, is emphatically a South tied to the past, real or imagined. While what may be at stake in the debate is the future of the nation-- who are we, as a nation? Where and how do we draw the borders of membership in the national community? What will we tolerate, and what will prompt us to undertake radical change?-- the South here becomes a blanket proxy for the nation's past, a temporal location as much as a geographical one.

This study represents and responds to a larger turn in the Southern studies field-- dubbed New Southern Studies, and distinguished by the more intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches of scholars such as Houston Baker, Jr., Dana D. Nelson, and Tara McPherson-- which seeks to consider and define the South not by its culture or geographical location, but rather by its deployment as a concept and imagined space. This concept or imagined space, moreover, while ultimately flexible and adaptable, is frequently rooted in monolithic visions of the South as a distinct and vanishing culture and region defined by a "sense of place." The imagined South, in its putative distinctiveness, occupies a vexed position in relation to the nation as a whole. New Southern Studies's emphasis on the South as an imagined concept is a direct response and challenge to traditional Southern Studies' overwhelming preoccupation with defining and locating the "real" or "authentic" South and Southern identity (an identity that, indeed, assumes a white subject). In its earliest incarnation, Southern studies, while occasionally

progressive for its time (W.J. Cash's seminal 1941 study *The Mind of the South* suggests itself), was overwhelmingly white and male (in both subject and authorship) and bound by geographical and national borders established in and unchanged since the Civil War. The original Southern studies was a field invested in its own regional exceptionalism, its own mythic narrative of cavalier planters, Gothic and grotesque families, and magical landscapes. It perpetuated an exceptionalist concept of the region's culture that championed authenticity (fried chicken, sweet potato pie, blues, country, Elvis) without challenging what largely amounts to white appropriation of black culture. It has been the task of scholars interested in forming a new Southern studies to systematically and repeatedly dismantle the legacy of its older incarnation in order to pave the way for a field founded on interdisciplinary, intersectional, and international investigation and analysis. New Southern Studies, moreover represents an attempt to expand the frame within which the U.S. South is considered to include hemispheric, transnational, and global scales of circulation and interaction. This turn, as well as the term "New Southern Studies," are generally credited to Houston Baker, Jr. and Dana D. Nelson, who in the introduction to their 2001 co-edited special issue of *American Literature* called for a "new Southern studies" that would, chiefly, employ new methods and frameworks that could account for a more interdisciplinary, intersectional, and complex vision of the South and thereby "reconfigure our familiar notions of Good (or desperately Bad) Old Southern White Men telling stories on the porch, protecting white women, and being friends to the Negro" (231-2). Baker and Nelson, in turn, acknowledged that this call built on the turn represented by existing works by Patricia Yaeger, Ann Goodwyn Jones and Susan Donaldson, and Richard Gray. Each of these early landmark contributions to the emerging field of New Southern Studies rejected the narrow definitions of Southern identity imposed by previous scholars of Southern literature, expanding

and revising the boundaries of the region and its culture. In the years since Baker and Nelson's preface was published, the turn has cohered into a field of its own, spawning more special issues, collections of essays and, at University of Georgia Press, a "New Southern Studies" book series.

In part as an acknowledgement that the U.S. South is but one of many Souths-- and that its status as such is, additionally, relative--American literature scholar Jennifer Greeson stylizes it "Our South" in her eponymous book. Greeson argues that there is no "'real' South" (10) but the South that belongs to the nation as an "internal other," in co-constitutive ideological juxtaposition to the United States as a whole (1). The possessive in "Our South" denotes its status as both inside and outside of the nation, representative of a "disavowed binary"-- it is "ours" in that it is within the nation and available for deployment, and at the same time "ours" in that it is in subjection, a region held apart and outside of, an exception to the nation (3). Both exploited and exploitative, the South's status as "internal other" enables the United States to conceptualize itself as an exceptional and ideal democracy. "I do not ask," Greeson writes of her project, "what the South is; rather, I ask what it is good for, what it accomplishes and enables in the broader culture of the United States" (2). The South, in Greeson's work, is more aptly described as a tool or a skill available to the nation than a place. Literature scholar Leigh Ann Duck echoes this assertion in her book *The Nation's Region*, pointing out that monolithic understandings of the South have allowed the United States to "contain contradictions." The nation regarded the South with a "tension between nostalgia and critique" which enfolded the region within the boundaries of the nation while simultaneously disavowing any incongruities it might present to the modern liberal nation-state (20).

Literature scholar Scott Romine and American Studies scholar Jon Smith tackle the notion of the monolithic "real South" by pointing out that, commonly, what the perception of a

disappearing “real” or “authentic” South is “good for” is creating a sense of loss and urgency which in turn renders the imagined South exceptional, desired, and compelling. For Romine, this manifests in traditional Southern Studies as a lamentable “eschatological grandeur,” and in contemporary media narratives as a driving force in the cultural reproduction and commodification of the South (2). Where a sense that authentic “culture” or “heritage” are slipping away provokes discursive handwringing from scholars, it drives cultural production and consumption of objects of simulated authenticity. Culture, according to Romine, is a “field of desire” rather than an essential or inherited habitude (11), a way of building affiliation, community, and identity in the face of the changes wrought by globalization and modernization. The “real South” that results from such desire is necessarily fake, simulated, commodified: the product of an unceasing pursuit of an unrecoverable original. Its status as non-real, however, does not preclude its very real utility to create, commodify, and consolidate identity: “That the South is increasingly sustained as a virtual, commodified, built, themed, invented, or otherwise artificial territoriality,” Romine writes, “... has hardly removed it from the domain of everyday use” (9). Smith puts it more bluntly: “‘the South’ is, for me, a meaningless term, naming nothing but fantasies,” he declares (30). Smith characterizes traditional Southern Studies as inflected with “white Southern melancholy,” a quality Smith in turn identifies as a Lacanian drive, which-- in Žižek’s reading of Lacan-- does not intend to satisfy its ultimate goal, but derives its driving pleasure from the circular repetition of attempting to reach that goal (39). Traditional Southern Studies, in other words, is after its own tail, engaged in an interminable and pleasurable game of mourning and attempting to reclaim what it avows has been lost. To draw further on Lacan, the South in both Romine and Smith is the nation’s (and the field’s) *objet petit a*, that elusive and

therefore endlessly fascinating object of desire. That it, ultimately, does not exist makes it all the more compelling.

This project responds to and intervenes in what has been, as evidenced above, a movement largely focused in the field of literary studies¹, expanding the idea of the South as a mobile, flexible concept to include mode, repertoire: performance. Like Greeson, Duck, Romine, and Smith, I investigate the South not merely as a fixed region or a culture as it exists, but, further, I investigate it as an embodied mode, a repertoire of performances *as it used* or invoked in the context of the nation at large. I am also, more specifically, interested in tracing embodied encounters with the imagined U.S. Southern past. Answering the call articulated by ongoing national debates over memorials and flags, I ask: why does the monolithic Southern past persist in the contemporary imaginary, and how does that persistence exceed the inanimate markers of memory-transfer? What is at stake in playing out the Southern past-- imagined or otherwise-- across live bodies in the present moment? What, in other words, do performances of the Southern past *do*: what are they “good for”? In order to answer these questions, I primarily employ critical frameworks of analysis from the field of performance studies. Itself a deeply interdisciplinary field, performance studies draws on methodology and theory from cultural studies, theatre studies, sociology, anthropology, queer theory, critical race theory, philosophy, linguistics, film, dance, and other fields. Examining the world through the lens of performance, performance studies understands “performance” to be both a descriptive frame (to study any given activity *as* performance) and a functional tool with real impact and the ability to produce

1. While sociologists have also published works in New Southern Studies, the subfield still tends to be dominated by literary studies scholars. Sociologist Zandria Robinson’s excellent *This Ain’t Chicago: Race, Class, and Regional Identity in the Post-Soul South* is notable in that it is a New Southern Studies work that uses performance as an analytic category, yet it does not explicitly draw on performance studies frameworks, and focuses exclusively on identity presentation in everyday life, after Erving Goffman.

meaning within a social field (to study the effects of a performance, or what a given performance *performs* or accomplishes). As language philosopher J.L. Austin and gender theorist Judith Butler elaborate in their respective theories of performativity, performance (whether a “speech-act” or “doing gender”) constructs the world around us: performance is meaning-making, and it is also an ongoing process of social and cultural reiteration, a repetition and citation of meanings already in circulation.

Following the prompt offered by performance studies, I include among the case studies for this project three objects of inquiry which are typically and traditionally not understood to be performances in their own right: Civil War battle reenactments, a lynching protest reenactment, and plantation heritage site tourism. In reading these three practices as performances, I am able to examine the way each of these objects is comprised of a set of embodied behaviors and actions which both constitute and interplay with existing narratives, legacies, and desires anchored in the U.S. Southern past in order to produce meaning within the context of the contemporary moment. Even in the final chapter, which investigates contemporary theatre-- more traditionally the domain of “performance”-- my analysis is grounded not just in the dramatic text of the chosen plays, but in their live and embodied production. In both its indebtedness to the lenses of performance studies, emphasis on live embodiment, and its relatively broad range of objects of inquiry, this dissertation is modelled after important contributions to the field such as Rebecca Schneider’s *Performing Remains*, Joseph Roach’s *Cities of the Dead*, and Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Indeed, as the chapters that follow will bear out, each of these texts provide crucial frameworks for understanding the past as a present and enduring force in contemporary performance. Each of these works explores a range of case studies: Schneider, battle reenactment, performance art, and theatre; Roach,

circum-Atlantic cultural practices such as Mardi Gras Indians and jazz funerals in New Orleans; and Taylor, scenarios of conquest and discovery in the Americas. Yet each is deeply concerned with live performance and embodied behavior as historical objects, traces of the behaviors and performances of the past. Significantly, while Schneider, Roach, and Taylor trace the genealogies of their respective contemporary performance practices, they do not confine or define their objects strictly to or by the past, but look for-- as playwright Suzan-Lori Parks would put it-- the “Rep & Rev,” the repetition and revision, the changes, subtle and overt, that shape and transform a performance over time (“Elements of Style,” 9). Furthermore, as performance studies scholar Richard Schechner explains,

The artifact may be relatively stable, but the performances it creates or takes part in can change radically. The performance studies scholar examines the circumstances in which [for instance] the painting was created and exhibited; she looks at how the gallery or building displaying the painting shapes its reception (2).

To that end, each of the following chapters spends time with an interdisciplinary set of texts outside of performance studies proper-- including texts from history, cultural studies, tourism studies, and sociology-- in order to contextualize and inform my analyses. This diverse range of perspectives enables a more nuanced interpretation of the performances at hand, and situates each case study more fully within the discourses, histories, and ideologies surrounding their production and reception.

Because my critical inquiry is grounded in live, embodied encounters with the U.S. Southern past, this dissertation relies on field research and participant observation. In the course of researching this project, I traveled to and attended reenactments in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia; plantations in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia; and theatrical productions in Ontario, Canada and Washington, D.C. My own observations of each of these places and events is supplemented by an archive of written accompanying materials

such as programs, brochures, handouts, websites, performance reviews, travel reviews, interviews, and instructional handbooks. Adapted from the field of anthropology, participant observation in the performance studies context rejects the premise that a researcher can conduct “objective” or neutral research at a distance from her own identity, politics, and feelings. Rather, participant observation places the researcher within the very frame she analyzes, taking into account her own experience and positionality. The participant-observer cannot merely observe a process apart from herself, but necessarily participates in its occurrence through her very presence. Through my respective objects of inquiry, I took on the participant-observer roles of tourist, audience member, protestor, and spectating visitor; while these may appear on their surface to be relatively passive roles, they represent-- in the equation of performance-- a significant half of the work of performance, the spectator. Each chapter includes, therefore, my observations of the performance at hand, which are, in turn, unquestionably shaped by my identity: a white, middle-class, straight woman from the U.S. South, relocated to and further educated in universities in the Northeast. (Indeed, my race and gender undoubtedly allowed me to pass unquestioned through each of the performances I observed, with the obvious exception of the protest in Georgia, where I was one of a handful of white rally participants.)

As my reflexive rehearsal of a few of my own identity markers might suggest, this project also draws on an investment in intersectional and interdisciplinary critical lenses common to both performance studies and New Southern Studies. Just as the broader national conversation around Confederate memorials and flags has paved a discursive road for reckoning with contemporary attitudes around race, class, and gender, the performances I analyze here permit me to think through how the imagined U.S. Southern past is necessarily a gendered, classed, and racialized mode or space. Here again, reconceptualizing the Southern past as a repertoire or

performance allows me to consider the way the Southern past is at work on, is reified, and is potentially transformed or altered through the living body. The body and its practices are, after all, shaped by and within the external (and subsequently internalized) social forces of gender, region, race, and class, which are manifested and conserved, in turn, through the repetitious acts of embodied practice. The body, too, is unavoidably affiliated with the legacies of the trauma of slavery and the way the intersection of the identity markers “black,” “female,” and “Southern” have congealed since the seventeenth century. The hypervisibility (and hypersexualization) of black female bodies on the auction block (or, like Saartjie Baartman, on the freak show stage), the unpaid labor of black female bodies (particularly the labor of childcare and wet-nursing), the legally unacknowledged and condoned rape of black female bodies (and subsequent reproductive labor, through which more bodies are added to the rapist’s property), and the reduction of black female bodies to merely their bodies is the historical milieu of the black female Southern experience. The white Southern female body, too, carries its own historical weight: hyperfeminized and sexually policed, the white female body (to varying degrees, dependent on class) has been the justification and the complicit “lynch-pin,” so to speak, of the creation and enforcement of racist legal codes, of the violent torture, murder, and display of black male bodies, and of the de-feminization of black female bodies. This dissertation, therefore, is furthermore indebted to studies positioned critically at the intersection of race, gender, and performance or race, gender, and the South, such as Tara McPherson’s *Reconstructing Dixie* and Harvey Young’s *Embodying Black Experience*. Young, in tracing black performances of stillness across, for example, photography, boxing, and theatre, identifies ways in which black subjects resist, navigate, and signify on the “similar embodied experiences” produced by “projections of the black body across recognizable African American bodies” (15). In so doing, Young

emphasizes the transfer of cultural memory via the body and embodiment and privileges performance as a potential site of resistance, agency, and self-representation. McPherson, in her wide-ranging cultural history of the post-Civil War South, argues for a Southern Studies that refuses the “lenticular logic” that would separate white and black Southerners’ experiences of the region. McPherson’s dogged attention to race, gender, and class models New Southern Studies scholarship as insistently intersectional.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One begins with the brand of reenactment readers are most likely to be familiar with in a U.S. Southern context: Civil War battle and camp reenactments. I expand, here, upon the critical frameworks of performance studies and Southern Studies to elaborate the South as mode or repertoire. Drawing on my own experience as a spectator at living history demonstrations in Gettysburg, PA and at a reenactment at Fort Branch, NC, I use my analysis of Civil War battle reenactments to set up “reenactment”--in its status as an active performance of the past-- as the central term and lens through and around which the rest of the dissertation is organized. Reenactment represents this project’s reframing of the nation’s renewed attention to the South, memory, and the nation’s past to include performance and embodiment. Reenactment, as a self-proclaimed attempt to both embody and experience the past, and more specifically, to re-animate across one’s own body the lived experience of another, offers the reenactor the opportunity to practice “radical empathy” and produce new, embodied, potentially transgressive or progressive readings of history.

Chapter Two analyzes historical reenactment that seeks to address, remember, and repair the violence and trauma that characterizes much of black Southern history. The chapter focuses primarily on the annual Moore’s Ford lynching reenactment and activist rally. I contend that the

lynching reenactment rehearses simultaneously for two near futures: one in which current structures of power repeat violence against black bodies and one in which those structures are, conversely, toppled by inter- and intra-racial dialogue and witnessing. In its deployment of reenactment practice in the service of anti-racist activism and black resilience, the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment provides a model for a Southern performance mode-- still invested in memorialization and the tracing of legacy from past to present through embodiment-- that refuses to legitimate or reify nostalgic narratives of the region.

Chapter Three turns to the plantation "heritage" site as the source of its own brand of nostalgic time-travel. Haunted by the imagined ur-plantation, *Gone with the Wind's* Tara, the plantation heritage site, through an intertwined function of setting (including spatial arrangement, rhetoric, design, and policy) and cultural narrative, prompts the visitor to imaginatively insert herself into the frame of the plantation. I thus describe the plantation heritage site as a "scriptive space," a term I adapt from the work of cultural historian Robin Bernstein. The scriptive space of the typical plantation heritage site asks visitors to engage on an imaginative level, to time-travel, to play Southern. Indeed, the site almost inevitably offers visitors the chance to pay for souvenirs, food, venue rental, hotel rooms, spa services, or other commodities designed to extend and enable visitors' performances of the imagined Southern past. Yet, as I propose via the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana, plantation heritage sites could, alternatively, foreclose any imaginative performance of white nostalgia by drastically altering the "setting" they offer visitors in the site, and thereby shifting the cultural narratives with which they engage.

Chapter Four examines the Southern plantation and Southern history as they appear in contemporary theatre. In the last five years, theatre artists have been particularly prescient in

responding to the national conversations around the U.S. Civil War's cultural memory and the legacy of slavery, but the field of theatre studies has yet to fully examine this phenomenon. This chapter analyzes Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's *An Octoroon* (2015) and Jennifer Kidwell and Scott R. Sheppard's *Underground Railroad Game* (2016) in order to theorize the recent plethora of plays and productions that have taken up the South as a stage for processing and scrutinizing American cultural and racial memory. I term these dramatic works "plantation plays," which I define as contemporary plays that use the antebellum Southern plantation as a physical and psychic setting to intervene in and signify on the nation's relationship to memory, race, slavery, and region. Using Diana Taylor's concept of the "scenario"-- a flexible but recognizable and citational set of behaviors, sets, characters, and plots-- I argue that plantation plays stage Southern scenarios in order to disrupt them, and in the process disrupt the audience's comfortable distance from racism and the legacies of the "peculiar institution" of slavery.

Chapter One

If at First You Don't Secede: Civil War Battle Reenactment

But American reunion was built on a comfortable narrative that made enslavement into benevolence, white knights of body snatchers, and the mass slaughter of the war into a kind of sport in which one could conclude that both sides conducted their affairs with courage, honor, and élan. This lie of the Civil War is the lie of innocence, is the Dream.

-- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 102

On the broadest level [the Lost Cause] came to represent a mood, or an attitude toward the past.

-- David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 258

In the second season of David Lynch and Mark Frost's campy 1990 ode to the American soap opera, *Twin Peaks*, wealthy businessman Ben Horne suffers a breakdown after a series of personal and professional catastrophes. Clad in a bathrobe and locked in his office, the previously cutthroat Horne weeps as he replays black-and-white home movies of his happy childhood, chain-smokes cigars, and rearranges his office furniture into a precarious tower in a fevered attempt at *feng shui*. When all of these efforts to regain his previous confidence and contentment fail him, Horne begins to refocus his attention on the U.S. Civil War. A Confederate battle flag appears in his office, as does a tabletop diorama complete with miniature trees, soldiers, and weapons. His bathrobe has been replaced by a gray Confederate officer's jacket. Over the course of several episodes, the diorama expands to take up the floor of Horne's office; Horne himself develops a Southern drawl as he issues commands to the plastic soldiers arrayed around him. A sword and accompanying grey trousers appear, a tent, lanterns, a stuffed horse, a roaring fire, more Confederate flags. The music behind Horne's scenes acquires a distinct albeit cockeyed military flair-- all electronic snare drums, trumpets, and flutes. Horne's daughter Audrey, with the help of a psychiatrist, confirms what the viewer has likely begun to suspect: Horne has completely disconnected from his own time and reality, and is convinced that what began as recreation is truly happening. As Horne falls deeper and deeper into his Confederate fantasy, Audrey realizes that her father is working out the pain of his own psychic defeat by replaying and reenacting the Civil War with a different ending.

This development in Ben Horne's storyline is likely recognizable to a United States audience as an off-kilter send-up of the practice of U.S. Civil War battle reenactment. Itself often dismissed as a form of bastardized or imprecise historiography for the terminally uncool or the avowedly racist, Civil War battle reenactment occupies a marginal place among American leisure activities. Yet reenactors themselves are fiercely devoted to the "hobby"-- which I contend is in fact a performance practice-- finding within it community, identity, and the reported ability to "time-travel," or affectively and physically experience the past. These embodied experiences of the past, according to reenactors, thus make accessible a deeper understanding of history that exceeds the written archive and may, in their view, supplement it. Such an outcome would seem to suggest that historical reenactment might offer a more expansive or alternative view of history that departs from or complicates traditional historiography; it opens the possibility of "radical empathy," or the attendant practice of intense and thorough commitment to living and performing another human's lived experience. Yet Civil War battle reenactment ultimately tends to be a memorializing performance practice, ideologically inflected and committed to maintaining and re-performing an imagined U.S. Southern past tied to a Lost Cause narrative. Drawing on my observations from a visit to the museum and reenactment demonstrations at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and to a day-long reenactment event at Fort Branch, North Carolina, this chapter investigates the imagined South as a performative mode, a repertoire available to and taken up by reenactors regardless of their military affiliation in a given reenacted battle. That is, in its preoccupation with locating, grasping, and experiencing the past, Civil War battle reenactment may be deemed a Southern performance practice. Characterized by a never-ending search for the inaccessible authentic past,

Civil War battle reenactment is steeped in (predominantly white, male) melancholy and nostalgia.

Indeed, melancholy and nostalgia pervade the TV series with which I opened this chapter. The TV show, through blurred focus, pastel color palettes, and retro costume and set design, crafts a dreamy otherworld of 1950s America. In the small town of Twin Peaks, WA, diner pie and coffee are a nourishing meal, everyone's a neighbor, and the "bad boy" is a sensitive dreamer on a motorcycle. Lurking beneath the wistful patina of yesteryear, however, is an elusive and pervasive evil that surfaces in unexpected people and places. Murder, sex trafficking, domestic violence, adultery, insurance fraud: for all its "down home" appeal, *Twin Peaks* is clearly far from wholesome. The "period piece" elements of *Twin Peaks* are, significantly, constructed from the popular imagination, a collage of references to film, TV, advertisements, and popular conceptions of what it was like to be a small-town, middle-class, white American in the mid-century. It is not, in other words, a period piece: it is less a document of a historical period than a document of contemporary America's nostalgia for a way of life that took shape not through lived experience, but through the stories we told ourselves about ourselves, whether to entertain or to sell products. In this sense, *Twin Peaks*, set in a fictional logging town in the American northwest, is as Southern as grits.

The South functions, in the U.S. imaginary, as a symbolic repository for the past: it is both the netherworld to which we easily consign "retrogressive" racism and sexism, and the pleasurable well of authenticity from which we draw "home-style" cooking and "old-fashioned" values and manners. The South morphs from one text, object, or situation to the next, one moment a welcome respite from modern life, and the next its backwards and reviled antithesis. The popular imagination is, of course, an interactive and collective endeavor: consumption and

production, within the social imaginary, are indivisible, depending on each other for the constitution and circulation of its representations. Pieced together from film, literature, advertisements, television shows, music, news coverage, and everyday life, the South of the popular imaginary, while mutable according to the ideological position of its participant interactor, is commonly located in the imagined past. Accordingly, to interact with the imagined South is to participate in a national nostalgia, a collective yearning to produce a fantasy reliquary for our national monsters and princesses alike. The Southernness I claim for *Twin Peaks* originates not (only) in Ben Horne's Confederate delusions, but in its candid (if eccentric) nostalgia for an imagined American past. Southernness, here, manifests not as regional origin but as mode: mode of operation, mode of expression, mode of being. As such, I argue that the South, in the U.S. context, is deployable-- in the sense of the word as both mobile and useable-- by and throughout the nation, regardless of an interactor's place of residence or birth. It is a constituent of the national identity grounded in an imagined past. Literary scholars Leigh Ann Duck and Jennifer Greeson have convincingly made this argument about national literatures, expanding the scope of the descriptors "Southern" and "South" to denote their meaning outside of the geographic region, and their function in facilitating the forging of a national identity. Their work suggests that the South is an adaptable concept; building on this, I contend that the South may also be regarded as a repertoire, a set of behaviors, actions, or performances available for reenactment.

In expanding the mobility of the South as a concept to include performance, I further elaborate on the work of media studies scholar Tara McPherson, who, in her book *Reconstructing Dixie*, takes up various Southern objects--television shows, memoirs, films--and examines the South(s) they imagine. The word "imagine" is a crucial element of McPherson's

undertaking, in that the driving proposition of her work is that the South, as a region, is inherently an imagined space. Although McPherson's proposition allows her to locate multiple, flexible Souths (and to envision a critical regionalism that would pave the way for "transformative, cross-racial alliance," 255), the contemporary objects she examines-- both popular and obscure-- return her, over and over again, to the past. As if willfully, these objects disrupt McPherson's attempt to limn a contemporary South apart from the threadbare Old South myth. And yet, more often than not, the specific past invoked by McPherson's objects is the Old South of grand plantation houses, gently rolling Mississippi steamboats, and hoop-skirted belles. Even where this past is not readily visible, where the object is modern in all obvious respects (say, for instance, the pages of a wedding issue of *Mississippi* magazine, or the 1998 film *Steel Magnolias*), it haunts and informs the narratives of the South.²

Tellingly, the romance of the Old South is not an inclusive narrative or mode, predicated as it is on a white interactor. As Zandria Robinson and Patricia G. Davis ("The Other Southern Belles") have shown in their respective studies of black women's reclamation and performance of the Southern belle or lady stereotype, the romantic Old South may be taken up against its grain, repurposed despite the history of its development to insist upon the very black femininity and subjectivity it would erase. Yet the foundational construction of the Old South romance is the concealment or outright "symbolic annihilation" (Davis, *Laying Claim* 7) of black labor and subjecthood within its frame, despite the fact that, as McPherson points out, it is precisely through this labor that the white grandeur at the center of the Old South romance is enabled to

2. As McPherson notes, Old South-inflected names for gated residential communities, condominiums, townhouses, etc. ("plantations," "oaks," "belle," "landing") are popular across the nation, not just in the South (46). As I note in the introduction, even upstate New York institution Cornell University-- until 2016-- styled its botanical gardens "Cornell Plantations."

emerge. Nostalgia for the Old South is implicitly white³, eliminating the troublesome problems of racism and slavery by refocusing its aspirational attention on the imagined luxury and beauty of white life. White nostalgia is a drag⁴ (pun intended) in the South of the national imaginary, pulling the place and its inhabitants insistently back to a romantic landscape that--ironically-- does not and did not exist. That is, the past that is most often mobilized in narratives around the Old South is a fiction, a myth; though it nevertheless has very real impact on the way race, gender, and regional identity have cohered and continue to develop. The drag of white nostalgia is also to be found in its performative element: Americans who participate in this fiction are “playing at being southern,” in McPherson’s terms, engaging in an elaborate and often commercialized game of pretend whose allure lies just as much in the escape from the “complicat[ions of] race or racism” as it does in the splendor of its accompanying props and costumes (253).

This moment, wherein McPherson identifies and dismisses “playing at being southern” as an escapist mode in the American repertoire, passes quickly, but appears to me to be ripe for further investigation. It has become de rigueur among contemporary U.S. Southern Studies scholars to dismiss “haunted” or “mired-in-the-past” Old South narratives as passé, in favor of expanding the field’s purview and context. And while I acknowledge that global and hemispheric

3. I dwell, in this chapter, on the whiteness-- and more specifically, the white nostalgia-- of Civil War reenactment not to legitimate models of the South that center whiteness as the normative lens of the south, but to attend to the call that scholars such as Hazel Carby have made, to “acknowledg[e] whiteness, not just blackness, as a racialized categorization” (18).

4. Similarly, queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman uses the term “temporal drag” to describe performance artist Sharon Hayes’s *In the Near Future*, in which, dressed as “the archetypal humorless lesbian feminist,” Hayes stood at the sites of historic protests and held signs bearing slogans that ghosted any number of political causes of the past and present (61). Freeman’s “temporal drag” simultaneously indexes the pull of the past and the archetypal lesbian feminist’s status as “killjoy” or dull annoyance. My use of the term “drag” here references the pull of the past, but also the element of impersonation or pleasurable roleplay inherent in “playing at being Southern.” Insofar as the nation conceives of itself as a progressive and liberal democracy, white nostalgia may also be considered a “drag” in its contravention of the nation’s self-identity.

Southern studies are crucial to understanding the South as a concept and relative region both within and outside of the context of the United States, the events of the last two years have fired the symbols and images of the U.S. Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow back into national consciousness. This newly reignited debate over how the nation remembers and re-members itself, white-hot 150 years later, demonstrates not only the talismanic weight of these cultural narratives, but also the importance of understanding how these narratives are enacted and enlivened in the contemporary moment.

What if we were to take “playing at being Southern” seriously? I want to consider it, in the terms of performance studies, as an act of world-making, calling into being a place located temporally in the past, where contemporary white Southern (and, for that matter, American) anxiety around race dissipates into the Spanish moss. “To play at” is to pretend to be, to imitate; it is also to fall just short of the original, to remain a copy of “the real thing.” To play at is, furthermore, to insert oneself into the action; it reaches beyond the distance afforded by film or television. In this sense, “to play at” aligns with reenactment, that vexingly unclassifiable practice situated somewhere between theatre, history, and everyday life. Fittingly, reenactment often figures in the U.S. imaginary as Southern, bringing to mind as it inevitably does the Civil War battle reenactments that pit Southern Confederate soldier against Yankee Union soldier.⁵ I argue, moreover, that reenactment is itself a Southern practice in its investment in remembering

5. Southern country star Dolly Parton has notably commodified Civil War battle reenactment in her popular, multi-location dinner theatre horse-show spectacular “Dixie Stampede.” Although the show features choreographed clashes between North and South, the experience itself is billed as decidedly Southern, serving guests “homemade biscuits,” “hickory smoked barbecue,” and “unlimited Coca Cola” (“Four Course Family Feast”) while they enjoy “beautiful horses” and “romance.” In the wake of the national debate over public Confederate symbols, the show was rebranded in 2018 as “Dolly Parton’s Stampede,” although, ironically, this may have been less about removing the stigma of regionalism than it was about assuring the future circulation of the region throughout the nation. The change, Parton wrote in a press release, “will help our efforts to expand into new cities” (qtd. in Jon Freeman).

and, moreover, revivifying the past, bringing the past to life via the reenactor's body. What is absent from McPherson's "playing at being Southern" is the register of embodiment, of real-world impact, that reenactment achieves.

Across a wide range of texts, performance studies scholars suggest that, in embodied performance, to remember (to re-member) the past is to make it real in the present, to bring the purportedly dead past into relation with living bodies. The slipperiness of the past as it is enacted through performance in the present opens cultural memory to not always immediately visible variations, disruptions, or transformations. Performance, though deployed in the service of preserving hegemonic memory and meaning-making, in its liveness has the capacity to upend that preservation and produce new, potentially radical meanings. Indeed, in his book *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach argues that, through performance, the past is always already real in (and constitutive of) the present, due to the process of surrogation, which has no beginning or end. Through a continuous progression of selective forgetting and imperfect substitution, performances define and redefine a community's cultural memory, and thereby define and redefine the community or culture itself. The inherent inaccuracy of this process introduces the potential for change over time, for blips of improvisation in even the most apparently inflexible forms, thus rendering performances of cultural memory like the Civil War battle reenactment susceptible to the interventions of counter-memory. Diana Taylor identifies "scenarios" as the tropic framework within which performances of embodied cultural memory occur; they are "culturally specific imaginaries--sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution--activated with more or less theatricality" (13). Like Roach's concept of surrogation, Taylor's scenarios can seem frozen in time, unchanging and predictable, and yet they "allow for reversal, parody, and change" in that they "adapt constantly to reigning conditions" (31).

Performance is citational, based on already coherent scenarios, but it is not an exact duplicate; it “constitutes a once-againness,” a repetition which, crucially, has some difference. It is within this difference, this imperfect re-engagement with and performance of the past, that counter-memories (and performances of those counter-memories) may find the most fecund ground for the reversal or subversion of hegemonic cultural memory.

In *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider fixes her sights on the error in the repetition-- what the attempt to repeat or re-perform the past gets wrong-- to explore how that error may be, ironically, precisely the moment in which time folds, recurs, or flips. “Theatricality,” Schneider writes, “prompting recognition of againness, oddly prompts the returns of history in that it prompts recognition of recurrence” (50). That is, the disruptive error of the live body, encountered in performance, evokes the citationality of the performance, re-situates it in a genealogy (to borrow a phrase from Joseph Roach, who in turn draws on Foucault) of performance. The performance is marked as non-original, and therefore both a failed copy and a copy of the original. Schneider is after, in particular, the sense of (imperfectly) touching time that motivates Civil War reenactors: “in affective engagement, many of them find reenactment to be, if not the thing itself (the past), somehow also *not not* the thing (the past), as it passes across their bodies in again-time” (8). It is in the liminal space between the not and the not-not that reenactors encounter some kind of sense or feeling of the past, an embodied knowledge, however fleeting, of the Civil War.

While the theories of performance laid out by Schneider, Taylor, and Roach suggest that reenactment is ripe for deployment against its own grain, in practice, Civil War reenactment reifies and embodies a dominant system of representation wherein the white, male hero fights courageously for his home, the white woman recedes gracefully into her supporting role in the

background, and black men and women disappear altogether from view. The politics of Civil War reenactment and their reenactors are often problematic: similar to the affective engagement with the past offered by plantation tours, Civil War reenactments are typically premised on a return to the values of a fabled, untroubled past where gender, race, and sexuality were clear and uncomplicated by the “political correctness” of the contemporary era. Reenactors may even be motivated by, rather than historical accuracy, a desire to replay the past with a different ending-- a desire to see the “South rise again” and, this time, win the victory it unfairly failed to achieve in the nineteenth century.

In Ben Horne’s Confederacy-fueled mania in *Twin Peaks*, we watch a man feverishly and compulsively reenacting the past, unable to return to his real life and time until he has successfully changed history. The past and its defeats so deeply possess Horne that it is only through the exorcism of reenactment that he can move on from his melancholia. His brother, daughter, and employees don period garb and reenact the Battle of Appomattox, but reverse the ending: General Grant surrenders the North to Horne, as General Lee. As if by magic, Horne is himself again. The episode is intended to give us insight into the character’s inner turmoil and needs, drawing parallels between Horne’s failures in business and the South’s failure to fully and lastingly secede from the Union. But it’s also a fecund image for the kind of de facto work that Civil War reenactment accomplishes, as a performance practice and as an embodied, popular historiography. It may reflect an insistent white (and frequently male) subject’s desire to stage a return, and, at the same time a revision, in an attempt to shore up power, privilege, and boundaries deemed unfairly lost. Consider, for example, country musician Hank Williams, Jr.’s 1988 single “If the South Woulda Won,” which samples the tune of “Dixie” and fantasizes about what the nation would be like “if the South woulda won”: the answer, repeated in the refrain, is

“we woulda had it made.” That “we,” it becomes clear as Williams elaborates on the policies the re-envisioned South would institute for the nation (lynching “killers,” training girls to smile at men, “tak[ing] Miami back” and banning cars from China), is white, straight, male, and American. The song reveals a sense that the position of the white male Southerner has been and continues to be under siege since the conclusion of the Civil War: only through a revision of history, through the staging of the “right” outcome, can such subjects regain the hierarchical position they were always meant to occupy. In the epigraph to this chapter, historian David Blight and cultural critic Ta-Nehisi Coates describe the past painted by the pastel-hued brush of the Lost Cause as a “mood or a disposition,” a “Dream.” All three terms suggest an individual and affective relationship to history, one that may or may not be conscious in its revisionary impulse. Somewhere between affect and reason, history and memory; this “disposition” towards the Southern past limits history to the mind, returning us to the operations of cultural or even aspirational memory rather than to rigorous interpretation of the past.

But the very real revisionary impulse of the Lost Cause-- at the bare minimum-- tinges Civil War reenactments in their exclusive portrayal of battles and camp life and not the, as reenactor Brad Keefer cagily puts it, “messy bits, which are the causes and outcomes” (quoted in Stole). Civil War reenactments function as a performative space where predominantly white participants can live the Dream and act on the mood, performing a highly romanticized and de-contextualized history into being, ostensibly washed clean of its overtly racist roots, but retaining the strictly codified gender roles that underpin white supremacy and the Lost Cause. Moreover, as a performance practice that claims a historiographical and educational schema, the public-facing reenactment events take on an authority that may allow the history encountered at a local Civil War reenactment to substitute for the scant or uneven coverage the subject often merits in a

U.S. classroom. Not limited to one's regional provenance or identity, any person with the money to furnish the necessary supplies may reenact,⁶ taking up the trappings of the North or South at will. In this sense, reenactment presents an opportunity to take up and enact Southern-ness as a performative mode-- I contend that, regardless of one's military allegiance in a given reenactment event, the very act of reenacting the Civil War is in itself a Southern performance practice. Putting aside the fact that Civil War reenactor troops frequently "galvanize," or switch sides to even out the opposing forces for an event (and that many galvanized reenactors will portray a disgruntled or disloyal Union draftee), reenactment participants of all affinities describe the draw of a more "honorable," "courteous," or "simple" time. It is the prospect of living the romantic and whitewashed past, of (re)creating and imagining a past where genders are unfailingly distinct and hierarchized, and race recedes into the unseeable distance, that ultimately drives Northerners and Southerners alike to the reenactment campground.

Finally, it is in the practice's emphasis on embodiment and lived experience of the past-- that is, on embodied knowledge-- that the greatest stakes of Civil War reenactment lie. As I will demonstrate through my analysis of two Civil War reenactments-- one in the North, one in the South-- and of first-hand accounts of reenacting and reenactment handbooks, through embodiment, reenactment practices purport to bring the past into being, into the present; to gain measurable and first-hand understanding of history. While embodied, live performance that seeks to learn from others' experience by practicing a kind of radical empathy gestures toward a progressive historiography, it is limited by practice (and by the rules of representation) as well as

6. There are, of course, rules-- determined by individual reenacting companies and events-- governing cross-gender and cross-racial reenactment, which I discuss later in this chapter. While white men have the greatest degree of freedom in choosing their role, or "impression," women and people of color may meet resistance to creating a historical impression against the grain of their gender or racial presentation. Reenactors, however, who wish to create a historical impression that "matches" their legible identity will generally be welcomed.

by the ideological investments of most participants. Civil War reenactment, furthermore, has the potential to function as an exorcising and dialogic site for the often-unaddressed problematic legacies and divisions of U.S. history that are currently erupting via national debates about Confederate monuments, police brutality, mass incarceration, and the resurgence of white supremacist groups; it more often functions as a playground for those whose interests lie in maintaining the power structures that render those legacies and divisions invisible.

“Hallowed Ground”: Touring Gettysburg

The Battle of Gettysburg took place over July 1-3 of 1863. Often described as one of the most important military engagements of the Civil War-- the Union ultimately claimed victory-- the Battle of Gettysburg was also the gravest, leaving some fifty thousand dead, wounded, or missing. Months later, President Abraham Lincoln would dedicate the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, giving one of the most well-known addresses in American history, one still learned and recited in classrooms 150 years later. As the northernmost major military engagement of the Civil War, Gettysburg is also one of the few non-Southern sites for Civil War battle reenactment that is actually a Civil War battleground, rather than an encampment, fort, or prison. Before we turn to reenactment itself, it is worth sifting through the other ways in which the historic battleground engages its visitors, presents historical information, and contextualizes and implicitly values those encounters. My purpose in dwelling with the site's other modes of visitor engagement and historiography is to limn the distinction the site itself makes between more traditional methods of teaching history and reenactment or living history display. The collective rhetoric appearing in posted signs, website, and printed brochures at Gettysburg suggests that living history, reenactment, and the site of a past event itself yield special or more profound insights into history. While this may be a function of effective advertising-- the site

may be directing its visitors to the element of Gettysburg that has been deemed to be the most likely to engage them-- the effect is to continually deemphasize the accompanying museum, film, and cyclorama in order to foreground the visitor's embodied encounter with the actual battleground site and living history demonstrators. This mapping demonstrates, too, the stakes of embodied performance of the Southern past counter to memorialization efforts that congeal around inanimate statues, flags, and other symbols of "heritage."

Because of the scale and significance of the battle, the Gettysburg National Military Park, museum, and visitor center run programs year-round, not just on the anniversary of the battle or the cemetery dedication (although these dates undoubtedly attract the highest volumes of visitors). On October 15th, 2016, I made the trip down to Gettysburg. On the day that I visited, a cool and sunny day, hundreds of visitors-- boy scout troops, families, couples, tourists speaking in an assortment of languages and non-U.S.-American accents--milled around the museum and the surrounding park. The visitor center offers multiple modes of encountering Civil War history: a traditional museum exhibiting historic artifacts; a film featuring well-known actors reading passages from historical documents and placing the Battle of Gettysburg in the wider context of the war; and a three-dimensional cyclorama of the battle, restored and repaired to a close replica of its original nineteenth-century appearance. Each of these modes is billed as the beginning of and an introduction to the main event: a visit to the battleground site itself ("The Visitor Center"). The museum, film, and cyclorama, while they may approximate to varying degrees the experience of the site, are nevertheless subordinate to the act of touring the battlefield in person. Gettysburg's status as one of the most well-known and highly visited Civil War sites-- a hotbed, especially come July, for reenactment-- taken together with the range of modes through which

visitors may experience its history, make Gettysburg a ripe site for exploring the pull and primacy of embodiment and embodied knowledge in reenactment practice.

I begin in the museum,⁷ a labyrinthine series of dark, dank rooms displaying various guns, uniforms, cannons, and more personal traces-- letters, pipes, photographs, and canteens. The museum's curators took great care to deliver a neutral and even-handed narrative of the Civil War: while the museum's displays do not deny or obscure the fact that the Union won the war and are generally considered by contemporary Americans to be the morally "right" side in the conflict, equal and respectful attention is paid to the Confederacy. Most artifact displays are contextualized with two quotations representing the two viewpoints in the conflict, and there is no clear indication of institutional endorsement of one side or the other. Certainly, the museum's dogged attempts at curatorial impartiality may stem in part from a desire to avoid offending visitors whose ancestors fought on the side of the Confederacy, or who otherwise feel a kinship with the South and Johnny Reb.

The result of the displays' neutrality is that the museum feels bewilderingly disinterested, and furthermore appears to suspend judgment expressly to invite the visitor to make his or her own assessment of history. The impartial tone of the museum display labels likely derives, in part, from industry standards for interpretation. Freeman Tilden, a pioneer in cultural and historical interpretation and the author of an influential sourcebook on the subject, writes that "the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation" (59). Any interpretive material should compel the visitor, in other words, to become a researcher or interpreter in his or her own right, actively engaged in assessing and contextualizing information rather than passively absorbing stated facts. The bulk of Tilden's argument for provocation over instruction lies in the

7. For a fuller account of the museal space and its relation to the visitor, see Chapter Three.

belief that visitors are more likely to actually retain and connect information that they have themselves participated in acquiring. Furthermore, industry ethics demand that display labels demonstrate respect above all, often encompassing an understanding of the interests of communities whose culture or history is on display, an understanding of the visitor's interests, and responsiveness to the displayed objects' "strong affinities with national, regional, local, ethnic, religious or political identity" (Lewis, 12). The Gettysburg museum's ostensibly neutral stance, therefore, may not only come from an attempt to provoke visitors to engage critically with the displays, but moreover from an effort to demonstrate sensitivity around regional identity. There is a keen sense, throughout all three of the indoor visitor center offerings-- the museum, the cyclorama, and the film-- that, in the interest of honoring all those who lost their lives fighting in the Civil War, neither side should be outright denounced. Instead, the museum, cyclorama, and film (titled *A New Birth of Freedom*) praise a non-regionally specific patriotism and bravery, and grieve for non-regionally specific loss of life: the heroism and sacrifice are broadly and wholly American. Certainly the assumption of a non-regionally specific audience broadens the base of consumers in this instance, but moreover, as Performance Studie scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts, "display not only shows or speaks, it also *does*" (128). That is, in simultaneously insisting on foregrounding the national identity of soldiers over their regional identity and refusing to issue moral judgment, the indoor attractions at Gettysburg perform a symbolic reunification of the nation. This impulse to curatorially narrate an arc of unification by underplaying (and, indeed, romanticizing or heroicizing) the misdeeds of the South reflects a longstanding tradition in the United States which may be traced back to, for instance, D.W. Griffith's notorious 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, whose title eerily anticipates the Gettysburg film title.

The main attraction of a visit to Gettysburg, however, is not necessarily the carefully curated museum displays or the Morgan Freeman-narrated film, but the sense of “treading in the footsteps where they have trod.” Visitors, and especially Civil War history buffs, seek out the thrill of physically encountering the past through contact with an important historic site. There is, in other words, an embodied knowledge available to those who physically move through the landscape where, 150 years ago, thousands of soldiers camped, fought, and died. Where written description calls on one to conjure up the experience of the battle entirely from imagination and dry fact, visiting the historical site itself offers a wealth of sensory information to inform one’s sense of the event. The visitor center itself seems to confirm this, referring on its website to the center as “a great starting point,” “an excellent introduction... to prepare you” for the battlefield, and a “start” to “your Gettysburg experience” (“The Visitor Center”). The website emphasizes personal experience and contact (that is, embodied or sensory experience) with the site over the mediating documents, artifacts, film, or visual art that seek to contextualize the battle in the visitor center. It furthermore seems to place a higher value-- or at least to acknowledge that the visitor places a higher value-- on the relatively immediate embodied experience of the place. To be certain, a visit to the Gettysburg battlefield in 2016 is an ascetic experience compared to the likely scene in 1863: there are no bodies, cannons, or horses to produce the sounds, sights, and smells that would have assaulted a nineteenth-century visitor. However, the history of the site can inspire a heightened awareness of the past, to the point where time feels almost collapsed or condensed. Historian Pierre Nora explains this phenomenon in “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”: the absence of true collective or cultural memory in modern society “pose[s] the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (7). That is, in the face of modernization and the loss of “environments of

memory,” we feel compelled to designate and maintain repositories or sites of memory. Sites of memory are, therefore, where memory “crystallizes and secretes itself”-- they are places laid thick with the past. A visit to the site, in its crystallization of cultural memory, feels like the closest thing to visiting the event itself. The Gettysburg Foundation’s⁸ page for the battlefield and its monuments explains that “today, visitors... can stand at many of the markers or monuments and picture the battlefield from the perspective of the units that fought there” (“Battlefield Monuments.”) While the punctum of the event has-- in the forward march of linear time-- come and gone, the site itself endures, spans the passage of time. Visitors may use it as a fixed lodestar to navigate the past, to insert themselves imaginatively into the passed event.

The desire to be present or to experience an event that is no longer available is not unique to modern-day visitors; in the nineteenth-century, a hugely popular form of entertainment, the cyclorama or panorama, was premised on precisely this yearning for an approximation of lived historical experience. A panorama, which typically consisted of a series of large-scale painted panels stitched together to form a circle, allowed viewers to insert themselves into a historical scene and acquire some sense of what the event was like. Popular since its invention in the eighteenth century, by the end of the nineteenth century the panorama had developed into the cyclorama, distinguished by even larger paintings⁹ and the inclusion of three-dimensional objects in the display to create the optical illusion of a physical environment rather than a mere static illustration (Barber). Additionally, a slight inward curvature at the center of the painting gave the

8. The Gettysburg Foundation, a non-profit educational organization, was formed in 2006 when the Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg and the Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation merged. While the battleground is technically a national military park under the National Park Service, the Foundation partners with the National Park Service to fund (via visitor’s center revenue, membership fees, donations) and steer the site.

9. While the Gettysburg cyclorama measures 377 feet in circumference, Barber notes that an eighteenth-century panorama painted by Robert Barker measured 90 feet in diameter, or roughly 280 feet in circumference (103).

viewer the visual perspective of a three-dimensional landscape. The cyclorama was such a popular amusement that cyclorama companies formed and constructed special round buildings for the express purpose of displaying a changing array of cycloramas. Cyclorama subjects ranged from famous battles to city life to the crucifixion. A visit to the nineteenth-century cyclorama often also included a lecture or account from a historian or first-person witness of or participant in the event: in addition to the sheer size and spectacle of the three-dimensional cyclorama, the attraction traded on authenticity. A cyclorama promised patrons the next-best-thing to being present at the event itself.

Within decades of the close of the Civil War, cycloramas of significant battles began touring the nation. Americans seized on the cyclorama as a way to relive their own personal experience (in the case of veterans) or to experience first-hand the battles that had shaped or ended the lives of their brothers, sons, and fathers. Where photographs and paintings presented a limited and flat representation of a single moment in time, the cyclorama offered the chance to physically move through a surrounding landscape which, though not completely three-dimensional and still frozen in time, imparted a sense of movement and fullness. Moreover, the viewer is not merely a passive audience member, but is invited, by nature of the form, to move throughout the space to take in the full measure and sense of the scene. In this sense, the cyclorama positions the viewer, if not as active participant in history, then as witness.

Despite their popularity into the early twentieth century (or perhaps because of, as frequent shipment and installation damaged the paintings or resulted in their misplacement), few Civil War cycloramas remain intact and on display today. One of these is the Gettysburg Cyclorama, painted by French artist Paul Dominique Philippoteaux in the early 1880s, and restored in the early twenty-first century for display to Gettysburg park visitors. If nineteenth-

century viewers were impressed with the cyclorama's spectacular size, lifelike diorama, and meticulously researched and detailed paintings, the cyclorama's twenty-first-century curators have had to employ lighting, sound, and technical effects to achieve a similar sense of awe in their film-and-TV-accustomed counterparts. Ushered into a darkened, circular room, cyclorama viewers stand on a raised, stepped platform circumscribed by metal and plexiglass railings. From a booth to one side, a staff member narrates the scene into a microphone headset. The lights shift slowly, revealing the carnage of the battle scene with the steadiness of a sunrise. Bright flashes of light from distinct points on the painted panels indicate the blasts of cannons; deep booms from the sound system accompany. As the narration progresses, a haze of smoke filters in from the ceiling and settles over the scene: below us, there is mud, brush, and grass, dotted with broken wagon wheels, lengths of rope, a knapsack, a sword. One late-nineteenth-century advertiser for the Battle of Missionary Ridge cyclorama claimed that, "on entering the Cyclorama, spectators step at once upon America's greatest Battle Field, are placed in the centre of the troops in action, and view [the battle] in the most vivid manner possible" (*Cylorama: Battle of Missionary Ridge*). The 2016 Gettysburg cyclorama experience is, much as the original nineteenth-century cyclorama was billed, immersive: the attraction means to educate and entertain by inserting the audience member into history. But there is a doubling at work in the contemporary cyclorama visit. That is, the audience member experiences, at once, the simulated battlefield of the Civil War and the nineteenth-century pastime. A twenty-first-century visitor to the cyclorama can elaborate her encounter to imagine two embodied experiences in history: the experience of the Civil War soldier in battle, and the experience of the veteran or civilian attempting to live or re-live the battle decades later. Much like battle reenactment, the cyclorama aims to bring the witness as close to the "real thing" as possible, despite clear obstacles: the

technical effects are advanced beyond the capabilities of the original cyclorama display, not to mention the gap in personal and national memory that a twenty-first-century visitor brings to the attraction. Although a modern visitor is, presumably, at least mildly interested in Civil War history, they are unlikely to have a living relative or close friend who participated in the Civil War. While the cyclorama's scale, encircling, and detail may come closer to approximating the battlefield than the museum displays, it ultimately cannot compete with what is clearly the main attraction: the ground on which troops on both sides of the war camped, fought, and died.

With that in mind, I head outside to my car.¹⁰ I drive slowly through the park, following the narrow "Auto Tour in the Field" road that cuts through the broad swathes of open meadow. Parked cars line either side of the road, and daring tourists with cameras in hand dart across the leisurely traffic to snap photos of stone markers erected in the memory of specific companies, infantry units, and battle maneuvers. The largest groups of tourists collect around the small demonstration camps pitched along the road, where men and women in period costume mill around fires and chat with spectators. Although the Gettysburg National Park does not offer a full reenactment of the three-day battle throughout the year, each weekend features living history demonstrations and presentations by volunteer reenactors who travel to the park for that purpose.

As theatre historian Scott Magelssen points out, the public's fascination with live performances of history or historical subjects-- be they pageants, reenactments, living history demonstrations, or theatre-- is nothing new. People have been drawn to live performances of history since practically the beginning of live performance ("Introduction," 2). Cultural historian

10. In the parking space next to mine, a National Park Service Jeep with a bumper sticker reading "409: You Can't Change History." Referencing the locally controversial firing of Penn State football coach Joe Paterno in 2011-- with 409 wins-- amid the Jerry Sandusky child sexual abuse scandal, the bumper sticker reverberates strangely in the functional context of the battlefield. Here, reenactors' desire to preserve history leads them to attempt to relive it, to enliven it and, in so doing, necessarily to live it differently than it occurred originally.

Alison Landsberg posits that historical depictions, particularly those that engage viewers bodily or personally, appeal to the desire to experience history as memory, to forge an “experiential relationship” to a past that was not part of one’s own experience (33). We desire these experiential relationships to pasts outside of our experience (or, in her words, “prosthetic memories”) because we desire knowledge, and some kinds of knowledge can only be attained via experience and embodiment. R. Lee Hadden, a seasoned Civil War reenactor and the author of a handbook on the subject, is more blunt in his assessment: “there are serious purposes to living history,” he writes, “however, one thing that has made it so popular is that it is fun” (14). Undoubtedly, living history demonstrations tend to be more hands-on than a museum display, film, or cyclorama. Reenactors at Gettysburg invite spectators to handle their clothing to get a sense of its heft and construction, to taste the food they cooked, or to smell the heady, sulfurous smoke of burnt black gunpowder after a shot.

I wander through the campsite of the Ohio Valley Civil War Association. The walls of the canvas tents flap against their wooden stakes in the breeze, sounding sharp coughs under the blasts of the gun demonstration in the next field over, which had all but emptied out the camp. I can see a Cheez-It box peeking under the edge of one tent’s door, its presence suggesting both the potential for rupture in the carefully constructed façade of living history demonstration and the continuous time-straddling executed by its agents.¹¹ I come to a smoldering campfire where two gray-costumed reenactors from New Jersey are demonstrating to a small group of spectators

11. This disjointed overlapping of times is emphasized humorously in the film *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002), when Reese Witherspoon, fashionably attired in an A-line skirt and high-heeled boots as the high-flying, Alabama-born fashion designer Melanie, delicately picks her way around the bodies of reenactors on a Civil War battlefield. Peering into each face, she asks, “Daddy? Daddy?” The entire fifth regiment sits upright from their inclined attitudes of death to inform Melanie that her father is “about to surrender.” Melanie thanks them and the reenactors drop back, resuming their feigned death poses. The scene also demonstrates Civil War battle reenactment’s popular association with the South.

how the 12th Alabama infantry cooked their meals over the coals and cleaned their weapons. As one man offers the audience a taste of hardtack, the other passes around Confederate five-dollar bills, printed in black-and-white on office paper and cut out to size. Switching abruptly out of the first-person he had been using to perform the impression¹² of “Benji,” a poor farmer’s son from Alabama, this second man launches conspiratorially into his theory about the conclusion of the war: “Know why I think they lost?” he queried, in a thick Brooklyn accent. “The South wasn’t really *beaten* by the North-- not by a long shot. They would have kept fighting. They just didn’t have any more men to send; they ran out of soldiers.” The reenactor’s accent threaded through his demonstration, underlining his regional provenance and disputing his putative Southern persona just as surely as the Cheez-It box had ruptured my sense of moving through a Civil War encampment. And yet, his pronoun-switch and conjecture complicated any assumptions I formed about his regional allegiance. His rhetorical separation of himself from his assumed persona’s cohort (“I” distinct from “they”) and his tense-shift to a twenty-first-century standpoint in relation to the Civil War (“they lost,” “they would have”) signaled that he was speaking as himself, not as his persona. However, the content of his conjecture betrayed a sympathy for the Confederate army that I found wholly unexpected-- in his formulation, the Confederates were not “beaten,” but would have nobly soldiered on, had they possessed the means. They had merely reached the bitter end of their resources, and were thus forced to concede.

12. Reenactors prefer the term “impression” to “role” or “character.” The rationale is that, while “role” or “character” might imply that the reenactor or living historian is creating a purely fictional persona, the word “impression” reflects the rigorous historical research behind the development of a historical persona. There is also a tinge of anti-theatrical prejudice in the preference: reenactors insist that their attention to historical accuracy and authenticity is distinct from the “playacting” of, say, live-action role-playing or theatre.



Figure 1: A “haversack talk” display at Gettysburg allows reenactors to demonstrate and explain objects common to the era.



Figure 2: Photocopied Confederate dollars passed out to spectators by volunteer reenactors at Gettysburg.



Figure 3: Reenactors perform a military drill at Gettysburg.

Theirs was an economic defeat, in other words, and not a spiritual one. It seemed to me a distinction designed to preserve the dignity of the Confederacy and of the South as a region, and bears resemblance to the “Lost Cause” narrative, which hails the Confederacy as righteous underdogs. In fact, military historian Mark Perry identifies precisely this argument as part of the “liturgy of the Lost Cause”: “that the South’s cause was just, had nothing to do with slavery, that the southern armies had never been defeated but were simply overwhelmed by sheer numbers” (368). It might seem a strange impulse to indulge in Lost Cause justifications, given the reenactor’s observable and stated status as a Northerner. I cannot say definitively whether the reenactor had developed this theory from careful study of historical record or from his own experience portraying a Southerner. (Mistakes peppered throughout his prior speech-- including misnaming Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of War and giving the wrong year for the start of the war-- suggest the latter.) Reenactment, after all, is premised on inserting oneself into a different time and context, on physically and experientially identifying with those who lived in that past. Had the reenactor’s imaginative empathy for his Confederate persona bled into his thinking as a twenty-first-century U.S. American? More broadly, his apparent sympathy for the South illustrates the mobility of region outlined by New Southern Studies: to qualify or identify as Southern does not necessitate birth there, or even acquaintance with its geography. The South can be invoked, produced, encountered, implemented regardless of location; it resists the delimitations of borders, a state of mind.

Later, after the reenactors have retreated to their camps for the evening, I stroll through the town of Gettysburg itself. It is clear that the opportunity for approximated time travel or the thrill of encountering the past expanded to include the town, not just the battlefield: I notice several tourist groups and couples dotting the streets, dressed in mid-nineteenth-century civilian

garb. The sidewalks are cramped with signs and shop displays of Civil War-era goods and services available inside: an authentic daguerreotype of yourself in rented antebellum costume, a haunted ghost tour of the battlefield, a jigsaw puzzle featuring a painting of a Southern belle and her dashing Confederate soldier posing on the steps of a white plantation house, a reproduction deck of playing cards such as a Civil War soldier might have carried. Most of the souvenir shops devote significant floor- and shelf-space to souvenirs commemorating or celebrating the Confederacy or “Dixie,” including keychains, magnets, hats, postcards, shot glasses, and paperweights. The difference between the riot of pro-Confederate wares displayed in the shops and the austere objectivity of the museum is stark: where the museum’s status as part of a national institution funded by the federal government mandates a non-partisan and non-regional tone, the commercial arena merely responds to the market. These commodified fantasies of a chivalrous, romantic, rebellious South exist because there is a demand for them, because tourists purchase these objects to take home with them as a memento of their visit to Gettysburg.¹³ The Confederate flag has long been the subject of heated debate in the United States, one that has grown even fiercer after photos circulated of white supremacist Dylann Roof-- who murdered nine black worshippers at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015-- waving the flag. While its proponents argue that the “Stars and Bars” represent Southern heritage and, more specifically, respect for ancestors who fought and died for the Confederate cause, the flag’s public display is more closely aligned with the white supremacist response to the Civil Rights movement of the 1940s-1960s. Though re-introduced to the popular imaginary through overtly racist films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), display of the Confederate flag only became prevalent in the South after the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of*

13. For more on the commodification of the South and souvenirs at Southern heritage sites, see Chapter Three.

Education Supreme Court case ended in the *de jure* de-segregation of public schools (Webster and Leib 174). The Confederate flag's renaissance was born of a stubborn refusal to upset the racist status quo, a defiance that certainly did buy into the rebellious nobility of the Lost Cause narrative, but was not divorced from "hate," as its supporters would claim. That same attitude of in-yer-face contrariness blares in heavy fonts from many of the Confederate-flag-branded t-shirts displayed in the stores: "If this offends you, you need a history lesson!", "Lee surrendered, I didn't!." "It's not about hate, it's about heritage!"

Interspersed among the Confederate battle flag souvenirs are similar objects featuring the U.S. American or Gadsden flags. While the message sent in flying the U.S. American flag may seem clear enough-- national pride and patriotism, and at its most extreme, anti-immigrant jingoism-- the Gadsden flag has become an increasingly embattled emblem over the last few decades. Taken up by Libertarians and, more recently, the Tea Party as a symbol of anti-government sentiment, it has also been at the center of multiple court cases alleging the flag's additional use to communicate racism or white supremacy (Walker). Linked visually by their presentation for sale on the same shelves in Gettysburg shops, the Confederate battle flag souvenirs and their patriotic companions blend into an almost generically indistinguishable show of a distinctly libertarian and aggressive brand of U.S. American nationalism, veering into nativism and racism. What's more, many of the slogans paired with the Confederate items suggest that, far from merely memorializing a historical (and, therefore, past) event or movement, these souvenirs document an ongoing and living movement and/or regional membership. Anchored as this movement is in nostalgia for a romanticized Southern past, it is also future-oriented: several objects I encountered meld the Southern past with contemporary politics to suggest a future return. "If at first you don't secede," read one Confederate-flag-

emblazoned shot glass, “try, try again!” A variant of “the South will rise again!”, this slogan suggests that the Confederacy did not die, but is simply biding its time until it reforms and secedes again: and this time, for good. Perhaps most disconcerting, in the heat of the 2016 presidential election, was the proliferation of Confederate memorabilia showcasing images of presidential candidate Donald Trump stylized as a Confederate officer or variations on his campaign slogans (“Make America Civil Again”). The combination suggests, simultaneously, regional alliance and the consolidation of a national populist movement. This concurrence, in turn, suggests that the kind of South or Southernness evoked by Confederate symbols is portable and adaptable, changing over time and according to the situation. And yet, at the same time, Confederate monuments and flags across the nation were being removed, protested, or vandalized in an attempt to reshape the discourse around the South and memorialization. The South and its symbols are not, in other words, geographically or temporally fixed. Regions are, after all, primarily imagined spaces, constituted not so much by the fact of their geography as by the ongoing performances of affinity that assure their distinctiveness and preservation.

American historian Matthew Pratt Guterl, in his gloss of the word “South” and its importance to American cultural studies, points out that the South is not necessarily a static location, but is historically and contextually specific, appearing variously as a concept, set of politics, and imagined place or narrative. The South exists just as much in the rural hamlets outside of Ithaca, New York, where a Confederate flag or bumper sticker proclaiming the driver a “redneck” or “rebel” are not out of place, as it does in my home state of North Carolina, or in the Mississippi and Tennessee towns where my parents grew up. Reconceptualizing the South as mode or repertoire affords us a framework for understanding how and where the South is performed outside of the geographic region, but it is, importantly, a reflection of the South as

concept, as an imagined space.¹⁴ Tara McPherson argues, furthermore, that this understanding of place and region as “always already relational” allows one to encounter the South as multiple, non-monolithic, and in flux (35). At stake in a flexible South, McPherson insists, is a critical regionalism that accounts for counter-histories and -narratives, a critical regionalism that might produce new models for being Southern.

My sojourn through the museum, cyclorama, battlefield and camp demonstrations, and town of Gettysburg exemplifies the dizzying, fluid, and often contradictory temporal, regional, and political-ideological implications at the heart of Civil War reenactment in the United States. The unstable but constituent facets of reenactment combine to leave one feeling temporally, politically, and regionally unmoored. The conflict and its symbols, a century and a half later, still serve to mark and consolidate ideological and regional membership-- so much so that, as I’ve noted above, the Gettysburg museum diligently cultivates a neutral stance in exhibit narratives and displays to avoid offending or dishonoring Southern visitors and/or their ancestors. As the Gettysburg souvenirs demonstrate, Southern Civil War symbols such as the Confederate battle flag may be variously interpreted, in the twenty-first century, as a racist threat, a marker of Southern heritage or regional identity, a desire for a return to the past, or a sociopolitically conservative display of patriotism, according to the ideology of the viewer.¹⁵ Likewise, interest in the American Civil War and its reenactment can betray a range of (sometimes inconsistent)

14. As I state in the introduction to this project, my goal here is not necessarily to identify or define “Southernness” as it is lived in the geographic region, but to examine how it is taken up and what it is “good for” in the national imaginary, as exemplified by performances of the U.S. Southern past. I acknowledge that the U.S. Southeast, Deep South, Southwest, and each of their constitutive states and regions (not to mention the hemispheric South) have their own cultures, repertoires, and symbolic fields.

15. I do not, of course, endorse or defend the “heritage not hate” pretext for the display of the Confederate battle flag.

political and regional investments, running the gamut from neo-Confederate allegiance to a commitment to feminist or anti-racist historiography and representation.¹⁶

Whether or not participants desire an actual return to the past (and whatever their motivations for that desire might be), the main attraction of extra-museal spaces and practices such as the Cyclorama, the battlefield, or camp or battle reenactment is the chance to encounter traces of or experiences with the past. Indeed, perhaps what is most intoxicating about these kinds of immersive, temporally-fluid spaces is that they are always already failed in their immersion: we can never truly return to the past. There are always rude interruptions of the present into the past-- the black-and-white Confederate bills, the box of Cheez-Its, Rebecca Schneider's discovery of a faux severed finger¹⁷--that jerk one suddenly and insistently from one time to the other. The target of the attempted return or encounter is, furthermore, vexed and unstable: the question of historical authenticity and the gaps in historical records generate the possibility of multiple pasts, some of them manufactured and some of them closer to the ultimately unknowable truth. While the museum display or history film attempts to show glimpses of the past by narrating or arranging historical documents and objects-- traces behind a pane of glass--reenactment offers the tantalizing prospect of, if not truly traveling to the mysterious past, then brushing up against it, trying it on for size. Civil War reenactment is and

16. Notable among the latter category: Lauren Cook Wike, who won a landmark lawsuit against the National Park Service in 1993, establishing women's right to participate in Civil War reenactments, and who has since authored several books on women soldiers in the Civil War; J. R. Hardman, whose documentary *Reenactress* highlights female reenactors who cross-dress to portray the women who fought in the Civil War and who herself reenacts a female soldier; and the members of FREED (Female Re-Enactors of Distinction), who portray black female intellectuals, political activists, and nurses from the Civil War era.

17. Schneider encounters a fake finger on a reenactment battlefield in Rhode Island and experiences the shock and confusion of believing it to be real followed by amusement upon realizing its artificiality (*Performing Remains* 51).

has always been premised first and foremost upon the preeminence of embodied knowledge and personal experience.

The Civil War past was not always so distant and unknowable. In fact, the first Civil War reenactments took place before the war had even ended, as soldiers held camp and battlefield demonstrations for curious civilians keen to understand the military life led by their absent friends and relatives. In the years following the war, veterans' organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans held camp reenactments to commemorate their members' military service and to reconnect with fellow veterans (Hadden 4). Battle reenactments continued after the war concluded, following in the American tradition of "sham battles," which had drawn huge crowds of spectators since well before the Civil War began (2). Organized by the respective veterans' organizations of either the Union or the Confederacy, these sham battles were designed more to remember and honor one military's service than the other-- they were largely separate affairs. But in 1913, Union and Confederate veterans alike gathered in Gettysburg to commemorate the battle's fiftieth anniversary together: the reunion and reenactment were to cement the reunification of the nation via pomp and performance. Veterans-- many now well into their seventies and eighties-- wore their old uniforms and camped in separate CSA and Union camps, but "greet[ed] their erstwhile foes with handshakes rather than bayonets" during the reenactment of Pickett's Charge (Horwitz 136).

It should be noted that while these "Blue-Gray" reunions were widely touted as a significant performance of national reunification, racism and lingering regional divisions foreclosed the possibility of a true reconciliation. Most of the Civil War veterans' reenactments and reunions took place concurrently with lynching and Jim Crow law in the United States, and excluded black veterans (Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 181-2). During the great 1913

Gettysburg reunion, the local newspaper, *The Gettysburg Times*, reported that Union veterans marched on the Confederate camps that evening, and noted approvingly that “the Johnnies received them with open arms” (“March on Rebs”). “March on Rebs,” however, appears adjacent to an item describing a violent altercation the same evening between a Union veteran and the son of a Confederate general that began with “a discussion of North and South” (“Eight Stabbed at Local Hotel”). As the enraged younger man ran out of the hotel, he slashed or stabbed bystanders; though from Philadelphia, he had, the newspaper noted, “a decided southern accent.” At the same time that the peaceful exercises of the anniversary commemoration played out on the battlefield, a more violent (and, in that sense, perhaps more accurate) meeting of North and South was (re)enacted at a nearby hotel. And, what’s more, the hotel conflict was intergenerational: while the Union veteran had fought in the Civil War, his opponent’s rancor was inherited from his father. In the case of the hotel stabbing, the passage of fifty years had not diminished the conflict between North and South, but had, in fact, produced a new combatant, once-removed from the war itself but just as willing to fight for his region. Betraying already the elision between history and memory that would come to characterize national narratives of the war, the incident echoes Blight’s assessment: “Memory is passed down through generations; history is revised” (*Beyond the Battlefield 2*).

By the 1930s, many Civil War veterans had passed away, and the few thousand left were decidedly geriatric. Civil War reenactments as a spectator event, no longer peopled by those who had directly experienced the battles and eclipsed by the advent of film, dwindled. In 1933, historic gun enthusiasts founded the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association (NMLRA), devoted to collecting and firing black powder rifles. By the 1940s, a significant portion of the NMLRA had expanded their hobby to include an interest in researching and experiencing the

clothing and life styles of those who had fired the weapons concerned. This interest was not confined to the Civil War-- it ranged from early American hunting to frontier settling to American Indian tribes. It was not until the 1949 formation of the North-South Skirmish Association, a NMLRA splinter group, that a hobbyist organization was devoted solely to the reenactment of the Civil War. By 1958, the North-South Skirmish Association had developed rules that emphasized not only the care and use of period weapons, but furthermore required units to research and inhabit the culture and costume of the Civil War era (Anderson 138).

Still a decidedly fringe hobby in the late 1950s, Civil War reenactment is commonly regarded to have entered its heyday during the national centennial events organized between 1960 and 1961: in particular, many reenactors and reenactment scholars alike mark the 1961 reenactment of the First Battle at Bull Run (also known as the Battle of First Manassas) as a turning point for reenactment (Anderson, Carlson, Hadden). The North-South Skirmish Association, together with soldiers from the National Guard, performed a reenactment of the battle on July 22, 1961, for a crowd of 50,000-70,000 in 110-degree heat. The disastrous spectacle cost almost \$200,000 in food, gunpowder, horses, and cannons (“Manassas Battle to Live Again”). A steady stream of spectators and reenactors ran through the medic tents, where over a hundred people were treated for heat exhaustion, animal bites, and bee stings (“Crowd Has Most Casualties”). On the battlefield, unsafely discharged weapons led to first-degree burns, cuts, and heavy bruising among participants. Indeed, some reenactors felt the conditions of the large-scale reenactment were so dangerous that they doubted whether they’d participate in the activity again: “many of the men on both sides seemed bent on refighting the war,” and one reenactor feared a “drunken hothead would decide to really let fly with a Minié ball” (qtd. in Anderson 143). To add insult to injury, while the reenactment planners had gone to great lengths

to avoid traffic jams at the outset of the event, little consideration had been given to traffic logistics as thousands of overheated spectators and reenactors took to the roads afterward (“Thongs See Manassas ‘Battle’”). A nearby plane crash contributed to the standstill traffic, which left many in their cars for hours on the same stretch of road. The National Park Service, galled by the garishly celebratory spirit of an event meant to commemorate death and sacrifice, the danger to spectators and reenactors, and by the damage to the historical site, passed regulations banning reenactment from national parks. National parks still allow and often sponsor reenactors to perform living history and weapons demonstrations; full reenactments, however, must take place on nearby land.

The 1961 Manassas reenactment, despite its obvious drawbacks, was hailed by the press as a success, and sparked new interest in the hobby nationally-- notably, even then-president John F. Kennedy enjoyed watching reenactments (Hadden 4). One reporter, writing twenty-five years later of the plans for another reenactment at Manassas marking the 125th anniversary of the battle, notes breathlessly that he attended the 1961 event as a child and found it “unforgettably dramatic” (“South Will Rise Again”). The North-South Skirmish Association and affiliated seasoned reenactors committed with renewed fervor to safety and authenticity; many point out the “costumes,” “inappropriate gear,” and “printed cardboard cartridge boxes” that characterized the 1961 Manassas reenactment to explain how far the hobby has evolved (Hadden 4). By the 1970s and 1980s, the hobby had become popular enough that businesses began to appear whose sole purpose was to manufacture and sell historically accurate reproductions of weapons, clothing, tents, and gear to Civil War reenactors. (Indeed, reenactment handbooks routinely cite the incredibly high cost of “authentic” equipment for reenactment.) In 1986, *Time* magazine

estimated that around 50,000 people in the U.S. participated in reenactments (Skow et al.); in 1999, Tony Horwitz appraised the number of nationwide participants at “over 40,000” (126).

Radical Empathy: Theories of Reenactment

As reenactment generally and Civil War reenactment more specifically have gained in popularity and visibility in the U.S., a plethora of studies across scholarly disciplines has theorized the practice.¹⁸ While many of these works comprise anthropological investigations dedicated to documenting and analyzing the language, cultural norms, and values unique to reenactment events and units, central to my inquiry are the studies which have approached reenactment primarily as an embodied practice. My interest in reenactment lies not necessarily in the actual past it claims to resurrect, but in the multiple and Southern pasts imagined, (re)enacted, and deployed in the present *via* Civil War reenactment. What are these specific Souths, and how do present reenactors and spectators understand and engage them? How do these Souths resist geographical or regional definition? What can the proliferation of Southern pasts tell us about the way the concept appears and is used in the present? Reenactment’s temporal slipperiness--its collapsing of the past and present--derives in significant part from the focalization of the living body in living history practice. Reenactment is, fundamentally, a live act, performed in the present in order to understand or experience the past. Indeed, embodied experience or knowledge depends upon a live, immediate encounter-- it must be gained in the present tense, in the first-person, on an individual basis. Indeed, in its endeavor to stage a radically empathetic encounter between two subjects unknown to each other, across temporalities, reenactment has the capacity, albeit not often mobilized, to enact progressive

18. See, for example, Thompson, *War Games*; Tyson, *The Wages of History*; Schocket, *Fighting Over the Founders*; Hall, “Selective Authenticity”; Strauss, “Identity Construction Among Confederate Civil War Reenactors”; Auslander, “Touching the Past.” These works span the fields of history, museum studies, popular cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and fashion studies.

change and transform its ideological associations. Drawing on models of community-engaged theatre-making, theatre scholar Lindsay Cummings identifies “dialogic empathy” as crucial to the dynamic understanding enabled by live theatrical performance; key to Cummings’s formulation of dialogic empathy is the mutual and processual interchange between performers and audiences-- and, for that matter, between artists themselves in the creation of a performance. Cummings stresses that the practice of dialogic empathy “involves thinking and feeling, imagining the other in the other’s situation, allowing his or her affect to resonate with us, and communicating our interpretations back to the other whenever possible for feedback” (7). Such a practice closely mirrors what reenactors claim as part of their experience-based historiographic research, with the obvious exception of reciprocal communication with the mirrored other. For a theory of empathy that more closely approaches reenactors’ praxis, I turn to archival studies scholars Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, whose subjects are often-- like the reenacted others of Civil War battle reenactment-- practically if not theoretically absent from and therefore incapable of real-time interlocution. Caswell and Cifor write, of archival work, that, modelled on a feminist ethics of care, “empathy is radical if we allow it to define archival interactions even when our own visceral affective responses are steeped in fear, disgust, or anger” (25). Caswell and Cifor, here, build in part on the work of anthropologist Joan Koss-Chioino, who defines radical empathy as the moment when “individual differences are melded into one field of feeling and experience” (655). As each of these definitions suggests, radical empathy is a conscious and intentional practice of openness to connection, of laying aside one’s own concerns, preferences, and circumstances in order to more deeply understand the experiences and feelings of someone else. Inextricably tied to affect and its somatic reverberations, radical empathy in the reenactment context allows the reenactor to feel co-present with past subjects, to embody the past in the

present. Reenactment's predication on radical empathy and embodiment might shift the terms of historiography and recentralize the body--all bodies-- as a privileged site of knowledge and, in the terms of Taylor, knowledge transfer.

Vanessa Agnew figures reenactment as an almost religious experience, pointing out that it is premised on a conversion-testimonial structure. Reenactors, in their search to achieve "period rush" or "wargasm" (that is, to become so completely immersed in the past as to forget their own time), undergo a conversion "from ignorance to knowledge, individualism to sociability, resistance to compliance, and present to past" solely via their own personal experience ("What Is Reenactment?" 330). The reenactor's body is the central text across which lessons about the past are read: the reenactor "testifies" to the physical and affective knowledge they have gained through the simulated and sometimes extreme conditions of reenactment. Though the behavior, conditions, clothing, food, and speech that reenactors employ are based on thorough examination of historical documents and records, reenactors derive their authority to interpret history from their own subjective experiences, from their bodies. As Agnew points out, it is exactly because they realize that their method of historical inquiry (that is, embodied experience) may be considered overly individual or imprecise that reenactors often place a high value on authenticity and bodily discipline (331-2). The more authentic one's hat is, or the more one suffers physically or psychologically in the interest of authenticity, so the thinking goes, the more accurate one's interpretation of history is likely to be. Agnew has written elsewhere that this emphasis on sensory experience and feelings, as exemplified by reenactment practices, is a product of history's affective turn ("History's Affective Turn"). Agnew takes as her case study German "living history" reality TV that asks participants to live as though they were in a different century and socioeconomic position. Agnew argues that, while the ethical impetus of

much public history interpretation (and particularly of German public history) is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, the goal of reenactment is to “elegize certain aspects of the past and elide what remains uncomfortable and troubling” (302). That is, Agnew contends, reenactment is more about a coming to terms with the present than it is about coming to terms with the past; if anything, reenactment enacts an “emancipatory gesture” for Agnew, allowing participants to free themselves from the present in order to embrace a fantasy of the past (“What is Reenactment?” 328). In this sense, reenactment might tell us more about the contemporary than the historical: what are the elements of the past, imagined or real, that reenactors find preferable to the present? What elements of the present do reenactors wish to escape?

Agnew ultimately determines that reenactment poses an interesting question-- what kinds of historical evidence might embodied practice produce? -- but, beyond that, she dismisses it as merely nostalgic play-pretend. While her analysis mainly focuses on reenactment’s shortcomings as a historiographic methodology, what she fails to fully account for is what reenactment *does* produce. If we take seriously the assumption of performance studies-- that performance (encompassing not only artistic or theatrical performance, but also the performance of the self in everyday life, and, in this case, the self in everyday historical life) is world-making--then what does reenactment accomplish? What sort of pasts and presents does it produce, contest, or reinforce? Stephen Gapps, in his 2009 article ““Mobile Monuments,”” comes closer to answering the question. Taking a more hopeful view (influenced in part, no doubt, by his own admitted participation in and enjoyment of reenactment as a personal hobby), Gapps contends that reenactment’s embodied approach to understanding history “open[s] up possibilities” and “retains [the past’s] marks of production but also contains the possibility of change” (407).

Because the fulcrum of historical reenactment is the living body, that is, the practice necessarily follows other categories of live performance: it is ephemeral, predicated in co-presence and memory rather than mediation, and potentially powerful in its capacity to render the body political via representation. What's more, reenactment qua live performance is a form of mobile commemoration in direct contrast, according to Gapps' formulation, with physical and immovable monuments and memorials (406). Gapps suggests that reenactment's ability to enliven and embody history might make history itself seem more flexible, less monumental, and more inclusive. Introducing the possibility of human error and change, the live body's centrality to reenactment, Gapps writes, "indemnifies your impression" (406).¹⁹ Gapps, here, also fails to attend to live performance's consequences, ephemerality notwithstanding. According to his "mobile monuments" theory, reenactment has the potential to be, at once, transformative where history is concerned and harmlessly ineffective where the present is concerned. Gapps wants to consider reenactment as "world-making" performance, but argues that the world-making which reenactment accomplishes is easily expunged if it forsakes or challenges progressive historiography. I disagree: a reenactor's impression that is constructed on, for example, the notion of the Confederate soldier as a romantic and courtly gentleman, cites and therefore participates in and reinforces the myth and its attendant values about class, gender, and race. This is not to discount Gapps' approach wholesale: his optimism about the transformative and progressive potential in reenactment's investment in the body and affect as historiographic tools is not without foundation.

Certainly, the premise of reenactment is that the reenactor will, to the best of his or her ability, step into the position and psychology of another human in order to better understand (and

19. Gapps uses the word "impression" here as reenactors do: the historical persona developed and portrayed by a reenactor in the course of reenactment. See note 12.

make others understand) that person's life. In this sense, reenactment is a practice of radical empathy. There seems, however, to be a limit to this radical empathy in practice: the very thing that authorizes reenactors to practice and interpret embodied history-- the body-- is what constrains their experiments. The emphasis that reenactors place on authenticity has occasioned heated debates and even sparked legal cases around who is permitted to portray whom: reenactors are expected to adhere strictly to the representational dictates of the historical record (Hadden, Horwitz). A black woman, in other words, would be hard-pressed to find a Civil War reenacting unit that would allow her to portray a general. Moreover, as popular culture scholar Dennis Hall notes, U.S. Civil War reenactors are overwhelmingly white and male, and while some women participate as civilian reenactors (and fewer as soldiers), few reenactors or spectators are black (7-8)²⁰. The rigid and reigning law of authenticity, together with the activity's relative lack of racial and gender diversity, results in a curtailed enactment of radical embodied empathy. While reenactors may develop impressions that require them to empathize with a person of different educational, socioeconomic, regional, or immigrant status, their impressions rarely call upon them to stray empathetically outside of their own race, gender, or sexuality²¹. Gapps' suggestion that reenactment's potential to produce a more flexible and inclusive sense of history, taken together with Agnew's argument that reenactment practices can tell us more about the present than the past, leads me to ask whether reenactment's embodied

20. Horwitz goes so far as to characterize Civil War reenactments as "blindingly white" (137).

21. The potential and limits of cross-racial and color-blind casting in creating dialogue and empathy around race have long been the subject of debate in the theatre world (see Wilson, "The Ground on Which I Stand"; Catanese, *The Problem of the Color[blind]*; Banks, "The Welcome Table: Casting for an Integrated Society.") Certainly, one of the earliest and most offensive formative U.S. American theatrical conventions was the cross-racial casting of white actors in blackface minstrel roles. While scholars such as Eric Lott (*Love and Theft*) have argued that this cross-racial casting represents a latent and ambivalent desire on the part of its white producers and consumers, blackface minstrelsy is manifestly not a practice grounded in radical empathy. For more on cross-racial casting, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

history facilitates radical empathy in the present. That is, does participation in living history (and the unspoken necessity to be able to imagine oneself in another's position) extend outside of living history, and into participants' everyday lives? If "the past is a foreign country" and its inhabitants are likewise foreign or other to the reenactors who seek to understand them, does this understanding encompass the "others" reenactors encounter in the present (Lowenthal)? If we may take the ongoing begrudging inclusion of women in the Civil War reenactment ranks (those who do portray soldiers are often required to pass "five foot" rules to ensure their gender is not detectable from a predetermined distance) as an example, the answer is likely not quite so optimistic as Gapps would have it.

Dennis Hall, in his article "Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of History," suggests that reenactment has less to do with a true desire to empathize or learn about others than it does with nostalgia in reaction to the late capitalist present. Reenactment is, primarily, "a pleasure structure" rooted in the desire to preserve what has been or what is perceived to have been (9). Reenactors participate because they derive pleasure from responding to the pressures and changes of the present with the preservation of the past and its apparent calm and steadiness-- reenacting, that is, can impart on participants a sense of enjoyable control in a world that feels uncertain. Hall, here, approaches Agnew, who locates the impulse to reenact in the twin desires to "elegize" and "elide": to reenact is, in effect, to escape to a past of your own choice, one in which the complications of history and present alike are swept away.

In fact, Agnew, Hall, and Gapps-- despite their varying conclusions on how reenactors use or produce history-- all highlight the pleasure that reenactors derive from their activities. And yet reenactment, though primarily pleasurable, is not wholly an amusement. The inherent subjectivity of the practice attracts because it offers participants the chance to "experience"

history; that is, to make the past a present experience. But if our reality coheres only as we experience it, then “living the past” through reenactment risks replacing the reality of the past with an imagined historical reality. Reenactment, that is, can paradoxically produce a historical reality grounded in present experience. And it is in the potential for erasing the racism, classism, and sexism of the past-- or, more likely, in the potential for upholding it or even celebrating it-- that the danger of this production lies.

While reenactment manuals acknowledge that the practice is, first and foremost, an enjoyable pastime, reenactors have developed methodologies for what they consider to be the serious historiographical work of reenactment. “Experimental archaeology,” a somewhat controversial archaeological methodology that first arose in the late nineteenth-century and came to prominence among U.S. archaeologists in the 1970s, seeks to replicate aspects of historical life in order to better understand it (Anderson, Flores). While archaeologists are often concerned with the material culture of the past-- such as the implementation of period technology, or the methods for creating a period object-- reenactors have adopted the term to describe the most immersive or “hardcore” reenactment experiences (Kemmer & Kemmer, Hadden, Anderson). Reenactors believe that, in not just replicating some conditions, but in living all possible conditions of historical life, they may arrive at more accurate approximations of the past. Reenactor Brenton Kemmer describes experimental archaeology as “the most personal, and possibly the most gratifying” form of reenactment (13). Pleasure, subjectivity, and historiography collapse on each other, producing a personal and embodied experience that is at once a source of private gratification and an authoritative historical record. The progressive and destructive potentialities of reenactment as an embodied practice converge alike in reenactors’ adoption of experimental archaeology: undergirded by a hypothesis of radical empathy, the

“experiment” acquires the language and presumed force of scientific method. Given the limitations to accurate historical replication through reenactment I’ve outlined above and the ideological investments of many participants, Civil War reenactment might aptly be described as a great experiment, a procedure performed to determine something. The experiment’s alchemical yield? A Southern past washed clean of its problematic stains.

“Try, Try Again”: An Experiment at Fort Branch

I drove east one clear November morning from my childhood hometown in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the coastal plains of North Carolina. I passed Princeville, formerly Freedom Hill, formed by newly freed blacks after the Civil War and purportedly the nation’s first town incorporated by African Americans. Only a month earlier, Hurricane Matthew had flooded the Tar River here, leaving devastation in its wake and threatening to displace the historic black community. North Carolina remains one of the leading producers of cotton in the United States, and most of its cotton farms are concentrated in this area, known for its sandy loam. As I make my way east, relentlessly flat fields of skeletal cotton plants roll past, defoliated and picked almost clean of their bolls in last month’s harvest. It’s a cotton field I turn into about twenty miles past Princeville, ushered to my parking spot among the barren plants by enterprising Boy Scouts. Walking away from my car, I stop to pluck a forgotten boll, the soft white fibers still hanging from its dried calyx.

It’s a simple gesture that costs me nothing, but for millions of enslaved blacks-- many of them, doubtless, forced to labor on this very land-- it formed both the capitalist rationale for their enslavement and the yardstick by which their enslavers “calibrate[d] torture” (Baptist 127). As the Industrial Revolution made textile production faster and cheaper, the worldwide demand for cotton grew; in response, enslavers planted more cotton and demanded that their forced laborers

harvest enormous amounts of the crop with increasing speed and efficiency. Those who failed to collect the minimum prescribed weight of cotton by the end of a working day were punished brutally. The foundation of an enormous global industry, cotton and slavery “expand[ed] in lockstep” (Beckert 103). As cotton became an increasingly important commodity in the regional, national, and global economies, Southern politicians popularized the phrase “King Cotton” to signal the economic and political power of the South, chief grower and exporter of cotton. And Southern politicians and plantation owners realized that the maintenance and expansion of the institution of slavery was crucial to the South’s ability to produce cotton to meet global demand, leading to heated national debate. Forced labor through slavery undergirded the South’s political and economic power, and they were willing to fight for it; for their part, free states in the North saw the opportunity to accrue greater political power through the prohibition of slavery in new states admitted to the union. While there were certainly Northern abolitionists who called for an end to the peculiar institution on moral grounds, many Northern politicians were more concerned with swinging the balance of power in their favor. Confident that cotton’s primacy in the U.S. economy portended a short and successful skirmish, the South seceded in 1861, starting the U.S. Civil War.

The intertwining of cotton, capitalism, and slavery-- specifically the national conflict over whether slavery should continue and in what form-- as the driving force behind the U.S. Civil War may seem too obvious to bear rehearsal here. Yet this narrative is far from universally accepted. Confederate apologists often point to “states’ rights,” not slavery, as the galvanizing cause behind the Civil War. While they concede that slavery was immoral, they contend that the institution was on the wane anyway; the true issue that Southerners seceded over was the division of power between state and federal governments. Central to the “states rights” narrative

is the implication that the secession occurred in pursuit of nobly righting an injustice (the misallocation of power)-- notably absent is any discussion of the ongoing and systematic torture and enslavement of a race of people. This line of reasoning elides both the North and the South's economic and political interests in the future of slavery. Moreover and more to the point, it allows its proponents to minimize the racism inherent in an embrace of Confederate legacies. More palatable than outright Lost Cause ideology, the "states' rights" rationale still suggests that the Confederacy represents a heroic if ill-fated effort for an honorable cause; it is precisely its palatability that allows its adherents to frequently avoid the public charges of racism that accompany a more open embrace of the Lost Cause.²² Far from a fringe belief, the "states rights" argument appears in textbooks as authorized history and dominates public opinion on the subject. In response to the question "what caused the Civil War?", most Americans in a 2011 Pew Research Center poll (48%) answered "states' rights." Respondents under the age of 30 were the age group most likely to answer "states' rights" (60%), suggesting that the rationale is growing in popularity, not waning. According to a 2018 study by the Southern Poverty Law Center, only eight percent of high school seniors identified slavery as the central cause of the Civil War ("Teaching Hard History"). Surveying teachers in the same study, the SPLC found that U.S. classrooms tend to rely on a progressive model of history, glossing over problems-- such as racism-- which do not fit into a vision of the nation as continually improving; teachers, moreover, the study concluded, tend to focus on the experience of white people in the Civil War,

22. The rationale has gotten frequent press recently when politicians and public officials have repeated it. While, previously, espousing the "states rights" argument occasioned little in the way of sustained public criticism, as the Civil War's legacy has re-entered the national spotlight, each public remark on the subject now reliably produces a flurry of "explainers," think pieces, and opinion columns drawing an explicit connection between secession and slavery. See Pena, "GOP Senate Candidate Corey Stewart Says Civil War Wasn't About Slavery"; "Corey Stewart Airbrushes Slavery Out of Civil War History"; Domonoske, "John Kelly Claims Civil War Caused by Lack of Compromise. History Shows Otherwise"; McCarthy, "Trump Voices Confusion Over US History: 'Why Was There a Civil War?'"

de-contextualizing any discussion of slavery. Our national ambivalence around the Civil War and its causes represent a decades-long war waged-- largely by white women-- over the memorialization of the Civil War, on the battlefields of education, films, public parks and monuments, flag display, ritual, and now by means of lawsuits to keep the symbols of the Confederacy in public view.²³

Beyond the cotton field where I absentmindedly tugged a ragged boll from its stem, crowds of spectators and reenactors mill through the sutler row, soldiers' encampment, and battleworks of Fort Branch. I doubt the reenactment organizers gave much thought to the cotton field beyond its usefulness as a parking lot, but as I study it, the white cotton boll in my palm acquires a stubborn uncanniness. It is an index of the ongoing discursive battle over the Civil War, and what is at stake in erasing slavery and racism from the narrative in an endeavour to remember and glorify white Confederate soldiers and their descendants. In a very real sense, Civil War reenactments are embodied and experiential battlegrounds for the struggle over how the nation will remember and make sense of the Civil War. Implied in their professed adherence to "authenticity" and historical accuracy is that reenactors translate Civil War history across their bodies, preserving-- as closely as possible-- the original. Perhaps more accurately, we might say that they *write* a kind of experienced popular history into existence, a history bolstered by both reenactments' claims to accuracy and by the educational framing that accompanies many elements of a reenactment. Most public-facing reenactment events (that is, events open to spectators instead of limited to reenactors only) are formal or informal living history demonstrations, which may or may not be accompanied by printed handouts or reproduction

23. For more on Southern white women's Confederate memorialization efforts, see Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*; Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past*; Blight, *Race and Reunion*. I discuss white women's roles in Lost Cause mythology and Southern performance more fully in Chapter Three of this project.

period objects, but explicitly aim to contextualize and explain the historical practices spectators encounter (Kemmer & Kemmer, Tilden, Hadden, Maltby, Watson). Reenactment sites themselves may also include a museum space displaying artifacts with contextualizing labels; these sites and their museums may or may not be operated by recognized federal historical and preservation agencies. Fort Branch, for example, while listed as a regional historic site by the state of North Carolina, is privately owned, and its museum and grounds are maintained by the resident reenacting company and volunteers, funded in part by a grant from the NC Confederate Centennial Commission (“Restoring Fort Branch”). Though unregulated by any professional or governmental historical institution, the display labels in such museal spaces are presented as official history.

As a result of this educational framing and emphasis on historical accuracy, reenactors cultivate a sense that the history they performatively conjure is “the real thing,” or as close as anyone can hope to come, experientially. Almost every account of reenacting breathlessly describes the “time warp,” the sense of having passed through times by painstakingly embodying and performing the past; the experience is so prized and recognized among reenactors that it has passed into glossaries of reenacting terms (Hadden 225). Reenactor and period musician Kent Courtney provides perhaps the most impassioned description of time warp: in a chapter entitled “Becoming a Time Traveler,” Courtney writes,

a reenactment is a large-scale seance... The spiritual experience comes like a flash in a time warp wherein the window has opened up and the reenactor has seen a former life. Days long gone grow alive inside the person.... There is a spiritual awakening that tingles the brain; then suddenly, he’s there (8).

Courtney’s reliance on spirits and the occult to describe time warp suggests that the coveted experience is both liminal and otherworldly, mystical, beyond understanding. It appears without warning, a momentary dropping of the veil between times. And yet it is also insistently physical;

a séance depends upon the physical presence of the gathered bodies of its participants, and certainly upon the body of the medium, through whom the contacted spirits will speak.

Reenactors, here, are both the circle of witnesses and the medium itself, the past passing through their bodies to impart fleeting but nevertheless palpable and overwhelming impressions. Perhaps most significantly, the time warp sensation, as described by reenactors, is tinged with the unassailable truth of a religious vision. That is, contingent as they are on personal embodied experience and interpretation via the lens of the self, historical reenacting and the finds unearthed through its “experimental archaeology” seem to defy refutation. Whereas historians might debate over the interpretation of a document, the reenacted historical event takes on the authority of a witnessed event: a reenactor’s experience of the “as if” of embodied performance blurs into embodied knowledge, the weight of a firsthand account. It follows, given the weight of truth that reenactors ascribe to their activities, that spectators of a reenactment might also come away with a sense of having witnessed history, though at a remove. In fact, as I wander into the woods abutting the cotton field, I overhear a father informing his children, in hushed tones, that “once we walk through here, we’re going into another time.” Later, a fellow spectator tells me she noticed my New York license plates and hopes I parked inconspicuously: “somebody might throw mud on a Yankee car,” she explains, signalling that spectators and reenactors alike are alive to and willing to enact the regional divisions of the past.

The stakes of reenacted history are high. If Civil War reenactments, through first-hand embodied experience, spectating, and educational context, are imbued with a sense of accuracy-- if not factual accuracy then intuitive accuracy-- then only the elements of everyday life that they deem fit to portray appear within the frame of the resulting historical narrative. As I’ve noted above, Civil War reenactment is overwhelmingly a white pastime. While black reenacting groups

dedicated to reenacting the lives of the United States Colored Troops exist, most Civil War reenactment events gloss over race and slavery.²⁴ Reenactment manuals, in fact, generally neglect to mention slavery, racism, or even the existence of race at all. This omission, coupled with the emphasis on “duty” and “honor” as important qualities of the era, render the texts complicit in the same kind of memorialization discourse that touts the Lost Cause or States’ Rights arguments. Indeed, in a text box labeled “The Tariff Issue,” Courtney explains that the Civil War was occasioned by a dispute over tariffs, with nary a mention of cotton or the expansion of slavery (22). For most spectators and reenactors, the Civil War they experience through reenactment is one divorced from or altogether voided of slavery or race. The result is, in the words of Patricia G. Davis, a “symbolic annihilation” of black lives from the Civil War scene and divesting black Southerners of their regional identity (*Laying Claim* 7). I would add, it also results in a symbolic annihilation that passes as official history and feeds an already mythologized understanding of the nation during and since the Civil War, shaping national narratives, discourse, politics, and policies.

The earthwork mounds of Fort Branch were constructed in 1863 on a bluff some seventy feet above the Roanoke River, a spot chosen to defend a railroad bridge crucial to the Confederacy supply line after several Union raids in the area. Built by five hundred enslaved, the fort was outfitted with cannons and torpedoes.

24. For more on Black reenactors’ subversive deployment of antebellum gender stereotypes to claim a subjectivity and representation otherwise denied them by the very logic of Civil War reenactments, see Davis, “The Other Southern Belles.”



Figure 4: Spectators watch reenacted cannon fire as part of the thirtieth annual Fort Branch reenactment, 2016.



Figure 5: A cotton field served as a makeshift parking lot for the Fort Branch reenactment.



Figure 6: Reenactors portraying members of the Union and Confederate cavalry ride into the fray at Fort Branch.

As Union forces led by Major General Sherman reached nearby Goldsboro in early 1865, the few Confederate troops remaining at Fort Branch were ordered to evacuate. Soldiers set fire to the magazine and pushed the cannons into the river before abandoning the fort (“History of Fort Branch”). Now, the earthen mounds are grassed over, hidden away behind a stretch of woods. Visitors can stand in the crenels, or open-topped firing windows, of the reconstructed wooden battlements and imagine taking aim as a sharpshooter or artilleryman. Children clamber over the earthworks, kicking up dust as they follow the curve where it arches up to overlook the bend in the Roanoke River, a reproduction cannon perched and aimed at the water below. In the center of the fort, a split-rail fence keeps visitors from straying into a small patch of unidentified graves, the faded stones overgrown with moss. As spectators gather, pitching collapsible canvas chairs on the perimeter of the mounds and down into the field below, a reenactor addresses the crowd. Although the completed fort never saw a battle, he informs us, the reenactment we are about to witness is a reenactment of what the defense of the fort *would* have been like, had it occurred.

The reenactment begins with a shout in the distance, and from the woods at the edge of the field below a host of eight mounted cavalry charge into view. Wary of harming each other or their horses, the riders circle the field and occasionally cross sabers before returning to the woods, where they begin their assault again. The repeated loop of yelling and hoofs underscores the reenacted battle that begins now in earnest as gray- and blue-clad infantry aim their weapons at each other and fire. Cannons in the distance begin to fire, startling spectators. A sulphurous smoke wafts through the air. Reenactors fall to the ground under the sharp crack of spent gunpowder, some of them dragging themselves in shows of pain out of the sun and into the shade beneath the trees of the fort. As spectators are free to roam and the reenactment ranges across both the fort and the adjacent field, the scene is panoramic, all-surrounding. Ears ringing with the

powerful echoes of the cannon, I turn and scramble up the steep mound behind me to return my attention to the fighting in the interior of the fort, mounting it just in time to watch the few remaining Union soldiers surrender their weapons and yield to the Confederates. Across the battlefield, lively and sustained shrieks arise-- a “rebel yell,” that might, without context, not strike one initially as the celebration it is. Any Confederates still standing join the conquering company assembled in the fort, and, as most of the Confederate soldiers stationed at Fort Branch hailed from the state, one reenactor leads the rest in a cheer for North Carolina. The call “The Old North State!” and its response, “Forever!”, rings out five times, and by the final repetitions, most of the spectators have joined in, bellowing “Forever” along with the reenactors.

A striking anachronism in a practice otherwise dedicated to historical authenticity and accuracy, the Fort Branch reenactment performs a hypothetical history, borrowing details from skirmishes in the area and what is known of defensive plans for the fort to, in the words of the handout given to spectators, show “how the fort would have been defended and assaulted.” It is, in effect, a broad-scale implementation of experimental archaeology, asking reenactors and spectators alike to suspend the disbelief of the actual past to encounter a reenactment of a past that never occurred *as if* it had occurred-- to embody a speculative history. And rather than dismiss the exercise as a hobby or flawed historiography, I take Fort Branch to be an important performative act, one that illustrates the equation at the heart of Civil War reenactment. The open introduction of an element of imagination, of play-- constructed though it is from historical record-- into reenactment, which has staked its credibility upon rigorous historical research, realizes dual and opposing effects. On the one hand, the historical research renders the “re” of the resulting re-enactment: the “back,” the “again,” the performing of an original action for a second time. And, on the other hand, the reenactment is history at play, enlivened and always

already failed in its very attempt to re-enact what has never been. In its status as both original and repeated, the Fort Branch reenactment allows its participants to choose their own history, embodying not just the given-to-be script of the past, but a past of their own making and living. That the reenactment concludes as it does-- with Confederate victory and a rebel yell-- suggests that despite the potential to choose otherwise (and in spite of the more broadly historically accurate defeat of the South, ultimately), what animates Civil War reenactment is the chance to live the past as it should have been. It is easy to locate a Southern affinity in the reenactors' decision to represent and celebrate a Southern victory. Yet the Southern mode here, I contend, is moreover the impulse to return to a time that never existed, to "play" a course of history that never played out.

Whether or not the events reenacted occurred, to reenact is to extend to the passed and the past the fine-grained attention and respect of a kind of radical and embodied empathy; to insert one's own body and image into the returned past. A speculative reenactment like the one at Fort Branch highlights the imaginative and re-visionary possibilities inherent in living history: in practicing radical empathy, reenactors are already accustomed to painstakingly researching, conceptualizing, and occupying the attitudes, behaviors, and living conditions of others. Although this radical empathy is limited by the strict rules of representation governing Civil War reenactment, speculative reenactment emphasizes that these rules are self-imposed and discretionary. If a historical reenactment of a hypothetical but unrealized event may take place, why could the reenactment not expand its scope to include contextualization that strips the mantle of glory from the Lost Cause, to represent non-majoritarian experiences of the Civil War, to offer, at least, an ending that doesn't draw its spectators into a shared celebration of Confederate victory? While I believe that the live and embodied nature of reenactment offers

these possibilities, and I am certain that progressive exceptions exist, the nature of Civil War reenactment is to conserve, to maintain a narrative, affect, and space that reaffirms the Civil War as a primarily white, straight, cis-male experience, and that moreover upholds that experience as a nobler, simpler, and superior alternative to the complicated present.

Chapter Two “The Fruit Keeps Falling”: A Lynching Reenactment

In a very real way there is no lynching until there is a picture of a lynching.
-- Eric Lott, “A Strange and Bitter Spectacle”

The subject of this chapter, when I share it with scholars and non-scholars alike, produces a by-now fairly predictable range of reactions: shock, uneasiness, uncertainty, disgust; sometimes outright anger, sometimes an identifiable mental hefting, an in-the-moment attempt to sort the performance into a recognizable category, to make sense of its existence in order to suss an appropriate response. Perhaps the title of the chapter has elicited a similar reaction from its readers. Whatever the reception, the response is almost always the same: why? Why reenact a lynching? Unspoken although, I presume, underlying this question is a host of other questions weighing the value and danger of a historical reenactment of racial violence: Can a reenactment of something so gruesome and charged produce anti-racist or progressive meaning outside of its sheer shock value? Does a lynching reenactment as a representational mode risk flattening or, worse, caricaturing the violence, the victims, the perpetrators? How do you control the reception of such a performance? Does it risk re-traumatizing spectators already traumatized by centuries of racist violence and terrorism? What if spectators fetishize or are thrilled by the violence or mislay their sympathies with the perpetrators? What if white spectators leave the performance with a sense of absolution or distance from such an overt and historical display of racism?

These questions are concerned with the representation of historical violence and therefore might also apply to other modes of representation, such as painting, theatre, literature, or film.²⁵ However, an element of the queasiness around the event, I suspect, derives specifically from the

25. Certainly, the recent proliferation of articles about “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces” in *Inside Higher Ed* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* attest to the already raging debate over the place of trauma and representations of trauma in the classroom and academia.

term “reenactment.” Historical reenactments in the U.S. context, as I’ve pointed out in the previous chapter, bear multiple and sometimes conflicting connotations: they are at once dismissible as a “hobby,” a failed and self-indulgent attempt at playing the past, and endowed with the authority of “authenticity” and historical accuracy, an important educational experience that exceeds the classroom or textbook. A lynching reenactment might trivialize its subject matter *and* uphold dangerously overdetermined or under-contextualized understandings of race, racism, racial violence, and history *at the same time*. They are, moreover, and specifically in the case of Civil War battle reenactment, frequently a kind of performative shorthand for a set of ideological positions around race, gender, and national identity that would preclude anti-racist activism. The Civil War battle reenactments I described in the first chapter of this project depend upon an authentic immersion with a scarcity of context, on living a “time out of time,” removed from the complications of racism and slavery, to achieve the pleasurable time-fissure *frisson*, the “wargasm” or “time warp” that its participants seek. A reenactment of a lynching is unsettling, in part, because it may suggest some pleasurable dimension to even the representation of violence directed against black bodies. These understandable concerns around representation, broadly, and reenactment, specifically, are likely why, to date, there is only one regularly held lynching reenactment in the United States.

The Monroe, Georgia reenactment represents the murder of George Dorsey, Mae Murray Dorsey, Roger Malcolm, and Dorothy Malcolm, who were killed by white locals in 1946. After Roger stabbed white farmer Barnette Hester in a dispute-- over what, precisely, is unknown-- he was arrested and held in the county jail. Roger’s wife, Dorothy, arrived at the jail several days later with another white farmer, Loy Harrison, who had promised to bail Roger out; Dorothy also brought along her brother George-- recently returned from his deployment in World War II-- and

his wife Mae. On the road back to the Malcolm home, the car was overtaken by a mob of white men, who forced the two couples from the car and murdered them. The reenactment itself is framed as the culminating protest performance event of a day-long activist rally and pilgrimage to relevant local sites, during which community activists repeatedly draw connections between the 1946 lynching, the Civil Rights movement, and modern-day policing of and violence against black bodies in the United States. The annual reenactment, organized by the Moore's Ford Movement, has itself been hotly debated among the activists calling for a memorialization effort for the four victims of the 1946 lynching. Putting aside the question of whether a reenactment of a lynching is the "best" or "right" way to memorialize its victims, to seek justice, or to heal a community's traumas (all of which are stated goals of the Moore's Ford Movement), I will explore what the reenactment achieves through contextualization and performance, as well as how it seeks to navigate the potential pitfalls inherent in the form.

In his essay "The Street is the Stage," performance studies scholar Richard Schechner considers the carnivalesque nature of mass gatherings-- an umbrella category under which he includes ritual dramas, political demonstrations, protests, and festivals-- to determine their political efficacy. While these public, collective spectacles may suggest or imagine, in their carnival sensibility, some potential for change in the social order, Schechner contends that they ultimately end without revolution: "the carnival cannot itself be what replaces the status quo" (85). The limits of public drama or demonstration, Schechner determines, lie in their inability to expand the utopian inversion of power they imagine beyond the event itself. While these events may figure themselves as "rehearsals for the near future"-- that is, a practice for the change soon to come-- these rehearsals never resolve into a lasting transformation. These public demonstrations, moreover and insofar as they are performances, are "amoral" (*Future of Ritual*

1), available to be taken up by any ideology, which may in turn, through the performance, reproduce its own worldview. It's my argument that the annual Moore's Ford lynching reenactment, as a public and ritualized event, is in fact efficacious *because* it rehearses the past for a near future, mobilizing performance's inherent amorality to reclaim a performance practice typically linked to an antagonistic ideological position. Counter to Schechner's qualification of public drama as rehearsals for an abortive future, the lynching reenactment rehearses simultaneously for two near futures: one in which current structures of power repeat violence against black bodies and one in which those structures are, conversely, toppled by inter- and intra-racial dialogue and witnessing. Unlike the Civil War reenactments I attended and described in the previous chapter, the Moore's Ford reenactment deliberately and consistently situates its historical subject in the context of the past, the present, and the future, sometimes discursively collapsing all three to emphasize patterns of racist disenfranchisement, violence, and discrimination over and against prevalent national narratives of progress. The Moore's Ford reenactment, that is, in its contextualizing rehearsal of the past, relocates racial terror lynchings' reverberations not just in the geographic South, but across the nation, effectively dislocating and mobilizing the South.

Every year since 2005, on or around July 25th, a group of mostly black community members gathers on the Moore's Ford bridge in Monroe, Georgia to reenact the lynchings that took place there in 1946.²⁶ I participated in the reenactment as a spectator in July 2017.

Following a rally in a local church, the reenactment begins with a ritual visitation to the

26. My understanding of past reenactments is informed by various news articles and videos documenting them over the years, but primarily by Mark Auslander's accounts of the reenactments, "'Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held': Reenacting a Lynching in Moore's Ford, Georgia" and "Contesting the Roadways: The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment and a Confederate Flag Rally, July 25, 2015," which include reflections from participants.

gravesites of the victims-- George and Mae Murray Dorsey, Roger and Dorothy Dorsey Malcolm-- and continues in a pilgrimage to various stations that figure significantly in the events leading up to the lynchings (a farmhouse where the confrontation that led to the lynchings occurred, the county jail where one of the victims was held). In some years, including 2017, the pilgrimage has included a stop at the courthouse annex for a reenactment of 1946 white supremacist gubernatorial candidate Eugene Talmadge's speech to the white citizens of Monroe, in which he railed against the recent enfranchisement of black Georgians (effected by the Supreme Court's refusal to hear *King v. Chapman* in April of that year).²⁷ In recent years, spectators have explicitly tied the reenactment to the Black Lives Matter movement, wearing signs reading "I am Trayvon Martin" and "I am Michael Brown." The spectating group's arrival at the bridge coincides with the appearance of a lynch mob armed with pop guns and a car carrying the four victims. The community members making up the lynch mob (who have been, in various years, white as well as black, designated by "KKK" signs, armbands, or white masks) yell racial slurs and obscenities at the victims and kick and punch them. Fight choreography, along with the rest of the reenacted scenes, is rehearsed ahead of time, led by a director chosen from among the organizing activists. In recent years, this has been Rev. Cassandra Greene. Finally, the reenactors representing the white lynch mob hang a noose around one of the victims' necks before pushing all four down an embankment, where the mob aims their pop guns and pulls the triggers.²⁸ In most years, the murders have been followed with the removal and display

27. Primus E. King, a black man and a registered voter, was turned away in 1944 when he attempted to vote in the Muscogee County Democratic primary. King sued Chapman, the chair of the county Democratic Party, and a Georgia district court ruled that Chapman's disenfranchisement in the primary was unconstitutional. After several rounds of appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately refused to hear the case in April 1946, legally enabling black voters to participate in Democratic Party primaries in Georgia.

28. While the popular definition of lynching is specifically death by hanging, lynching scholars have noted that other methods of killing included shooting, stabbing, and burning. Judith L. Stephens defines

of a bloody fetus from the stomach of Dorothy Malcolm, who was purported to have been pregnant at the time of the killings. While the pregnancy was not officially documented at the time of the murders, organizers cite a conversation with funeral director Dan Young in which he confirmed the pregnancy, and in 2008 the organizers ceremonially named the unborn baby “Justice.”²⁹ The reenactment typically closes with the singing of the hymn “Precious Lord” over the bodies of the victims.

Insofar as we might consider the reenactment a ritual drama, it inhabits a shared tradition with the dramatic works Soyica Diggs Colbert investigates in her book *The African American Theatrical Body*. Colbert characterizes these plays-- such as Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mister Charlie*, and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Topdog/Underdog*-- as essentially acts of transformative repetition and reproduction: they thereby “reproduce a scene and rework that scene’s history” (13). In reproducing the lynching, the participants do not so much reimagine its facts as re-insert themselves into a white supremacist history that would prefer to leave them out--except as the props it requires in order to materialize through violence. In remembering and repeating a scene, too, that continues to grip the community, reenactors insist on tracing that scene’s history to the present. However, despite the reenactment’s trappings of the theatre (rehearsals, some scripted moments, a director), it ultimately resists the category, residing somewhere between drama, sacred ritual, protest, and performance practice. The day-long event, from the morning rally to the pilgrimage to significant sites for prayers, extemporized

lynching, broadly, as “the murder of black individuals, primarily black men, by a white mob with no repercussions for the perpetrators” (3).

29. The story of Malcolm’s baby’s murder echoes the story of Mary Turner, whose 1918 lynching in Brooks County, Georgia was highly publicized and served as a rallying point for the NAACP’s anti-lynching campaigns over the ensuing decades. Mary Turner was hung upside down, burned, and cut open so that the mob could remove her unborn baby, whose head was stomped before Turner herself was shot. For more on the potent conflation of Dorothy Dorsey with Mary Turner, see Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching*, pp. 167-70.

speeches, conversation, and reenacted moments to, finally, the reenactment of the lynching itself, more closely resembles the structure of a day in a reenacted Civil War camp, a loose program dotted with demonstrations and battle reenactments. The pilgrimage and its stations, moreover, inevitably echo the Christian Via Crucis or “Stations of the Cross,” in which churches display a series of symbolic images corresponding with moments leading up to Jesus’s crucifixion, which worshippers are meant to follow in order, praying or reflecting at each image. More specifically, the day as a whole roughly follows the revivalist “warm-up, sermon, harvest” structure that typifies African-American Christian liturgy, with the rally serving as a preliminary framing of the event, the pilgrimage as an extended and collective discourse on racial justice, and the reenactment itself as a ritual akin to a sacrament, a culminating moment of solemnity (Haldeman 31). Indeed, the rally (which begins in a church) and the pilgrimage are steeped in Christian rhetoric and dramaturgy, a likely reflection of the fact that several of the activists who organize the protest are ordained Christian pastors. Chief among these Christian dramaturgical elements is the call-and-response form of testimonial characteristic of African-American Christian worship: as I will elaborate below, participants were encouraged throughout the rally and pilgrimage to testify to their own experiences with racist trauma, and to engage dialogically with the day’s speakers as they shared their testimony.

This chapter examines the Moore’s Ford lynching reenactment as a public protest performance that refocuses and reframes reenactment’s obsession with the past on rehearsal, on contextualizing the “again-ness” of the past’s return in order to prepare for the future. I argue that the lynching reenactment rehearses for multiple near futures at once, across a scale of change: futures in which black lives are alternately valued, devalued, or devalued but remembered and avenged. The performance reenacts the past, but in rehearsing it for spectators,

rehearses it for a near future in which violence has anti-racist witnesses and culminates in justice for its victims. This witnessing crowd of spectators is, significantly, composed mostly of black community members, where historically lynch mobs were formed by white community members. The reenactment thus rehearses for a near future (and in fact generates a present) in which an inter- and intra-racial community convenes to partake in serious dialogue around race and racism in the United States, expanding lynching's legacy and foothold to include the nation rather than solely the South. Furthermore, and most (de)pressingly, the reenactment rehearses for the very real near-future encounter with black criminalization and/or death. As smartphones equipped with cameras and social media applications rapidly proliferate among Americans-- the most recent Nielsen report noted that a record eighty-eight percent of U.S. cell phone customers use smartphones (Nielsen Corp.)-- black death is rendered hyper-visible via the circulation of cell-phone footage of the killings and beatings of black men, women, and children. Cell-phone footage spread on social media has furthermore highlighted the daily harassment and deployment of the police by white community members against their black neighbors in the midst of routine and non-threatening activity, including barbeques, babysitting, soccer games, and shopping trips. At such a moment in U.S. history, a reenactment of racially motivated murders, underscored by political disenfranchisement, prepares and fortifies its spectators for their next, inevitable confrontation with the devaluation of black lives. More than a rehearsal in theory, at the 2017 reenactment, almost every spectator used their cell phones to take personal photographs and video of events throughout the day; spectators thus rehearsed not only for encounters with future trauma, but for their roles as future citizen journalists and "cop-watchers." Yet even within this bleakest of possible near-futures imagined by the reenactment is the kernel of change. Even if the utopian moment dissolves at the end of the performance, the preparation for the worst remains,

as does the ritual memorialization of the lynching victims and the re-forging and reinforcement of local, genealogical connections sundered by the very murders reenacted. Etymologically, “rehearse” derives from the French *herse*, which refers to the harrow or rake used to prepare soil for planting (*OED*). To rehearse, then, is to prepare the same ground again for new growth. To rehearse the past, we might extend, is to prepare the ground of history for new planting-- whether or not the seeds take hold and yield shoots, the soil is turned, unearthing the stones, dead roots, and detritus that might have hindered germination.

Lynching and Its Returns: Performances of Violence

Historically, lynching in the United States is a performance in its own right, a pointed spectacle of violence whose purpose is threefold: to chastise and control black community members through violent example, to accomplish and strengthen the racial hierarchy that places whites at its apex, and to reinforce the boundaries of white membership.³⁰ The discipline element of the lynching was not so much about proportionate punishment outside of the legal system as it was about the public torture and killing of black bodies without recourse. One body was as good as another. Indeed, in many cases, no crime at all had been committed, or the perpetrator was intentionally or lazily misidentified. Most frequently, the purported crime was the rape of a white woman by a black man, a myth which at once reveals the intertwined sexualization of black men and fear of black masculinity and the hyper-feminization and sexual policing of white women. White women, in other words (and to varying degrees, dependent on class), were the justification

30. Racial terror lynchings were most prevalent in the years following Reconstruction, as whites sought to reassert their racial supremacy and control over blacks, particularly in the South. Lynchings continued to flourish well into the mid-twentieth-century. While no accurate count of the number of lynchings exists since lynchings rarely resulted in a police report or investigation, let alone a criminal trial, the Equal Justice Initiative estimates that 4,084 African-Americans were lynched in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia between 1877 and 1950, in addition to 300 lynchings in other states during the same time period (“Lynching in America”).

and the complicit “lynch-pin,” so to speak, for the torture, murder, display, and dismemberment of black men. Yet even as the myth required restrictive performances of sexual purity, domesticity, and femininity from white women in the role of the helpless damsel, white women undisputedly accrued power from this position, united across the gender line with white men in the fortification of white supremacy. And yet this-- as anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett put it-- “old threadbare lie” acted not just as a premise for racist violence, but as a cover for the chief reason for lynchings: to maintain white supremacy in spheres public and private.

Literary historian Koritha Mitchell has coined the phrase “master/piece theatre” to describe lynching as a response to white anxiety about black success: in the spectacle of lynching, “whites literally used *pieces* of black bodies as props to perform their *master* status” (3). Grace Elizabeth Hale, in her larger study that traces the cultural construction of white and black as racial categories via the development of mass consumer capitalism, similarly points out that the lynching of black citizens by white mobs was a way of violently extending segregated consumption. As lynchings became ritualized mass spectacles-- that is, an amusement or leisure activity-- the very structure and logic of the lynching event sorted those who could participate in the putative “pleasure” of attending or enacting a lynching and those who were subject to its violence by their racial status. “In a grisly dialectic, then,” Hale writes, “consumer culture created spectacle lynchings” just as spectacle lynchings reasserted “consumption as a white privilege” (205). Whites regulated, via lynchings, property: who could purchase or own it, who could exist on which property, and who, ultimately, could be transformed into property via the circulation and collection of body parts after a lynching. Indeed, as cultural historian Sandy Alexandre argues, although the enslavement and ownership of black people had legally ended, lynchings effected “claims to ownership” more broadly, not only dispossessing black victims of

their bodies and lives, but furthermore marking lynching sites as white spaces and robbing black citizens of a sense of belonging to the land where they resided. Each of these readings of lynchings suggests that, while lynchings were terrorist acts of violence, they were rooted in deep-seated white anxieties about maintaining a racist order of society that materially benefited whites. White supremacy, that is, is an incomplete project; it needs to be enacted through performance to continually reconstitute itself. When the everyday procedures of white supremacy-- segregation, lesser or no public facilities servicing black customers, disenfranchisement via poll taxes and literacy tests, required black performances of deference to whites-- were transgressed, or otherwise failed to reassure the white polity, a lynch-mob sought to reaffirm the racial hierarchy by brutally demonstrating what blacks could not lay claim to: citizenship, safety, subjecthood. Lynchings, while particular and local and far from uniform, developed their own familiar dramatic structure: the black victim (typically a man) was captured from jail or hiding (or plucked off the street), perhaps identified by the purported victim, transported to a site where white spectators and participants gathered, and mutilated or tortured before being killed.

Lynchings, increasingly, developed into mass spectacle events, drawing local crowds as well as spectators from outside of the communities in which they took place. The frequently collective nature of lynchings underscored the message these extrajudicial killings conveyed to African-Americans: these murders, while witnessed by many, will never result in a criminal conviction for the perpetrators. White communities closed ranks around witnesses and killers alike, and threatened or physically assaulted anyone who might testify in court; white sheriffs detained would-be witnesses for the prosecution; white juries, presented with overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing, refused to indict or convict white defendants. In the Moore's Ford case,

a man named Lamar Howard was badly beaten by James Verner, one of the men accused of lynching the four victims. Howard had testified in the grand jury hearing to having seen Verner bring two guns matching the murder weapon descriptions to work the day before the lynching. Though Howard went on to testify again-- this time about the retaliatory beating in addition to Verner's weapons-- an all-white, male jury declared Verner not guilty (Wexler 199-200). Even in cases where the lynching took place in relative secret, without a crowd present, the event reverberated afterwards, among black and white communities alike. Whether or not they occurred with an audience, lynchings were spectacular performances of violence that were at once insistently public and shrouded in silence. Both symbolic and literal performances of white supremacy, lynchings depended upon an audience, upon becoming public, upon dissemination. The spectators, then, whether or not they directly participate in the murder of lynching victims -- and even whether or not they are immediately present at the time of the victims' death-- are more than mere passive bystanders; they are crucial to the enterprise of lynching. Amy Louise Wood distinguishes the grade of spectatorship compelled by lynchings as witnessing, explaining that a "spectator or bystander becomes a witness when his or her spectatorship bears a legal, spiritual, or social consequence; when it can establish the true course or meaning of an event or action; or when it can confer significance or value on an event" (4). Indeed, insofar as race lynchings *become* race lynchings only in their spectacular, public dimension (even if that public aspect follows later), witnesses and lynchings are co-constitutive elements of a singular performance. Spectators or bystanders only become witnesses in that their viewing of a lynching or its aftermath produces the lynching *qua* lynching itself, and thereby accrues the significance and consequence that Wood describes.

As Mitchell's "master/piece theatre" suggests, and as Grace Hale and Harvey Young have also observed, body parts, photographs, and other relics of the scene circulated afterward so that whites not present at the scene could enjoy the spectacle secondhand (and so whites present could have a souvenir of their participation). These performance "remains," as Young is careful to emphasize, also served the function of terrorizing black viewers when they encountered them, a reminder that black bodies could at any moment undergo the same violent transmogrification into commodity, fetish, souvenir (167-189).³¹ Victims whose bodies were not fully dismembered might be deliberately left on display, sometimes accompanied by an explicit sign, as a warning to black citizens and an extended spectacle of white supremacy for white ones. A relative of Moore's Ford lynching victim Roger Malcolm, Joshua Shelman, Jr., shared such an account at the rally preceding the 2017 reenactment. Describing the lynchings of Joe Watts and Tom Allen, which had taken place in the same county thirty-five years earlier, Shelman stated:

They lynched [Allen] in a place called the Corner. And of course they attached notes on his body saying "do not remove," the notes said "do not remove any remains." There's a history of lynching where body parts were taken and stored inside the homes. Five hours later, over 1500 invaded the Monroe county jail. They took... Joe Watts south, and lynched him near the Corner. We never found his body parts. We never found him.

Notably, the details Shelman shared derived not from secondary historical accounts, but from his own family's oral history-- Joe Watts was Shelman's great-uncle, and Tom Allen was a cousin. Shelman's family members had viewed firsthand the display of Allen's body, had been unable to locate Watts's remains for burial, and had continued to recount the trauma of this experience

31. As Young's cataloging of the various ways lynched bodies have been read suggests, scholars have posed a range of frameworks for understanding lynching. Notable examples include: Robin Wiegman's "The Anatomy of Lynching" examines lynching as a denial of black masculinity; Kirk W. Fuoss, in "Lynching Performances, Theatres of Violence," understands a lynching to be composed of multiple networked performance cycles that he terms a "performance complex"; Rasul A. Mowatt reads lynching spectacles as leisure activities in "Lynching as Leisure"; Peter Ehrenhaus and A. Susan Owen, in "Race Lynching and Christian Evangelicalism," posit lynchings as ritual blood sacrifices performed by white Christian Evangelicals in search of racial redemption.

over time. The audience for the originary lynching spectacles thus widens, extending across racial boundaries, generations, and time. The queasiness of memorializing lynchings, via reenactment or otherwise, may in part derive from this sense that lynching events are unfinished performances: how do we determine the nature of our witnessing? Can one bear witness to such an event without becoming a part of it?

Skeptics might answer that while lynching photographs, body parts, and other remains are horrifying reminders of the past, they are just that: the past. The history of American lynching, particularly as it appears in popular and grade-school history, tends to relegate the practice to a bygone era of overt racism. The accepted understanding of lynching as a primitive expression of an outgrown racist animus fits into the national narrative of forward-moving progress over time: the implication is that race-driven lynching is unrelated to the American present, having been successfully overcome in the distant past. And yet, this dismissal of lynching as a distant figment of our racist past ignores the many ways in which racially motivated spectacle lynching was essentially a modern invention.³² While extrajudicial killing was part of life in the United States even before the nation as such existed, more commonly, extrajudicial punishment took the form of public but nonlethal violence, such as tarring and feathering, and most frequently targeted white men (Berg 3).³³ After the Revolutionary War

32. More pressingly, perhaps, it also allows public figures to get away with using the term in political rhetoric. Given its history, the word “lynching” (or its variants “hanging” or “noose”) on the one hand functions as a dog whistle for sympathetic racist listeners, and on the other hand, its status as historical act allows the speaker to deny that the word has any meaningful currency in the present moment. Mississippi senator Cindy Hyde-Smith was widely condemned, for example, for joking about attending a “public hanging” on the campaign trail against her black opponent, Mike Espy, in November 2018. In May 2017, Mississippi state legislator Karl Oliver called for the lynching of lawmakers who supported to removal of Confederate monuments. In August 2017, Georgia state representative Jason Spencer, in a public Facebook post, warned former state representative LaDawn Jones that “I can guarantee you won’t be met with torches but something a lot more definitive,” if she persisted in advocating the removal of Confederate monuments.

33. This is, of course, to differentiate the usage of the term “lynching” as we understand it now from its early usage, not to imply in any way that black people-- enslaved or otherwise-- were not subject to

concluded and the United States continued to expand westward, early so-called “lynch law” strove to maintain order in new territories where formal court systems and law enforcement had yet to be established. Lynchings, in the sense of extralegal murders, did not begin to attain their racialized meaning until the Civil War and Reconstruction threatened to make citizens of the largely enslaved African-American population (Goldsby 17). At this same historical moment, industrialization and globalization ushered in a new vision of the world and of the nation: as the nineteenth century drew to a close, modernity and its horsemen-- urbanization, commercial and industrial growth, immigration, the citizenship of the previously enslaved-- threatened to upend the existing social and racial order (Goldsby, Hale, Woods). Lynching arose, in part, as a response to the profound ambivalences of white citizens to the United States’s entry into modernity. Where historical lynching represented whites’ reaction to modernity’s assumed disruption of the racist hierarchy, the Moore’s Ford lynching reenactment represents, conversely, a reaction to modernity’s failure to make good on precisely this promise. Jacqueline Goldsby, drawing on Guy Debord’s theorization of the spectacle as “a worldview translated into an objective force,” contends that race-motivated lynching can only be understood in the context of the modernization of the U.S., as a violent manifestation of American modernity (qtd. in Goldsby 26). That is, lynching is not-- or is not just-- a direct reaction to modernity, it is modern itself insofar as it materially translates the violence characteristic of modern industrialization and warfare into racist spectacle.

Moreover, the same technological innovations that inaugurated the American modern age shaped the development of racially motivated lynchings into mass spectacles. Newspapers and

punishment, and frequently, torture. It is, in fact, to emphasize that, prior to abolition and during Reconstruction, the term “extralegal” did not apply to much of the punishment of blacks, since the law did not recognize the rights of blacks as citizens. African-Americans did not receive the legal recognition of full citizenship until the Civil Rights Act of 1866.

radios created mass audiences beyond the spectators who gathered to witness the event in person; telegrams and telephones eased the task of rounding up a crowd for a flash murder and obtaining real-time information about the whereabouts of the victim; trains, automobiles, and the development of public roads and highways facilitated rapid travel for would-be spectators arriving from outside of the community; free rural delivery, point-and-shoot cameras, and commercial printing of photographs and postcards ensured that lynching spectators could create and widely circulate images of the murders in a relatively private manner. The technological development of racist terror lynchings, indeed, is ironized by Moore's Ford reenactment spectators, who use their phones and cameras to record and circulate images of the reenacted lynching to much different purpose. Not coincidentally, the structures associated with technological advances in the modern era-- telephone poles, street lamps, train signals-- were often used as makeshift gallows in lynchings, symbolically reinforcing lynching's status as a modern innovation. Essayist Eula Biss remarks in a note on her memorable essay "Time and Distance Overcome" on the jarring experience of researching historical mentions of telephone poles in mass-circulated American newspapers only to be deluged with reports of lynchings: expecting to unearth a story of modern progress, her realization of the relationship between modernity and extrajudicial, racially motivated killing completely reshaped the essay (89). The development of mass-circulation newspapers not only ensured that more Americans encountered stories of lynchings, it also contributed to the development of the racially motivated lynching as a ritual spectacle. Newspapers hewed to stock characters, narratives, and representations of lynchings, reinforcing a dominant ritualistic narrative of a lynching that rendered the stories of specific and local lynching spectacles "virtually interchangeable" (Hale 208). Newspapers with mass audiences also created a mass political consciousness hitherto unseen, raising the stakes of

voting and political enfranchisement for the common citizen at a time when suffrage was expanding (Berg 26). As a result, Berg contends, the common citizen felt empowered to mete out justice. I would add, moreover, that this sudden and often violent mass participation in voting and politics might have underscored and inflamed white voters' already potent sense of unease around the looming enfranchisement of black men, a theory that bears out in the many reports of lynchings that occurred directly before or after local elections took place. This includes the lynchings at Moore's Ford Bridge, which took place a week after the primary election that saw the highest black voter registration in the county's history to that date (Wexler 31). The Moore's Ford reenactment highlights this connection by including a reenacted speech from virulent white supremacist gubernatorial candidate Eugene Talmadge, promising his white constituents that while some black Georgians would vote, "the fewer the better," followed by two scenes of black women going to vote in the primary in spite of threats and insults lobbed by the white crowd of reenactors.

Beyond its consignment to the primitive past and in much the same vein, lynching-- in popular understanding and academic scholarship alike-- is frequently classified as a uniquely Southern phenomenon. While, certainly, the majority of racially motivated extralegal killings took place in the South, refusing to consider lynching in the national context-- not to mention refusing to consider the lynchings that occurred outside of the South-- similarly risks abandoning a more complex understanding of lynching and racial violence in the United States for the relative comfort of simply pointing to a "backwards" region and time. Some recent scholarship-- notably that of criminal justice historian Michael J. Pfeifer and literary historians Jennie Lightweis-Goff and Jacqueline Goldsby-- has produced excellent arguments for reframing lynching as an American rather than a Southern phenomenon. These studies stress that

lynchings, while less frequent, were just as spectacularly attended and reported in other parts of the country. Contemporary observers of lynchings, Pfeifer points out, “often construed lynching as a national problem with sectional dimensions,” that more closely reflected an American tendency to prize personal authority over that of the state than it did any regional trait (*Lynching Beyond Dixie* 2). In *A Spectacular Secret*, Goldsby similarly draws on accounts of nineteenth and early twentieth century writers to extend this observation: her subjects, Goldsby notes, “expressed deep concern for the national-global (rather than regional-local) scope of the violence” (22). Lynching, according to Goldsby, was understood in its time as not just Southern, and not even just American, but as a practice that had occurred (and could occur) in any region in the nation, and that could spread beyond the borders of the nation itself. Just as this project seeks to relocate the South not as necessarily a tidily discrete exception to the nation, but as a mobile thread in the nation’s tapestry, this emerging trend in lynching scholarship challenges the established framework that-- while commendable in its impulse to chronicle and account for the fullness of racial violence in the South-- in imposing a narrow frame absolves other regions and, ultimately, the nation of its responsibility for and complicity in that racial violence. And, indeed, the Moore’s Ford Movement reenactment itself reflects this push to re-frame lynching as an American practice rather than a Southern one. Throughout the long day of the rally and reenactment, speakers repeatedly and emphatically drew attention to lynching’s broader scales: not just that it happened “all over the country,” as Joshua Shelman, Jr. put it, or “not just here” as reenactment director Cassandra Greene asserted, but that the practice’s symbolic work continues to echo through current national policies and institutions. Connecting lynching to the court system, mass incarceration, police-involved shootings, voter suppression, lack of educational resources, and income and housing inequality, Raynita Alexander-- a relative of lynching victim

Maceo Snipes-- insisted on lynching's spectral persistence in the contemporary lived experience of African Americans. "It's still going on," she announced at the 2017 Moore's Ford rally. "It's still going on but we really have to be vigilant, and we have to be strong and courageous....Lynching today is new lynching. It's just a new type of lynching." If, as I've argued in the previous chapter, reenactment is a Southern practice, then the Moore's Ford Movement activists are employing a Southern practice against its grain in order to disrupt or expand the putative Southernness of the practice of lynching itself.

Lynching was, as Alexander's comments above suggest, only one performance in a larger history and system of racist forces in the U.S. South (and in the nation). After the abolition of slavery, newly free black southerners quickly found themselves effectively re-enslaved by sharecropping arrangements. Often working the same land they or their ancestors worked under slavery, black sharecroppers received their housing, money, and seed from the typically white landowner, and in turn raised crops on the land. After selling their crop and returning the owed proceeds to the landowner, sharecroppers often found themselves still in debt. With little hope of upward mobility and no legal recourse against a white landlord in the racist courts, sharecroppers could be whipped, restricted from leaving their tenancy, or evicted without notice. All four of the victims of the Moore's Ford lynching were sharecroppers. As David Oshinsky explains in his history of Parchman State Penitentiary, *Worse Than Slavery*, black southerners could be picked up for minor or invented criminal charges and were either formally loaned to farms or government projects for unpaid labor, or were told the charge would be forgiven in exchange for free work. Lack of legal recourse meant that black women, tenant farmers or not, were vulnerable to rape and sexual assault; black men and women alike were disenfranchised by poll taxes, intentionally unpassable literacy tests, and political party restrictions.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which Civil War battle reenactment, in its anxiety to enact the embodied return of and to the past, offers its participants affective passage to imagined Souths. Through this enactment of putative pasts, reenactment in the U.S. Southern context often functions to maintain and memorialize the white supremacist legacies and fantasies of the Civil War. If Civil War battle reenactment is, as I have suggested, a Southern mode of performance that attends to latent national and regional desires to (re)turn to a social system predicated on racism and sexism, it would appear to preclude anti-racist deployments. The mode itself seems designed for conservation rather than the transformation an anti-racist project would require. There is, furthermore, a real and compelling case to be made for refusing to reproduce or represent acts of violence against marginalized bodies, particularly at a moment in the U.S. in which those acts feel all too present and familiar. The idea of reenacting a lynching, when black death is hyper-visible across social media platforms, news media, and in everyday life, is beyond tasteless: it is, horrifyingly, redundant. Similar attempts to stage public reenactments of inherently racist and violent U.S. historical practices, such as the slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg in 1994, have been endlessly scrutinized and ultimately condemned. On the one hand, they are accused of reproducing a violent, sensationalized, and objectifying spectacle for pleasurable consumption and on the other, of drawing attention away from the dominant narrative of the struggle for (white, male) independence and the birth of the nation.³⁴ While the danger of reproducing a violent spectacle is clear in the idea of a lynching reenactment, an analogue for the latter criticism might be that, in reenacting extrajudicial, racially motivated killing from the early-to-mid-twentieth century, we risk displacing the culpability for racism and

34. On the controversies surrounding the Williamsburg slave auction reenactment, see McConachie, Phillip, and Janofsky; for a consideration of “mock” auction performances across American history, see Stupp.

racist violence on eras past, replicating the tendencies of scholarship and popular narrative that would consign lynching and racial violence to a distant past. In so doing, we lose the opportunity to examine and call to task racism as it emerges in the present moment. Moreover, racism as it appears in spectacular, community-involved acts of racial violence and murder is simply defined and decried: more insidious, systemic forms of racism may fall out of the reenactment's frame. While most Americans would likely agree that slavery, lynching, or Jim Crow laws are morally wrong, anti-racist projects may face opposition in teasing out contemporary structures and legacies of racism. A reenactment of a lynching might serve to reinforce "post-racial" rhetoric without interrogating the very real way race continues, nationally and regionally, to affect those hailed as non-white.

It is, perhaps, due to the reasons outlined above that very few lynching reenactments are produced in the United States. More common are mock lynchings of effigies, staged as a performance of racism and as a statement of white supremacy. Lynched dolls and dummies, as well as empty nooses, left under cover of darkness in public places such as schools, libraries, churches, and museums, operate as a shorthand for the nation's history of racist murder, and, most notably, they operate as a threat. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors and documents hate crimes, hate groups, and extremists in the United States, has noted a significant surge in noose-related hate crime incidents since November 2016 (Bates). In these cases, the appearance of a noose or lynched effigy-- with or without other objects or signs indicating racist intent-- is a compelling enough message in and of itself to launch police and/or FBI investigations. The near lynching of an eight-year-old biracial boy in Claremont, New Hampshire on August 28, 2017 suggests that, far from mere historical and hollow imagery, nooses present a potent challenge to the lives and safety of people of color.

In spite of (and, indeed, because of) the associations surrounding mock lynchings, some anti-racist activists have recently taken up the display of lynched effigies to stage their own pointed interventions in the practice. On July 4th, 2017, Alabama activist David Sadler staged a mock lynching of himself in protest of racial and social injustice (Macias). In Richmond, Virginia, anonymous art collective Indecline hung eight clown figures dressed in KKK robes from a park tree on September 7, 2017, turning the threat of violence back on those who most frequently employ it. Notably, while these interventions speak in the vernacular of American racial history, they stop short of reenactment of historical events. Reenactment references real bodies, real violence, and real deaths, and therefore extends beyond the threat of future harm: it is a three-fold violence, documenting past violence, situating itself in the context of present violence, and gesturing forward to violence yet to come.

The lynching spectacle, despite the ways in which it continues to circulate and survive via its “performing remains” and currency as both threat and symbol in the contemporary American landscape, seems to defy memorialization. The problem of memorializing lynching most notably entered the public consciousness-- and inspired significant scholarship on the subject-- with the opening of James Allen’s “Without Sanctuary” exhibition at the Roth-Horowitz Gallery in New York City in 2000. A white antiques collector, Allen-- along with his partner John Littlefield-- spent years collecting lynching photographs and postcards from estate sales, flea markets, and private homes. The exhibit traveled the nation before going on permanent loan to Emory University’s special collections; a book featuring selected photographs and contextualizing essays followed. From the beginning, the exhibit stirred controversy: while Allen and his supporters contended that the exhibit confronted the viewer with undeniable documentation of a horrible but largely unrecognized part of American history, critics found the

photographs under-contextualized, sensational, and traumatizing. Much of the criticism of the exhibit, in other words, stemmed from a sense that it is impossible to control or direct the gaze of the white viewer: an encounter with the photographs, despite the best intentions of the curators, might just as easily kindle feelings of self-absolution or thrill as self-implication or horror (Hale, “Review”; Lott, Young).

Photographs and other representations of lynching are notably absent from the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened in April 2018 along with its companion Legacy Museum, in Montgomery, Alabama.³⁵ Created by the Equal Justice Initiative, the central memorial structure features weathered metal columns-- representing individual U.S. counties-- engraved with the names of lynching victims; the sloping floor gradually places the viewer beneath the columns, craning the neck upwards to see from the same position of many of the white mob members in lynching photographs. In the field surrounding the memorial are duplicate columns, which the memorial’s organizers plan to send to be installed as memorials in the corresponding counties if they request them. The monument’s lack of representative images within the memorial space itself (although sculptures and lynching photographs appear in the surrounding six-acre park and museum) appears to respond to the anxieties that arose from the “Without Sanctuary” exhibit, choosing to refocus the viewers’ attention on the names of the individuals rather than on their disfigured corpses. This corresponds with Lightweis-Goff’s proposal, in which she advises that “lynching memorials should be anti-mimetic and denaturalizing,” eschewing any representation of trauma (174). Lightweis-Goff favors a more abstract memorial, one that emphasizes space over spectacle, because she contends that such a memorial will be less likely to veer into the voyeuristic or placidly reconciliatory, tending

35. For a fuller account of my visit to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, see the Conclusion of this dissertation.

instead to force the viewer to rethink their relationship to the space and to the community. Harvey Young, on the other hand, considers lynching memorialization as it occurs in museum spaces, and concludes that the museum cannot adequately contain or present the lynching event. In part, Young argues, this is due to the nature of lynching: lynchings were “flash events” that, while part of a broader national epidemic, were emphatically local. Memorializations must balance the two narrative scales of lynching at the same time-- a difficult feat for a museum exhibit. Moreover, “the site,” Young writes, “cannot remember the tragedy”: lynchings marked everyday places in local memory only without leaving significant physical reminders behind (194). Images or recreations of lynching sites will only reveal their mundanity, the absence of any sign of lasting impact on the landscape. Despite the circulation of photographs and other relics from lynchings in their aftermath, few “remains” survive for public collection and display, to say nothing of the suitability of displaying such traumatizing objects or images. Finally, given that any memorialization of lynchings will confront Americans with a part of their history that disrupts the codified pluralist ethics of professionalized museums, do lynchings even adhere to the missions of formal museal spaces? That is, is the inherent confrontation in lynching memorialization antithetical to the purpose of these institutions, as they exist in the U.S.?

Perhaps, Young suggests, the most effective part of his case study, America’s Black Holocaust Museum, is the wax figures that were removed from the life-size lynching diorama before the museum closed its doors altogether in 2008. The wax figures, standing in for living bodies at risk, “invited the museum spectators into the event being restaged” (204). Young, however, curiously draws the line between wax figures and real bodies, arguing that it is the inauthenticity of the wax figures that gives the spectator room to engage imaginatively with the scene. Young posits that staging the lynching scene with “actual, flesh-and-blood bodies” would be less

effective in engaging the imagination of the spectator because it does not require the spectator to make the scene “real” by projecting her own memories, thoughts, and feelings (ibid.). I would counter that, correspondingly, it is precisely the inauthenticity of the theatrical violence performed by the Moore’s Ford reenactors (pop-guns, stage blood, choreographed blows) in contrast with the reality of the site and the presence of the victims’ extended families that successfully calls the reenactment’s spectators into a similar imaginative engagement, and one that highlights the reenactment’s context. The lack of historical “authenticity” that undergirds Civil War reenactments and the use of theatrical violence emphasize that the reenactment is a past event unfolding in the present. Where Civil War reenactment relies on a dearth of context and on the most accurate representations of battle to achieve a sense of time travel, the lynching reenactment insistently pulls the context back into view-- past and present.

Both Lightweis-Goff and Young fail to consider the ways reenactment might navigate the problems they identify in memorializing lynchings. The capstone to a day-long pilgrimage to sites that, contra Young, are called on to remember by living family and community members, the reenactment echoes the “flash event,” convening communities and creating records that will testify to a reverberating injustice. Chief among these navigations is the way the reenactment rehearses the traumatic past mimetically and representationally, placing emphasis not on the representation of acts of violence itself, but upon the potential futures for which the rehearsal prepares its spectators.

Moore’s Ford Bridge: July 1946-2017

The sparsity of anti-racist lynching reenactments makes the one that occurs all the more striking for its exceptionality. In the case of Moore’s Ford, the reenactment references at least four real deaths: Roger Malcolm, Dorothy Dorsey Malcolm (who may or may not have been

pregnant at the time of her murder), George Dorsey, and Mae Murray Dorsey.³⁶ On July 14th, 1946, Roger Malcolm, a black tenant farmer on Barnette Hester's farm, got in a fight with his common-law wife, Dorothy, on the road that crossed by Hester's farmhouse. The cause of the fight is unknown, but testimony from several community members suggested that Dorothy might have been pregnant with Hester's child, or with Hester's brother's child. It is also not clear whether Dorothy's alleged sexual relationship with either of these white men was forced or consensual; certainly, it would have occurred in a serious imbalance of power. Malcolm was intoxicated and brandishing a knife; when Hester tried to intervene and break up the fight, Malcolm stabbed Hester, puncturing his lung and lacerating his intestines. Hester was rushed to the hospital, where it was not clear if he would live. Malcolm ran into the fields, where Hester's neighbors found him and turned him in to the sheriff. In the meantime, Dorothy visited Loy Harrison, a wealthy white landlord, to ask him whether he might consider paying Roger Malcolm's bail in exchange for work. Harrison declined, so Dorothy went to one of the few wealthy black professionals in Monroe, undertaker Dan Young, to ask him the same question. Young, who had helped spearhead the effort to register hundreds of newly enfranchised black voters in the months before, felt the black community couldn't risk a misstep two days before the primary election. He also declined. Now out of options, Dorothy had to let Roger stay in jail, where he was vulnerable to kidnapping and lynching. Eleven days later, when it became clear that Barnette Hester would not die, the deputy sheriff informed Hester's father that Malcolm

36. Because the lynching occurred in 1946, by which time its perpetrators might fear federal prosecution, no souvenir photographs from the event of the lynching itself appear to have circulated. Eyewitnesses, however, claim that the site was nearly picked clean of "souvenir" bullets, bone fragments, teeth, and other evidence that might have aided investigators. White citizens also posed for souvenir photographs at the site in the days that followed. My account of the lynching draws on Laura Wexler's *Fire in a Canebrake* and Anthony S. Pitch's *The Last Lynching*, the only published histories of the event. Both studies derive from partial FBI case files, interviews, and newspaper reports.

could now post bail for attempted murder. Loy Harrison told Dorothy that he'd changed his mind and would take her to pay Malcolm's bail; she brought along her brother, army veteran George Dorsey, and his wife Mae Murray Dorsey.

Harrison paid Roger Malcolm's bond, retrieved Malcolm from the jail, and started driving back toward his farm; he later claimed to have taken the route that went by Moore's Ford bridge in order to drop off George and Mae at their tenant cottage. Approaching the bridge, he was forced to stop when a group of armed white men appeared in front of and behind the car. The men forcibly removed Roger Malcolm and George Dorsey from the car, bound them, placed a noose around Roger's neck, and pushed them down the hill; Harrison tried to convince them to leave Dorsey, but his request was met with threats. Dorothy Malcolm recognized and cursed one of the men by name, and they duly pulled her and Mae Dorsey out of the car (breaking Dorothy's arm in the process) and dragged them down the hill as well. A man forced Harrison, at gunpoint, to get out of his car and stand with his hands on his head, facing away from where his passengers were lined up at the bottom of the hill. Harrison reports hearing three countdowns and subsequent volleys of gunshots. He drove home to call the police; on his way, another group of white men stopped him and peered in the back of his car. Harrison concluded that the mob had posted men at all possible routes to ensure Roger Malcolm's seizure and murder. As word of the lynchings spread, white citizens from the surrounding counties and towns drove to the bridge to search the grass for souvenir bullets and rope fibers (one woman found Dorothy Malcolm's tooth; she kept it for her charm bracelet), and to pose for pictures with the bloodstains where the bodies fell.

On July 22nd, 2017, I joined the members of the Moore's Ford Movement for their thirteenth reenactment, on the seventy-first anniversary of the murders. The organizers are

mostly black community members, many of whom work in local churches and/or have long histories of working with the Civil Rights movement. Other spectators and speakers include local community members, journalists who have traveled from out-of-state to cover the event, and relatives and descendants of lynching victims, whom organizers center and call on to speak throughout the day. With the exception of the reenactment itself, spectators are welcomed to address the crowd if they are so moved. The day began at First African Baptist Church, where participants gathered to commemorate the anniversary and frame the reenactment event within the history of lynching in the United States. A series of speakers, including event coordinator Minister Hattie Lawson, reenactment director Rev. Cassandra Greene, and Moore's Ford Movement chair Rep. Tyrone Brooks, explained the day as part of a larger quest for racial justice and called the audience's attention to other, more recent lynchings that have occurred in the Monroe, Georgia area. These leaders called up, one by one, family members of lynching victims to testify. Few of the family members knew the victims personally, and reflected instead on their individual experiences with discovering and grappling with this particular fragment of their family history. Almost every family member who spoke pointed out that genealogical research had led them to the discovery, as the remaining Dorseys, Malcolms, and Murrays had moved away from Monroe, Georgia to start new lives elsewhere in the aftermath of the lynchings. "If we don't [do genealogical research]," warned Dr. Joyce Dorsey,

we may not find the truth... Because when you are Caucasian, it is easier to trace your family line. When you're not, it is difficult. Because, from the black race, we usually had to flee our homes. We fled lynchings no matter what our last names were. So I'm coming to you from that standpoint.

Dr. Dorsey emphasized the genealogical research she was inspired to undertake by the reenactment as a form of civil rights activism, an anti-racist, reparative labor. In direct defiance of a violent act meant to terrorize, destroy, and uproot black families, Dr. Dorsey works to re-

forge genealogical connections, find lost family members, and reframe the family narrative. While other community members were invited up to speak about the impact of the 1946 and other lynchings as they were so moved, event leaders emphasized the presence and experiences of the family members as crucial to the day's work of manifesting history previously forgotten or ignored.

As the rally wrapped up, we moved to our cars to form a long motorcade, led, pointedly, by a hearse. Due to both logistics and KKK presence at previous reenactments, the motorcade was guided and flanked by local police as well as members of the Athens chapter of the all-black Ruff Ryders Motorcycle Club. The motorcade wound its way through the sparsely populated countryside, past pastures and peanut fields, past newly constructed McMansions with manicured lawns, past the Sons of Confederate Veterans sign posted next to the Kiwanis Club sign at the city limits, past a hand-painted billboard: "I support President Trump, not fake news media." For the next four hours, we make our way from one churchyard to the next, stand around a gravesite, and listen to Rep. Brooks extemporize about the victims, the history of racial violence, the Civil Rights movement, and the Moore's Ford Movement's memorialization effort. When the Movement first coalesced, most of the graves were overgrown with briars and weeds, their wooden markers nonexistent, toppled, or rotting. One of the Movement's first points of business was to raise money for carved stone markers to preserve the burial sites, in danger of disappearing into anonymity and poison ivy. The Zion Hill Cemetery, where Mae Murray Dorsey is buried, is a small stand of hickory trees hemmed in by parking lot asphalt and a strip of squat government buildings, including the Walton County labor department and parole office. Except for the tombstone marking Dorsey's grave, the cemetery's markers are lopsided and nameless wooden crosses. Rep. Brooks shakes his head as he picks his way through brambles

and sunken graves. “We’ve got to take care of our own,” he announces through the bullhorn. The rest of the Moore’s Ford victims’ graves are in extant church properties, plots in red clay next to brick and white clapboard churches. We also visit the graveside of Lynn McKinley Jackson, a twenty-three-year-old army private lynched³⁷ in 1981 in Monroe and buried in the same cemetery as Roger Malcolm. At each graveside, Rep. Brooks calls the family members of the victim to pose for photographs with the tombstone and share a word of prayer and reflection. At the final cemetery, participants file into line behind the hearse to receive a Racial Justice calendar produced by the Equal Justice Initiative, the same activist group that-- at the time-- was in the process of building the first national memorial to lynching victims, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, in Montgomery, Alabama. Rep. Brooks turns our attention to the month of January, which features a black-and-white photograph of mourners carrying two white coffins out of the church and into the same grass patch where we stand.

We drive back into town to the old county jail, now a courthouse annex. The two-story, late-nineteenth-century brick building sticks out among the cinder-block thrift and auto body shops that now surround it. This building is where Roger Malcolm was held for eleven days before the lynching. It’s also, Rep. Brooks informs us, where he and several other local civil rights activists were held in the 1960s. The spectators assemble across the street in the post office’s side yard. In the grassy street corner by the old county jail, the reenactors representing Barnette Hester, Roger Malcolm, and Dorothy Malcolm perform the altercation and stabbing that incited the Moore’s Ford lynchings. While in the past, this scene had occurred at the Hester farm

37. The coroner’s jury in the inquest officially ruled the death a suicide, but several factors-- Jackson’s body was found hanging twenty feet from the ground, the base of the tree was covered in gasoline, Jackson’s hands were tied, he had been dating a white woman from the area-- led Black community members to conclude and maintain that the death was a lynching murder. In the days after the jury’s decision, the Klan and civil rights activists clashed on the streets in dual demonstrations.

(and, indeed, was listed there on the 2017 itinerary), organizers decided to relocate this reenactment at the last minute, concerned that the Hester family would make good on the threat that they had made in years past to shoot reenacting trespassers. As Barnette Hester stumbles, bloody, out of sight, a crowd of white reenactors in approximated 1940s clothing appears and forms a semi-circle in front of the jail. Walter Brown-Reeves, dressed in the trademark red suspenders, reenacts Governor Eugene Talmadge, reciting a speech delivered by the white supremacist politician in the Monroe courthouse square a month before the lynchings occurred. Talmadge warns against the dangers of racial equality, and, in particular, the black vote. “As your governor, I shall see that the traditions that we fought for, and our grandparents fought for, are maintained and preserved,” Talmadge crows, to the cheers and applause of the gathered white townspeople. As the crowd disperses, four more reenactors round the corner of the building where the spectators stand: first a pair of black women, then a black woman and her young daughter, each pair on their way to cast a vote for Talmadge’s opponent, James Carmichael. The white reenactors turn on them, screaming obscenities and slurs, and attempt to block the doors. Holding her head high, the woman walks her daughter into the building and out again. “We know where you live!” taunts one white man. “They voted,” Rep. Brooks cheers, “Give them a hand!” As the spectators clap and whistle, a black woman standing next to me pats her son-- who looks to be about the age of the girl reenactor-- on the shoulder. “This is a history lesson,” she tells him. “That’s why we’re here.” Finally, we pivot around the side of the building to watch a reenactment of Loy Harrison bailing Roger Malcolm out of jail. Loy Harrison, smiling, ushers Roger, Dorothy, Mae, and George into a mustard yellow 1940s Mercury coupe and drives away.



Figure 7: Reenactors gather at the steps of the old county jail to hear a speech from gubernatorial candidate and avowed white supremacist Eugene Talmadge.

This is the last we see of the reenactors for another hour or so. Moore's Ford itself is an unassuming spot in the woods, down several winding country roads. The crowd of spectators has more than doubled since the morning, and the police and organizers struggle to arrange us in the thick carpet of pine needles on the side of the road. Several news organizations, including NBC and the *New York Times*, have sent reporting teams to cover the reenactment, and both Rep. Brooks and Rev. Greene take great pains to create the optimal sight lines for the cameras. "Look out! Look out for the cameras!" Rep. Brooks repeats through his bullhorn periodically. The temperature has risen over one hundred degrees, and we fan ourselves, dripping sweat, as we await the arrival of the reenactors. Rev. Hattie Lawson ranges through the crowd, reminding everyone that the organizers have bottled water available in the back of a car if anyone needs it.

The coupe appears, and the same white men reenactors, now toting toy shotguns, reach into the vehicle to drag first Roger, then George, then Dorothy and Mae out of the car. As the mob members bind the victims' hands with heavy rope, almost every spectator takes out a cell phone and begins to record the event. We follow, phones in hand, as the mob pushes the victims down the sloping bank and into the field below. The spectators hang back in a crowd, letting the news cameras circle the reenactment tightly. The white reenactors line the victims up on a green tarp, spread on the grass in anticipation of the fake blood to come, and spectators raise their phones above the heads of those in front of them, trying to get a better angle. Three rounds of bang snap noisemakers mark the volleys of gunshots, and the victims fall, bloody, to the ground.

After the white mob has cleared away, spectators begin to draw closer to the four motionless reenactors on the tarp, shaking their heads, some in tears. An Atlanta jazz singer, Ja'Naan, dressed in a long, black, beaded gown, emerges from the trees to sing Billie Holiday's famous lynching dirge and protest song "Strange Fruit" over the bodies. Ja'Naan begins her rendition with a full-throated, improvised vocalization and original verse in addition to the familiar lyrics, which declare lynched bodies the "bitter crop" of the pastoral South. Ja'Naan's original verse echoes and reinforces the sentiments of each of the day's speakers, who have insisted that lynching's legacy persists in the present moment: "I guess the fruit keeps fallin'," she sings, "fruit keeps fallin'."

Rehearsing to Witness: Remembering Black Lives

Black Monroe citizens interviewed decades after the 1946 Moore's Ford lynchings recall the effect on their community vividly: after Harrison called the police, officers dispersed throughout the town's black neighborhoods, clearing the streets. They told black citizens that, for their own protection, they should stay inside with their lights off; most people interviewed

interpreted this enforced curfew as a threat rather than a safety measure. Some connected the lynchings to the record turn-out of black voters in the election the week before-- in other counties, most if not all black voters stayed home, threatened with violence or bribed by their landlords. One thing was certain: the white mob (and, afterward, the whites who showed up to collect souvenirs) had staged a successful performance of violence in order to restore and retain the racially-determined imbalance of power in the region. As sociologist Kai Erikson has noted, trauma is not limited to the individual, but can affect entire communities in “collective trauma,” which both binds communities together and damages its “texture” (187). Trauma becomes a condition of the community, a haunting: “our memory,” Erikson writes, “repeats to us what we haven’t yet come to terms with, what still haunts us” (184). More than fifty years after the fact, it became clear that the murders of Dorothy, Roger, George, and Mae still haunted Monroe, both white and black. “All this killing, this lynching,” remarked one 2010 participant, “it haunts us still. That’s why we need to be here” (qtd. in Auslander 2010). A 2017 participant stated, “Every time I read this story, I bleed tears.” “Literally,” Rev. Greene announced to the rally audience as she described directing the reenactment, “I cry every year as I do it.” The reenactment, then, is a kind of exorcism in cathartic repetition, an attempt to come to terms with what still haunts; it is both an act of memorialization and a manifestation of memories that persistently linger.

The reenactment is also, crucially, a reenactment of an incident with few to no eyewitnesses: the events of the massacre are pieced together from the scant physical evidence from the crime scene and autopsies, Loy Harrison’s testimony, and deathbed confessions from a handful of white citizens who claimed to have heard or observed the lynchings from afar (but not, of course, to have participated). After word of the murders spread, most whites hotly denied that they were anywhere in the vicinity of Moore’s Ford at the time of the lynching. Fearing

more violence, few black citizens attended the victims' funeral services, preferring instead to view the bodies in the relative safety of the black-owned funeral home where they were kept in the days before the services. Viewing the bodies was as close as the victims' friends and family members would come to knowing what transpired at Moore's Ford, as the site itself was picked clean before any black Monroviaans ventured to the area. Painted wooden crosses-- now rotted away-- marked the graves of the four victims. The original event thus engendered what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor terms "percepticide," the willful but necessary-to-survive blindness of a community to the atrocities visited upon it (123). The reenactment responds to this percepticide, this failure of witnessing, and rehearses this violent event, previously concealed in fear and stonewalling, to be witnessed.

Psychoanalyst Dori Laub, drawing on his experience working with Holocaust survivors who are often unable to remember and bear witness to their own trauma, terms this failure a "collapse of witnessing." The Holocaust, according to Laub, is "an event without a witness": people outside of the Holocaust failed to intervene in or acknowledge its existence, victims of the Holocaust were steadily eliminated, and Nazi ideology disallowed their recognition of the proceedings of the Holocaust as destructive or immoral. Moreover, Laub contends, because victim and perpetrator alike were so deeply imbricated in the event's "coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference" that the genocide precluded a neutral or "outside" frame of reference, the Holocaust could not produce a reliable witness (81). Lynchings, similarly, eliminate their victim-witnesses and, moreover, demand that their perpetrators refuse to acknowledge that what they are witnessing is, in fact, a crime. Those outside of the event fail to witness it, fearful for their own safety or silently complicit in shielding their neighbors from justice. Mirroring the traumatized Holocaust survivor who cannot remember or articulate the

origins of that trauma, the collective trauma in Monroe haunted, but did not testify. Literally and legally speaking, those who were called to testify as part of the FBI investigation refused to bear witness to the crime: in spite of the mob of armed men Harrison reported, in spite of hundreds of whites milling through the lynch-site in search of souvenirs, in spite of national press, the 1946 Moore's Ford lynching was an event without a witness, at least within the legal system.

How, then, could the community "witness" its own trauma? In 2005, when the first reenactment of the lynching took place, the FBI case investigating the murders was still open and unsolved. And, indeed, the case remained so until December 2017, when the Georgia Bureau of Investigations announced that it had exhausted all possible leads and would officially close the case.³⁸ The organizers of the first reenactment-- the interracial Moore's Ford Memorial Committee, created in 1997, along with leaders of the SCLC-- wanted to call public attention to an unanswered injustice and push, via performative protest, for a resolution to the case. (The group, after some restructuring, has since rebranded itself as "Moore's Ford Movement (365)".) Reenacting the lynchings on the site of their occurrence, as opposed to merely holding a memorial service, a rally, or visiting the site and talking about what happened, insists on creating witnesses for a witness-less event. The Moore's Ford reenactment rehearses history and gives it a new future: one in which black death is seen and remembered, killers are brought to justice, and witnesses emerge, ready and willing to share their testimony.

Witnessing via reenactment likewise places the body squarely at the center of the reparative event. Over the last decade, reenactors have placed increasing emphasis on the

38. The case was still active until the announcement. As recently as 2013, the FBI questioned a living suspect named by a family member as a mob participant. The case made headlines again in October 2018 when the federal Justice Department appealed a district judge's decision to unseal testimony from the 1946 grand jury case. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit is not expected to produce a decision about the unsealing until 2019; if it declines to unseal the testimony, the likely argument will be that the disclosure is not in the public interest and could intimidate witnesses (although all witnesses in the 1946 case are deceased).

experience of the reenactment--both as a participant reenactor and as a spectator--as both unsettling and crucial to healing community wounds. Reenactors describe the experience as “time travel” (qtd. in Auslander 2015), an opportunity to “hold on to those who can’t be held,” “a fugue state,” and a way to understand both “how a man could behave in such a way” and “just what the victims felt like on that day” (qtd. in Auslander 2010). Spectators likewise seem to read the reenactment’s embodied experience-- for both reenactors and spectators-- as central to the movement’s effectiveness. The victims “live through you” Joshua Shelman, Jr. instructed the 2017 reenactors, just as Raynita Alexander described the emotional devastation of “*see*[ing] what our ancestors *actually* went through” and Cassandra Greene insisted that “when you step onto ground where you know that people have died, it [does] something to you.” The reflections of reenactors and spectators alike at the lynching reenactments echo those of Civil War reenactors interviewed by Rebecca Schneider. Like the Civil War reenactors, the Moore’s Ford reenactors seek a bodily knowledge of the past, a “queasy portal in time where a momentary forgetting might take place, where time and space seem to come undone, or overlap and *touch* to the point of confluence” (Schneider, 41). Evolved into something beyond protest, the lynching reenactment is in search of an embodied encounter with past violence, a repetition of that violence in order to stave off future violence. White participants playing the KKK members have, in the past, dropped out at the last minute or refused to participate more than once; in the first reenactment in 2005, Rep. Brooks shared during the 2017 rally, they were unable to find any willing white reenactors at all, and the mob was played by black reenactors. “I was not there,” said one white reenactor after the 2010 event, explaining that the experience had so totally taken hold of him that he had little to no memory of having performed his role (qtd. in Auslander 2010). The implication of his statement is that the reenactor experienced a kind of time travel by

substitution: he was so immersed in his role that he “was not there” at the reenactment, but there at the original event. At the same time, *he* was not there at the reenactment, but was replaced by a 1946 version of himself, a violent racist. The reenactor’s statement echoes Richard Schechner’s well-known description of the performer in the moment of performance: the performer is “not me” and “not not me.” In the liminal space between these two stages, “the performer experiences his own self not directly but through the medium of experiencing others” (*Between Theater and Anthropology* 112). This is, perhaps, where the concept of reenactment’s “radical empathy” as I have described it in Chapter One reaches its full potential: in performing the affective labor of reenacting a racist white lynch-mob member, white participants implicate themselves in-- literally insert their bodies into-- the scene of the lynching in order to reckon with the most traumatic parts of American history. They do this not only for their own experience-- although, as “radical empathy” and Schechner’s dual “not-me/not-not-me” suggest, the experience might yield some self-knowledge or internal grappling-- but to give the community the opportunity to witness a previously unacknowledged injustice, and, in a sense, to publically witness and acknowledge it themselves.

Black reenactors playing victims, likewise, have reported emotional fatigue and asked to rejoin the ranks of spectators: “I can’t tell you all the pain I feel inside... When I’m lying down there in the mud by the bridge, it’s like no time has passed” (qtd. in Auslander 2010). The statements of black and white reenactors alike suggest that not only is the reenactment an incredible feat of affective labor, but in those moments of complicated feeling, participants gain access to the past as much as Civil War reenactors may claim to. Or, perhaps, the distinctions between the past and the present, the South and the nation, are blurred in a way that disturbs tidy and progressivist narratives of national identity. Moreover, the day’s dramaturgical structure

emphasizes the centrality of the body to the kind of witnessing the event undertakes: from the open forum of the morning rally, where family and community members stand and testify to their personal or familial encounters with racism and lynching; to the gravesides of the victims, where relatives are called to stand by the markers; to, finally, the reenacted scenes, where black community members-- sometimes, again, relatives of the murdered-- stand in for the victims. In each of these scenarios, the speakers draw authority to testify from their personal embodied experience with racial discrimination and/or violence in the United States, but a special significance accrues around the living family members of the victims, vesting them by virtue of blood and bone with an aura of times collapsed. They are, at once, themselves-- the future descendants of the lynching victims, here in spite of racial violence and terror-- and living, corporeal indices for their passed/past family members, whose futures were foreclosed by lynching. Black Monroe citizens who perform the roles of the lynching victims and spectators, and who stand at the gravesides of their relatives to speak on their behalf performatively insist that their bodies are the bodies that bear the consequences of white supremacist performances like lynching; at the same time, the re-performance of the lynching gestures toward the bodies who have not yet borne the consequences--the white murderers who eluded prosecution and justice.

In considering the display of the wax bodies in a lynching scene in the now defunct America's Black Holocaust Museum, Harvey Young contends that the display "invited the museum spectator into the event being restaged," allowing the visitor to "imaginatively witness" a lynching (204, 208); a feat he suggests would not be possible in a live restaging of the event. Yet the Moore's Ford reenactment likewise invites spectators to imaginatively witness a lynching, and, in fact, its organizers emphasize that the act of witnessing is essential to the

reenactment project--the reenactment is about, like the museum display, making visible an erased history. However, the witnessing of the Moore's Ford reenactment, in contrast to a museum display, is always collective. In Young's account of his visit to the museum, he mentions several times that he and his travel companion were the only visitors that day, and took in the museum's displays alone, at their own pace. In the Moore's Ford reenactment, there is no individual encounter with a display to ponder on one's own. Rather, witnesses arrive in a large group, and are part of a present audience, reacting together to the violent performance they see. Their presence is not passive, but action- and future-oriented: in the Christian faith (to which many if not most of the participants adhere) as in the legal system, to witness is, eventually, to testify, to spread the word about your witness-derived knowledge. The reenactment, moreover, takes place across multiple settings and locations, emphatically mobilizing and mapping the history of the final event's violence over sites across the county. In its similarity to the Christian Stations of the Cross, the reenactment seeks a collective witnessing that is sustained, mobile, and processual. The witnessing of the lynching reenactment is, then, to collectively see the past that went unwitnessed before, and to testify to that past for change in the present. The reenactment forges a record where no record exists; it draws a largely forgotten or under-recognized event into history.

Furthermore, to witness the reenactment is, unavoidably, to become part of the reenactment. While, as a spectator of Civil War reenactment, I was not privy to the bulk of the reenactment experience-- camps, balls, early morning drills, experimental archaeology-- and had to rely instead on first-person written accounts for details of these events, lynching reenactment spectators cannot help but ghost the mobs of spectators often present at lynchings. To watch a lynching reenactment, then, is to inevitably reenact yourself; as a spectacle of violence, lynching

required spectators to achieve its intended effects. Although in the 1946 lynchings the public spectatorship occurred after the fact, still the spectators of the Moore's Ford reenactment invoke the history of spectatorship around lynchings. The interracial spectators themselves disrupt the white genealogy of lynching performance by spectating not for the purpose of pleasure, entertainment, or a misplaced sense of racist righteousness, but for the purpose of remembering and reconciliation. In contrast to the historical performance of lynching spectators, the reenactment spectators watch the event in respectful silence, not hurling epithets or egging on the murderers. They have also, in recent years, sung freedom songs while waiting for the victim reenactors to arrive. In 2017, spectators shared water with each other, watching carefully over each other to make sure no one succumbed to the extreme heat. Afterwards, reenactors, organizers, and spectators shared a meal at the church where the rally was held. In an act of radical empathy of another shade, spectators rehearse for a future in which these deaths will be witnessed and memorialized, and will furthermore be witnessed with compassion.

Rehearsing for Next Time

Perhaps the most effective form of compassionate witnessing in the last ten years has arisen from the ability to record and circulate evidence of racial discrimination and violence via the proliferation of camera-phones and online networks. Participating in a kind of "sousveillance," or "surveillance from below," everyday citizens armed with smartphones and Twitter accounts can now bypass traditional media outlets to instantaneously share images, video, and sound recordings of acts of discrimination or violence that they encounter (Bock). This "cop-watching" or counter-surveillance effectively redirects the flow of power, democratizing the surveillant gaze and demanding accountability from those who traditionally occupy positions of power and privilege in public spaces, from police officers to white customers

at a store. And the redirection of power is, indeed, effective, if only on an individual level, and limited by the willingness of the state to conciliate: stories abound of investigations launched over inappropriate police conduct, of employees losing their jobs after a video of racist behavior surfaces, even if that behavior is part of the employee's private life. As recently as November 2018, Clayton Hickey was fired from his position at Regional One Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, after a photo of him wearing a "Mississippi Justice" T-shirt featuring a noose and the Confederate flag to the Election Day polls began circulating on social media. The use of social media to witness injustice convenes a community even where none is available in the immediate geographic area, creating a "digital counterpublic" that shifts the authority of watching to the margins at the same time that it empowers the individual witness to testify (Hill 288). In other words, to make the decision to take up the camera phone and record with the intention of circulating evidence of injustice is to reconceive of oneself as a witness, as an active and participant citizen of a larger community.

Through the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment, spectators rehearse for a near future in which they may encounter injustice and be called upon to witness through recording. In this future, while violence and racism are inevitable, they are also, crucially, perceivable and potentially legally actionable. In contrast with the 1946 Moore's Ford case, in which eyewitnesses refused to materialize and any photographs were circulated privately for personal gratification, the reenactment promises that next time, evidence and testimony will convict the perpetrators. Moreover, it promises that the historical record will include any future injustice for posterity; it insists on the existence of an event which, for decades, did not even merit a highway marker. At the 2017 Moore's Ford reenactment, organizers and spectators alike emphasized the importance of creating both personal and national records of the event. Organizers took great

pains to ensure that the media crews present could document each of the day's events fully: they introduced the journalists several times throughout the day, directed and framed images to be photographed, and frequently reminded spectators to make sure they were giving the media clear shots of the reenactments. This activity intensified for the reenactment of the lynching itself-- organizers used megaphones to address the crowd, yelling "don't get in the scene!", "don't get in the shot!" continually, a call that was taken up and repeated by other spectators. The organizers' urgency to accommodate the media is unsurprising, given its pivotal role in launching the movement, the reenactment, and the history of these lynchings onto the national stage. But beyond the publicity that well-framed photographs or video of the reenactment might bring to the Moore's Ford lynchings, the organizers seem to be driven by a desire to enter the lynchings into the official record, to create and insert documentation into a gap in the archive. They insist on removing the spectators from the scene, including in the frame of the professional photographs only the reenactors in the moment of reenactment. The organizers' desired photographs, that is, are not of the reenactment as a complete event (including organizers, crowds of spectators, other media crews), but of the events reenacted. "In Photography," Barthes writes, "I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (76). The organizers' insistence on creating nationally circulated and professional photographs of the reenacted events is, in itself, activism: in their status as documents of "the thing that has been there," the photographs testify to the existence of the trauma that has silently haunted the Walton County community for decades. What's more, the institutions behind the media crews guarantee that the photographs-- perhaps even those that are not published as part of a news story-- will enter into both institutional and public archives, preserved as part of a formal record.



Figure 8: Nine of the twelve spectators in this photograph (including myself) use personal cameras to record the reenactment of the Moore's Ford lynchings.

The prevalence and primacy of media cameras made the use of personal cameras at the 2017 reenactment all the more striking. As the spectators took our designated places outside of the media shots, and the reenactors began, the overwhelming majority of us lifted smartphones in front of us to record personal photographs or video. Many spectators remained in this position for the duration of each reenacted scene, watching the events of the reenactment play out on a compact glass screen. While my impulse to record is driven by the need to preserve research materials, the actions of my co-spectators are not immediately clear. After all, we have literally just been arranged explicitly to create better shots for photographers and videographers who will

produce nationally available images of the event-- it's not as though high-quality records of the reenactment will not exist or be accessible. The widespread use of smartphones suggests that what matters is not necessarily the existence or quality of an image of the reenactment, but the record of one's personal experience: this is what *I* saw, this is where *I* was standing. Recording spectators, in other words, were creating not just a document of what happened, but of their own participation, their own witnessing. Much as with the redirection of power that occurs when bystanders record and disseminate encounters with racist discrimination, smartphone recordings of the reenactment democratize the resulting records of the event. While some theorists of live performance might despair of the way most spectators viewed this live reenactment through their phones, I contend that the phenomenon was in fact itself an embodied practice: spectators were affirmatively answering a call to participate as witnesses, as citizen journalists. The personal recording of the reenactment stands in for but also *rehearses* a crucial witnessing that may be required at any moment. Indeed, insofar as smartphones and social media promise to quickly circulate any images of racist violence and therefore render these images ubiquitous or even inevitable, the rehearsal may also be a preparation for future trauma, for the next encounter-- virtual or otherwise-- with black death. But the spectators' instinct to record suggests a simultaneous rehearsal for a more hopeful future, one in which, despite the persistence of racism, bystanders will answer the individual call to witness to the community, holding the perpetrators accountable for their acts in the court of public opinion if not the court of law.

Conclusion: Rehearsing the Community:

Whereas the legal system places primacy on the individual witness to establish the events of the past, the Moore's Ford reenactment re-locates the power of witnessing in the collective, in the community. Although the recordings taken by individual spectators may become important

records of individual acts of witness, it is from the moment of their dissemination, from the convening of a public collective-- the "demos," the people-- that the power of such witness derives. The community-- healing it, galvanizing it, empowering it-- is central to the stated purposes of the Moore's Ford Movement and the annual reenactment. But perhaps most crucial to the reenactment is the way the day's events and rhetoric redraw the lines of community, expanding and revising who is included within its boundaries. Lynching and racism, the Moore's Ford reenactment insists, are not merely "Southern" problems, nor, for that matter, are they problems that can be solely resolved or commemorated by African Americans. Rather, in contextualizing and reenacting the Moore's Ford lynchings for the national stage, the Movement reconceives of racism and racist violence as a national problem to be addressed by an interracial coalition, and accordingly hails its spectators as members of a broader, inclusive community. Opening the day with an open forum "rally" and structuring the long pilgrimage of various significant sites that followed in a similar open forum fashion, organizers nurture an environment of dialogue and participation. Each spectator, whether or not they take up the call to address the group, is nevertheless empowered to testify. As a result of the structure and length of the day, spectators speak to each other easily and often, entering conversations that begin in the morning in a pew at the First Baptist church and round off over biscuits and chicken that evening. The crowd is, importantly, intra- and interracial, and includes travelers from the North as well as the South. In this final "rehearsal for a near future," the reenactment convenes and rehearses the community itself, practicing the open dialogue around race, racism, and legacies of racial violence that organizers say is necessary to pursue justice and healing. "What we want to do now," Rep. Brooks told the 2017 rally crowd,

is let everybody know that, as we build the Moore's Ford Movement going forward, wherever there's been a lynching in America, we want to connect to that community and

make it a part of our Moore's Ford Movement. That's how we are evolving, that's how we are growing. We're not going to stop.

That is, the movement conceives of itself, and of the day of reenactment, as constituting a living and growing community unbound by geographic region or race. Spectators, in stark contrast to the racial and regional division that characterizes lynching narratives, are literally called to the table to rehearse a future in which communities expand and coalesce. Yet the inclusive community that the Moore's Ford Movement seeks to call into being is a limited one: organizers, for instance, make no mention of Matthew Shepard's 1998 homophobic lynching, or of the reported 102 murders of transgender people in the United States between 2013 and 2017, over half of which occurred in the South ("A Time to Act" 34). Additionally, the community of assembled participants is overwhelmingly black, reflecting the discouraging if not wholly unexpected refusal of white locals to participate in restorative justice efforts, despite their centrality to such an effort.

Any form of community, however flawed, that the reenactment constitutes (much like the utopian performatives-- fleeting moments in live performance that suggest or invoke a better world-- that theatre theorist Jill Dolan describes) does not endure. When the day is over, spectators disperse; the reenactors return to their day-jobs and regular clothing. According to Schechner, the "rehearsals for a near future" that materialize through the public reenactment dissolve at this moment, that near future foreclosed. Nevertheless, the reenactment is by far the Movement's most effective activist strategy: the reenactment is covered by local and national media every year, developments in the case have received further media attention because of the reenactment's notoriety, and activists have successfully leveraged the national attention to push for local recognition in the form of historical markers and federal recognition in the form of re-investigation of the murders. Moreover, the reenactment's ritual memorialization of the Moore's

Ford lynching victims and reification of genealogical connections persists despite the events' fleeting nature. Finally, even if the most utopian "near future" rehearsed by the reenactment does not immediately manifest, the reenactment rehearses for multiple "near futures" in order to prepare its participants for their next encounter with racist discrimination and/or violence. The act of rehearsing itself, in other words, is a utopian and activist project, in that it does the real work of preparing participants for the future. To undertake that preparation is to both imagine and manifest a future in which the past-- far from a "distant" or singular location-- is reckoned with and remembered in all its complexity in the present.

Chapter Three

Expecting Tara: The Southern Plantation as Heritage Site and Scriptive Space

History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.

-- David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, xv

I am standing, in 2018, in the formal parlor of the Latta Plantation house, built in 1800 in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina as the residence of the white Latta family, who enslaved over thirty black men and women to grow cotton on the surrounding acreage. The house itself is relatively unassuming, a white two-story clapboard structure with narrow windows and framed by two tall brick chimneys. The old heart-pine floorboards creak as visitors array themselves about the room, leaning in to inspect the faux-mahogany fireplace or the imposing grandfather clock. The site docent draws our attention to the high ceilings, which lend the room a light and airy quality. “This house is probably a lot bigger than it looked like on the outside,” she announces. “Maybe not. Some people expect something much more grand; they’re expecting Tara, right? They don’t get Tara.” The tour guide’s line prompted laughter from my fellow tour group members. At least once on almost every plantation tour I attended in preparation for writing this chapter, the tour guide would compare the building-- its architectural features, its erstwhile inhabitants and their behavior, its fate during the Civil War-- to Tara. The frequency with which these guides drew tourists’ attention to how the plantation house we were visiting shared in or diverged from Tara’s own fossilized image and narrative came to strike me as almost compulsive or compulsory: a necessary acknowledgement, perhaps born of years of experience with tourists’ Tara-centered comments or questions. Tara haunts the heritage plantation site, those plantation properties still standing and open for public visitation. Billed variously as museums, historical architecture preservation, state-owned park facilities, luxury

vacation destinations, or wedding and corporate event rentals, the center and main attraction of the heritage plantation site is almost exclusively the “big house.” While the house itself may vary in size, visitors’ expectations are likely to have been conditioned at least in part by Tara’s imposing, white, columned facade.

Certainly, a brief scan of the reviews left by tourists at Louisiana plantations like Nottoway, Oak Alley, and Laura, suggests that many visitors arrive primed to make the comparison, or are, indeed, searching out their own “Tara experience.” “If you have ever wanted to feel like Scarlett O’Hara then this is the place for you,” wrote one reviewer in 2010 (“Still a Grand Lady”). “I had always wanted to... see how Scarlett lived and whilst this plantation house was near to New Orleans and not Atlanta I still dreamed that I could run down a sweeping staircase in a beautiful satin gown,” effused another in 2016 (“Nottoway Plantation House”); yet another, in 2017, wrote “I felt like I had stepped back a hundred years or more and I was Scarlett who was in possession of the most beautiful home ever!” (“Step Back in Time”). Moreover, the framing of a given plantation house in relation to Tara began, sometimes, before one had even arrived on the grounds: the website for the Old River Road Plantation Adventure tours, which advertises day-long bus excursions to a combination of plantations outside of New Orleans, boasts that “Oak Alley is an exquisite reminder of an [*sic*] bygone era, an era now ‘Gone With The Wind’” (“Laura Plantation and Oak Alley Plantation Tour”). Even where explicit mention of Tara is absent, a chance to experience first-hand the brand of white luxury that coheres around the icon of Tara haunts advertising copy. Houmas House Plantation’s website invites potential visitors to “relax with a refreshing mint julep and enjoy the breeze off the nearby Mississippi River” (“Houmas House”), while a brochure for Nottoway Plantation boasts that its luxury overnight stays in the mansion “allow you to sleep as the Randolph family [first owners of

Nottoway Plantation] did, in pristine chambers with antique beds and authentic furniture and accessories” (“Nottoway Plantation Resort”).

My analysis of plantation heritage sites draws on my experience as a visitor to seven such sites between 2017 and 2018: Whitney Plantation (Wallace, LA), Oak Alley Plantation (Vacherie, LA), Laura Plantation (Vacherie, LA), Nottoway Plantation (White Castle, LA), Boone Hall Plantation (Mount Pleasant, SC), Mount Vernon (Mount Vernon, VA), and Latta Plantation (Huntersville, NC). I visited Oak Alley and Laura plantations as part of the Old River Road Plantation Tour, a bus tour which picks up tourists in the French Quarter of New Orleans and provides commentary on the surrounding area while transporting tourists to the appointed sites. On the bus tour I took, as the bus driver’s spoken survey revealed, my fellow tourists had traveled to New Orleans from California, Washington, Minnesota, Ohio, and Kentucky. In addition to the rhetoric and space of the tours themselves, my analysis considers the marketing materials (brochures, websites), optional or additional site spaces, and commercial spaces of the plantation heritage sites.

Much as Civil War reenactment’s attraction for both participants and spectators alike is the opportunity to experience, directly or indirectly, what life in the past was like, plantation heritage tours seem to offer a similar personal and lived encounter with history. This encounter is specifically framed by the plantation site and, most notably and typically, the plantation “big house.” Because this encounter is specifically centered on the plantation “big house,” the plantation heritage site³⁹ experience organizes itself around the same imagery and narrative that,

39. My use of the term “plantation heritage site” denotes single-family-owned plantations that have since been-- under the aegis of private, state, or not-for-profit entities-- renovated, preserved, and opened to visitation by the public. I have narrowed the focus of the term to exclude living history heritage sites-- like Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation-- that interpret towns and settlements, as they do not focus the visitor’s imaginative energies and attentions on a singular, wealthy, slave-owning family in the same manner I investigate here.

in the postbellum era, domesticated and romanticized the site of brutal capitalism and imperialist settlement (Guterl). More than insight into history, what plantation heritage sites trade in and offer are embodied and fantasized experiences with the commodified Old South, as embodied by the icon of Tara. As “scriptive spaces”-- a term I adapt from the work of cultural historian Robin Bernstein-- plantation heritage sites prompt visitors to imaginatively insert themselves in the insistently white, feminine frame of the plantation house. In so doing, these sites reanimate and reinscribe mythic narratives of the Old South even as they may-- via marginal or additive signage or programming-- acknowledge the violence or injustice of slavery and racism. Potent because they are impossible to fully achieve, these impelled fantasies refocus the attention of the visitor on the professed opulence and gentility of the past, effecting a “symbolic annihilation” of black enslavement and labor (Davis 72). That is, black enslavement and labor is largely left out of the frame of the plantation site, yet where it is acknowledged, it is supplementary to the dominant narrative of Southern white gentility. Consequently, despite the fact that on most plantations, enslaved black people outnumbered their white enslavers, black lives are erased or marginalized representationally from the historical record presented by the plantation heritage site. The museal nature of the space itself forestalls fulfillment of the fantasy: strictures about where visitors may walk and what they may touch ensure that a visitor may not fully enact the script that the space otherwise prompts. Yet, having prompted the fantasy, plantation heritage sites reliably conduct visitors into gift shops, hotels, restaurants, venues for rent, or resort spaces where visitors may spend money on objects and experiences that allow them embodied access to the script of the Old South. Of the sites that I visited during my field research, the notable exception to the commodified fantasy structure is the Whitney Plantation, which styles itself explicitly as a slavery museum and memorial to the enslaved. The Whitney refocuses and revises

the script of the plantation heritage site as scripted space, suggesting a model for such sites that rejects Tara's white-centered romance and reclaims the plantation as a site built and operated by forced black labor, for the purposes of enriching white enslavers.

Tara, as my experience at Latta and other plantations demonstrates, is something of a lodestar for Southern plantation heritage sites. Tara, in Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind*, is the Georgia home of Scarlett O'Hara, who at the novel's outset is a spoiled and flirtatious sixteen-year-old Southern belle. Against the backdrop of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the book follows Scarlett's trials and travails as she tries, over and over again, to return to the Tara and "green cotton fields of home" (1349) that she remembers from her careless youth. Long before my plantation tours in 2018, fans of the novel eagerly anticipated the filmic manifestation of the notorious plantation in what amounted to a national frenzy (Cox 90). The country was gripped by a burning desire to know who would play *Gone with the Wind's* central characters Scarlett and Rhett and where their stories would play out (Cox 93-4). The opening of the film, then, seems to respond knowingly to its original audience's breathless excitement. Even before the opening credits of David O. Selznick's 1939 film adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*, the film dramatically reveals its central image, an iconic plantation house. In the darkness, an extended drumroll sounds, and church bells begin to toll as if for a wedding. We see first a stylized hanging sign announcing the production company: against a blue sky and shadowed by a waving tree branch, the sign suggests a pleasant outdoor location. Suddenly, the camera drops down to show an enormous columned white house surrounded by green lawns and gently swaying trees. The house is revealed with the tolling of bells and literal trumpeted fanfare, underscoring at once the film's long-awaited arrival and the unveiling of its central image. Seeing the film for the first time, one might assume that this plantation house is Tara, the home

that the novel's protagonist, Scarlett O'Hara, longs for but to which she can never fully return. (And, in fact, fans of the film still make the pilgrimage to the building, hopeful that they might find Tara). Yet this house, in fact, is the erstwhile headquarters of Selznick International Pictures, in Culver City, California. Built in 1918 by filmmaker Thomas Ince to resemble George Washington's plantation house at Mount Vernon, the white-columned building was frequently used as an antebellum Southern set piece in films and, by 1939, had become producer David O. Selznick's signature image and logo (Taves 114-117). Broadly, the building represents Hollywood's participation in creating and circulating images of Old South nostalgia, but moreover and in the context of *Gone with the Wind*, the house grounds the viewer in the world and fantasy of the film. Whereas in other opening credits (for example, 1937's *Nothing Sacred* and 1938's *The Young in Heart*), Selznick featured the building in a wider shot, revealing modern features such as a flagpole, in *Gone with the Wind*'s credits, the camera is angled to only reveal the building in its pastoral landscape. The combination of the extended drumroll, which also does not appear in Selznick's previous credits, and the closer shot of the building, appear to have no other rationale than to accentuate the grandeur of the plantation house as a symbol for the film that will follow: the studio building anticipates the grandeur of Tara, assuring the viewer with this introductory figure that they are about to enter the romantic South. Although Tara itself is somewhat smaller by comparison (and is only a set facade), through its emphasis on the studio building, the film serves up and reveals the Tara that a fan of the novel might expect, laying bare from the beginning its investment in and nostalgia for the "lost" beauty and refinement of the Old South. In the logic of the film, the grand film studio building and Tara are one and the same: interchangeable symbols of a mythic past, vehicles for the constructed dream to follow. As the credits begin, background images of the larger plantation fade in and out of view: enslaved men

and women slowly and gently laboring in the rows of a cotton field, cows grazing in a meadow, flowering trees. As the credits finish, a slow and choral hum, backed by a plaintive violin, takes up the tune of “Dixie.” Expository intertitles scroll as a line of silhouetted figures drive cattle across a sunset-lit field: “there was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South... Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave... Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A Civilization gone with the wind...” The music, images, and text all serve to establish and reinforce the white columned plantation house’s primacy as a dreamy symbol of lost grandeur. Tara, we immediately understand, is more than a setting, but a way of life, and an interpretation of U.S. history premised on the perspective of the white slaveholding elite. That way of life, moreover, encompasses a set of behaviors and attitudes that reflect a strictly classed, gendered, and raced hierarchy of people. In this way of life, all the men are white, wealthy, and courtly toward women, and all of the women are white, wealthy, and beautiful. Black enslavement recedes to the margins, merely a quaint detail of the bucolic landscape. In emphasizing and romanticizing white gendered and heterosexual relationships, the opening moments of the film link Tara inextricably with domestic white femininity: a domestic white femininity which is moreover doomed to be consigned to the unattainable past from the outset.

It would seem no mistake then, that in both the novel and the film, the first time we are introduced to the story’s heroine, Scarlett, she is seated on the plantation porch, being wooed by a pair of gentlemen callers. The film takes care to present an establishing shot of Tara before cutting to Scarlett in a wide angle shot on the porch, framed by blossoming dogwood and the French windows of the house. An enslaved man chases a chicken across the screen and one of the Tarleton twins stands directly in front of Scarlett, leaving her voluminous white skirts visible

but obscuring her face. As the camera slowly zooms in, Scarlett's face is finally revealed in a close-up for her trademark "fiddle-dee-dee." Staging a similar tantalizing reveal to the one that opens the film, this first scene draws an unmistakable visual equivalence between Scarlett and Tara. In Margaret Mitchell's novel, the opening paragraphs describe Scarlett's "charm," "pale green" eyes, and "magnolia-white skin" as she sits "in the cool shade of the porch of Tara, her father's plantation" (3). Scarlett's skin and eyes and the white and green of her new dress, comprised of "twelve yards of billowing material," echo the white and green excess of the flowering dogwood trees nearby (3). Her twin admirers are "as much alike as two bolls of cotton" and "as mettlesome as the horses they rode" (4). The novel's first pages wander seamlessly from descriptions of the human characters to features of the plantation landscape and back again, employing metaphor to suggest a connection between the characters and the plantation so emphatic as to be essential. In the world of Tara, "raising good cotton, riding well, squiring the ladies with elegance, and carrying one's liquor like a gentleman were the things that mattered" (5): highly codified gendered behavior and the efficient ownership and management of a lucrative cotton plantation appear to be indistinguishable here, shaped as the characters' lives are by a space-- the plantation-- at once domestic and capitalist. Tara, that columned plantation house that in the opening of the film and novel metonymically represents this way of life as a whole, functions as more than context. It is-- in Mitchell's and Selznick's renderings as in its afterlife among *Gone with the Wind's* fans-- more than a character in its own right, an extension of Scarlett, and a stubborn refutation of the novel's would-be New South narrative.⁴⁰ As Tara McPherson notes, Mitchell tries but "never fully shakes Scarlett free from her plantation home" (49).

40. The phrase "New South" describes the post-Reconstruction modernization and industrialization of the South. Scarlett's doggedly survivalist instincts represent the scrappy, postbellum rebirth of the region.

Accordingly, despite Mitchell's attempts and protests to the contrary⁴¹ (and in large part due to the film adaptation's visual romanticization of Tara as an image of the Old South) her fictional plantation house has come to symbolize and concretize nostalgia for a white, wealthy, gendered vision of the South. In this vision, the plantation house-- rather than one structure of a larger capitalist enterprise premised on the exploitation of forced labor and the ownership, rape, and torture of humans-- transforms into the sacred domestic domain of the accomplished young white woman whose skill at practicing a specialized and desirable femininity will afford her her choice of desirable husbands. Here again, the choice of a marriage partner (which even in Scarlett's case comes down to spiteful whimsy or a financial rather than romantic decision) is posed as the ultimate goal and achievement for a wealthy white woman, leading to the production of legal and legitimate male heirs, the continuing consolidation of the family wealth and stature, and the preservation of the heterosexual, patriarchal family unit. The vision of the South that Tara manifests-- perhaps we might say the "Tara South"-- is one that aligns closely with Lost Cause⁴² narratives that arose after Reconstruction, in that it prizes the perspectives and experiences of white, wealthy enslavers and cherishes romantic notions of the Southern past. In centering whiteness, the Lost Cause and the Tara South participate in and valorize white supremacy. Moreover, in the case of both the Lost Cause narrative and the Tara South, white

41. Mitchell reportedly intended that her novel dispel and depart from the "moonlight and magnolias" myths surrounding the South in the national imaginary post-Reconstruction, going so far as to complain to consultants for the film adaptation that the columned Tara of the film set had her confused about whether she should "laugh or throw up." She wrote to a friend in 1942, well after the initial frenzy around the novel and film, that she was embarrassed to be "included among writers who pictured the South as a land of white-columned mansions whose wealthy owners had thousands of slaves and drank thousands of mint juleps" (qtd. in Cox, 93). See also McPherson, 47-61.

42. The Lost Cause ideology, propagated chiefly by pro-Confederacy organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans, promotes historical narratives that seek to excuse, qualify, and romanticize the cause of the Confederacy in the Civil War contra historical evidence. The Lost Cause, for instance, claims that "state's rights," not slavery, was the central cause of the war, and that noble Southerners were merely defending their rights against an aggressive and domineering North. For more on the Lost Cause, see Chapter One.

women are not only enshrined as the imperiled avatars of white femininity and sexual purity, they are also frequently the primary architects, proponents, and circulators of these very narratives (Auchmutey, Janney). Yet where the Lost Cause was principally advanced by white Southern women in their efforts to commemorate the Confederacy through education and the erection of public monuments, Tara retains a national staying power that defies region. Certainly, its emergence in the national imaginary was the mutual product of Southerners and non-Southerners alike. While Georgia-native Mitchell's Tara was a humbler structure, Tara's Hollywood image was selected and manufactured by non-Southerners such as original director George Cukor, who, in scouting locations in Virginia, Charleston, and Savannah, had already decided what a "perfect antebellum mansion" should look like (Cox 93).



Figure 9: Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) and Tara, from the 1939 film adaptation.

The filmic Tara, in its wide circulation, solidified the national⁴³ image of the plantation house as a grand white-columned mansion; though it accrued an aura of authenticity via born-and-bred Southerner Margaret Mitchell's authorship, the film ultimately and circularly produced an image of the Old South that both grew from and fed a national moonlight-and-magnolias narrative. With more than eight theatrical releases in the U.S. since its original 1939 premiere (most recently in February 2019 for the film's 80th anniversary), the *Gone with the Wind* film has set multiple box-office records, including most tickets sold for a film and highest gross, adjusted for inflation (Rahmanan, Lumenick). Far from "gone with the wind," the novel has sold over 30 million copies worldwide, and consistently appears in the top five of Americans' all-time favorite books. According to Harris Poll survey data, *Gone with the Wind* held the number two spot in both 2008 and 2014, after the Bible; it was, aside from the Bible, the number one favorite book of female respondents and the number one favorite book of white respondents in both 2008 and 2014. The name "Scarlett," the U.S. Social Security Administration reports, was the 18th most popular name for female babies born in 2016 and 2017. The book and film's popularity over the last eighty years and their saturation in popular culture have ensured that even though not every American has actually read or watched *Gone with the Wind*, its associated imagery, settings, and personas are easily recognizable as belonging to a nostalgic Old South, regardless of one's familiarity with the specifics of Scarlett and her devil-may-care lover Rhett Butler's lives. And Tara itself-- whether or not its audience recognizes its provenance-- has come to nationally represent the ultimate in Southern luxury, hospitality, grandeur, and elegance,

43. This is, of course, not to mention the book and film's equally impressive circulation internationally, which likely has accordingly shaped the global image of the antebellum U.S. South. The book, for example, has been translated into twenty-seven languages and has been published in thirty-seven countries (Taylor 1).

spawning aspirational subdivisions, retirement homes, and country clubs in its name and image across the nation.

The proliferation of Tara references surrounding antebellum plantation tours, while perhaps not unexpected, is nonetheless perplexing given the fact that Tara is, of course, entirely fictional. Yet so vivid is Tara in the national imagination that its material and historical unreality feels ungraspable. A Google search of the phrases “Tara plantation” and “Tara Gone with the Wind” yields suggestions of questions posed by users employing the same phrase: “where is the real Tara plantation?”; “What plantation was used in Gone with the Wind?”; “Where is the Tara house from Gone with the Wind?”; and “Gone with the Wind house location.” The searches also yield dozens of articles about people building their houses to look like Tara, which plantations to visit for the best Tara experience, and providing house building plans for Tara, suggesting that despite its nonexistence, fans seem determined to manifest it in reality. Perhaps it is precisely Tara’s dogged absence that accounts for its allure: certainly, in this respect, Tara would seem to echo the nostalgia for the Old South itself. Central to Tara and Old South nostalgia are a narrative of loss, a sense that something desirable can never be recovered, possessed, or truly experienced. Literary scholar Scott Romine likens Tara, in this sense, to the Lacanian *objet a*, the unattainable desired object whose potency derives from its ultimate inaccessibility, and to the Freudian fetish object, which only functions in its ability to effectively substitute for an original that never existed in the first place, eliding in its surrogacy the truth of that original fiction. *Gone with the Wind*, Romine argues, through these acts of substitution and inaccessibility “enacts... the commodification of southern culture, reproducing the South not as *home* (inhabited place), but as *homesickness*” (28). Always fictional and therefore unattainable, Tara derives its value from its perpetual non-existence, from its undelivered and yet tantalizing promise of a future

return to an imagined past. The reader or viewer, like Scarlett, cannot return to Tara, however desperate their desire-- yet “after all, tomorrow is another day” (*Gone with the Wind*). The commodified Old South-- plantation shutters, sweet tea and mint juleps, Southern belle etiquette manuals--seeks to materialize the lost home, to restage Tara if only briefly and partially. In Tara, McPherson contends, “the plantation home surfaces as the primary environment of memory and desire. This genteel landscape enables a powerful fixing of white identity within a very particular *mise-en-scène*, a setting that structures the possibility for the novel’s racial performances” (54). Tara, in McPherson’s estimation, is a setting in the theatrical or literary sense of the word, the physical surroundings in which the given narrative plays out. Yet Tara exceeds the physical: it is a kind of fantasy framework, producing Scarlett’s successful performance of white femininity even as it obscures or erases the black labor that enables that performance. This framework simultaneously naturalizes performances of white Southern upper-class femininity and the “plantation as home to a large and happy family,” where enslaved labor recedes out of view (*ibid.*). McPherson’s point, here, suggests that the always unattainable house itself is not the only lacuna haunting Tara: enslavement and forced labor do not conform to a romanticized vision of the plantation, and must therefore transform into mutually beneficial relationships or disappear altogether.

Indeed, the heritage tourism industry itself is premised on providing (and, of course, commodifying and consequently profiting from) a surrogate for loss and absence: in this sense, plantation sites that actively draw on or reference Tara as a kind of ur-plantation could be said to merely be profitably expanding on what is already their stock-in-trade, marketing an even more elusive experience to visitors. According to theatre historian Scott Magelssen, a “narrative of loss” structured the development of the American heritage tourism industry, where loss could be

anything from a loss of identity to a loss of skill to a loss of economic certainty to the loss of widespread participation in agricultural production (68). In each case, heritage sites purport to salve the wound, offering visitors the chance to fill the gap of the lost past with a demonstration of breadmaking or a stroll through a well-tended vegetable garden. While Magelssen is ambivalent about whether the narrative of loss preceded the rise of the tourism industry or whether the industry savvily disseminated the narrative in order to create a need to fill, it is clear that the response the heritage site provides to that loss is an entirely crafted one. That is, heritage sites select which elements of the past to demonstrate, narrate, or highlight for their visitors, resulting in an interpreted encounter with history--indeed, costumed guides are often referred to as “interpreters”-- whose means of interpretation are not always entirely visible. Imbued with the aura of authenticity, the heritage site authorizes a remedy for the lost past; yet, unlike a traditional museum, the heritage site selects and arranges immersive environments and demonstrations, lending a sense of an “undoing’ of the time that ha[s] elapsed since their occurrence” (Magelssen 44). In the “doing”-- in performing everyday tasks from the past, in touring visitors through everyday lived spaces-- heritage sites simultaneously enliven and authenticate the history they shape and present. As performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes, these living history practices “create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented.... The impression is one of unmediated encounter” (55). In other words, the relationship between visitor and traditional museum space seems clear: the visitor views objects from behind the separating sheen of glass, reading contextual information from coordinating labels. The visitor encounters history at a distance, interpellated firmly as a modern-day observer of the curiosities of the past; the fact of history’s interpretation and the source of its authorship is made manifest, in the museum, in the

labels. In contrast, the heritage site-- though it may also include an ancillary museum-- primarily relies on living history displays and site tours to relay its interpretation of history, effectively enacting and unfolding its interpretation of history into the present time. The concurrent sense of liveness and blurriness between what is real and what is represented-- after all, a demonstration of breadmaking still results in freshly baked bread, or in the words of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, “in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human”-- renders the relationship between visitor and site less clear, just as it obscures the work of interpretation on the part of the site (“Possession,” 5). Less obviously at a distance created by spatial arrangement and temporality, the visitor may feel less like a visitor to an institution displaying elements of the past and more like a visitor to the past itself.

This is, in fact, the experience that many heritage sites tout in their marketing materials, and one which hinges on the desire for an affective, imaginative, and sensory encounter with history: that is, a desire to resolve the loss or absence central to heritage tourism through personal experience. Historian David Lowenthal argues that heritage is, in fact, defined by its deference to a sense or impression of the past or to “the realm of faith” rather than to historical fact (135). Heritage thrives on vagueness and generalization, on the conflation of past and present perspectives and experiences, in order to serve up a version of history palatable and useful to the present-day interactor. While history dwells on the specifics, muddying up the mythic narrative with pesky complications and contradictions, heritage enables the visitor to preserve a mythic view of the past which may in turn allow them to preserve otherwise incoherent national, ethnic, and/or personal identities. In this sense, the central absence of heritage tourism multiplies: it lies not only in the unattainable past that animates the industry, but in the exclusions which serve to unify and simplify its presentation and content. Yet it may be

precisely the elusive absence which persists even at the moment of visiting the heritage site which ironically proves most engaging for visitors: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that heritage sites, in reference to the lives once led in that location, “must show more than can otherwise be seen. Guides routinely refer to what cannot be seen—the people and events and places of years ago. They animate a phantom landscape on the back of the one toward which attention is directed” (168). Heritage tourism provides the fecund site (in theatrical terms, the setting, costumes, and, frequently, the characters and props) as well as the narrative or interpretive framework to realize an encounter with the past, but it remains the task of the visitor to answer the site’s invitation and imagine the “phantom landscape.” The visitor’s imagination, their ability to “suspend disbelief” and envision the past-- aided though they may be by sights, smells, and sounds provided by the site-- is key to a successful experience of the site. If the visitor is to “step back in time,” as so many heritage sites enjoin potential customers to do in their marketing material, the visitor must be prepared to engage imaginatively, to collaborate with the site to “animate a phantom landscape.”

The multiple losses that permeate, produce, and empower both Tara and the heritage tourism industry would seem to render the heritage plantation site all the more profoundly a nexus of absence. In such a space, as the discussion above suggests, visitors might be motivated by-- and sites frequently market themselves as-- the opportunity to participate in a more immersive, mythic “undoing of time” in order to fill the gap of the alluring yet impossible Southern past. Southern plantation tours are contradictory spaces in this respect. Because they most often feature tours of the “big house,” which itself is typically furnished with valuable and fragile antiques, visitors are rarely allowed full access to the space and its contents, and yet are continually invited to imagine themselves at home within it. Velvet ropes, signs, and tour guides

themselves caution visitors not to sit on or touch fragile objects, or venture into restricted areas. Yet plantation house tours cultivate a sense of the “gracious past,” including displaying generous feasts and luxurious goods, demonstrating acts of hospitality such as preparing tea for guests, dressing guides in period clothing, and emphasizing proper behavior and typical daily activities within given rooms in the house. Many of the plantation houses I visited explicitly addressed the visitor as a guest to the house within the frame of the past, describing how “you would eat” or at what age “you would be married.” While this mode of address is not uncommon in living history or heritage tour sites⁴⁴, the plantation house, premised as it commonly is on an “authentic” experience of Old South romance, invites visitors to insert themselves imaginatively into the space in order to live a romantic Southern fantasy. Visitors are, moreover and significantly, prompted to imagine themselves as the wealthy, white, enslaver family who would live and benefit from the luxury on display in such a house, not as the enslaved people who labored in its kitchens, nurseries, and fields.

The work of cultural historian Robin Bernstein provides a key framework for me for thinking about how plantation sites structure the visitor’s passage, prompting imaginative performances of Old South fantasy that can ultimately be enacted through a purchase in the site’s gift shop, hotel, or restaurant. Bernstein’s work is particularly productive for my purposes, as I will elaborate, because she constructs a lens for reading invisible or otherwise materially absent (in her case, past) performances from the extant artifacts that elicited them. Much as I propose to

44. See, for instance, the work of Magelssen, Roth, and Snow, for extended studies of the techniques, research, and theories underpinning live historical interpretation at heritage tourism sites. While Roth’s and Snow’s studies are primarily focused on first-person interpretation (which is more akin to reenactment in its emphasis on historically-informed role-playing) and plantation houses tend to feature third-person interpretation (or costumed guides who demonstrate historical activities but do not explicitly roleplay), their work nevertheless provides useful insight into the rationales, goals, and pitfalls of simulated history at tourist sites.

investigate an unseen, imaginative performance prompted by the cultural and spatial context of the plantation heritage site, Bernstein reads the material and cultural narratives of a given “thing” to understand what kinds of behaviors past interactors might have performed. In her 2011 book *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, Bernstein analyzes American material culture to trace the historical co-development of the concept of childhood innocence and racial formation. Drawing on performance studies, Bernstein considers an archive of material objects in their capacity as “scriptive things,” which she defines as “an item of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behaviors” (71). Bernstein’s scriptive things, in other words, are both the precursors and the artifacts of past embodied performance; her readings are in search of the past interactions between human and thing that haunt the historical artifact, which may or may not have followed the prompts issued by the thing itself. Things are distinct from objects; where an object merely exists, inert, to be used by humans, a thing “demands to be reckoned with” (72). The thing emerges in the moment when it appears to take on a life and meaning of its own, over and apart from human need, although always only thing-ly in its relation to humans. A thing, in other words, is not always a thing, but achieves this special status through humans’ negotiations and interactions with it. Specifically, an object becomes a thing when it seems to acquire its own subjecthood, or ability to act: it “becomes a thing when it invites a person to dance” (73). Crucially, things then become scriptive through the workings of two interrelated sets of cues: on the one hand, the cultural narrative which contextualizes and provides a cultural script for interaction with the thing, and on the other hand, the materiality and design of the thing itself, which encourages humans to interact with the thing in particular ways. Most memorably, Bernstein illustrates the concept of “scriptive things” with the example of the stuffed or rubber black doll: whereas cultural narrative and materiality guided

children to play with white china dolls carefully and tenderly, a rubber black doll could-- according to its material durability and the cultural narratives that shaped its use-- be thrown, hit, or otherwise abused. This moment, when narrative and materiality combine to prompt a human to interact with an object in a particular way, Bernstein terms "enscription," expanding Althusser's description of the subject's interpellation into an ideology to include not only "verbal demands followed by bodily actions" but also "encounters in the material world" (77).

Enscription, like interpellation, is a process through which the individual is hailed by a thing and the script produced by the thing's attendant narratives and materiality: the individual may answer that hail in any number of ways, but in answering, participates in the constant process and project of their own subjecthood. Moreover, the interpellated individual, in answering the scriptive thing's hail, is "initiate[d]... into one specific version of the world"-- in the case of the dolls, a version of the world in which black bodies may be treated with a violence that white bodies may not (79). The scriptive thing prompts both determined and implied actions: for instance, Bernstein points out, the way that we read a book written in English, turning the pages and reading from left to right, is determined, but how we react to the contents of the book is merely implied. The enscription that a scriptive thing endeavors to enact, therefore, does not preclude potentially resistant interactions with the scriptive thing, refusals to perform the script as given. Yet Bernstein remains equivocal about whether these resistant interactions are not merely themselves alternative implied actions: for example, laughter in response to sentimentalism. The competent performer, who recognizes, understands, and can decode the scriptive thing's prompt for performance, may act against the grain of that prompt, but this may merely result in a secondary or "transgressive script" that still lies within the scriptive thing's repertoire (ibid.).

Drawing on Bernstein's concept of scriptive things, I propose to adapt the term and examine plantation heritage sites as "scriptive spaces." That is, spaces which, enmeshed in the dual forces of cultural narrative and setting, prompt visitors passing through them to behave and imagine in prescribed ways that introduce and reinforce a "specific vision of the world" and of the Old South. Setting, here, refers to both the materiality of the space-- the textiles, furniture, objects, decorative and architectural elements that shape and populate the space and, in theatrical terms, form the "set" or "scenery"-- and the spatial arrangement and institutional procedures and rhetoric that govern a visitor's movement within the space. As with the materiality of the scriptive thing, the setting of a scriptive space enables or encourages some ways of interacting with the space and prevents others. For instance, in a parlor set for tea, site guidelines may prevent visitors from taking a seat on the velvet bustle chair and raising a china tea cup in a reenactment of the former residents' actions, but the costumed tour guide may describe in great detail the procedure and etiquette for preparing and drinking a cup of tea and the cost, significance, and desirability of the beverage. She may pass around a brick of compressed tea leaves or a cone of sugar that visitors may hold, smell, and examine closely in order to familiarize themselves with the tea ritual's associated objects. Although, in this example, visitors cannot actually enact the tea drinking, the site's setting-- from the soft chairs and delicate cups to the guide's costume, which animates the past in the present, to the opportunity to feel the heft of a tea brick-- invites and prompts the visitor to imagine themselves within the described scenario, drinking tea. The cultural context of the tea parlor in the big house of a Southern plantation foregrounds performances of white wealthy Southern femininity, emphasizing aesthetics and pleasure (luxury, elegance, refined manners and taste, beauty). Context and setting conspire to prompt the visitor to engage with the space via fantasy, particularly if the visitor personally

identifies with the subject position of the archetypal actor in the scenario, the white woman. As the word “scriptive” suggests, the scriptive thing or space provides not only a set of potential and meaningful behaviors or actions for its user, but a role or subject position. While it is certainly possible that a non-white or non-female-identifying visitor might take up the script that the space offers, the assumed subject primarily hailed by the scriptive space of the plantation house-- insistently domestic and inflected with romance-- is a white woman. (And, indeed, with the exception of Whitney Plantation, the majority of tourists present when I visited the plantations included in this study appeared to be white.) While there are no formal studies or data on the gender or race of visitors to Southern plantation heritage sites, if we take the fanbase of *Gone with the Wind*-- due to the connection to Tara outlined above-- as indicative of the person more likely to use their leisure time and money to visit and tour a plantation house, then that person is solidly white, heterosexual, and female (Auchmutey, Severson, Taylor). In Bernstein’s terms, the most competent performer, a white woman, would respond to the prompt of the scriptive space of the plantation heritage site by imaginatively inserting herself into the domestic space of the plantation house, culminating in the purchase of some object, food, or experience that would yield an embodied enactment of her fantasy. This competent performer, recognizing and understanding the ways in which the scriptive space hails her and cues her to take up a particular scripted fantasy, may choose to perform contrarily. She may, for example, refuse to fantasize, fail to purchase a gift shop souvenir, or pose a question to the guide about the lives and contributions of the people enslaved on the plantation. Though these behaviors may seem to transgress the primary script of the space, they are still coherent responses within the framework of the space, and therefore do little to conclusively or effectively disrupt the scriptive space. They may even, as Bernstein suggests about laughing at sentimentality, be an alternative implied

action prompted by the space. Moreover, in buying a ticket for admission to the plantation tour in the first place and moving through the space as a tourist according to the site's guidelines and procedures, the visitor has already interacted with the space according to its prompted determined actions. And insofar as the plantation heritage site preserves and circulates an image of the antebellum South as a grand or romantic site of white luxury, even the resistant visitor has at least partially enabled and endorsed the scriptive space by paying to enter and interact with it.

Just as Bernstein distinguishes between a mere object and the more animated "thing," scholars have already theorized "space" as a special category of area or location, parsing the difference between a point in space and the sense of space created by human interaction in or with a given location. Perhaps the most well-known of these theories is that of Michel de Certeau, who defines a "place" as a stable location where, through human action, space is "actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (117). Space is "a practiced place," determined by the subjects whose movements transform it from stable place to a set of unfixed possibilities. As with the object, which may suddenly reveal itself to be a thing, the line between place and space is also constantly under negotiation. Once a stable assemblage of benches, sidewalks, and plants designed and constructed by a landscaper or community planner, a city park becomes a space when humans use it to play, walk, gather with friends, or eat a picnic lunch. The ongoing transformation of place into space and back again, de Certeau writes, is effected by stories. As "spatial trajectories" (115), stories tell us what range of actions we can undertake in a space: the story "opens a legitimate theater for practical actions" (125). Stories organize our understanding of and practice within a space, and these stories, in turn, develop and change over time according to the movements that occur within that space. Spaces accrue a history, a cultural context, and a set of accepted practices. Although de Certeau is less interested

with the cultural history of a space than he is with how it is practiced and actualizes itself in the lived and present moment, his theory of space coordinates with Bernstein's concept of scriptive things insofar as it attends to the way narrative, over time, shapes and provides a set of scripts for action. Making use of de Certeau's distinction between place and space, my own term, "scriptive space," acknowledges its subject as a practiced place-- that is, a specific location vaulted into liveliness and volatility by human action and interaction.

Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre provides another useful framework for thinking about how spaces become what they are and accrue meaning and sets of cohesive practices. Like de Certeau, Lefebvre understands space to be constituted through an ongoing and fluid process as humans interact with it conceptually, physically, and representationally. Lefebvre therefore sorts these ways of understanding a space into three categories which are constantly in tension with one another: conceptualized space, perceived space, and lived space. Conceptualized space-- or representations of space-- entails the space as it is conceived of or designed by those in power. The conceptualized space of the plantation heritage site, thus, is "the dominant space" conceived of and created by the plantation owners, architects, investors, renovators, historians, curators, and property managers, who each mobilize capital, expertise, and power to manifest their ideas for how the space should be practiced and understood (38). Spatial practice, or perceived space, is how humans may be observed to practice a space. Cyclically co-constitutive of society at large, spatial practice "produces [society] just as surely as it masters and appropriates it" (38). If we were, as Lefebvre invites us to, observe visitors in the plantation heritage site, we would likely note their slow pace of walking, their stopping and leaning in to observe objects on display, folding hands behind or in front of their bodies to avoid touching what is off-limits, filing into small spaces, snapping photos, asking questions of the guide, or

chatting at a low volume with other tourists. Indeed, in its spatial practice, the plantation heritage site may appear very similar to the spatial practice of a museum space. Yet while we may observe the way that these visitors outwardly or physically practice the space, what is more difficult to discern is the way that they internally or affectively practice the space. This brings Lefebvre to his final term, representational spaces, or lived space, which is “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (39). Representational spaces account for the way that humans create both internal and cultural meaning for a space through their individual and acculturated desires, memories, dreams, and imaginations. While some of this symbolic meaning emerges through the way a space is represented in art, literature, and other cultural fields, representational space is “the space of ‘inhabitants’”: it is necessarily interior, personal, and ultimately, unknowable. In this sense, representational space is the concept of Lefebvre’s that might come closest to describing the way that visitors at a plantation heritage site interact with the space via fantasy or nostalgia, an interior practice and repertoire shaped by larger cultural narratives and images as well as the personal imagination and desires of the individual visitor. Thus, a single space-- for instance, the plantation heritage site-- is the continually negotiated product of multiple and at times conflicting lenses of use and meaning: the site may be imagined, practiced, and conceived in three very different ways, or each of these ways may align with and inform each other.

Where de Certeau primarily examines the space as it is constituted in the present moment by observable practice, Lefebvre includes the consideration of a space’s symbolic meaning as it is lived. Each of these concepts, of course, acknowledges that spatial practice occurs, repeats, and acquires meaning through narrativization, yet neither provides a clear methodology for tracing the operations that symbols, desires, and imaginations perform in a given space,

particularly as those operations may deviate from or contradict observable practice. For my purposes, Bernstein's "scriptive things," premised as it is on identifying past embodied performances, yields the most useful framework for understanding how heritage site visitors might be affectively or imaginatively engaging with the space. Fantasy is, of course, a not merely ephemeral but an imperceptible object of study: without directly questioning them (and even then, my understanding will be limited by language and the relative candor of my interlocutors), I can no more claim to observe or experience the interior imaginative life of others than I can the past itself. Bernstein, similarly, is in search of the unseen-- the embodied performances of the past as historical subjects interact with their "scriptive things"-- and has developed her concept and method of close reading a historical artifact accordingly. In her attempt to investigate unobservable but embodied performance, prompted by the interworking of culture and material design, Bernstein provides a framework for analyzing the past in the absence of traditional evidence in the archive. The plantation heritage site, in that it prompts visitors to imagine themselves as white, wealthy subjects within the frame of the plantation house and simultaneously forestalls the embodied performance of that fantasy by restricting visitors' practice with and within the physical space, produces a similarly absent or trace-less performance. Therefore, without the benefit of access to visitors' minds or experiences, I argue that by adapting Bernstein's "scriptive things" and reading the prompts of the "scriptive space," we might gain some insight into the kinds of embodied but invisible encounters visitors have or are encouraged to have at a plantation heritage site. In other words, while I cannot directly observe the imaginative performances at the center of this study, I can read, in their absence, the imaginative performances that are prompted or scripted by the site itself.

The Plantation Heritage Site as Scriptive Space

Plantation heritage sites, because they include entry to historic preserved buildings which in turn often feature fragile antiques, rarely allow visitors to wander through the big house-- the building most likely to hold irreplaceable or expensive historical collections-- unattended. Instead, visitors tour the house in small groups at pre-ordained times under the guidance of a docent, who may or may not wear a period costume. At each of the seven sites I visited, big houses were only accessible via a guided tour. In addition to protecting the site's most valuable assets, this policy also serves to emphasize that the big house is the special attraction of the site as a whole, and as such is the experience at the heart of the site. This emphasis foregrounds historical daily life in the plantation big house as the normative experience of the Southern past; the lives of enslaved black people and poor whites living and working on the plantation or nearby fall out of the frame of the plantation site, or are pushed to the ancillary margins. The remainder of the site's structures and land may or may not be included as part of the main tour, but are frequently available for visitors to peruse alone and on their own time, should they so desire. At Laura Plantation, where the big house is part of a longer formal tour that also includes the gardens, the kitchen outbuilding, the enslaved cabins, and a former owner's retirement house, the big house is first among the structures toured and constitutes the bulk of the tour's time, thereby introducing the symbolic prism through which the rest of the site is filtered. The tour of Whitney Plantation, in contrast, began in the white clapboard Antioch Baptist Church-- originally the Anti-Yoke Baptist Church-- built in 1870 in nearby Paulina, LA by formerly enslaved people. From the church, the tour proceeds to a memorial to those enslaved on the plantation, a memorial to enslaved children in Louisiana who died before the age of three, enslaved cabins, enormous open kettles used to boil and process sugar cane juice, a metal jail, a

blacksmith shop, the overseer's house, and finally, the big house. The Whitney tour presents the big house as a kind of dramaturgical after-thought: last in priority for touring, little time is spent in the house or on its architectural features or furnishings. Instead, the content of the house tour focuses mainly on the lives and duties of the enslaved who were charged with cooking, cleaning, serving, and raising its white occupants.

At five of the seven plantations I visited, enslaved cabins and any accompanying exhibits on slavery and the lives of the enslaved were not included in the tour and visitors had to elect to cross the grounds on their own to find these structures. These "self-guided" exhibits, absent of the authorizing narrative of the institutional docent, have the double effect of literally marginalizing black lives and experience and leaving an already dangerously unfamiliar and under-taught historical subject up to tourists to interpret and understand for themselves (if they choose to visit these exhibits at all). Without rigorous contextualization and explication, visitors-- already, perhaps, primed to seek a "Tara" experience of white grandeur-- may find in these exhibits confirmation of pre-existing biases. At Latta Plantation in North Carolina, for example, visitors can choose to walk to a single, reproduction cabin on the outskirts of the historical outbuilding area, where they can look in through the open door-- crossed with a single rope to prevent full entrance-- into the interior of the cabin. The interior of the cabin itself, displaying a jumble of antique objects, is left to the visitor's individual interpretation, presented as it is with no contextualizing information. The single bed displayed, for instance, might lead the visitor to conclude that such dwellings were intended for single-occupancy. On the exterior wall of the building, the only posted information comes in the form of two planks of wood, each engraved with the word "Slaves" and a list of names of people enslaved on the plantation, sorted by the two families who had enslaved them. In the "education hall," which serves as a museal space

adjacent to the plantation's gift shop, the site provides the bulk of its contextualization of the institution of slavery. Acknowledging the trauma of slavery, the display addresses family separation, labor, and violence. Yet the display's impact is diminished by the way the museum as a whole focuses the visitor's attention on white life on the plantation. The majority of the museum's displays discuss historical fashion, female education, cotton production, and the plantation-owning family. Additionally, the accompanying video introduction to the site, which plays on a loop while the visitor moves through the museum, draws on imagery of the romantic South to contextualize and introduce the site. The video features costumed white reenactors strolling on the plantation grounds to jaunty fiddle music and explains that the Civil War was fought over states' rights (as I discuss in Chapter One, this is a common argument used to downplay the role of slavery in the Civil War and is frequently deployed on behalf of Lost Cause rhetoric). As the music shifts to a slower tempo, the video narrates the lives of plantation owners, which is visually represented with a close-up of a hoop-skirted dress twirling in slow-motion. Discussion of slavery enters the narrative frame of the video only to illustrate the wealth of the planter family.

Boone Hall Plantation, in South Carolina, is one of the few plantations to maintain enslaved cabins original to the property for visitation; as at Latta, these structures are optionally visited via "self-guided tour." Each of the eight cabins on "slave street" focuses on a "theme" of black history and life, some of which display artifacts, and some of which are represented by costumed wax figures posed in a scene within. According to the spring 2017 map, these themes include: "Praise House," "Slave Crafts," "Their Life & Family," "Archaeological Discoveries," "Their Work & Life," "Emancipation & Freedom," "Struggle for Civil Rights," and "Leaders & Heroes." In each of the exhibits, visitors, cordoned off from any wax figures by a belt barrier,

can press a button to hear a prerecorded narrative contextualizing the scene or objects. The cabin exhibits stage the slave quarters and slavery itself as part of a progressive thrust of an ultimately redemptive history, culminating in the “Leaders & Heroes” cabin with a triumphant video featuring former U.S. president Barack Obama, proof of the “achievement of racial equality.” The cabins, taken together, suggest that while slavery was an injustice, the nation has eradicated and reckoned with its racist beginnings. The United States remains a demonstrably racist nation which retains the legacy of slavery in many of its systems, laws, attitudes, and institutions--not to mention the overtly racist reactions from many Americans upon the election of Barack Obama-- a fact which belies the post-racial society advanced by the “Slave Street” cabin exhibits. Moreover, the lack of a live institutional presence in the form of a guard, docent, or exhibit attendant leaves the exhibits, and in particular the wax figures, open to interpretation or engagement contra their purpose as the objects of an empathetic understanding of the lived reality of slavery.⁴⁵

This point is most saliently illustrated by the images of Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who murdered nine black worshippers at Emanuel AME Church in nearby Charleston in 2015, at Boone Hall. Part of an apparent larger tour of significant sites of black oppression in the South, the images of Roof-- found posted on his personal website after he committed the Charleston Massacre-- depict him posed in front of the plantation big house as well as seated with the wax figures of the cabins (Tucker and Holley). In the cabin photos, Roof recasts the figures in his own racist scenario, inserting himself in the frame and deploying his own body to forge a fantasy of ownership and the return of slavery. In one photo, Roof stands behind two mannequins representing an enslaved woman and man, legs hip-width apart, arms at

45. For more on wax figures, live reenactment, and the representation of racist trauma, see my discussion of Harvey Young’s reading of a lynching diorama in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

his sides, and smirking broadly. In another, he sits, ramrod straight, in front of the mannequins and fixes the camera with a blank and contemptuous stare. The mannequins, part of the “praise house” exhibit, lean forward slightly, their arms outstretched and faces frozen in smiles of pleasure. It seems clear that Roof has chosen to photograph himself with these mannequins in particular, using the contrast between their off-balance stances and his own stiff poses, as well as their facial expressions, to mock and to produce a scene of white power and ownership. While one might dismiss the scenes Roof stages as an alternative or antagonistic performance of the plantation heritage site as scriptive space, I would argue that his performance is in fact eminently competent. Roof’s performance responds to the script produced by the site’s prevailing cultural narrative, which recirculates the grandeur and luxury of white enslavers in the South, and by the site’s setting, which prioritizes the mansion and its attendant focus on white life and aesthetics over the ancillary, marginal, and unsupervised encounter with black plantation life.

Nottoway Plantation offered no physical structure to contextualize or commemorate slavery and its relationship to the plantation: the one artifactual trace of slavery on the grounds was the overseer’s bell, which featured as a decorative element in the plantation’s rose garden. Nottoway explicitly markets itself as a destination for romance and luxury, styling itself “Nottoway Plantation and Resort,” and hiding speakers in faux decorative stones around the grounds to pipe in mood-setting music. (On the day that I visited, an instrumental version of “My Heart Will Go On,” the syrupy 1997 pop ballad from the film *Titanic*, scored my encounter with the overseer’s bell in the rose garden.) Nottoway made headlines in 2013 when white, feminist singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco planned a four-day songwriting workshop retreat at the resort. The decision was met with outrage on social media-- predominantly from women of color-- over the hypocrisy of holding a purportedly feminist, progressive event at a site that not only was

created through the enslavement of black men and women, but so clearly romanticized its own history. Ultimately, the flurry of tweets, blogs, and articles protesting DiFranco's decision resulted in the cancellation of the retreat (Anderson). Much of the outrage originated from the plantation's website, which characterized slavery and the treatment of the enslaved much as the museum display I discuss below: the website praised the plantation owner's business acumen in motivating his "workforce" with rewards. As of 2019, the Nottoway history page on their website still praises the owner's business acumen, but does not mention slavery or the enslaved at all. The only written acknowledgement of slavery on the grounds of Nottoway suggests that the exclusion reflects a broader attempt to reframe the site as a romantic domicile where slavery was a mutually beneficial arrangement. "It is difficult to accurately assess the treatment of the slaves," reads a sign at Nottoway's small, ancillary museum, "but various records indicate they were treated well for the time." The sign provides no further information about the records it refers to, but proceeds to enumerate the gifts that the plantation owning family annually bestowed on the people they enslaved, who responded with "music and dancing." The sign effectively refocuses the reader's attention on the generosity of the white Randolph family and the putative happiness and well-being of the people they owned, echoing ante- and postbellum proslavery rhetoric that sought to excuse slavery on the basis of its alleged benefit to black people. Based on an assumption of blacks' racial inferiority, this rhetoric, in turn, fueled and was fueled by the forced performances of the enslaved on the plantation as well as the auction block (Thompson 70). Misleading or outright racist signage and missing historical context with respect to slavery at plantation heritage sites briefly came into the national spotlight in 2019. Another Louisiana plantation, Rosedown, made headlines for finally removing signs describing the people enslaved there as "well taken care of and happy" and gifted with "a natural musical instinct"

which they used to celebrate the largesse of the plantation owners (Ballard). More troubling, Rosedown Plantation is a state historic site, owned by the state of Louisiana and run by the Louisiana Office of State Parks. The plantation represents, by far, the most popular state historic site in Louisiana, drawing almost 30,000 visitors in 2014-2015, or about eighteen percent of the state's total visitors to historic sites for the period (*Sunset Report* 46). In the absence of a more rigorous accounting for the plantation as a site of enforced labor and racist chattel slavery-- even the meager accounting that the contrast of a cramped cabin with a large and comfortable house might prompt-- signs like those at Nottoway and (until recently) Rosedown not only relegate slavery to a footnote in the margins of the romantic story of the Southern plantation, they moreover romanticize and sentimentalize the institution of slavery itself. Such signs give the impression-- bare as they are of any intimation of the rape, torture, hard labor, disenfranchisement, objectification, and family separation that were intrinsic to the institution-- that enslaved people who received gifts at Christmas and adequate housing enjoyed a good life in exchange for their labor. Thus reassured, the visitor is free to engage with the scriptive space's cultural narrative of a luxurious and genteel Old South uninterrupted by the contradiction of black labor or suffering. Oak Alley Plantation, as the tour guide informed my group, used to instruct its docents to describe the plantation owner as "a benevolent owner," but has recently asked docents to leave mention of the treatment of the enslaved out of their discussion due to lack of documentation. At any rate, she shares, they know the enslaved at Oak Alley were whipped, but do not have the documentation to characterize the beatings, the rationale behind them, or their intensity. "Well," remarked an older white male tourist in response, "like anybody else, I'm sure you'd have good days and bad days." The glib statement reflects the man's identification and empathetic connection not with the enslaved who were subject to violence, but

to the white enslavers who enacted that violence. The statement suggests that the tourist is taking up the scriptive space's prompt to imaginatively inhabit the persona of the wealthy white plantation owner. Actress Azie Mira Dungey, who performed the role of Lizzie Mae, an enslaved black woman, at Mount Vernon, developed a satirical web series in 2013, "Ask a Slave," highlighting the frustratingly ignorant and sometimes outright racist encounters with white tourists at the plantation site. The interactions Dungey satirizes and describes-- visitors demanding service from interpreters portraying the enslaved; worrying about who will bring the enslavers their tea while the enslaved are sleeping; blithely inquiring whether the enslaved are grateful that they work for a Founding Father or whether they found their positions through a newspaper advertisement-- marginalize the experiences of the enslaved and align the visitor's sympathies and identification with the white enslaver. Dungey's experiences have been echoed by black actors at heritage sites in Maryland and Virginia; it is little wonder that plantation heritage sites frequently struggle to hire and keep black interpreters on staff (du Lac). Whether or not a site prioritizes hiring black living history interpreters, at sites such as Oak Alley, Nottoway, Latta, Boone Hall, and Mount Vernon, where structures commemorating black lives are deemed optional, tourists may very well knowingly or unknowingly fail to visit or read such displays in the first place.

The tours of the big houses themselves generally begin at a pre-appointed time outside of the building. A tour guide or docent meets the gathered tourists to open the doors and invite them into the house, an act of hospitality that invokes the image of the South as gracious and generous and positions the visitor immediately as not just a tourist but a guest in a *home*, a domestic space. On the large brick lower porch fronting Oak Alley Plantation, tourists could purchase a lemonade or a mint julep (with or without bourbon whiskey) to sip under the ceiling fans while

waiting for their tour to begin. While the fact of the exchange of money somewhat undermines one's ability to read these beverages as a mark of hospitality, I would argue that the experience underlying the sale of these specific beverages in this specific location is what is actually on offer, and that experience-- drinking a cold beverage on the front porch of a plantation house, much as Scarlett and the Tarleton twins do in the opening moments of *Gone with the Wind*-- is fundamentally a moment of imagined Southern leisure and hospitality. With the exception of Whitney Plantation, docents at all of the plantation sites I visited referred to the big house at least once if not consistently as "home" rather than "house." The Oxford English Dictionary defines "house" as "a building for habitation" and "home" as "the place where a person or animal dwells." Key to the distinction between these words is whereas a house is a building defined by its potential to be a residence, a home is any place-- building or otherwise-- defined by its current and ongoing in-habitation by a living creature. "Home," then, is not only emphatically domestic in its implicit referral to household life, but it is also of the present, describing as it does a current condition. At Nottoway, the guide referred to the house almost exclusively as "our home," further extending the domestic frame of the space to include the present. Whereas "the home" or "this home" might be construed to refer to the building's historical use as a living space for past residents, "our home" insists on the domesticity of the space *as it continues*, in the present, including as it does the living docent herself via the first person plural possessive. Incorporating the docent and thereby presenting an embodied possessor of the space-- at least rhetorically-- emphasizes the tour as not just a transaction between an employee and paying customers or an educational circuit through a space, but as an act of hospitality between a host and her guests. Insofar as this act and the typically white, female docent's identity intersect with the Southern plantation's culturally determined scripts, we might also read this rhetorical choice as a

performance of the good Southern hostess, whose specifically feminine duties include making guests feel welcome and comfortable in the domestic space she cultivates. Furthermore, the “our” in “our home” is ambiguous, leaving open the possibility that a visitor might read themselves into the use of the first person plural, thus reinterpreting the space as their own domestic domain.

The majority of the docents who led tours I participated in were female; moreover, the only costumed docents I encountered were female. Costumed docents invariably wore large hoop skirts in bright or light colors, yet the costume material and design and the docents’ hairstyling and makeup did not follow the strictures of period authenticity. This may well be due to a lack of institutional resources (authentic period costumes, as I discussed in Chapter One, are incredibly expensive and time-consuming investments, and a large and/or seasonal staff may make authentic period costumes cost-prohibitive). What the hoop skirts provided, I would suggest, was a gesture toward the cultural narrative embedded in the scriptive place of the plantation heritage site: visitors are conditioned to expect the site to be peopled with young women in bell-shaped dresses, and sites meet that expectation not in the name of education or historical accuracy, but in order to reinforce the “specific vision of the world” of the Old South that the dresses recall. At five of the plantation heritage sites I visited, costumed interpreters-- as distinct from tour guides-- roamed the grounds freely: most of them, rather than address visitors directly, performed some daily activity as though unaware of the intrusion of the present on their historical lives. This may well serve and be intended as a window into historical life, yet it also has the effect of contributing to the setting of the scriptive space, animating the past and creating a living mise-en-scène that facilitates the visitor’s imaginative self-insertion in the romantic Old South. Moreover, because these interpreters were-- in my experience-- all white and predominantly

women, they preserve the prevailing narrative of the Southern plantation past as a primarily white, domestic, romantic space.⁴⁶ Beyond the narrative invoked by the visual of the skirt itself, the hoop skirt also produces a specific habitus or embodied performance from the guide, obliging her to move slowly and carefully through the space of the house to avoid knocking into any antiques, readjusting or lifting the skirt to navigate stairs or narrow door frames-- a performance which, read through the gendered, classed, and racialized narrative lens of the romanticized Old South, evokes feminine grace and gentility. The docent in hoop skirts, again, embodies and enlivens the past for the tourist. If the docent plays the role of the good Southern hostess of the antebellum plantation house, then her performance positions us, the visitors, as her guests in the past.

Many plantation heritage sites encourage this time-warp framing and create the conditions for tourists to encounter the space as guests in a home with as little intervention as possible under the circumstances of the heritage space. All of the plantation sites I visited, with the exception of Mount Vernon, allowed visitors to enter rooms in the big house that were free of any cordoning that would separate visitors from displays or otherwise interrupt the fantasy of visiting the past. Visitors were asked not to sit on the fragile furniture, and had to remain with the group instead of wandering into other rooms on their own volition, but could otherwise move through the space of the plantation house as one might upon visiting someone's home.

46. This is not to advocate for the historical interpretation of slavery at such heritage sites, which-- at sites such as Williamsburg, VA and Plimouth Plantation (MA)-- has already sparked deserved controversy. For more about the limits of representation and historical interpretation regarding slavery, see Stupp. My point, rather, is that historical interpretation writ large merits re-examination in the context of the plantation heritage site, where it is all too easy to deploy such educational and representational tools in the service of nostalgia and to the detriment of a more rigorous dialogue about the histories and legacies of such sites.



Figure 10: A costumed docent welcomes visitors into the foyer of Oak Alley Plantation's big house.



Figure 11: A costumed interpreter reads a book in the upstairs hallway of Oak Alley Plantation house.

Furthermore, the plantation houses I visited frequently set spaces “as they would be” for a visit from a guest, and rhetorically addressed the tourist as an antebellum guest to the house. The guide at Oak Alley Plantation, for instance, drew our attention to the sliced pineapple displayed on a silver tray in a guest bedroom in the big house, a custom meant to welcome guests to the home. “As a guest in our home,” she assured us, “you’d be given pineapple just like this.” Latta Plantation, similarly, set the table in the dining room for a feast for guests: “All of this is period-appropriate. The table and everything is set as if you’re coming into the Latta home on a special occasion, like Christmas.” At Laura Plantation, the tour guide emphasized the authenticity of the garden, which had been planted to the specifications of an antebellum owner,

according to her journal. “It is as it was,” the guide said, “if you had come up those steps one hundred and fifty years ago. You’d have been here on business.” At Mount Vernon, a docent informed tourists shuffling through one room that “if you brought your own butler, your own servant, he served you from here. The servants would occupy this building. If you were a guest, you’d stay in one of the guest bedrooms.” Just outside the gentleman’s study at Nottoway Plantation, the docent stopped our group and turned to address the women. “Back then, women, you were allowed to go in [here] through the morning, but after lunch, it was strictly just for gentlemen. This is where they come and talk about war and politics, drink brandy, smoke cigars, and do a lot of swearing. So women’s ears are just too sensitive for this, and they actually have to go across to the tea parlor.” With a deep curtsy, the guide opened the door to the study and gestured to invite the group to pass into the room. “I do however welcome *everyone* in,” she announced. As each of these examples demonstrates, the plantation heritage site tour frequently and sometimes elaborately employs the second-person pronoun to address visitors directly and draw them into the frame of the Southern past. While this tactic is likely grounded in the desire to capture and keep visitors’ interest in what may otherwise feel like dry and distant historical material (Roth), it also has the effect of prompting visitors to imagine themselves as antebellum guests in the house, subject to its gendered rules and the beneficiaries of its generosity. More specifically, each of these examples locates the “you” of the visitor within a particular historical identity or persona: as a guest in each of the houses, the assumed and interpellated subject is white and wealthy. In the case of Mount Vernon, the “you” might even be an enslaver yourself, with a servant to serve you from the servant hall. It is worth noting that the chance to address the visitor as an imagined servant or enslaved person (“As a servant, you would have stayed here” instead of “The servants would occupy this building”) is glossed over.

Indeed, the content of the tours themselves largely concentrates on the wealth of the plantation owners, as illustrated by their belongings and home design, and on the romantic intrigues and marriages of the young white women of the plantation-owning family. The setting of the plantation heritage site, of course, presages the discussion of wealth: much of the physical trappings of the plantation big house remain impressive and are clearly legible as costly or even extravagant to the modern-day visitor. Yet each of the tours I attended-- with the exception of the Whitney-- repeatedly emphasized the relative wealth of the plantation-owning family, detailing the rarity, price, and provenance of fireplaces, objet d'arts, fabric, china, and paintings. This discussion inevitably led to two subjects: the consolidation of family wealth via the marriages of its daughters, and the preservation of wealth (and general pluck and resourcefulness) effected by the family's women during the Civil War, when Union soldiers threatened to take or destroy valuable objects. Such narratives pointedly ignore the underlying reason that the families were able to accumulate such enormous wealth in the first place-- that is, the forced and free labor of enslaved men and women-- and moreover plots a tragedy in which the families figure as protagonists in distress. These narratives, in other words, direct our identification and empathetic powers to the white families who lived in these mansions, and use anecdotes about courting, weddings, and witty hiding places for jewelry to domesticate, feminize, and romanticize the plantation site. At Latta and Nottoway, guides identified the "exact spot" where daughters had married their beaux in the house. As tour guides elaborate on the gendered etiquette that dictated interaction between the genders and the general behavior of young women-- all with an eye to making an advantageous marriage match-- the visitor is prompted, sometimes explicitly, to consider their own gender and how these strictures might modify their own relationships and behavior. If, as I've suggested above, most visitors to such sites are white women who are

already primed to seek out an embodied encounter with a romantic Southern past, then this prompt is all the more tempting. The scriptive space of the plantation heritage site rehearses the Tara narrative which firmly centers the Southern belle as the flirtatious and desired avatar of Southern domesticity; its materiality provides an effective setting for its visitor to take up the script offered and imagine herself as the wealthy white heroine whose romantic life leaves little room for acknowledgment of slavery.

Should imagination fail to adequately exorcise the impulse that the scriptive place suggests, plantation heritage sites provide multiple opportunities for visitors to enact fantasy by making a purchase. Each site I visited had a gift shop where visitors could buy souvenirs; with the exception of the Whitney Plantation, the majority of these gift shop souvenirs functioned as potential props for future performances of the romantic Southern past. Lacy fans, magnolia- or violet-scented perfumes in glass bottles, etiquette manuals, recipe books, quills, toy rifles and swords, needlepoint kits, and boxes of pralines: the objects for sale in the gift shops, like Bernstein's scriptive things, invite the user to occupy and perform a specific subject position, that of the white Southerner. Primed by the scriptive space of the plantation big house, the visitor can act on the prompt to imagine themselves into the Southern past, enacting and-- in the case of the foodstuff such as pralines, cane syrup, or muscadine wine-- literally consuming a specific and romanticized South. As Romine notes of the commodification of the South, "as a mode of both material and symbolic exchange, consumption facilitates the reproduction of culture" ("Consumption," 225). The performances enacted by visitors, prompted by the meaning-making of the scriptive space and made possible by the material exchange in the gift shop, reproduce the cultural narrative of the Old South as a nostalgic location of gentility and luxury. And several of the plantations I visited offered tourists even more (and more expensive) opportunities to enact

an Old South fantasy: every plantation except for the Whitney is available to rent as a picturesque venue for weddings, photography sessions, or corporate meetings. In the case of weddings in particular, visitors could take up and perform the script provided by the tour's emphasis on romance and marriage, even going so far as to stand in the "exact spot" ghosted by the weddings of Southern belles past. Nottoway, Oak Alley, Mount Vernon, and Boone Hall all provide on-site dining options, whose menus include pointedly Southern and historical dishes such as "Lowcountry She Crab Soup" (Boone Hall), "Colonial Hoecake" (Mount Vernon), "Plantation Fried Green Tomatoes" (Nottoway), and a "Mint Julep Flight" (Oak Alley). Nottoway and Oak Alley, moreover, are also hotels with rooms available on the grounds of the plantation for guests-- Nottoway, which bills itself as a resort, offers rooms in the mansion itself as well as Victorian-styled rooms in various historic outbuildings such as the carriage house or the *garçonnière* (house for unmarried young men). Each of these hotel experiences, the heritage sites stress in their marketing materials, affords the visitor both luxury and a chance to more fully immerse oneself in the past. Thus these commercial capstones to the plantation heritage site function as the fulfillment of the embodied fantasy prompted by the scriptive space, the chance to perform whiteness, femininity, and wealthy elitism as the space has primed the visitor to do.

These plantation heritage sites, hinging as they do on a white interactor-- and, what's more, an interactor whose cultural competence and desires prime them to take up the scripts of Southern nostalgia-- leave alternative subject positions stranded outside of their scriptive spaces. An alternative model for the scriptive space of the plantation heritage site may be the Whitney, which, in its focus on memorializing the lives and experiences of the enslaved, is more ambivalent in its interpellation of visitors but strict in its foreclosure of historical fantasy. The Whitney features life-size clay sculptures, "the Children of the Whitney," by African-American

artist Woodrow Nash, which depict enslaved children. Each of these children is based on a formerly enslaved person whose oral history was recorded by the Federal Writers' Project from 1936 to 1940; they are depicted as children to reflect their ages at the time of their emancipation ("Children of the Whitney"). The children are arranged throughout the property, sitting on the porches of cabins, watching from the corner of the church, standing in the bedroom of the big house. Their presence is a constant reminder of the institution that enabled the establishment and success of large plantations in the South. Materially, the children are more clearly art sculptures than the mannequins at Boone Hall, and thus avoid outright kitsch that might prompt a mocking interaction like that of Dylann Roof (and, to be sure, the constant presence of a tour guide would forestall such a performance). Instead of a paper ticket, visitors are issued a small plastic card on a lanyard to hang around their neck. The card is printed, on one side, with the image and name of one of the children, and on the other, an excerpt from the oral history of the person the sculpture depicts. While the card (and its prompt to hang the object around one's neck like a name-tag) might suggest that the visitor identify with the child they are assigned, the site stops short of explicitly asking visitors to do so. Unlike the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which prompts visitors to assume the identity of the historical person featured on their entry card and pass through the stages of their oppression as they were arrested, deported to a camp, or killed, the Whitney does not address the visitor as though they are an enslaved person. Rather, the card-- just as the sculptures themselves-- seem intended to humanize the experience of slavery without risking representing the institution across the bodies of living interpreters. The visitor is hailed explicitly as a contemporary student of the nation's racist past and moreover, as a mourner at a site of loss and memorialization; the tour itself brooks no recourse to nostalgic fantasy. The tour ends, like the others, in the commercial space of the gift shop. Yet, unlike the

gift shops at other plantation heritage sites, the Whitney gift shop sells predominantly educational materials-- books by James Baldwin, Octavia Butler, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass-- and insistently contemporary gifts by African and African-American artists, such as kente cloth bags. Even as the tour empties into the gift shop, the walls around the gift shop are filled with colorful Post-It notes, where visitors are encouraged to write their thoughts about the tour and read the thoughts of others. Visitors, here as in the tour itself, are still prompted to process their experience, engage in dialogue about race and racism, and contextualize what they have learned within the frame of their lives in the present.

Chapter Four Plantation Plays, Disrupted Scenarios

I want you to imagine that you're standing in a big open field. And all around you are little specks of white. Cotton. That's because now you are in the Deep South. And, as you stare out across that field, you see an old barn in the distance. Go ahead and walk up to that barn for me now. And as you approach, an old familiar smell hits you: hay. (Whispers) It is also the smell of the past. And as you crack open that barn door you begin to hear a voice...

--Jennifer Kidwell and Scott R. Shepherd, *Underground Railroad Game*, 14

In African-American performance artist Robbie McCauley's 1989 play *Sally's Rape*, McCauley, together with her white collaborator Jeannie Hutchins, grapples with the racist and sexist legacies of American slavery via her own family history, most notably her enslaved great-great-grandmother's rape by the white man who owned her-- an assault from which McCauley herself is descended. Employing elements of improvisation, direct address, and audience participation, *Sally's Rape* establishes from its beginning that the piece shapes and is shaped by audience reaction and engagement. "We can't have a dialogue by ourselves," the performers declare to the audience in the first scene, "so you're in it" (6). Throughout the play, McCauley and Hutchins move lightly from respectability politics to segregation to improvised discussion of the play itself, occasionally trying on personas in service of a story but largely performing themselves as interlocutors. At one point, as they work through Hutchins's impersonation of Thomas Jefferson's wife, McCauley casually mounts a table. The lights shift. She drops her dress, revealing her naked body. Hutchins begins chanting "bid 'em in, bid 'em in," turning to the audience and urging them to join her. As it becomes clear that the audience's refusal to accept Hutchins's invitation will result in McCauley's prolonged exposure, audiences-- who one might expect to be profoundly uncomfortable-- reluctantly join the chant. When the choral chanting begins, the scene progresses, and McCauley gets dressed again. As McCauley and

Hutchins continue to negotiate their respective relationships to the piece and to each other vis-à-vis their racial identities, McCauley invites an unenthusiastic Hutchins to stand on the auction block. McCauley strives to create the same conditions as before, ordering the light board operator to shift the lights, instructing Hutchins to strip naked, and convincing the audience to repeat the same “bid ‘em in” chant, but Hutchins won’t, or can’t comply.

Theatre scholars have read these auction block moments as the climactic crux of McCauley’s play. “The auction block,” notes Harvey Young, “from an African-American cultural perspective, is an American icon” (150). The auction block functions as a kind of shorthand for American audiences, swiftly and forcefully invoking the commodification, dehumanization, forced labor, torture, and display of black bodies. Sociologist Patricia Collins locates the foundation of contemporary pornography and the sexual politics surrounding black women’s bodies (namely, their hypersexualization and objectification) in the enslaved woman’s appearance on the auction block. “In the antebellum American South,” she writes, “White men did not have to look at pornographic pictures of women because they could become voyeurs of Black women on the auction block” (136). Black women were objects for display and possession, and the block itself was both stage for their display and the means of their commodification for the purposes of ownership or exchange. Moreover, as Deborah Thompson, Ann Nymann, and Jennifer Griffiths note of *Sally’s Rape*, although Hutchins embarks on this theatrical experiment with McCauley in the hopes of creating interracial dialogue about race in the United States-- the play literally ends with the artists instructing audience members to introduce themselves to each other and begin a discussion-- Hutchins, as a white woman, ultimately does not have access to the embodied experience of a black woman, and her performance on the auction block would be, as Thompson notes, “dishonest.” Even so, her

failure to expose herself in the same way marks the limits of allyship. Finally, I would add, in making the play's forward motion contingent on the participation of the audience in the "bidding in" of both women, McCauley insists that audience members rethink their own complicity in continuing structures and systems of racism in the United States. In other words, in what amounts to around seven minutes in an hour-long piece, this iconic scene from the U.S. Southern past manages to manifest the complexly interrelated operations of race, gender, and capitalism in the past and the present.

Yet the scene functions as it does precisely because of the legibility of its constituent elements, in concert with each other. The table, alone, would not necessarily suggest the auction block; though McCauley's exposed body might invoke the genealogy of the auction, it remains a subtle suggestion until it is contextualized by the audience's chanting and the mounting of the table. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's notion of the "scenario," a term embedded in her quest to dislodge the narrative text from its place of primacy in the humanities and account for the transmission of knowledge via embodied performance, provides a useful framework for understanding the potency of McCauley's auction block moments. Taylor's theory of performance describes a repertoire of embodied traces of the past, an "invocational practice," that "evokes memories and grief that belong to some other body" (143). Embodied performance, in other words, enables the transfer of memory across generations, yielding access to pasts-- potentially abstracted or transformed over time-- that we've never personally experienced but whose effects and traces linger in our lived realities. Taylor suggests the term "scenario" to expand her inquiry beyond the theatre yet account for the ways in which a sense of theatricality makes certain performances recognizable and compelling, thereby ensuring their repetition in the future. Scenarios are "culturally specific imaginaries" that enact a formulaic set of environments,

actions, and personas, at once citing, obscuring, and reinforcing the assumptions and structures that undergird them (13). “The scenario,” Taylor asserts, “makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes” (28). Thus the scenario is also eminently legible to the culturally literate witness, its constituent parts and plot so familiar as to appear predictable. And yet, Taylor insists, scenarios are flexible and adaptable; their flexibility is both what allows them to pass through time, maintaining cultural continuity, and what makes them ripe for subversive disruption.

Taylor’s investment, of course, is in the embodied repertoire as opposed to the written archive, and her term might therefore appear to misalign with American drama and its overweening reliance on text. Yet theatre scholars have theorized, similarly, theatre’s interdependence on memory and recognizable or “recycled” gestures and interactions. In his book *The Haunted Stage*, theatre scholar Marvin Carlson identifies memory as characteristic of theatre and, moreover, “more central” to theatre than the other arts (7). Coining this memory function “ghosting,” Carlson argues that theatre’s central purpose is to ask audiences to recognize and read what they are witnessing on stage through a number of memory-laden contexts: the actor’s body, the text, and the props, set, and costumes, not to mention the theatre building itself. “Theatre,” Carlson writes, “as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself, seeking to depict the full range of human actions within their physical context, has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations....The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection” (2). Insofar as theatre strives to be representative of life, and of the narratives we spin around and to make sense of our lived experiences, theatre is necessarily composed, in part,

of both cultural and individual memory. And cultural and individual memory, in turn, are in continual flux, expanding and retracting, making and altering meaning as they are filtered through varied contexts and networked with other memories. Theatre, that is, confronts us with the sediment of the past even as we must draw on the past--via cultural and individual memory--to make sense of what we are watching onstage. It is both record and process. Gina Bloom, Anston Bosman, and William West echo this assertion in "Ophelia's Intertheatricality, or, How Performance is History," their argument for understanding a theatre performance not as a punctual or singular event but as "intertheatrical." Drawing on Butler and Derrida's notions of citationality, intertheatricality refers to the way that the present performance is mediated by or cites past performances, and, at once, prepares the way for future performances that will similarly practice citation. Bloom, et al. understand theatre to be, like Ophelia, always temporally divided, distracted, pervasive, and dispersed: they describe the feeling of pervasive and unconscious familiarity that a spectator experiences while watching theater, which, insofar as it stages a collection of human behaviors, tracks gestures and symbols that obscure their originary sources. "Ophelia's Intertheatricality" encourages theater historians and critics not to look for unified readings of individual productions, but to embrace theater as an embodied collection, gathering, or recycling that also gestures forward to future collection, gathering, and recycling.

While the terms "intertheatricality" and "ghosting" each attend more specifically to the theatre's relationship with memory and the past, their fine-grained attention to the gestures, objects, and texts that appear in the space of the stage paradoxically renders their resulting theories of theatre too diffuse for my purposes. That is to say, while I agree that we may regard the theatre as essentially an art form always already in the process of engaging with the past--regardless of the content or subject of a given production-- these terms do not necessarily

account for the ghostly recurrence of scenes: the meaning-laden and historically determined interplay of specific settings, actions, and characters. I propose, therefore, to return Taylor's term "scenario" to its theatrical origins,⁴⁷ recontextualizing it in the theatre in order to understand how contemporary plays set in the U.S. South engage with and generate new meaning from existing cultural imaginaries.

The U.S. South, and more specifically, the antebellum South as it is remembered and deployed in the present, yields an array of scenarios rich in classed, gendered, and racialized meaning. Though fixed in the past, these scenarios retain their cultural currency, recurring, for instance, in film, TV, advertisements, political rhetoric, leisure tours, and resorts. Robbie McCauley reenacts one of these Southern scenarios when she, a black woman, steps onto the auction block in *Sally's Rape*, in order to disrupt it. Playing on the scenario's predictability, McCauley repeats the scenario but places Hutchins, a white woman, on the block: when the scenario fails to come to its "natural" conclusion-- an exposed and objectified body onstage in front of a chanting audience-- the disruption effectively reveals and emphasizes the underlying logic of the original historical scenario.

Although not itself explicitly set in the U.S. South, *Sally's Rape* and its auction scenes anticipate the recent swell of plays set in or about the antebellum or Reconstruction South, from Brave New World Repertory Theatre's site-specific *The Cherry Orchard* adaptation *The Plantation* (2017) to Suzan-Lori Parks's epic trilogy *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2, and 3)* (2014) and Jeremy O. Harris's psychosexual fever dream *Slave Play* (2018), and

47. Taylor makes the theatrical origins of her term "scenario" explicit when she quotes the original definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "a sketch or outline of the plot of a play, giving particulars of the scenes, situations etc." (qtd. in Taylor 28). The full entry also includes references to film, novels, opera, ballet, and role-playing games. In including only the theatrical dimension of the term in her definition, Taylor underscores that she understands "scenario" to be chiefly rooted in the world of the theatre.

Charly Evon Simpson's haunting historical drama *Behind the Sheet* (2019). As in the ongoing national debate over the preservation and display of Confederate monuments and the Confederate flag, the South as it figures in these plays functions as a stage for processing and scrutinizing American cultural and racial memory. More specifically, in staging discrete and distinctively Southern scenarios from the U.S. imaginary, these plays point to and prod at the cultural continuity that renders these scenarios still coherent in the twenty-first century. That is, these playwrights are capitalizing on the potency of the mythical Southern past in the cultural imaginary of the present in order to stage broader interventions in contemporary American racial logic. The collapsing of the division between past and present is a recurrent feature of these plays: the moonlight-and-magnolias fantasies they conjure are frequently punctured with contemporary references, phrases, and gestures.

The Southern plantation-- that mythical and romantic setting replete with cotton bolls, hoop skirts, and Mississippi drawls-- serves as the central location for most of these plays. Whether or not an individual set design realizes the symbolic trappings (graceful columns, grand verandas, spreading live oak branches) that might recall an antebellum estate, each of these plays depends upon the plantation's indexicality to situate the audience immediately in the given circumstances of the play. Matthew Pratt Guterl notes, of the plantation as icon in the American imaginary:

Invoking the word brings to mind clichéd images of tree-lined promenades, vast homes with sprawling porches centered on equally vast agricultural plots of land. Every plantation requires a master and a mistress, paired representatives of white supremacy and representations of the peculiarly feudal affect of the entire complex. And everywhere, the cliché dictates, there must be slaves or servants or peons-- small and large, male and female, old and young. Populated by a small stratum of white overseers and masters and a dense layer of black slaves, the plantation is neither a farm nor a factory, but rather some deeply, disturbingly racialized combination of the two (26).

The Southern plantation, in Guterl's accounting, is its own kind of scenario in the American cultural repertoire, calling to mind its own setting, characters, relationships, and behaviors. Those elements of the scenario work to reinforce a larger and insistent revision of history in which plantations and their methodologies are fixed in time and region: they are "disturbingly racialized," yes, but also "peculiarly feudal," relegated to the "Old South." It is precisely the distance produced by the iconic plantation's relegation to an imagined courtly past, Guterl posits, that seems to (but does not) excuse nostalgia for the plantation. The setting communicates that, within the world of the play, there is a labor regime premised on a racial hierarchy and that racial violence and discrimination are imminent if not in progress. Moreover, the setting may communicate a highly stylized, romanticized, and flattened approach to history: that is, the plantation as a theatrical setting evokes the past, but more specifically, it evokes the nostalgic impulse that imbues the antebellum Southern plantation with whitewashed grandeur and simplifies and domesticates its aggressively capitalist purpose. In other words, the plantation is also a psychic setting, locating the audience in both the origins of and the ongoing struggle (or lack thereof) to reconcile with the nation's racist history. But of course, as Taylor's "scenario" suggests, these settings are subject to transformation, disruption, subversion: we may begin in a plantation, and end up somewhere else altogether. Yet despite the plantation's ultimate slipperiness in some contemporary American plays, its imagery is deployed in marketing materials, programs, lobby displays, and sets--not to mention not infrequently the titles of the plays themselves-- effectively signaling the plantation as a central element of the plays. For this reason, I will use the term "plantation plays" throughout to refer to these dramatic works.

Plantation plays are inherently politically charged and informed, emerging as they do in timely response to the ongoing circulation of Lost Cause narratives and the national debates over

the public memorialization of the Confederacy and reparations for slavery. In this sense, we may compare them to neo-slave narratives, which African-American studies scholar Ashraf Rushdy defines as “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (3). Rushdy places the development of neo-slave narratives-- a genre which emerged in the 1970s-- within their political and intellectual context, arguing that radical changes in the field of history regarding enslaved people’s lives and agency as well as political movements such as the struggle for Civil Rights, feminism, and Black Power produced and shaped the first neo-slave narratives. Plantation plays, of course, differ from neo-slave narrative novels formally-- they do not, for instance, consistently “adopt the conventions” of the nineteenth-century slave narrative-- and are dramatic works meant for live production. Yet they do share an investment in recentering and valuing black subjectivity, and, as African-American Studies scholar Madhu Dubey points out of later, non-realist neo-slave narratives, “the ultimate aim of challenging narratives of African American history as a process of racial advancement” (336). Like these neo-slave narratives (most famously, perhaps, Octavia Butler’s 1979 novel *Kindred*, in which a twentieth-century black woman travels back in time and meets her enslaved and enslaver ancestors), plantation plays insist on the plantation and slavery’s continued legacies in the politics of the contemporary United States.

In an amplification of McCauley’s invitation to her audience to participate in “bidding her in” at the auction, contemporary plantation plays invite their audiences to revisit the Southern past, or at least a dream of the Southern past. A significant number of these plays engage the audience in elements of participation, eliminating the safe distance of the passive viewer. In a disruption of the “contract” of separation between theatrical action and the audience, these participatory plays, to various degrees, cast the audience into roles in the action of the

performance. As American Studies scholars Houston Baker and Dana Nelson have noted, the South often works via “ideological juxtaposition” as a regional scapegoat for the nation at large; allowing monolithic, uncomplicated thinking about the South to stand unexamined preserves “white geographical innocence” in the non-South (234). The nation, in other words, is constructed and unified, in part, by the notion of the South as backwards Other. “To have a nation of ‘good,’ liberal, and innocent white Americans,” Baker and Nelson write, “there must be an outland where ‘we’ know they live: all the guilty, white yahoos who just don’t like people of color” (235). This kind of self-congratulatory nationalism gets to have its cake and eat it too: it can exclude the South ideologically from the borders of the nation even as it enjoys the region’s cultural exports and derives sanctimonious pleasure from the region’s moral and intellectual inferiority. Lest audiences, safely ensconced in their theatre seats, feel too self-assured of their personal detachment from the racism that plays out on the stage before them, the plays insist that audiences understand themselves as not just implicated in the action, but integral to it. Through direct address, the dissemination of “props” through the audience, and straightforward audience participation, the plays forestall (or, at the very least, drastically reduce the opportunity for) smug disengagement with the subject matter. By eschewing the assumed fourth wall between the audience and the performers and instead emphasizing the nature of theatre-- that is, that it is a live art performed in front of and therefore dependent upon a live audience-- the plays force audience members to recognize and reckon with their relationship to the play. (Auction block scenarios, in particular, throw the transactional nature of commercial theatre into stark relief: we did, after all, pay to see this work.) Indeed, this desire to hold up a mirror to the audience and reveal their relationship to the material may be one reason so many contemporary playwrights of color are turning to the South as a setting and set of scenarios in the first place. Playing on the

expectations of the theatre-goer-- particularly given that attendance at theatre performances are highest in the Northeast U.S. and in metropolitan areas,⁴⁸ making the average American theatre-goer more likely to regard the Southern plantation as Other-- the plays seem to invite audiences to encounter the South as the “outland” that exists both within and outside of the nation, only to reveal that the South as it exists in the world of the play is, in fact, a hall of reflective mirrors. The 2018 New York Theatre Workshop production of *Slave Play* goes so far as to make this mirroring literal in its set design: the play unfolds before large mirrored panels that reflect both the audience and a projected image of the plantation where the play is set (Hempstead). These plays, then, propose to perform a double disruption: on the one hand, a disruption of Southern scenarios that calls attention to a cultural repertoire that continues to haunt and impede cross-racial dialogue in the United States; and on the other, a disruption of the expectations of audience members that may compel theatre-goers to regard and assess their own complicity in what they might otherwise assume is a remote event.⁴⁹ Moreover, recent U.S. Southern Studies scholarship frequently eschews the nostalgic plantation as an enervated and irrelevant or spectral symbol of the U.S. South unworthy of further study. In contrast, these plays by contemporary playwrights of color demonstrate the enduring utility of the Southern plantation in creating provocative works of art that historicize, disrupt, and challenge our thinking about race. In what follows, I will trace the disrupted Southern scenarios of two such plays: *An Octoroon* (Branden Jacobs-

48. AMS Planning and Research Corp., *American Participation in Theater*, Seven Locks Press, 1995, pp. 24-5.

49. I use the words “may compel” to acknowledge that while I am interested in how these works use the South and Southern scenarios to challenge and engage with American racial legacies and cultural memory, the political efficacy of individual productions is not the focus of my investigation. For an excellent evaluation of the Company One production of *An Octoroon*, see Carrie J. Preston, “Hissing, Bidding, and Lynching: Participation in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’s *An Octoroon* and the Melodramatics of American Racism,” *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2018, pp. 64-80.

Jenkins, 2014) and *Underground Railroad Game* (Jennifer Kidwell and Scott R. Sheppard, 2016). Both plays have elicited mixed-- though strong-- reactions from critics and audiences since their premieres, in part due to their confrontational and darkly funny tone, which unsettles audiences who cannot find a politically safe place to land within their dramaturgy. Beginning with an extended analysis of each play's disrupted auction block scenarios and concomitant disruption of the contract between audience and performers, I will conclude by turning to the plays' fugitive scenarios, which may offer a qualified alternative to the abjection of racism.

An Octoroon

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's 2014 *An Octoroon*, based on Dion Boucicault's 1859 melodrama *The Octoroon* (itself adapted from Thomas Mayne Reid's 1856 novel *The Quadroon*) takes place on a Louisiana plantation, where the recent death of its owner has-- thanks to the scheming of the villainous overseer-- left the estate finances in shambles. The plantation and its associated property will have to be auctioned off, including the tragic heroine Zoe. Zoe, as an octoroon (a person who is one-eighth black), presents visibly as white, but is deemed black and therefore salable by the law. Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* restages *The Octoroon* as both a kind of revival or reenactment of the original play, often cleaving closely to Boucicault's script, and an adaptation of--that is, a variation on-- historical material. In strategically including wholesale passages from the original play rather than adapting the narrative arc or themes alone, Jacobs-Jenkins effectively forms quotation marks around Boucicault's words, engaging the bygone playwright in a discussion of race and racism in the United States, past and present. (Indeed, Jacobs-Jenkins goes so far as to put fictionalized versions of himself and Boucicault in conversation on stage). For the average audience member, unlikely to be familiar with the original melodrama, it is at times near impossible to discern where Jacobs-Jenkins has intervened

in Boucicault's text; at other moments, Jacobs-Jenkins ruptures the stilted nineteenth-century speech with unmistakably twenty-first-century language. The result is a kind of suspension between times, a soup of past and present that refuses to allow the audience to settle in either context. At the same time, by collapsing the presumed separation between past and present, Jacobs-Jenkins draws our attention to the connection between the two, holding the present accountable for what it has inherited from the past: the everyday of the twenty-first century, he suggests, is only mundane because we have lost our national memory of its violent, dramatic beginnings. Racism has not disappeared or been "solved." Moreover, the difficulty in reviving Boucicault's play in the twenty-first century is not so much that the racist legacy of slavery has been somehow miraculously expunged from our nation and its institutions, but that the play's status as a historical document renders it toothless and distanced. It doesn't, in short, seem to have anything more to say to us about race or national identity that isn't patently obvious on its melodramatic surface. Branden Jacobs-Jenkins solves this dilemma by, rather than reviving the play wholesale, adapting it. Split across authors, times, and sensibilities, Jacobs-Jenkins's adaptation revives and critiques its source text, effectively staging a conversation between the nineteenth century and twenty-first. That is, *An Octoroon* achieves a delicate balance between recreating or reenacting enough of the play's original content, signifying on that content, and reflecting that signification not just on the overt racism of Boucicault's day, but on the present-day audiences witnessing the adaptation. This balance is achieved in part by Jacobs-Jenkins's savvy selection and deployment of the Southern scenarios that are already embedded in his source text. In reenacting these recognizable scenarios with crucial moments of difference-- frequently contemporary difference-- that ironize their original and significantly alter their meaning, Jacobs-Jenkins complicates the audience's relationship to overtly racist material.

Playwright, actor, and theatre-manager Dion Boucicault's 1859 melodrama *The Octoroon*, enormously popular in its own time, enjoyed revivals through post-Civil War Reconstruction and well into the twentieth century. Various writers have pointed to Boucicault's savvy negotiation of "the peculiar institution" at a time of national tension around questions of the abolition or expansion of slavery to account for the play's longevity;⁵⁰ certainly, the play's position on slavery is conveniently ambiguous, allowing it to travel the nation without alienating audiences in the North or South.

The plot revolves around Zoe, a free octoroon woman who lives on her recently deceased white father's Louisiana plantation, Terrebonne, which is threatened by an accumulation of overdue mortgages. The late Judge Peyton's dashing nephew George, newly arrived from Europe and unaware of Zoe's racial (and consequential social and legal) status, falls hopelessly in love with her. Meanwhile, the sunny, simpering Southern belle-next-door, Dora, has set her cap for George and entreats Zoe for help wooing him. In a memorable scene, George confesses his love for Zoe, and Zoe confesses her "dark, fatal mark" (120). George declares he will marry her anyway, and carry her off to a place where they can live freely together. Unluckily for the two lovers, the plantation's villainous former overseer, Jacob M'Closky, has designs on both the plantation and Zoe. Already responsible for the estate's financial trouble, M'Closky conspires to

50. Boucicault biographer Robert Goode Hogan, for example, boasts that "instead of manufacturing mischief, Boucicault treated his subject in the most impartial way. The hottest and loyalest Southerner, viewing the play with an equable eye, could find it in nothing that the most popular of Southern authors or authoresses of the day might not have written. . . . He solved the difficult problem of portraying Southern life upon the stage without offending sensitive Southerners or overheating truculent Northerners." *Dion Boucicault* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 64-5. Actor Joseph Jefferson, who originated the role of Salem Scudder in the play, noted that though "there were various opinions as to which way the play leaned—whether it was Northern or Southern in its sympathy," the play was ultimately "non-committal." *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 162. See also Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 34; Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979), 109; and Myron Matlaw, "Preface to *The Octoroon*," in *Nineteenth-Century American Plays* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1985), 97-99.

obtain and hide the letter from a distant firm that would release George and the plantation from debt. He murders the enslaved boy Paul, who was sent to collect the mail from a passing steamboat, and whose American Indian companion Wahnotee is subsequently blamed for Paul's death. He furthermore exposes a technicality in Zoe's freedom papers, rendering her enslaved and therefore part of the property that will be auctioned off in the liquidation of the estate. Salem Scudder, the family's unrefined but kindhearted current overseer, urges George to marry Dora so that her wealth will save the plantation. George resolves to do it in order to save the people enslaved by his family (including Zoe) from being sold away. M'Closky successfully bids for and purchases Zoe in the auction, but before he can claim his prize, a fateful photograph reveals him to be Paul's killer. M'Closky narrowly escapes a lynch mob by setting a steamer on fire in the play's spectacular climax but is killed by the vengeful Wahnotee. Before M'Closky's death, the would-be vigilantes retrieve the stolen letter and deliver Terrebonne (and, therefore, Zoe) from sale. The news, however, arrives too late, as Zoe has taken poison to avoid enslavement under M'Closky: she dies in George's arms, made, in death, both white and "free," as the play's final line notes (150).⁵¹

51. Previous studies of the play have noted that this racial purification via death is absent from Boucicault's revision of the play for its 1861 London production (a revision which Boucicault initially resisted and only finally made after multiple demands from the British viewing public), in which Zoe revives and is whisked off by George to live happily ever after in a non-Southern locale. Sarah Meer, undermining the portrait of Boucicault as a stalwart anti-slavery playwright, comes to the conclusion that the playwright was reluctant to make the change to the ending not because he believed, as he stated publicly, that it would dilute the anti-slavery message of the narrative, but because he himself felt ambivalent about marrying even a fictional non-white woman to a white man. Other studies have pointed to the revision as evidence that Zoe's death is only inevitable within the context and racial logics of the antebellum United States. Yet this view of the play's circulation and coherence outside of the United States is complicated by Lisa Merrill and Theresa Saxon's recent discovery of promptbooks which suggest that British productions occurred simultaneously in which Zoe did and did not die.

Taking up and twisting the conventions of nineteenth-century minstrelsy and melodrama, Jacobs-Jenkins writes many of the roles-- originally played solely by white actors⁵²-- for actors of color performing in black-, white-, and red-face. Jacobs-Jenkins also trades on the direct address, soliloquies, presentational style, and asides typical of nineteenth-century drama, giving his fictionalized self “BJJ” confessional monologues and lines in which he appears to share with the audience the racial politics behind his writing process, the play’s casting, and the intended effects of the play’s dramaturgy. The conversation is intimate and raw, as BJJ recounts therapy sessions, the way he is pigeon-holed as a “black playwright,” and the double standards that force black actors to accept stereotypical roles. Periodically, BJJ pauses from applying makeup to drink from a bottle of alcohol. From the outset, Jacobs-Jenkins casts the audience into the role of active co-conspirator, privy to the details of his project as well as of his state of mind. Yet as the play progresses and the audience is recast as the crowd at a slave auction (and, as Preston notes of the 2016 Company One Theatre production, as the mob at a lynching), *An Octoroon* belies its own apparent candor and shifts the terms of its relationship with its audience. As these dramaturgical details might suggest, Jacobs-Jenkins’s play veers tonally between sardonicism and earnest sentimentality, leaving the viewer with little clue as to what the appropriate or expected response might be. Jacobs-Jenkins takes up Boucicault’s ambivalent dramaturgy, heightening and extending it beyond the original material in order to create an unstable philosophical ground for audience members. The effect of the adaptation is, in rapid turns, humorous and disturbing, leaving audiences wondering, by the end, whether they should be laughing or horrified.

52. In the original New York production, these white actors included Boucicault himself, in redface as Wahnotee, and his wife Agnes Robertson as Zoe.

Tellingly, before we arrive at the plantation Terrebonne where and around which most of the play's action unfolds, Jacobs-Jenkins opens the play with a prologue set "in an empty, unfortunate-looking theatre" (7). The self-described "'black playwright'" BJJ enters naked but for a pair of underwear, and delivers a monologue about navigating the writing process, rehearsals, and production as a black theatre artist. A vanity and chair appear, and he begins the process of whitening his face and hands with stage makeup; soon, he is joined by a fictionalized (and very drunk) version of Boucicault, "Playwright," played by a white actor, who delivers his own monologue about theatrical innovations and casting while applying redface. Only once BJJ and Playwright have finished their transformations into their *Octoroon* characters, complete with costumes, wigs, and makeup, does Terrebonne materialize. Jacobs-Jenkins notes that the plantation might be "a low-built but extensive planter's dwelling, surrounded with a verandah. Or not. (Perhaps it's just a theatre full of cotton)" (17). In the production at the Shaw Festival, which I attended September 2, 2017, two flat panels lifted from the stage floor to fashion the right and left walls of a smaller, three-walled playing space. A white scrim upstage allowed for actors and set pieces behind to form striking and stylized poses evocative of visual artist Kara Walker's black cut-paper silhouettes, themselves highly referential of nineteenth-century portraiture and the violence of Southern plantation mythology. As the two walls drew upright into place, a mass of cotton bolls fell with a dull thud from the fly space to the stage below. The audience watches, in other words, as a theatre set is constructed onstage before them. The plantation, as the setting of the play, is rendered artificial, flimsy, even chintzy from its first appearance. Other productions have similarly emphasized the plantation's overtly theatrical status as set: Area Stage's 2017 production (FL) took place against a cheesy, painted theatrical backdrop depicting long rows of cotton leading up to a columned mansion. Chautauqua Theatre

Company's 2018 production (NY) built a smaller wooden stage on top of its existing stage and scattered cotton bolls across the playing surface, while fluffy white cotton-boll clouds were suspended above. The Chautauqua production also hung an enormous golden picture frame around a projection screen behind the stage, where images of cotton fields and the plantation interior were projected. Regardless of how a given production realizes *Terrebonne* in the transition to Act One, in beginning the play with a "dressing room" scene, Jacobs-Jenkins purports to take the audience backstage, to offer a glimpse behind the scenes, before the costumes, makeup, and sets are in place. Such a dramatic structure seems to point to the theatricality and artifice of the play and setting that follow, while simultaneously obscuring its own status as theatrical by constructing a sheen of authenticity or truth around the dressing room prologue. Beyond the intimacy and special access implied by a dressing room, the way in which the prologue introduces us to two preparing "actors"-- who are themselves characters whose names map onto those of the actual playwrights of *The Octoroon* and *An Octoroon* respectively-- suggests that the following scenes exist within a heightened frame of theatricality in contrast to the prologue. A deeply theatrical and self-referential play, *An Octoroon* emphasizes the plantation as the quintessential theatrical setting at its heart. If, as Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes, we define theatricality as "a particular mode of using signs or as a particular kind of semiotic process in which particular signs (human beings and objects of their environment) are employed as signs of signs," then the theatrical emphasis on the South as setting emerges and functions both *because of* and *in the service of* the plantation's potency as a coherent sign in the American cultural imaginary (88). We might, indeed, read the theatrical set and makeup as their own meta-scenario, invoking American theatre history writ large and indicating what behaviors and plots might play out within its frame. *An Octoroon* savvily sets up a binary (the prologue is more real

or more authentic, what follows is outdated racist melodrama) only to upend that very binary: Jacobs-Jenkins doggedly undermines each distinction that he has set forth between the dressing room and the subsequent acts. The plantation and its inherent theatrical semiotics, it seems, are not confined to one time or genre, but bleed insistently across categories.

To begin with, the use of minstrelsy-derived makeup would appear to belong undeniably to the world of the nostalgic plantation, which, as Eric Lott argues, was itself “the minstrel show’s most elaborate invention” (193). According to Lott, it was in minstrel stand-bys such as “Dixie” or “Old Folks at Home,” that nostalgia for the sentimentalized, idyllic plantation first began to publicly emerge and circulate in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet Jacobs-Jenkins’s “misapplication” of blackface makeup-- though it seems to prepare us for the starkly racist world of the U.S. Southern past-- calls into question the racial logic of both the contemporary U.S. and the Southern plantation. In an echo of the nineteenth-century practice of demonstrating the application of makeup to assure audiences of the split between actor and performer (here, again, a scenario reasserts itself) we watch the actor playing BJJ apply the makeup in his dressing room, slowly whitening his body. Just as blackface makeup⁵³ now strikes one as strange, unrealistic, obviously untethered to the physical appearance of a black person, the material reality of whiteface makeup is that it renders the appearance of the black actor playing BJJ otherworldly, and frankly, sickly. The inadequacy of whiteface makeup reaches a disturbing climax when, toward the end of the play, BJJ (as M’Closky) is repeatedly stabbed and then dragged offstage with a noose around his neck by Playwright (as Wahnotee). Although the scene

53. These impressions are, of course, over and beyond what is likely the initial reaction, in an American context, to the practice’s minstrel and racist legacies. The recent discovery and publication of photographs of prominent public servants and politicians in blackface (sometimes pictured with friends in KKK costumes or Confederate uniforms) at all-white events in their youth has renewed national debate over blackface’s meaning and history. That some still defend it as relatively harmless simultaneously belies the visual context of many of the photographs and bespeaks a shockingly post-racial and ahistorical attitude.

does not depart in fact from Boucicault's *Octoroon*, in which the two characters fight, run offstage, and then M'Closky's death screams are heard, the adaptation pointedly draws on U.S. Southern lynching imagery. Indeed, moments before, the scene is punctuated by the projection of a lynching photograph on the back wall of the playing space, and by whispered enjoinders from "everyone" to "Lynch him!" (52-53). While the Shaw Festival production interpreted the stage direction "everyone" to include only the members of the cast, in the Company One production, the cast urged the audience to call for the character's lynching, thus positioning them as members of a lynch mob (Preston). Having framed this moment for us within the history of the extra-judicial killing of black men (and, in some productions, having attempted to reframe *us* as participants within that history), Jacobs-Jenkins engineers a stage-image that effectively renders the racial drag invisible, revealing the underlying scenario of the racial terror lynching: what we see is, simply, a white man violently dragging a bleeding black man by a noose. But in the dressing room, the smear of white face paint does not give the actor the appearance of "white" skin so much as it makes him look clownish--that is, the face paint that is the basis of the various racial drag performances in Jacobs-Jenkins's adaptation insistently draws attention to itself, to the failure of its approximation of a visible marker of race. Makeup, is, again, material: as such, it threatens to stain, to rub off, to color what it comes into contact with, whether it was meant to or not. The whiteface makeup that BJJ applies is just as likely to stain his collar or smear onto another actor's hand as it is to cover his face, rendering it an unreliable and stubbornly transferable marker of a physical category whose very premise is its non-transferability. At the same time, Jacobs-Jenkins's use of cross-racial makeup--a layer of soiling, exchangeable goo--takes the anxiety of racial contamination from Boucicault's play to its logical extreme. Where Zoe is "an unclean thing" by virtue of her "one drop" of black blood, the painted actors in *An*

Octoroon are literally unclean, liable to stain anyone they touch with white, red, or black makeup (Boucicault 128).

The result of the attention Jacobs-Jenkins draws to racial drag, via makeup, is an undercutting of “race,” a decided instability where racial legibility is concerned, even when the play seems to suggest stability; certainly, this instability is born of Boucicault’s own ambivalent dramaturgy. In the original play, Zoe’s racially liminal body must be destroyed because it threatens to upset the easily discernible difference between a white body and a black body (or, for that matter, a “red” body) and moreover threatens to reveal the interracial rape that produced it; Jacobs-Jenkins emphasizes the play’s high-stakes investment in a visual racial economy by making the racial roles of his characters optically unmistakable. However, the “drag” element of these roles-- the exposure of the makeup as theatrical or inauthentic—undermines and raises questions about the authenticity of visible markers of race. Jacobs-Jenkins’s cross-cast actors are pointedly both/and, visually split between the racial marker of their own skin and that of the makeup they wear. Under the veneer of red, white, or black paint, racial identities acquire a set of quotation marks; they are ironic, knowingly false. It’s not a tidy irony; it seeps into the skin-color premise of racial difference, calling our attention to the overlap between blackface minstrelsy’s optic logic of racial differentiation and our own methods of reading someone’s race on sight: for instance, a “‘black’ playwright.”

It would be easy to read this reversed performance of historical blackface-- a black actor whitening his face with makeup to play a white character, instead of the other way around--as simply a statement on the constructedness of race, the way race and racial-typing are premised on visibility, or on the way theatre has been complicit in the creation and solidification of racial stereotypes. (And it is these things). But BJJ interrupts his own performance of getting into

whiteface in order to point out that this very performance is necessary because, in previous iterations of this project, “all the white guys quit” and he “couldn’t find any more white guys to play any of the white guy parts” (8). The white actors’ reasons for turning down the roles range from complaints that the play is “too ‘melodramatic’” (ibid.) to the actor not “really get[ting] the stuff about slaves” (9), but Jacobs-Jenkins offers the clearest and most damning reason when BJJ posits that “the minute you ask a white guy to play a racist whose racism isn’t ‘complicated’ by some monologue where he’s like ‘I don’t mean to be a racist! It’s just complicated!’ he doesn’t return your phone calls” (10). Jacobs-Jenkins’s employment of whiteface to cast a black actor in the roles of both the hero George and the villain M’Closky, then, is ghosted by the absent white actors who found the melodrama’s depiction of race too uncomplicated (and therefore personally unseemly) to undertake. The white actors’ hesitation to play straightforward racists suggests precisely the attitude toward race that Jacobs-Jenkins labors to reveal as, itself, complacent and complicit in the ongoing preservation of covert racism. It also suggests that, where race is concerned, there exists still, even in the representation of it, a tinge of contamination: the actors are being asked to play a role, not to enact or take responsibility for racism in their everyday lives. And yet their uneasiness in accepting the role, at least according to Jacobs-Jenkins, seems to arise from a conflation of the two.

By the time we arrive at the seminal auction scene, it has become clear that the black actor playing BJJ is also portraying, in whiteface, both the hero (George) and the villain (M’Closky) of Boucicault’s play. On its surface, this reshuffling of roles may have to do with the lack of resources that often plague theatre projects, or with an underscoring of the lack of willing white actors, or with producing the slapstick humor that ensues when the actor playing both George and M’Closky is forced, in a lengthy bit, to fight himself over the right to bid for Zoe in

the auction scene. Yet dramaturgically, the double-casting is an important moment of scenario disruption for Jacobs-Jenkins. The whiteface makeup, as I've argued above, emphasizes and ironizes the whiteness of the characters. They are not just men, but "white men," signaled as such by white paint on BJJ's face. Collapsing these two characters into one body suggests that they are the two personalities of a Jekyll and Hyde figure; the difference being, where some scholars have argued that the violent Hyde is meant to be the racially black or Other version of white Dr. Jekyll, both of the personalities here are insistently white.⁵⁴ Where, in the tortured racial logic of Boucicault's *Octoroon*, Zoe's body is split between her predominant whiteness and the blackness that renders her a salable object (and ultimately condemns her to death), Jacobs-Jenkins reverses the split, suturing George and M'Closky into one monstrous, whiteface body. In the auction scene in the Shaw Festival production, actor André Sills appears in a costume that seems to uphold the separation of the two characters. On the right side of his body, he wears the refined white suit and blonde wig of George; on the left, the heavy black duster and dark wig and curled half-mustache of M'Closky. Despite the line where black and white meet down the middle of Sills' body, the white makeup over his face is uniform and unifying, disaffirming the sartorial split. The black playwright character BJJ, playing the hero and the villain in whiteface, is torn, in his relation to Zoe, between the benevolently racist lover and the nefarious, would-be rapist villain; no matter which version of whiteness wins out, the result is

54. Katy L. Chiles, in her article "Blackened Irish and Brownfaced Amerindians: Constructions of American Whiteness in Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*," makes the case for M'Closky's blackness as an Irishman. This distinction, which relies heavily on the context of nineteenth century racial ideology and immigration history, recedes in Jacobs-Jenkins's adaptation. *An Octoroon* refocuses the difference between George and M'Closky not on ethnicity, but on class. For more on *Jekyll and Hyde* as a racially divided figure, and, moreover, a "Gothic blackface narrative gone haywire" (55) see Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 48-65.

problematic. In their embodiment by one actor, the two characters are no longer separate, and their positions as hero and villain are no longer quite so distinct. Jacobs-Jenkins takes what ought to be the most clearly opposite set of characters from the Manichean genre of melodrama-- the good hero and the evil villain-- and muddies the rift separating them, suggesting that there is no innocence to be had where race is concerned. It moreover complicates the racial reconciliation narratives that frequently arise in a Southern historical context and seem to capture the progressive white American imagination, wherein a white Southern character learns to see and rebuke the oppression visited upon a black character by a backwards white Southern society. The unification of these character types-- the melodramatic hero and villain, the backwards white Southerner and the redeemed white Southerner-- challenges the understanding of racism that requires a clear villain for its existence and perpetration. There are no clear villains and no clear heroes, Jacobs-Jenkins seems to submit, particularly within the history of the formation of American racial ideology.

The auction scene is, as Jacobs-Jenkins has written it, in all respects a recognizable Southern scenario, replete with the props, setting, and characters that prepare us to apprehend the prescribed behaviors that will follow. A row of chairs facing a table which will serve as an auction block are arranged on the stage. The enslaved character Pete enters in shackles; the auctioneer enters with gavel in hand. One of the auction bidders, a steamboat captain named Ratts, enters "from the audience," immediately expanding the scope of the stage frame to include the audience (42). In fact, Jacobs-Jenkins suggests, while Ratts is the only bidder written into the script, he may be seated or attempt to sit among the audience, or the audience may be forced to bid (*ibid.*). In the Shaw Festival production, Ratts sat in the front row, facing the stage, and delivered his lines from the audience. As the auction scene proceeded, Louisiana bank notes

fluttered out over the audience, drifting into laps and onto the floor. Some audience members reached out or down, collecting a bill or two to tuck into their playbill alongside the auction notice that included a detailed list of fifty enslaved persons for sale as part of the dissolution of the Peyton estate. Only a handful of those listed on the notice actually appear, of course, as characters or in dialogue in the play-- the rest were invented to create a more realistic prop. And the notice *is* a prop, though it is a prop for the audience rather than for any of the performers onstage. The sale notice, though it may have passed before the auction scene as a piece of contextual history, suddenly snaps into focus as a part of the narrative action of the play, as a part of the scenario unfolding before us. Who, the audience member may wonder, would have a sale notice? The legibility of the scenario produces the answer: a potential buyer, a bidder, a member of the crowd at an auction. We've even been provided with prop money to complete a purchase. Although the Shaw Festival did not pause, as the Company One production did, to actively elicit bids from its audience, these props have already effectively cast the audience, unwillingly or no, into the scenario. Regardless of how or whether a given production chooses to take up Jacobs-Jenkins's invitation to engage the audience in the auction scene, the stage direction placing Ratts in the realm of the audience already draws us into the frame of the scenario. Once we have recognized the scenario, and therefore its constituent characters, setting, props, actions, we cannot help seeing its fullness, including the way *An Octoroon* proposes to include the audience as characters.⁵⁵

55. It's worth noting, of course, that the Shaw Festival takes place in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, just north of the border with the United States. One might reasonably assume, therefore, that their audiences are primarily Canadians and Americans (and, on the evening I saw their production of *An Octoroon*, the audience was primarily older and white). While I acknowledge that Canadians might feel a greater impetus to distance themselves from the material as not part of their particular national history, that does not preclude their likely familiarity with the basic scenario of the American slave auction, nor does it exempt them from the play's broader censure of whiteness.

SLAVES AT SALE, WITHOUT RESERVE. BY LAFOUCHE & CO.

J. A. LAFOUCHE, Auctioneer.

TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION

Peyton Estate

THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBED NEGROES:

- 1 PETE 72 years, lame, a house servant and overseer, good character.
- 2 DIDO 32 years, a likely negro, house servant, good temperament - fully guaranteed.
- 3 RENEE 44 years, a very superior washer, ironer, good cook - fully guaranteed.
- 4 RHONDA 19 years and child one year old, house servant - fully guaranteed.
- 5 MINERVA 27 years, a promising house servant, good cleaner - fully guaranteed.
- 6 DI 42 years, a house servant, a good house woman - fully guaranteed.
- 7 PRISCILLA 18 years, a house servant an excellent washer and ironer - fully guaranteed.
- 8 ELLIE 12 years, a house servant, a smart waiting girl - fully guaranteed.
- 9 BO 22 years, an excellent steward, waiter and servant - fully guaranteed.
- 10 MARCUS 33 years, a field hand, exceptionally strong - fully guaranteed.
- 11 LUCRETIA 22 years, labourer and good worker - fully guaranteed.
- 12 DAVID 50 years, a field hand - title only guaranteed.
- 13 GRACE 24 years, with child and has 10 month old baby, a field hand - fully guaranteed.
- 14 SOLON aged 36 years, a field hand - title only guaranteed.
- 15 MARK aged 33 years, a field hand - sold as having run away from the plantation.
- 16 BLACK ALEX 9 years, orphan
- 17 YELLOW ALEX 9 years, orphan
- 18 CECE 16 years, house servant, good cook, fine temper - fully guaranteed.
- 19 DEE 33 years, house servant and nurse, a likely negro - fully guaranteed.
- 20 LUCRETIA 21 years, field hand - fully guaranteed.
- 21 SAMPSON 35 years, field hand, a stout man - fully guaranteed.
- 22 BERNIE 42 years, a field hand - title only guaranteed.
- 23 JOHN 15 years, a griffe, and a smart waiting boy - fully guaranteed.
- 24 PJ 17 years - fully guaranteed.
- 25 OLIVER 11 years - fully guaranteed.
- 26 REBECCA 21 years, a griffe, field servant - fully guaranteed.
- 27 TOMMY 29 years, missing fingers, has stolen property - guaranteed against all diseases.
- 28 ROSIN 13 years, a griffe, good house boy, a fine temper - fully guaranteed.
- 29 JORDAN 40 years, a house servant, a likely negro and a trusty man - title only guaranteed.
- 30 EDWIN 27 years, a field hand, clean and capable, fully guaranteed.
- 31 ELIZA 14 years, a field hand, small but capable - fully guaranteed.
- 32 WILLIAM 11 years, a pickaninny.
- 33 ABRAHAM 35 years, an excellent carpenter - fully guaranteed.
- 34 PHILIP 18 years, a field hand, a first rate overseer, missing one eye - fully guaranteed.
- 35 JOHN 33 years, a superior blacksmith and handy at odd jobs - fully guaranteed.
- 36 JOSEPH 12 years, training as a blacksmith - fully guaranteed.
- 37 ANNE 24 years, with three children all under six years - all are fully guaranteed.
- 38 ADAM 44 years, good rough carpenter, a trusty man - fully guaranteed.
- 39 LILLY 18 years, a field hand.
- 40 DILLARD 31 years, a good sawer and axeman, 4 years in the woodyard - fully guaranteed.
- 41 NED 20 years, a good carpenter and likely negro - title only guaranteed.
- 42 ROBERT 26 years, handy at all kinds of work, understands filing and setting saws.
- 43 CHLOE 16 years, a house servant.
- 44 DAPHNEY aged 39 years, a tolerable good cook and house worker - fully guaranteed.
- 45 ANNE 40 years, a good nurse, skilled in most house duties - fully guaranteed.
- 46 BIG NED 22 years, field hand, strong.
- 47 DICK MORGAN 39 years, a very trusty servant, excellent character - fully guaranteed.
- 48 LITTLE NED 15 years, a field hand, a strong and capable boy - fully guaranteed.
- 49 PAUL 13 years, a quadroon - fully guaranteed.
- 50 LISE 17 years, a good cook, especially talented with pastry - fully guaranteed.

TERMS CASH Act of sale before J. A. LAFOUCHE Notary Public at the expense of the purchaser.

Figure 12: The auction notice included in the program for the 2017 Shaw Festival production of An Octoroon.

In fact, giving the audience the props-- the auction notice, the cash-- to participate in the auction but stopping short of asking audience members to bid may more readily ensure our designation as auction sale attendees. As Preston notes, her reaction to the invitation to bid at the Company One production left her feeling deeply ambivalent and uncomfortable, and ultimately, she chose to remain silent while her fellow theatre-goers dutifully escalated Zoe's price. Prepared by BJJ's speech about the absent white actors' reluctance to acknowledge or portray uncomplicated racism, a white audience member might well consider that to refuse to bid is to knowingly echo the refusal of the white actors, whereas to bid is to insert oneself uneasily into the embodied repertoire of white supremacy, risking-- even symbolically-- its perpetuation. That Preston felt she had a choice to make, a moment of individual reckoning and decision-making that allowed her to, however agonizingly, define her relationship to the auction scene in the first place stands in stark contrast to the Shaw Festival production: provided with the props, but with no opportunity to bid, we find ourselves inescapably hailed by the action of the play, our potential for self-determination foreclosed.

Jacobs-Jenkins's adaptation of Boucicault's auction scene deploys the auction block scenario-- that is, the recognizability of the moment as a set of culturally legible elements-- in order to disrupt a tidy reading of Zoe's sale. Expanding the frame of the scenario and effectively casting the audience into the scene as auction attendees and potential bidders unsettles the scenario from the past, collapsing representational and durational time. Simultaneously, it urges the audience to regard the scenario not from the perspective of disinterested observers, but from the perspective of involved and implicated participants. Moreover, the melding of would-be hero George with dastardly villain M'Closky into one monstrous, whitefaced man bidding against

himself for possession of Zoe suggests that, regardless of the auction's outcome, Zoe is doomed. With no clear hero and no clear villain according to the logic of melodrama, no clearly safe or good fate awaits the play's heroine. Jacobs-Jenkins thus emphasizes the scenario's own underlying premise, the existence and perpetuation of slavery and racism as intertwined entities. And in a system of racially-determined forced labor and racist hierarchy, whiteness-- insofar as race may be deemed a reliable or coherent category--always poses a problem.

Underground Railroad Game

The premise of Jennifer Kidwell and Scott R. Sheppard's 2016 play *Underground Railroad Game* will be familiar to many Americans:⁵⁶ a pair of over-enthusiastic middle school teachers inform the audience, their students, that the fifth-grade class will be reenacting the American Civil War. Prompting them to reach under their chairs for the envelopes which have been taped there, the teachers explain that the color of the toy soldier the audience members find in their envelope-- gray for Confederacy, blue for Union-- will determine each student's loyalty in the ensuing historical simulation. The winning side will be determined through points designated by the outcome of every school assignment, but also through "the Underground Railroad game," designed to teach the students about slavery (and, presumably, white resistance to and complicity in its continued existence). In the game, Union students earn points by safely smuggling black dolls representing enslaved people to cardboard "safehouses" in other classrooms and Confederate students earn points by successfully intercepting these dolls.

56. I myself have a distinct memory of participating in an Underground Railroad simulation at a campground as part of fifth-grade North Carolina social studies curriculum in the late 1990s. Although the program was meant to inculcate empathy and a deeper understanding of the plight of the enslaved, my primary memory is of an experience akin to a trip to a haunted house, alternating between outright fear and titillation as strangers burst through the darkness and screamed at me and my classmates.



Figure 13: During the April 7, 2018 performance of Underground Railroad Game at Woolly Mammoth, I was drafted, by means of the gray soldier under my chair, into the simulated Confederate Army, led by Teacher Stuart.

The students will imaginatively visit an antebellum plantation, learning about the lives of the enslaved. The teachers themselves will be roleplaying generals leading the respective armies, as well as a runaway enslaved woman and a Quaker Underground Railroad conductor. The emphasis of the classroom reenactment and where it locates the emanation of knowledge undoubtedly differs from the Civil War battle reenactments discussed in Chapter One of this project. The students and teachers, in *Underground Railroad Game*, are not undertaking “experiential archaeology” or even-- to use my term-- radical empathy, revealing new, experienced truths about history through a lived and embodied encounter. Although the

Underground Railroad Game privileges experience, it does not locate embodied experience as a source of new knowledge, but merely as a new dimension of understanding pre-existing concepts or ideas. The reenactment here is gamified, flattened into a set of rules spurred by pleasurable competition; it is a very simple demonstration of a complicated and thorny set of interrelated historical systems and forces (slavery, race and racism, sectionalism, war, law, abolitionism, civil disobedience).

The hokey, ingenuous zeal with which the teachers introduce the gamified approach to teaching the history of American slavery, white supremacy, and Civil War suggests that they are perhaps less prepared to sensitively and seriously handle the subject than they believe. This foreshadowing is borne out when the word “n***erlover” is found scrawled across one of the cardboard safehouses, prompting the teachers to scramble to address the situation with their students adequately. While black teacher Caroline attempts to address the student body as a whole, urging community accountability and empathy, white teacher Stuart becomes increasingly manic in his show of racial solidarity. Separating the students by race, he cluelessly repeats the slur to emphasize how hurtful it is, demands that white students think about the “horror” of being “a minority,” and ultimately proposes to Caroline with his great-grandmother’s ring, “because I want to live in a world where you can wear my great-grandmother’s ring” (21-22). Caroline’s discomfort with Stuart’s performance is palpable. She has attempted to address the student body without singling out students by race in order to lead and model a frank but reparative discussion about the history and meaning of a racial slur. Stuart, meanwhile, has essentialized, condensed, and frozen “minority” experience to one negative affect (“horror”), accused white students as a group, and has turned what should be a moment of intimacy and mutual love into a politicized and ostentatious display of his own anti-racism.

Simulations, role-playing games⁵⁷, and living history exercises, which first began to gain popularity in the U.S. classroom in the 1990s, have been touted as “student-centered learning,”⁵⁸ encouraging students to be “engaged and interacting with the material,”⁵⁹ and teaching them “that their actions can be significant in making things happen.”⁶⁰ They have also, and especially recently, made national headlines for placing undue representational burdens on students of color, simplifying complicated experiences of oppression, and traumatizing children with simulations of racial violence.⁶¹ Teaching Tolerance, the educational branch of the Southern Poverty Law Center, recommends that teachers avoid role-playing in teaching slavery, and warn in particular against separating students by race or treating them “as modern-day proxies for enslaved people or owners of enslaved people” (Israel). That the Underground Railroad Game should come to a disturbing climax around the reification and return of historical racism, then, seems inevitable. Yet the students do not seem to be the only ones struggling with the risks of the

57. The lobby display at the Woolly Mammoth for *Underground Railroad Game* included the opportunity to play many of the tabletop board games and computer games that are marketed as educational materials for classroom use. These included *Freedom: The Underground Railroad* (Academy Games), *The Underground Railroad Game* (Pressman; Black Heritage Series), and *Mission US: Flight to Freedom* (Corporation for Public Broadcasting).

58. Worthington, Tracy A. "Letting Students Control their Own Learning: Using Games, Role-Plays, and Simulations in Middle School U.S. History Classrooms." *Social Studies*, vol. 109, no. 2, 2018, p. 136.

59. Tollafeld, K.A. "Living History: Using Drama in the Social Studies Classroom." Dowdy J.K., Kaplan S. (eds) *Teaching Drama in the Classroom*. SensePublishers, 2011, p. 175.

60. Cardall, Ian. "Simulation and History: What Actually Happens in the Classroom?" *Teaching History*, no. 43, 1985, p. 14.

61. Most notably, children have been made to stand on a simulated auction block for sale, have been bound or yelled at to simulate the conditions of captivity and slavery, and have been sorted in the classroom according to their race. See, for example, Branigin, Anne, "California High School Sparks Criticism for Using Slave-Ship Role-Play to Teach Students History." *The Root*, 18 Sept. 2017; Mazza, Ed. "5th-Grader 'Sold' in Mock-Auction at New Jersey School," *Huffington Post*, 22 Mar. 2017; Martin, Jeff, "‘You Are My Slave’: School’s Civil War Day Sparks Mom’s Ire," *Associated Press*, 13 Oct. 2017. This, of course, is not to mention the use of simulation to train teachers themselves, as in, for instance, a simulated encounter with an active shooter. In one such simulation in Indiana, elementary school teachers were brought into a classroom and made to kneel on the ground, where they were shot with pellets. The Indiana State Teachers’ Association stated that “The teachers were terrified, but were told not to tell anyone what happened...Teachers waiting outside that heard the screaming were brought into the room four at a time and the shooting process was repeated” (qtd. in Zraick).

Game: teachers Stuart and Caroline extend their historical role-playing into elaborate and flirtatious private games that veer into overt sex and BDSM, walking the tightrope between sexual fantasy and racist fantasy until the distinction collapses altogether. As themselves, the teachers seem to enjoy baiting each other into fraught conversations flecked with racist jokes: Caroline appreciates that Stuart doesn't treat her as a fragile racial object in need of protection or special care around issues of race. Yet their sexual play manifests outlandish racist caricatures and fantasies, such as when Stuart's Man suckles at the bared breast of Caroline's Mammy-esque Woman while she sings the spiritual "Motherless Child" and he is ultimately consumed by her enormous petticoats. The distinction, too, between the teachers' private role-play and the classroom role-play blurs, as the scenes bleed into and erupt from each other.

This blurring of role-play situations comes to a head after Stuart proposes marriage to Caroline in an attempt to demonstrate his anti-racism: the two enact a frenzy of joy and anger, ripping down the Confederate flag displayed in the school auditorium, jumping over a janitor's broom, wrestling each other and screaming their safeword, "Sojourner." "The line between violence and sex," the stage directions read, "no longer exists" (22). In the following scene, titled "sex detention," Caroline orders Stuart, now in his underwear, to stand on a box. Beating him with a ruler, she assesses his body, finally demanding that he strip naked. Once he has reluctantly complied, Caroline forces Stuart to read the slur on the vandalized safehouse. She makes him read the slur over and over, repeating it in various accents, volumes, and cadences until, unprompted, he begins to yell it and beat himself with the ruler, moved to an unholy sexual climax. The two silently and awkwardly get dressed again. Though the moment is unmarked in the performance, in the script, their next lines are as the writer-performers "Scott" and "Jenn," not as the characters Stuart and Caroline:

SCOTT: Is that what we wanted?

JENN: I'm not sure (27).

The role-play, it would appear, has escaped the control of not only the characters in the play, but of the writers themselves. The teachers' sexual fantasies throughout the play, tied as they are to the roles and setting of the antebellum Southern plantation, dramatize precisely the controversy at the heart of simulated history in the classroom: are they using reenactment to confront, work through, and understand the complicated intersections of power, race, gender, and desire, or are they merely "reveling in the past" (19)?⁶² Is it possible to distinguish between the pleasure of living history and the lessons it might yield? Premised as simulated history is on the embodied experience and emotions of the individual, can these kinds of classroom exercises ever satisfactorily address or redress individual conclusions or interpretations of the material that run counter to the exercise's purpose?

Central to the "sex detention" scene are recurring disruptions of the auction block scenario, specifically the power imbalance forms the framework of the scenario. In a reversal of the expected roles, a black woman takes up the position of the auctioneer or enslaver, while a white man is made to display his body on the auction block as an enslaved person. Already the power dynamics appear to have shifted: the black female auctioneer exerts physical control over the white enslaved man on the block, disciplining him for not adhering to her commands quickly enough by striking his body. Naked and appraised as though for purchase or sexual gratification, the white man is reduced to an object, incapable of subjecthood, let alone agency. He performs for her, obeying her demands to dance, to strip, to recite the racial slur in a French accent, backwards, as a dog. Yet just as it appears that the new power dynamic has solidified, yet

62. This question-- are reenactment practices deployed in the service of empathy, understanding, and the productive nuancing of the past, or in the service of the individual's nostalgic pleasure?-- is central to this project. See Chapter One in particular for a fuller exploration of this question.

another shift occurs, almost as if the word itself has altered the balance. The racial slur, of course, is powerful in and of itself, as a discursively violent means of demarcating the relative value of humans based on their race and on their treatment of the racial Other. As the racial slur sounds again and again through the performance space, the white man appears to draw power and sexual arousal from it. The black woman is no longer in control of the word or its expression, no longer in control of the disciplinary weapon, and is left to observe in silence as the white man achieves sexual gratification using precisely the tools that she had once used to hold him in check. His sexual gratification, indeed, calls to mind the BDSM relationships that take the form of a female dominatrix dominating a male submissive or “slave.” Part of the sexual allure of this arrangement is an apparent reversal of normative gendered power dynamics: “the whole world,” as one professional dominatrix puts it, “is upside down” (qtd in Pinsky, Levey 439). Instead of being the most powerful person, the man revels in relinquishing control to someone typically in a position of relatively diminished power. As some sociologists have noted, these seemingly subversive encounters may ultimately reinforce and repeat existing dynamics of gender, power, and desire, as they center the male clients’ sexual demands and cast women as emotional laborers (Pinsky, Levey; Lindemann). This objection, however, may risk reifying the very structure these scholars take issue with: a focus on what the male client “gets” out of a BDSM relationship or encounter as opposed to what the dominatrix gets or perceives. For example, Mistress Velvet, a black dominatrix with a Master’s degree in interdisciplinary studies, describes her work in BDSM as a form of individual reparations; in addition to the money she receives from her white male clients, she often assigns them reading in black feminist theory as part of her domination sessions (Gore). “It’s a very exaggerated power dynamic,” she notes, “but its roots I think for me, emotionally, are coming from a need of being tired of navigating

oppression, and wanting to feel some sort of power that's in my hands, even if it's just for one hour” (qtd. in Gore). For Mistress Velvet, being a black dominatrix is a form of radical self-care, a way of-- momentarily-- reversing the power dynamic that characterizes her everyday life.

Caroline and Stuart’s BDSM disruption of the auction scenario, then, bears an unsettled and unsettling relationship to the auction scenario’s typical power dynamics. In one reading, the two, bogged down by the historical and contemporary traumatic intersections of slavery, racism, and sexism, fail to fully disrupt the scenario they set out to subvert. In another, Caroline’s temporary control over both the racial slur and Stuart’s body asserts an important if transitory inversion of the normative racial and gendered allocation of power.

The ruler and the school auditorium where this scene takes place (amid the schoolhouse detritus of flags, brooms, and dolls) invokes both the imbalance of power between teacher and student, and its eroticization via “school-teacher” fantasies. The savvy audience-member might recall, in this moment, that *we* are, in the framework of the play, the students. Consistent direct address (in some cases going so far as to call out individual audience members for misbehaving, answering questions correctly, or playing on the school basketball team) has thus far clearly positioned us as students, guided through an educational encounter with history. Bulletin boards posted on the back walls of the theatre, the intermittent interruption of school bells, and the toy soldiers taped under our seats extend the world of the play beyond the stage, creating an immersive setting for the audience. This immersion was particularly potent the evening I saw the production at Woolly Mammoth, as a real fire alarm for the theatre sounded halfway through, leaving audience members sincerely confused as to whether the siren was part of the show or not. Reluctantly but dutifully filing across the street to wait for the all-clear to return to our seats, many theatre-goers continued to wonder aloud whether this might be a middle school fire drill.

Whereas the previous reenactment scenes were underscored melodramatically with music and took place upstage, framed by ramshackle clapboard in an approximation of a plantation structure, this scene takes place downstage, more clearly in the middle school auditorium space. The distinction, it seems, between historical role-play for the purposes of education and contemporary role-play for the purposes of sexual titillation have eroded. Thus the mixed dramaturgical messaging of the “sex detention” scene leaves us stranded as participants in the framework of the play: are we watching another history simulation? Are we being taught another lesson? Ultimately, all roles in the play are unstable. Just as Caroline becomes Woman becomes Jenn and Stuart becomes Man becomes Scott, our role as the Hanover Middle School student body floats in and out of focus. The instability of these personas echoes and emphasizes the inherent instability and inadequacy of the often pat or flattened roles that classroom history simulations like the Underground Railroad Game assign to students.

Having attempted to disrupt and revise a Southern scenario, the play’s established conventions crumble under the weight of history and the difficulty of change: this disintegration feels just as much an assertion of the inexorable and enduring traces of the nation’s racist past in the nation’s present as it does an indictment of the use of classroom role-playing exercises to teach sensitive material. Indeed, as the following scene concludes the play with a series of reaffirmations of the previously established conventions, it seems to suggest the limits of living history as a tool for thoroughly and deeply confronting the legacies of slavery. But moreover, it suggests, in its structure, a deep skepticism about claims or narratives of racial progress. The two writer-performers, briefly-- in the script-- “Scott” and “Jenn,” return to their original characters of teachers Stuart and Caroline, addressing the student body with characteristic cheer. Greeting the audience as “Hanover Middle School” and “soldiers,” the teachers ask us to cheer for our

respective sides to identify ourselves as Rebels and Yankees before instructing us to shake hands with an opponent (28). Thus the framework of the play, temporarily disrupted, falls back into place, reaffirmed: we are once again hailed as the students, and the actors before us take on the roles of our teachers. They are ready to disclose the results of the competition: have the students “reaffirm[ed] or rewrit[ten] history” (4)? Caroline and Stuart announce in triumphant unison that “history has been reaffirmed” (28). Although ostensibly the preferred outcome-- the Union’s simulated victory precipitates, after all, the reunification of a fractured nation, the abolition of slavery, and the *de jure* enfranchisement of African Americans-- the announcement falls flat. Ringing backwards across the shocking scene we’ve just witnessed, the statement strikes one as an apt description of the auction block scenario. That is, it is not the progressive thrust of history which has been reaffirmed, but the historically embedded scenarios which replicate and transfer embodied repertoires and structures of meaning across time. History has indeed been reaffirmed, in the worst way.

The final scene returns us to the simulated past for what would be--in a straightforwardly progressive historical narrative-- a touching and earnest gesture to a better future. Caroline and Stuart use dolls as puppets, emphasizing the “not-me/not-not-me” aspect of living history role-play (Schechner). The teachers are not the dolls, not the roles the dolls represent, and yet we watch them manipulate the dolls and give them voice. Perhaps the central failing of simulated history is its failing to account for this inextricable overlap of present and past, the matrix of individual contemporary experience and historical context. (Though this failed or disruptive doubling of past and present via the live body is, of course, where performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider locates the affective efficacy of Civil War battle reenactment).⁶³ Perhaps it is,

63. For more on Schneider and Civil War battle reenactment, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

as the dolls also suggest, its proximity to acts of play and pleasure. The dolls, representing the runaway enslaved woman and Quaker Underground Railroad conductor, bid each other goodbye. The woman will head north to freedom; the man will treasure the memory of his role in her escape.

MAN: Now, this is not the end of your journey, but you are free from your past.
WOMAN: Somehow, I don't feel any different (29).

The white man, earnest but misguided in his fervor to help, fails to understand the weight of the racist past and presumes to declare the woman "free" of it. The black woman's response challenges this linear and progressivist notion of history. History, it would seem, remains in the body, *felt*, and not so easily changed, solved, or dismissed.

Conclusion: Fugitive Scenarios

In Harriet Jacobs's well-known 1861 autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the formerly enslaved Jacobs describes how her grandmother, Aunt Marthy, disrupts her own auction block scenario, reconfiguring it into a scenario of flight or escape to freedom. Although Aunt Marthy's recently dead enslaver has reportedly freed Aunt Marthy in her will, the dead woman's relative Dr. Flint conspires to continue to enslave Aunt Marthy anyway, and furthermore to sell her as part of the dissolution of the estate. When Flint informs Aunt Marthy that she will be sold privately to spare her feelings, Aunt Marthy insists on being sold publicly on the auction block, as a performative rebuke of Flint's betrayal. At the outset of the auction, Aunt Marthy "[springs] upon the auction block" and quietly displays herself for sale, prompting cries of "shame! shame!" from the white audience of community members, who admire Aunt Marthy and are aware of Flint's fraud (16). One old woman bids fifty dollars; the other auction attendees refuse to bid, allowing the woman to purchase Aunt Marthy at a low price and, subsequently,

free her. It is through her performance of the auction block scenario that Aunt Marthy is able to secure the means of her freedom, relying on the incoherence of her appearance (technically freed, therefore no longer an object for sale) within the scenario's organizing frame. In so doing, Aunt Marthy deploys one Southern scenario in order to enact another: the scenario of fugitivity, or fleeing from the bonds of slavery. And yet, the fugitivity of Aunt Marthy's disrupted auction block scenario is necessarily limited, as evidenced by the crowd's cry of "Don't stand there! That is no place for *you*" (ibid., emphasis in the original). That is, as the emphasized "*you*" suggests, Aunt Marthy specifically may no longer play a legible role on the auction block in the scenario, but other black bodies certainly do and will continue to. Indeed, Jacobs elaborates that Aunt Marthy, not content with her own freedom, will spend the rest of her life attempting to re-enter and reenact the scenario in the role of bidder, to purchase the freedom of her children. But, Jacobs writes, "not one of her children escaped the auction block" (13). Only two of Aunt Marthy's children would eventually taste freedom-- her son Benjamin, who flees to the North, never to see her again, and her son Phillip, whom she is eventually able to purchase. Harriet Jacobs's own long-standing abuse and eventual fugitivity (hidden, for years, in the attic of Aunt Marthy's house) is the subject of the bulk of *Incidents*.

Aunt Marthy's fugitive scenario, born of her disruption of the auction block scenario, results, therefore, in a complicated and limited freedom-- a gesture toward black agency and joy, albeit one constrained by the continued existence of racist oppression. *Underground Railroad Game* and *An Octoroon*-- while, as I have suggested above, they disrupt the auction block scenario in order to emphasize the continuing legacies of racism and slavery in the contemporary U.S., dislocating and expanding the South-- also offer qualified moments of agency, freedom, and joy via the fugitive scenario.

Underground Railroad Game includes three scenes between Man and Woman, the Quaker abolitionist and the black woman he is helping to escape from slavery on the underground railroad. Occurring precisely at the beginning, middle, and end of the play (literally, the first, fourth, and eighth scenes of eight), the three scenes seem to suggest a straight-forward Aristotelian narrative that belies the unsettling Stuart/Caroline scenes that interweave the Man/Woman scenes. Man and Woman's dialogue, which at times could have been lifted straight from any white-savior fantasy of a slave's escape to freedom, balances between corniness and sincerity:

MAN: A Quaker is a kind of Christian. One that believes that there is that of God in every person, regardless of what color they've been painted. That's why most Quakers are abolitionists.

WOMAN: 'Abohlishunuss?'

MAN: Why, yes. An abolitionist is someone who fights the injustice that is slavery.

WOMAN: Oh. I guess I always thought of y'all as "angels" (2).

The exchange, here, is anti-racist on its face (Man professes the injustice of slavery and the equality of all people, regardless of race), yet Woman's characterization as a wide-eyed and grateful innocent, childlike in her ignorance, sorts white Man and black Woman into a normative racist and gendered power dynamic. The strained earnestness of these scenes, in the frame of the play as a whole, reflects their status as educational reenactments, meant to instruct middle school students about slavery, race, and morality. At the same time, they represent the more tender and sentimental moments in the play, suggesting the truth in Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's paraphrasal of abolitionist Theodore Parker: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (Smith). The three scenes enact a fugitive scenario, with its attendant sense of righteousness and hope, but dramaturgically-- framed by the complicated failures of educational reenactment, and suffused with irony-- they are undermined, qualified.

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins likewise opens and closes the post-prologue portion of his play with figures who suggest an alternative--albeit a complicated one-- to black abjection. Jacobs-Jenkins locates the force of our sympathies in the show-stealing enslaved women Dido and Minnie. Dido and Minnie, in Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, are mere after-thoughts to the play's action and borrowed figures from minstrelsy who serve to give Boucicault's play "local color." Their main function is to act as silent, obedient black foils to Zoe, devoid of thought and feeling where Zoe's relative whiteness provides her with them in abundance. Their names-- Dido and Minnie-- were likely given for humorous effect, Dido being the ancient queen of Carthage and therefore an ironic name for a slave, and Minnie, in its similarity to "mini," suggesting diminutiveness, weakness. Jacobs-Jenkins expands Minnie's name (she explains that it's short for Minerva, 44), reframing both Dido and Minnie's names as powerful and venerable-- a queen and the Roman goddess of wisdom. In *An Octoroon*, the two women gain new interior life, code-switching, in their scenes together, from the minstrelsy-inflected plantation speech they use when white folks are around to the contemporary vernacular of two girlfriends. Noting that he doesn't "know what a real slave sounded like. And neither do you," Jacobs-Jenkins gives Dido and Minnie expletive-laced zingers that, in their humor, darkly outline the realities of everyday life as an enslaved person (17). Pointedly, Jacobs-Jenkins patterns the speech of these nineteenth-century figures after the contemporary speech of twenty-first-century black American women. The experience of the enslaved women plays out in two time periods, stranding them temporally. The women's contemporary references and vernacular (Minnie's friend dumped her boyfriend because she "couldn't deal with the long distance," Dido, sold to the steamboat captain, complains that "moving just always be stressin' me out," neither of them had sexual intercourse with the recently deceased Judge Peyton because "he only like lightskinned-ed girls" (17, 18, 57)

puts the conditions of enslavement in terms contemporary audiences can understand; it is the conditions themselves that, even in understandable terms, defy comprehension.

Dido and Minnie's speeches are, moreover, invented: Jacobs-Jenkins makes a point of refusing to attempt a slave dialect (informed, as those attempts historically have been, by blackface minstrelsy). The contemporary vernacular that characterizes Dido and Minnie's dialogue emphasizes that these scenes--scenes in which the women share with each other about their lives, their dreams, their anxieties, their miseries--are a twenty-first century addition. That is, the racial logic organizing the original Boucicault play cannot even conceive of black women as humans with interior lives, unless they are, in fact, white. Jacobs-Jenkins use of modern speech marks the absence of black women's voices in the archive as well as in the American melodrama canon: fictional though they may be, Dido and Minnie stand in for the black enslaved women whose voices fell through the cracks of the nation's documented history for centuries, tracing them into the present day.

Once the dissolution of the Peyton estate and the subsequent sale are announced, Dido and Minnie plot together to-- like Jacobs's Aunt Marthy-- engineer their own fugitive scenario via the auction block scenario. They decide that they want to be bought together, and more specifically they want to be bought by the steamboat captain Ratts, who they imagine will offer them a better and more exciting life. The two women dress up for the auction block, and once on it, they pose and mug, "somehow manag[ing] to seduce Ratts into buying them" (44). Dido and Minnie joyfully celebrate, happy to have exercised a limited amount of agency to determine their own fates. Yet, as the play closes, the precarity and limits of their fugitive scenario cohere.

Crying, Dido seeks comfort from Minnie:

DIDO: I just don't know what I'm supposed to be doing better.

MINNIE: What?

DIDO: To be happy. I don't like feeling the way I do. This life-- I didn't ask for it.
MINNIE: Didn't nobody ask for they lives, girl.
DIDO: I know. I just don't know what I'm supposed to do with that (58).

Although they've successfully disrupted the auction block scenario by choosing their new enslaver and choosing to stay together, Dido and Minnie's fugitive scenario is ultimately thwarted. They are still enslaved, still subject to the wills of others and illegible as feeling, thinking humans by virtue of their race. Moreover, as the women obliquely mention as the play closes, a "letter that was supposed to save the plantation" exists (ibid.) Although the women do not explain the significance of the letter, the savvy viewer will reach the conclusion: the letter saves the plantation but also reverses the outcomes of the auction, returning Dido and Minnie to the same place and status they had at the start of the play.

These complicated moments of agency, tenderness, and joy offered by the fugitive scenarios in *Underground Railroad* and *An Octoroon* leave the question of how the viewer is to receive or react to such moments up in the air. This uneasiness appears to be by design, yielding audiences that react drastically differently to the same moments. The incongruity of modern language with the decidedly antiquated system of slavery, for example, is what produces much of the comedy in Dido and Minnie's scenes, yet, laughing, the audience cannot help but reflect on the horror that underlies the women's exchanges: lack of control over one's own movement and living conditions, over one's own romantic relationships, over one's own sexuality and body are daily realities for Dido and Minnie. Though their dialogue on the subject does not betray the despair and anguish that characterizes Zoe's relatively overwrought speeches, they are subject to violence, rape, and unpaid labor, without legal remedy (in fact, it is the law that empowers their white owners to subject them to these injustices). Their children, likewise, are objects to be sold or traded into conditions the women cannot determine. Indeed, the contemporary vernacular

lends Dido and Minnie's remarks a sense of the mundane, the routine, which makes their content all the more horrific. As their scenes go on, the laughter they draw becomes more and more confused: are we meant to laugh? Who, in the audience is laughing, and who is not? Similarly, Stuart and Caroline of *Underground Railroad Game* exchange dark, edgy barbs about their interracial relationship, jokes whose premise is mocking outrageous stereotypes by exaggerating them. Because it is clear that the characters are not bothered by each others' jokes, the play seems to give the audience permission to laugh at racist stereotypes (and, on the evening I saw the play, they did). Yet the status of the laughter is in question, particularly as the play progresses and the characters clearly lose control over the very stereotypes they deploy in their role-plays.

Reviews of the several productions of *An Octoroon* and *Underground Railroad Game* often note the uncomfortable split between laughter and offense it elicits from its audiences. "There were times," writes critic Debbie Minter Jackson of the 2016 Woolly Mammoth production of *An Octoroon*, "when I shifted uncomfortably watching *An Octoroon* unfold in front of me, listening to the raucous laughter while wondering if we were all seeing the same production, like, really?" The same critic also reviewed the 2017 Woolly Mammoth production of *Underground Railroad Game*, noting that the play "got strong visceral reactions" from the audience but "I could never figure out-- why go there?" William Powell wrote, of the same production, that the play left audiences "squirming and shallow-breathed," that it is the kind of play that elicits such a range of reactions that it "makes you ask complete strangers in the lobby afterward, 'What did you think?'" Rachael Johnson remarks, of the 2016 *An Octoroon* at Woolly, that "it was hard to sit through the historical but decidedly perverse moments that some in the audience found funny." Joe McGovern queries, of the 2015 Theatre for a New Audience remounting of the original Soho Rep production of *An Octoroon*, "We can laugh, right?"

Similarly, Ben Brantley is prompted by the original 2016 Ars Nova production of *Underground Railroad Game* to ask: “We’ve turned stale and nasty old stereotypes into something to joke about, right? Well, no.” Jacobs-Jenkins himself has stated explicitly that the audience split between the decision to laugh or gasp is key to his theatre-making:

The successful audience is laughing at the same time and gasping at the same time. Well, a democratic audience [versus an audience reacting to a play together, in a state of consensus] is actually kind of weird. Sometimes people are laughing and sometimes they aren’t. That feels real to me. I love that. I love it when an audience can howl together, but I’m excited by people who titter or cackle at the wrong time. I love people who walk out! And how everyone looks at the person who walks out (“Feel That Thought”).

The discomfort in the reviews derives from a sense that, perhaps, laughter is not the appropriate reaction to the trauma and racism that underlies the humorous moments of these plays (or, more broadly, the trauma and racism that are the premise of the plays in their entirety). Laughter is not merely a tactic for lightening an otherwise heavy subject matter; it constitutes both the form and the matter of the plays’ critiques. In an interview printed in the program for the 2017 Woolly Mammoth production of *Underground Railroad Game*, Kidwell explains that the play itself emerged from humorous improvisation she and Sheppard were doing, inspired by the failure of a white park ranger historian to adequately address slavery and racism in a talk they attended together at the National Portrait Gallery in Philadelphia:

It is amazing to me that I would walk out of a talk about the Underground Railroad thinking more about the white guy who was talking about it. . . . We started playing around with the hilarity of this man and that’s how we jumped to ‘Oh let’s be teachers. Let’s teach about this’ (7).

Both plays invite our laughter *and* our discomfort at that laughter (not to mention the person who gives up and walks out). Laughing at Minnie’s or Dido’s quips or at two teachers cheerily presenting black dolls as an educational exercise and feeling, suddenly, unseemly, noticed, uneasy places the affected audience member at the center of each play. What do we hope to take

away, to “get out of” the theatre? In eliciting divergent reactions from audience members, or even from the same audience member, these plays invite theatregoers to dwell in the temporally circular, the complicated, the unsolvable. The outcome of their disrupted scenarios thus land dangerously, unsteadily, and this is precisely the point. Taking up the Southern scenarios of the fugitive slave and the auction block, *An Octoroon* and *Underground Railroad Game* demonstrate that while the theatre cannot untie the knot of race and racism in the U.S., but it may begin to suggest the outlines of its shape and bulk.

Conclusion

I opened this dissertation with the example of Tony Kushner's musical *Caroline, or Change*, in which Kushner characterizes his change-averse protagonist Caroline Thibodeaux as a Benjaminian Angel of History, catapulting backwards toward a future she cannot see because her eyes are fixed on the chaos of the past. The United States, in 2019, I posited, is in a similar moment of reckoning, as debates over cultural memory and the legacies of racist violence, segregation, and slavery roil the national waters, frequently focusing on the U.S. Southern past. These debates, I have argued, while they primarily center around inanimate markers of the past such as flags and monuments, are just as crucially-- if not more so-- embedded and at stake in live and embodied practices. While the contemporaneity of the subject prevents me from issuing any decisively conclusive remarks on how the nation will continue to grapple with the memorialization of its past, I want to briefly return to the physical memorial site in order to gesture toward the kinds of new models that are emerging from the current discourse, and which reflect a decided engagement with embodiment. To this end, I traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, on June 27th, 2019, to visit the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

The Legacy Museum and National Memorial opened in April of 2018, and have quickly become a popular draw, welcoming over 100,000 visitors in its first three months (Harper). A direct response to the conversation around whether to maintain Confederate monuments, the meaning of Confederate symbols, and how to contextualize U.S. history, the museum and memorial frankly trace the legacy of slavery through convict leasing, to racial terror lynchings, to Jim Crow segregation, to the generational poverty and mass incarceration of people of color. The

memorial was conceived of as a response to the sinisterly secretive nature of lynchings: a way to create a lasting and physical record of violent deaths that passed without repercussion or official acknowledgement. (EJI, at the museum, houses the most comprehensive archive and database of lynching records in the United States). The museum, in fact, is located on the site of a former warehouse where enslaved people were kept prior to being sold, just steps away, at one of the most active slavery markets in the United States (“The Legacy Museum”). Montgomery, the current capital of Alabama, was the first capital of the Confederacy, in large part due to its integral position in the domestic slave trade. Montgomery was the location of Rosa Parks’s act of civil disobedience, which led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1965, civil rights activists organized a march of thousands from Selma to Montgomery to press the governor to protect the voting rights of black citizens. The museum’s full title-- “The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration” lays out this premise, and the museum itself is designed to move the visitor chronologically through its argument about slavery’s legacy. Indeed, both the museum and the memorial depend upon the present, embodied visitor to make their point, deploying the visitor’s body to stage encounters with the past. Yet, at the same time, the museum and memorial pointedly avoid living history or the live and embodied representation of their subjects, exercising tight control over the visitor’s experience and all but eliminating the opportunity for problematic improvisation.

“You are standing on a site where enslaved people were warehoused,” read the large, boldface, white letters painted on the exposed brick of the entrance hall to the museum. From here, the visitor follows a narrow passageway into a darkened hall, where the brick walls recess into barred cells. Each cell is fitted with a projector above that, once one is standing directly in the cell’s doorway, reveals a ghostly, holographic figure. Each of the figures, who represent

enslaved people about to be auctioned, shares a short personal narrative drawn from firsthand accounts of the domestic slave trade. The hall empties into the main exhibit room of the museum, where the back wall draws the visitor through a chronological series of boldface legacies of slavery: “KIDNAPPED,” “TERRORIZED,” “SEGREGATED,” “INCARCERATED.” The exhibit room follows and expands upon these headings, incorporating interactive maps, videos, photos, and art installations to illustrate each in turn. In a moving echo of the auction cells that opened the museum space, the main exhibit closes with reproduction prison visitors’ booths. The booths are cramped and institutional, plastered with rules about what visitors can wear and how they can interact with their incarcerated loved ones. As the museum patron sits, a life-sized video turns on: a formerly incarcerated person, dressed in a prison uniform and as if through glass, approaches, sits, and picks up a telephone, prompting the patron to pick up the black plastic telephone in the booth. The person in the video begins to share a story about their experience with incarceration, their voice confined to the telephone speaker. These site-specific, individual, and interactive moments in the museum insist on and address the visitor as a present witness to the atrocities it documents. They stage a scene, but moreover interpellate the visitor into that scene as the sole live actor. Not quite reenactment, these moments still rely on the impact of embodied knowledge-- the acts of peering through rusted bars, lifting a prison telephone to one’s ear-- to portray the past.

The memorial is some fifteen minutes’ walk from the museum, surrounded by signage for the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. The main memorial is a sleek, gray slab, open-air structure embedded in a six-acre park, surrounded by sculpture, wide green lawns, trees, and bordered by smooth concrete walls. A sidewalk leads the visitor past the outer walls, where panels explain the connection between enslavement, lynchings, segregation, and police violence,

up towards the main structure. Inside, the visitor is confronted by hundreds of six-foot-tall boxes made of weathered steel, suspended by a rod from the ceiling. Each box is engraved with the name of a county and state, followed by a list of names (or, in some cases, the words “unknown male” or “unknown female”) of people killed there in racial terror lynchings. The boxes, roughly the dimensions of a coffin, stand at ground-level in rows: without a clear path through, the visitor must navigate around them. The counties are in no discernible order, and if the visitor is in search of a particular county, they must stop and scan each one. Yet once through the main structure, a sidewalk leads visitors into the “monument park,” where duplicates of each of the steel boxes are laid out--now plainly coffin-like--in alphabetical order by state and county. In an attempt to respond to ongoing conversations about monuments and memorialization, EJI has invited all of the counties represented to claim their corresponding column and erect it locally. (Applications to claim these monuments will open in 2019, but had not been opened at the time of my visit). The careful alphabetization here-- in contrast to the columns within the memorial structure-- is deliberate. As counties claim their columns and gaps appear in the long rows of the monument park, it will be easy for visitors to locate their county alphabetically and see whether their column is still in Montgomery. The monument park itself will become an evolving marker of the U.S. conversation around memorialization, history, and racism. While the gaps will testify to the attempts of local communities to reckon with and memorialize racial violence, the columns that remain will beg the question: why hasn't this place claimed their history yet? And at the same time, the claimed columns will disperse throughout the nation, “chang[ing] the landscape of America,” as a posted sign at the park notes, “to more honestly reflect our history.”

Meanwhile, as the visitor continues through the main memorial structure, the floor begins to gradually and almost imperceptibly slope downwards, while the boxes remain suspended from

the same height. Over time, I found myself-- like the other visitors around me-- craning my neck, tipping my head back to view the boxes overhead. The design of the memorial, here, demands that the visitor reenact the historical act of looking up at a lynched body: although the object in view is non-mimetic, the embodied performance is the same, recalling the photographs that circulated after lynchings, in which white people posed beneath their victim. As in the museum, the memorial uses the live body of the visitor to stage a scene from the past, calling on the visitor to act the part of the present witness to history. Yet and still: bodies matter. My performance, as a white woman, is a reenactment distinct from the upwards gazes of black visitors, several of whom-- as was the case on the day that I visited-- may be looking for the names of family or friends.

Indeed, it is precisely this distinction that forms the basis of what criticism has arisen around the memorial. Journalist William C. Anderson, upon reflecting on his own visit to the memorial, was troubled by the number of white visitors he observed snapping photographs of the steel boxes overhead. "I walked faster than I had to in order to outpace any white people around me who might distract me from my grief, which prevented me from taking my time with the monument," Anderson writes. "When I came upon a white man taking photos of the columns, I couldn't help but think, *They're still taking photos.*" The reenactments prompted by the memorial are slippery, open to interpretation: Anderson has no way of knowing why the white man he observed was taking pictures, yet the act reverberated for Anderson as a reenactment of the white people who committed lynchings, and took photographs as souvenirs of their actions. The memorial takes pains to maintain a sense of decorum and gravity; I suspect, in order to avoid such moments of discomfort. Signs posted around the park list prohibited behaviors (although photography is not among them) and remind visitors that "this memorial is a sacred place" and to

“please be respectful.” The museum, which visitors are encouraged to visit before the memorial, empties next to a green-screen photo booth where patrons can take pictures of themselves posing virtually in front of the memorial boxes; the booth then emails patrons a digitally copy of the pictures to download for free. The booth seems to exist to redirect or circumvent visitors’ impulse to commemorate their visit by posing at the actual memorial for photographs, which might risk disrupting or discomfiting others. The booth gives visitors a chance to indulge the impulse privately, and at a physical remove from the memorial. Yet, as Anderson notes, such efforts do not entirely forestall photography at the memorial, and I myself observed black and white visitors taking pictures of and with the steel boxes.

Ultimately, the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice are not a pat or untroubled solution to the question of how the nation should remember its past, or, for that matter, how the U.S. South should. But the museum and memorial, in their insistence on the primacy and potency of embodied knowledge, of live encounter with the past, of the lived reverberations of the past across contemporary bodies, take seriously the role of performance in historiography and memorialization. I have argued, in this dissertation, that performance and, more specifically, reenactment participate in the maintenance of cultural memory and myth around the U.S. South. My purpose, in part, was to emphasize that the debate over the region’s place in the nation and the nation’s history are not and cannot be limited to the inanimate symbols that thus far have dominated the discourse. The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice gesture toward a model for memorialization that engages with and deploys embodied encounters with the past as a central element, in concert with built environments and educational displays.

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