

Crafting emotional comfort: interpreting the painful past at living history museums in the new economy

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Abstract

This essay offers ethnographic accounts of two living history museums, Historic Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Conner Prairie, in Fishers, Indiana. While Snelling's programming worked to erase the history of slavery at the site, Conner Prairie foregrounded the trauma of slavery in a special after-hours event wherein customers paid to role-play for 90 minutes as fugitive slaves on Indiana's underground railroad in 1836. As different as the sites were with regards to how they dealt with slavery, both shared a common goal of 'keeping the customer satisfied'. The author argues that in practice, this service economy directive translated into a preoccupation with keeping the customer *comfortable*, and that this preoccupation with comfort ultimately shaped the delivery of interpretation at both sites.

Key words: living history, reenactment, slavery, emotional comfort, new economy

Introduction

In 1963, architectural critic for the *New York Times*, Ada Huxtable (1963: 17) admonished Colonial Williamsburg for its 'tidy, if over sanitary and frequently suspect kind of stage-set charm'-a charm that was achieved through selective preservation and restoration of the colonial capital, and by the removal of any buildings which did not fit into the living museum's idyllic vision of the colonial past. But living museums have not only been critiqued for their visual tidiness.¹ In 1978, historian Thomas Schlereth (1978) critiqued living museums for being 'lodged in the 'consensus' historiography of the 1950s', where they functioned as 'historical shrines' that encouraged 'a worship' of the nation's myths, symbols and heroes. Though Huxtable found fault in the living museums' aesthetic visions, and Schlereth found fault in their political implications-their critiques share a concern about how representations of the past can encourage historic erasure.

Critiques such as that of Schlereth are typical of the new social history practitioners who emerged in the post-civil rights era and who urged museums to serve, not as shrines to a mythic past, but as places where critical dialogues about history might be staged. In response to these critiques, and to these historiographical trends, many living history museums took up the call to incorporate the goals of the new social history into their programming, and to more extensively portray the histories of those not represented in previous living historical visions.

Anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable, in *The New History in an Old Museum* (1997) evaluated Colonial Williamsburg in this light, appraising how the museum had—and had not—responded to the new social history; in their final estimation, these two felt that Williamsburg's adoption of the precepts of social history had been stymied by the corporation's reluctance to address its 'own internal conflicts and differences' particularly with regards to its desire not only to 'manage the past' but also to manage 'perceptions of itself' (Handler and Gable 1997: 235).

Others, such as Kate F. Stover, have been more optimistic. In her 1989 assessment of living museums for the *Journal of American Culture*, Stover praised both Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation—a living village that interprets English colonial life in the year 1627—for producing complicated visions of the past, particularly noting the former's burgeoning African

American Interpretation Program (now defunct) (Stover 1989: 13-17). Likewise, Stacy Roth, author of one of the more recent interpretational guides for living historians, *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First Person Interpretation* (1998) positively appraised the fact that living museums have been increasingly willing to interpret conflict and controversy since the 1980s. Her handbook notes how '[many living museums] now recreate community discord, domestic arguments, and political confrontations, ... slavery, bigotry, religious dissent, bastardy, and other issues traditionally avoided for their potential to offend. Certainly,' writes Roth, 'the freedom to discuss just about any subject with a visitor is one of the greatest pedagogical advances of the past decade' (1998: 161).² Handler and Gable's study has shown, however, that just because interpreters may have the 'freedom' to interpret 'just about any subject' does not mean that interpreters do.

The reasons why interpreters do not necessarily exercise this freedom are complex. Offering insight into that complexity is Eric Gable's essay 'Maintaining Boundaries, or 'Mainstreaming' Black History in a White Museum' (1996). In this essay, Gable analyzes the ways in which Williamsburg guides dealt with the topic of miscegenation at the site, arguing that a majority of white guides at the site avoided the topic because of entrenched racial anxieties (Gable 1998: 178). As a result, Gable contends, 'even as [Colonial Williamsburg] includes the black experience in its narrative of national identity'-contentious issues such as miscegenation remain at the margins of history at the site.

However, an interpreter's own racial anxieties form only one piece of the puzzle. While also using skills of acting and educating, living history interpreters are also interactive service workers—that is, workers whose job requirements demand that they relate directly with customers and clients either through face time—as with restaurant servers, or through voice time—as with telemarketers.³ Thus, just as restaurant servers, retail clerks and flight attendants are trained to keep the customer satisfied, so are living history interpreters trained to provide quality customer service to visitors, and to keep those customers satisfied. But unlike other interactive service workers, the service exchange at living history museums also shapes how historical meaning is produced.

To probe this concern about how the service economy shapes the production of historical meaning, this essay offers a comparative ethnography of two Midwestern living history museums in the United States: Historic Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota and Conner Prairie Living History Museum in Fishers, Indiana—just a few miles north of Indianapolis. At the time of my research (1997-2006) these sites took divergent approaches to the performance, representation and labor of interpreting slavery to the public and to the management of their workers' and visitors' emotions with regards to its representation. While Snelling's programming worked to erase the history of slavery at the site, Conner Prairie foregrounded the trauma of slavery in a special after-hours event called "Follow the North Star" wherein customers paid to role-play for 90 minutes in the year 1836 as fugitive slaves on Indiana's underground railroad. As different as the sites were with regards to how they interpreted the history of slavery, both shared a common goal of keeping the customer satisfied. This paper argues that, in practice, this service economy directive translated into a preoccupation with keeping the customer/interpreter relationship *emotionally comfortable*, and that this preoccupation with emotional comfort profoundly shaped the delivery of interpretation at both sites.

It might seem a strange move to suggest that emotional comfort ties together the historical presentations delivered at these two sites. After all, one site (Snelling) tended to erase its associations with the history of slavery, while the other (Conner Prairie) specifically used its regional associations with the Underground Railroad to draw in customers. Nonetheless, the two sites are both firmly rooted in the New Economy and rely on interpretive workers to provide their service of living history. According to the United States' Bureau of Labor Statistics, those who labour at museums and historic sites work in the 'leisure and hospitality industry,'—a subsection of the New Economy that provides customers with total sensory experiences and entertainment.⁴

Like other workers working in the leisure and hospitality industry living history interpreters are expected to perform what Arlie Hochschild (1983) first identified as 'emotional labour'—a job requirement demanding that workers constantly monitor and manage their own emotional states as a way to affect the emotions of visitors. The case-studies that I present in this essay

will tease out how interpreters and museum goers sought and crafted *emotional comfort* as participants in the New Economy. Thus, my concern here is not with the historical accuracy of their portrayals, but rather with how their shared preoccupation with emotional comfort shaped the production of history at both sites.

Research design

My Conner Prairie research is drawn from two ethnographic research trips I conducted in 2004 and 2005. It was during the 2005 research trip that I participated in two Follow the North Star excursions and spoke with managers and interpreters about the programme over the course of several days.

My Historic Fort Snelling research comprises of archival research, interviews and participant observation. My participant observation at this site was rather extensive; I worked as a historic interpreter at Historic Fort Snelling for seven tourist seasons, beginning in 1999, and again from 2001-2006. Initially, I sought employment at Historic Fort Snelling because I needed summer employment between my first and second years of graduate study at the University of Minnesota. In the years following, I returned to work as an interpreter, but was forthright with management and my co-workers that I was writing on the work of living historians and that I was using the Fort as my main site for research. As such, my own sense of comfort and discomfort as an interpreter, as well as my closeness to the comfort and discomfort of my co-workers provided me with an intimate and embodied experience of how these emotions were experienced at the site.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted in-depth interviews (one-three hours in length) with 23 employees at Historic Fort Snelling, sixteen males, and seven females, roughly representing the ratio of male to female interpreters at this site over the years—a ratio which is anomalous to this living history museum. Of the 23 interviewees (who are given pseudonyms here), all but five had at least a bachelor's degree, at least five had either a master's degree or a doctorate, and all but one racially identified as "white"—one identified as Asian. The interviews were conducted between 2001-2003, and as such, programming, management, work conditions (etc.) about which the informants spoke, referred to their experiences at or before that time.

The greater part of my participant observation notes also draw from those three years. This is important to keep in mind because the Fort described in this article is undergoing constant change, and the content of the interviews, as well as my own experiences at the site, should be contextualized in terms of their location in time and space. For example, during my final season at the Fort, in 2006, there was a complete turnover in the incumbent Fort management, three new on-site supervisory positions, and plans about how to address previously un-interpreted aspects of the Fort's history—including the US Dakota War of 1862, and the War's attendant Dakota concentration camp, located just beneath the Fort's walls. By 2007, these new managers and supervisors shook things up by making it an interpretive priority for interpret staff to interpret the history of the enslaved at the site, including reconstructing the presumed living quarters of Dred Scott—the enslaved man who unsuccessfully sued for his freedom on the basis of having been in free territory while at Fort Snelling.⁵ Had such programmatic and managerial overhauls occurred earlier in my fieldwork, the results and content of this study would no doubt, be much altered.

Because I recognize that museum programming is always in a state of flux, I refer to the programmes that are the focus of this study in the past tense, and offer my analyses as case-studies that will yield broader implications for those interested in the practice of public history interpretation.

Follow the North Star: Conner Prairie

When I visited Conner Prairie in 2005 in order to participate in their 'Follow the North Star' Program, an advertisement for the role-playing excursion painted the following setting for would-be customers: 'It's dark. You're outside. A gun is fired and a menacing voice yells "Get on your knees! Keep your eyes down!" Where do you go? Who do you trust?' In order to

participate in this experience, visitors—who were primarily ‘white’—paid \$16 per person to play-act as black runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad in rural Indiana, circa 1836.⁶ As remains the case as of 2008, the excursion took place in the spring and fall, and was one of many special programmes offered by the living museum. A sampling of other events in 2005 included ‘Weekend on the Farm’, where visitors experienced a facsimile of 1886 farm life, ‘Headless Horseman’ created for Halloween enthusiasts, and ‘Apples, Apples, Apples’ an apple-centred event for ‘Prairie Tykes’ and their parents.⁷ As with these events, ‘Follow the North Star’ had a target market. One piece of promotional literature for the programme suggested that it was ‘perfect for groups and schools...seeking unique and powerful diversity training experiences’ though anyone seeking a visceral way to learn about the under-ground railroad was also solicited. Even so, would-be participants were cautioned in bold, cap-faced print that the event is ‘**NOT FOR EVERYONE**’ a caution warranted both because the event was physically demanding—it was conducted outside in the dark and asked participants to walk, run, lift objects and kneel—and because of its strong ‘emotional impact’.

That would-be participants were so warned illustrates the museum’s concern for their visitors’ physical and emotional comfort, in the hope that only those willing to ‘leave the comfort of the world [they] know’ would take part. Even so, the willing participants were not thrown into the absolute throngs of discomfort. While promotional literature for the event asserted, for example, that ‘Every moment is filled with uncertainty,’ the literature actually described in progressive detail what participants would encounter: ‘a slave sale and a wide range of people, including a belligerent transplanted Southerner, a reluctantly helpful farm wife, a slave hunter motivated by financial rewards, a Quaker family and a free black family’.⁸

During one of the two Follow the North Star excursions I participated in, a tour guide explained to our group: ‘The people you’ll encounter are Conner Prairie employees. They are playing their roles in this drama same as you are playing yours and they will not actually hurt you’. In addition to making customers aware of what characters they would meet during our 90 minute role-play as runaway slaves, and reassuring us that those characters were merely Conner Prairie employees who will not harm us, prior to the excursion Conner Prairie staff provided us with white sashes, and instructed us that any time we felt too uncomfortable during the role-playing, we could tie the sash onto our bodies—a signal to staff that the customer has had enough and wished to be treated as though invisible. As the guide who led us to our first role-playing encounter reminded us:

If the experience becomes too intense we have given you a little escape hatch; we have given you some white strips to tie around your head if you can’t stand it any more, in the mean time, slip them very carefully in your pocket or in your sleeve or something so they’re not visible, because you don’t want to confuse the people.

Customers had just cause for feeling uncomfortable. We participants in the ‘Follow the North Star’ excursion were organized into groups of roughly a dozen each, and were repeatedly addressed in pejorative ways and instructed to follow commands. For example, our inaugural encounter with first person (that is, a role-playing) interpretation was during the slave auction segment of the excursion. Here, a Conner Prairie interpreter yelled at those of us who were role-playing as the enslaved: ‘Bucks step forward, breeders step back. Keep your eyes down. Don’t you look at a white man. Don’t you talk unless I talk to you’. The second encounter with interpreters involved ‘forcing’ participants to pick up pieces of wood and senselessly move them from one place to another. In an effort to further illustrate how the enslaved were dehumanized, interpreters singled out one participant who was compelled to yell at her fellow ‘slaves’—‘Mooooove the wood’—with the emphasis on the ‘moo’. During my second round of participating on an excursion, interpreters singled *me* out, and I awkwardly complied with their commands. As uncomfortable as such encounters were (I was perhaps embarrassed more than anything), it is important to remember that we were warned of the nature of these experiences beforehand, around the time that we were given the sashes of invisibility. Any of us could have easily waved our sashes and found comfort and release from the emotional dis-ease we may have been experiencing. While a couple of participants did wave their sashes during the excursions of which I was a part, for the rest of us the sashes lent comfort because they held *promise* of escape

from the role-play.

At the close of the 90 minutes, our group met a free black family who sent us on our way to 'follow the north star' at which time we encountered a 'prophet' whose job it was to point at each person in the group, informing us of our ultimate fate as 'fugitives': one would be discovered by a slave catcher and sold back into slavery, another would drown in a river, one would make it safely to Canada, and so on. Finally after learning our collective fates, we were ushered into a debriefing room with cookies, lemonade and a Conner Prairie staff person who led a guided discussion about the experience, which began by asking visitors to think of a single word that would sum up how they felt about the experience. Some of the words shared during my observations were: 'frightened' 'anxious' 'reality' 'depersonalizing' 'scary' 'eye-opening' 'intriguing' 'wow' 'awesome' and 'fun'.

That the descriptive words visitors chose to share in their debriefing session ranged from 'frightened' to 'fun' points to the ambivalent effects of the programme: while the promotional literature suggested that 'this glimpse into our shared past' was aimed at making visitors uncomfortable for the purposes of teaching about a 'painful part of America's history', equal efforts were made to ensure the visitor be as emotionally comfortable as possible in the given context. In many ways, the service encounter was not unlike the elaborate sadomasochistic rituals described by scholars such as Anne McClintock (1995) and Laura Hinton (1999). As with sadomasochism, the event was largely scripted, we visitors took on a role that we understood was designed to make us experience some kind of pain, we entered into the theatrical display understanding what is expected of us in our role, and in terms of the role-play, we were only pushed as far as we would concede. The sash, again, could be employed as a prop to signify that things had gone too far in this service exchange between visitors who paid \$16 each for the experience of being disciplined and subordinated as slaves by Conner Prairie staff.

Adopting the rules of sadomasochism, thus allowed the service provider (the museum and its employees) to craft an emotionally comfortable service exchange, even in the wake of a rather uncomfortable topic: enslavement. But why would a visitor seek out such an experience? Psychologist Roy F. Baumeister defines masochism as 'essentially an attempt to escape from self, in the sense of achieving a loss of high-level self awareness. More precisely, awareness of self as a symbolic, schematic, choosing entity is removed and replaced with a low-level awareness of self as a physical body and locus of immediate sensations, or with a new identity with transformed symbolic meaning'. Baumeister further notes that masochism 'can serve as an effective deterrent to unwanted thoughts and feelings, perhaps especially feelings of guilt, anxiety, or insecurity' (Baumeister 2003: 28). As Western culture has become increasingly individualistic, he argues, it is possible that more 'selves' are led to seek out masochistic experiences in order to escape the 'burdensome pressure of selfhood'. It would appear that living museums that deal with the more painful parts of history have become arenas wherein individuals might enter into a sadomasochistic contract, as a way to escape their own selves.

To be sure, Conner Prairie promised that the experience would allow visitors to escape their normal lives; one of the programme's primary aims was 'to jolt and affect you in ways that reading a book or watching a movie about this painful part of America's history cannot'. But the event was also marketed as providing a 'unique and powerful diversity training experience' for participants. As such, the event's intense emotionality *vis-à-vis* the past, may be read as a vehicle to deliver a racial catharsis in the present. This certainly was the case for my tour guide, who, just prior our beginning the excursion told us that he felt the experience was important

Because I know that I have a lot of attitudes, and beliefs and feelings, some good and some bad, that I've inherited from my parents or grandparents and passed on to my kids, that was based on life experiences, and if I go back 2 or 3 or 4 generations in my family I know that they were a part of this somehow and they were affected by that and a lot of these attitudes and feelings and beliefs that have been passed on to me came from that experience and every now and then I have some. Maybe it will help you understand people...

Although we have to read a bit between the lines, it seems the guide was trying to suggest

that some of the 'attitudes and beliefs and feelings' that he inherited were racist and that he felt Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star' programme, could help him and others like him combat their own racism. Along these same lines, in the debriefing sessions with visitors that concluded the role-playing excursion, the employee who led the session made reference to a white man who had shared with Conner Prairie staff that his participation was motivated by a wish to confront his own racism. This same idea—that 'Follow the North Star' was an important programme because it allowed visitors to confront their anxieties about race—was echoed many times in conversations I had with Conner Prairie staff. Thus, the living history excursion—somewhat ironically—was both a masochistic vehicle for escaping the self, and a way by which one could address racial anxieties contained within the self. Emotional comfort was produced twice over here, because one could take comfort both in escaping the self through role-play, and in improving the 'authentic' self by somehow identifying with the Other.

The living history museum is not the only arena where this ironic comfort has been produced. In her study, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (1997), Saidiya V. Hartman analyzes the literary strategies of nineteenth-century abolitionist John Rankin, a Presbyterian minister and an early conductor for the actual Underground Railroad circuit in Ripley, Ohio. Drawing on traditions of sentimentalism (i.e. working to evoke heightened emotional states in readers) in his writing, Rankin's goal was to plead the case against slavery not only by employing vivid imagery of violence against slaves—including rapes and mutilations—but by encouraging readers to identify and empathize with the bodies of the enslaved through Rankin's own fantasies of himself as the enslaved; in one account, for example, Rankin describes his tortured emotional state while enduring [fantastical] whippings 'at the pleasure of a morose and capricious master' (quoted in Hartman 1997:18).⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* similarly relies on tropes of masochistic sentimentalism in order to argue the abolitionist cause. Marianne Noble argues in her book, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* that, in the tradition of other sentimental authors Stowe made her case against slavery through efforts of producing 'in the reader's body a sensation of sympathetic pain as a grounding for an intuitive understanding of the slave's 'real presence' as a living, breathing, feeling human being' (Noble 2000: 134). But the vicarious experience of this pain in sentimental literature, as much as it could foster sympathetic attachment to the enslaved could also encourage a narcissistic pleasure. Through empathic identification, Rankin pitied the enslaved, to be sure, but oddly, he did so by focusing on, and so pitying, himself. In so doing, anti-slavery masochistic sentimentalism was at once painful and narcissistically comforting—or, to borrow words from participants in the 'Follow the North Star' programme—it could be 'scary' and 'fun'.

As with abolitionist masochistic sentimentalism of the nineteenth century, through their 'Follow the North Star' program, Conner Prairie Living History Museum aimed to 'jolt and affect' people and to thereby drum up support for a cause. A sign of their times, Conner Prairie's cause was to train individuals in diversity by inviting customers to embody the enslaved, to feel their pain. As such, the emotional labour that interpreters had to perform was not the expected cheerfulness that is so often associated with the service economy. Indeed, during my first excursion, the interpretive guide who led our group to the slave auction, modelled appropriate feeling states for us: he was reflective and serious in his facial expressions, and in the words he chose to describe the event. After he expressed his hope that the programme would 'help you understand people,' some of the teenagers in the group showed their discomfort with the event by nervously giggling. He responded to this by admonishing them: 'Quiet back there, there's nothing fun or funny about being a slave: you're going to get out of this what you put into it, if you take this seriously. This is a living history museum, and out of all the living history museums in all the world, we're ranked in the top five. And the historical accuracy and content of our program is what gets that for us and this program is number one in the country for this type of a program and I really applaud your school for getting you into this because this is a really hard program to get into because there is a whole lot more demand than there is supply and we have people waiting for years to get into this... follow m.'

Emotional comfort does not always come packaged in a managed cheerfulness. In the above exchange, the guide initially chastised the giggling teenagers for displaying an emotion (giggling as a sign of amusement) that was incompatible with the setting. His initial words

informed them (and all of us in the group) that there was 'nothing fun or funny about being a slave'. But the guide quickly moved from suggesting that the appropriate feeling states should be displayed as a *moral* imperative, to suggesting that they should also be displayed as a way to get the most out of the purchase. In referring to the supply and demand of the excursion, the interpreter explicitly reminded visitors of the commoditized nature of the service and encouraged them to value their purchase so they could get what they paid for. Unlike tangible goods, the 'Follow the North Star' product required an investment of the emotional self in which visitors were only 'going to get out of this what [they] put into it'. Because the teenagers likely giggled because they were anxious about entering into this curious role-play (rather than because they were amused), their anxiety could be assuaged if they remembered that this excursion was something that was being managed in a familiar way; it was merely a service encounter. By reminding visitors that this was a highly valued service that they had paid for (and that others also wanted) the interpreter offered emotional comfort by empowering visitors to take ownership of their purchase. If they took ownership of their roles, their investment would be all the more valuable.

Historic Fort Snelling

Located at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, Historic Fort Snelling is one of several dozen historical sites managed by the Minnesota History Society. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the frontier fort was subject to a massive restoration and reconstruction project that aimed to re-create the Fort in its 1827 likeness. The focus on this year emphasized a unique time in American history when settlement was not allowed in the Northwest Territory, when the Territory was considered by whites to be a 'Great American Desert,' unfit for agriculture, but whose western mountain borders were full with animals with valuable furs. In the 1820s, the military was sent to the Northwest Territory to ensure—through treaty, trade and intimidation—that the tribes spent their time trapping and supplying furs to the fur trade. 1827 also marks the year before Andrew Jackson's policies began exacerbating already existing tensions between the United States government and Native Peoples. But the space of the Fort can also be remembered as a the site where Dred and Harriet Scott resided as enslaved persons in the 1830s (a residence that provided for their argument that they were free in their failed suit *Scott vs. Sanford*); it can be remembered as a prison/concentration camp that held eastern bands of Dakota Indians after the U.S./ Dakota War of 1862, where perhaps hundreds of Dakota died while held in captivity there¹⁰; it can be remembered as the site where 300,000 men were inducted into military service for World War II. By strategically focusing its interpretive programming on the year 1827, the Fort was most readily remembered as a prairie-land pastoral where mention of the Fort's black enslaved population was tacitly avoided.

Researchers Barbara and John Luecke, for their book, *Snelling, Minnesota's First First Family* (1993), compiled a list of 'Servants of Colonel Josiah Snelling, 1820-1827' which they derived largely from journals and the 'Accounts of Army Paymasters, 1819-1828'. From these documents the Lueckes found evidence that thirteen individuals worked for the Snelling's from 1820-1827. Of these thirteen, four worked for the Snelling family in 1827. Two of these workers were Swiss immigrants who had fled from the failed Red River Selkirk settlement in Rupert's Land (Canada) (1993: Appendix L, 261). The final two known servants in the household joined the workforce in the Snelling household in May of 1827, when Colonel Snelling paid Mr Bostwick of St. Louis, Missouri \$400 for a 'Negro woman (Mary) and her child Louisa'.¹¹ In the pay records Mary is described as having 'black complexion and eyes, wooly hair, 5'4, Slave'.

The Snellings, then, had no other servants in 1827, nor were they likely to have employed any additional domestics at this time. Not only was \$400 a hefty sum to pay for Mary and Louisa, the army only allotted its colonels extra money for the clothing and food rations of *two* servants each month; Colonel Snelling thus only received a total of \$10 extra each month, past his monthly \$75 wage.¹² Thus, although slave labour likely accounted for at least half of the workforce in the Snelling household, since the restoration of the Commanding Officer's House in the early 1980s, Mary and Louisa had been rendered *invisible* in the Colonel's household. This invisibility was encouraged by a number of factors.

The first and most obvious is that the Fort did not actively seek out interpreters to portray

these roles, or, for that matter, other possible roles for African American interpreters, such as fur traders, or free black domestic workers. In the collective memory of interpreters who have been at the site since the 1980s, only two African American interpreters have worked at the Fort (both of them women); meanwhile, hundreds of white interpreters have worked at the site since the 1970s and early 80s. During my seven years working at the site, I only worked with one African American interpreter, Kim, during my first year at the site in 1999.¹³ Kim had worked at the site during a previous season, but in 1999 she only worked for a couple of months, during which time she either portrayed the roles of Mary or of a free black domestic. Other than those times when Kim was scheduled to work, there was no 'visible' sign that blacks, much less enslaved persons, were at the army post in the 1820s.

And Kim's body was very literally the *only* 'sign'. Although the too steep interior staircase [sometimes] had a sign on it so as to explain to visitors that it was unlikely that such an interior stair existed in the original home, no sign hung downstairs in the house to make visible the presence of enslaved persons, not even in the quarters where Mary and Louisa actually slept—which staff was instructed to euphemistically refer to as 'servants quarters'.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the whiteness of the interpreters who worked in the house symbolically erased the documented black labour, so that if interpreters did not mention to visitors that the house relied largely on enslaved labour, few would have suspected it. One visitor in the summer of 2005, for example, left the kitchen area without learning who actually would have resided in the servants' quarters. In a conversation with me she said, 'We walked into the kitchen and someone else, a woman, a visitor, was there talking to one of the cooks, who was sewing, and the woman asked the cook about the room next to the kitchen, she asked her: "So what's this room", and the cook answered, "That's the servants' quarter", And they started talking about something else. I peeked in, and there was a pantry, and a bed, and the cook was right there, so I assumed that must be where she slept—that she was the servant—so I walked on'.¹⁵

That is not to say that the topic of slavery was entirely absent from the programming; its inclusion was left to the discretion of the interpreters working at the site. While in this case the interpreter present did not broach the subject of slavery, by failing to explain that the 'servants' were bonded labourers, many interpreters would discuss slavery with visitors once they ascertained that the visitors would be *comfortable* in such a discussion. Indeed, in interviews I conducted with Fort staff, none said they would deliberately avoid the subject of slavery, but in most cases how they chose to take up the subject, as one worker explained, 'depends on who it is'. By and large, workers I interviewed noted that they tended to adjust their interpretations of slavery based on what I will call 'comfort cues' that they picked up from visitors.

Maggie, a Fort interpreter, explained that she decided how to broach the topic of slavery at the Fort depending on 'the look on people's faces if nothing else'. When portraying a domestic working in the kitchen of the commanding officer's house, visitors often asked her if she slept in the room next to the kitchen—the 'servants' quarters'. She said that she often responds to that question by saying, 'no I don't live there, that's [for] the servants that Colonel and Mrs. purchased in St. Louis when they lived back there'. Then she would wait to see if the visitors understood the implications of what she had said. If they understood her meaning, they will have understood that the euphemism 'servants' actually referred to enslaved persons – which might lead to further discussion. Maggie said she *would* go into the history of slavery at the Fort in the 1820s or to break out of her 1820s character to talk about the Fort's role in the Dred Scott decision in the 1840s. But she was careful to note that this service was based on her gauging of the visitor's comfort cues: 'Again, it's body language and sometimes the kinds of questions they ask, or the quizzical look on their faces or whatever makes me think, hmm, this is someone who wants to know more [about slavery] and I should tell them more and get out of character and do that. I never hesitate to do that'.

While Maggie noted that she tried to gauge the interest and comfort of visitors with regards to slavery in order to determine how she ought to address the subject, she also noted that she learned this strategy by 'Watching other people and developing [her] own style after awhile' suggesting a lapse on the part of management in terms of training workers to engage with visitors on such matters. Commenting on the training received in this regard, another Historic Fort Snelling worker, Gavin said: 'Well, there isn't much time from management and higher ups to study these things [like slavery or race] because they've got their own agendas

and priorities, but they try to say, don't make a big deal out of it and try to make it palatable to the visitors and, it's all in the training materials somewhere. But I've never felt uncomfortable about it'. Gavin claimed that he himself did not feel uncomfortable broaching such subjects with visitors, but he did conform to management's directive to make 'it palatable to visitors':

Although I won't make a big deal about it if I have, you know, like African American kids, I'm not going to go on and on about slavery, I'm going to talk about the things that were going on, what people were doing and building out here, and I may talk about the more happy role models, I might talk about George Bonga or Dred Scott's wife. But we don't really have the resources and the training to really jump into race relations at all. We would just make people uncomfortable so it's better to just mention, yes this really happened, and this is what we know about it, what do you think about it, do you think it's a good idea, and then we just try to move on to something else.

Here, in Gavin's estimation, race took the place of a comfort cue so that in the presence of African American children, he would adjust his focus to dwell on 'the more happy role models' in the spirit of not making anyone feel uncomfortable—probably, I would venture, even Gavin himself, whose own comfort level might have been breached at the thought of talking about slavery with African American children. At the same time, Gavin's decision to talk about 'the more happy role models' conforms to the directives in the only substantive 'Guide' available to interpreters about African American History at the Fort. The 'Guide' was compiled in 1997, by Max L. Grivno, then a senior at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and who, that year, served as an academic intern for the Minnesota Historical Society.¹⁶ His research and internship culminated in a thirty-one paged document entitled, *African-Americans at Fort Snelling, 1820-1840: An Interpretive Guide* (1997).¹⁷ It is important to note that the Guide is no longer representative of Grivno's views which have, inevitably, been revised and refined in the years since he was an intern in the late 1990s (Grivno, personal communication). Moreover, I want to draw a clear distinction between the *Guide* and Grivno's views as a researcher who works on the subject of slavery and emancipation (and whose recent work on slavery has received the highest honours awarded by the Southern Historical Association). My real concern is to draw attention to the Fort's erasures rather than to take issue with the unrevised work of an intern in the 1990s. Those wishing to find out more about Grivno's current thinking in this area of study should consult Grivno (2007).

The guide has several components: it discusses race relations and slavery in the related contexts of St. Louis, Missouri, frontier Minnesota, and Fort Snelling, it gives an overview of notable and noted African-Americans who lived in frontier Minnesota in the pre-territorial decades, and it offers suggestions for interpreting African-American history in the context of its living history programme. One of those suggestions is:

3) Emphasize the variety of roles African-Americans played in the state's early history.

Rather than focus on the negative aspects of black life, especially slavery, interpreters should emphasize African-American's positive contributions to Minnesota's history. While acknowledging that many of the region's blacks were slaves, costumed guides should highlight black fur traders, especially George Bonga, and free blacks, such as James Thompson and the Jacob Fallstrom family. (Grivno 1997: 27)

Some parts of Grivno's *Interpretive Guide* are not without merit in its attempt to render a complex history of slavery and race relations in 'frontier Minnesota' and Fort Snelling. Still, when Grivno offers interpretive suggestions for Snelling's costumed guides, he offers a decisively chipper spin on the primary sources available to him. Here, Grivno suggests that social relations between the garrison's enlisted soldiers and Fort Snelling slaves were not tense and that they would have 'associated freely':

Because enlisted men and slaves occupied the lower-rungs of the Fort Snelling community they probably interacted with soldiers as relative equals. For example, the 'yellow woman' referred to in Colonel Bliss's reminiscences apparently had sexual relations with the garrison's enlisted men. As Bliss noted, 'she...became such an attractive belle among the soldiers that before leaving Fort Snelling we were obliged to make her a part of the cargo of the Steamer *Warrior*, and send her to St. Louis for sale' (Grivno 1997: 27).

It seems there may be more to extract from this particular 'reminiscence' of Colonel Bliss's, but it is offered as proof that enlisted men and the enslaved fraternized 'as relative equals' without offering alternative readings about how the enlisted men may have likewise considered this 'yellow woman' a piece of property, just as Bliss did when he was 'obliged' to sell her down-river.

Echoing the *Interpretive Guide's* rose-coloured reading of black/white relations on the frontier is echoed in the only mention of 'African-Americans on Post' in the standard training materials for interpreters on a role-playing instructional sheet. Without offering any primary or secondary sources, the 'role-playing' instructional sheet contains five lines on white/black relations at the post in the 1820s (the same number of lines it offers for 'saluting outside'—'saluting inside' takes an additional two lines):

During the 1820s slaves, free black servants, and fur traders were present on post. Enlisted men would have been very familiar on a social basis with these individuals, who—depending on their situation—may have actually led a more privileged and more comfortable life than many soldiers. Friendly social interchanges would likely be the normal mode between soldiers and civilian servants.¹⁸

Both pieces of training literature not only offer remarkably optimistic views of the past. To Grivno's credit, his at least mentions that there may have been a 'negative aspect to black life' at Fort Snelling in the 1820s—even as he encourages guides not to 'focus' on them. But Grivno and the writer of the five lines, are not alone in their inclinations to accentuate the positive — they are consistent with a dominant strain in contemporary conservative ideology which holds that only harm can come by dwelling on the negative aspects of the past. Neo-conservatives like David Horowitz have frequently argued that bringing up the traumas of history only carry with them the potential to ignite racial conflict in the present. We can see this mode of thinking in his sensationalist argument against slavery reparations, wherein he claims that 'the renewed sense of grievance—which is what the claim for reparations will inevitably create—is neither a constructive nor a helpful message for black leaders to be sending to their communities and to others' (Salzburger and Turck 2004: 129). Similarly, conservative President Ronald Reagan, in his 1983 'Evil Empire' speech to the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals argued for an objective yet *optimistic* view of history: 'whatever sad episodes exist in our past,' he said, 'any objective observer must hold a positive view of American history, a history that has been the story of hopes fulfilled and dreams made into reality'. In many ways the training materials and programming at Historic Fort Snelling echo this upbeat vision of the American past.

In the wake of the training materials offered to interpreters, it is no wonder that interpreters like Gavin chose to talk about the 'more happy roles models'; he did feel that his options for interpreting racial issues with visitors were somewhat thwarted because management did not provide him with adequate training to address historical race relations with visitors more substantively. The lack of formal training on slavery and race relations in the 1820s is perhaps why some interviewees reported feeling awkward when discussing the subject of slavery with visitors, a sentiment suggested by seventeen-year old Jacob who said, 'There was slavery at the Fort and that's something that we need to [address]— and I think it's good that somebody talks about it, but I don't want it to be me. I feel somewhat uncomfortable talking about it'. In this case a comfort cue informed how slavery was dealt with, but not necessarily with regards to the comfort of the visitor, but with regards to the comfort of the interpreter.

Oliver said that he sometimes felt uncomfortable with the ways that some of his fellow interpreters tried to interpret racial issues, particularly when they expressed racist viewpoints of their 'characters' in front of the public:

This summer I had a couple of interesting experiences with some of the male staff members who, very pointedly, were using these words in front of the public at various times throughout the summer, and I would find myself sort of nervously laughing or trying to modify or moderate that view in some fashion right in front of the public, just to make sure that they got the point, that they understood the difference. But what made me uncomfortable was the fact that I was the only one in the room attempting to do it. There wasn't a lot of, I don't want to say 'context'...but sometimes I felt it was a little heavy and it often done with children, *mainly* done with children, who I think obviously have a very limited understanding of the whole period. It quite frankly, made me uncomfortable [...to hear them] utter these words and express these opinions about the 'dirty savages' and 'we want to kill us some Indians' and so on and so forth, it made me very uncomfortable...

For his part, Oliver said that he tried to stay clear of expressing racist viewpoints, even if it was likely that his historical character would have held racist views. In particular Oliver mentioned that he would 'never attempt to get into those situations with children' and 'often won't get into it with Senior Citizens, simply because they grew up in a different time' when 'many of those same phrases or expressions [used in the early nineteenth century were] being offered up'. For Oliver, age served as a comfort cue that could potentially safeguard his own discomfort; when he did interpret historical viewpoints that concerned race, he said he 'tend[ed] to shoot for people more my own age, between the 25 to 55 range' with the hope that that might make their mind set 'close enough' to his. Ultimately, however, Oliver felt that using expressions such as 'the red man' or 'niggers'—while historically appropriate—would make him feel uneasy: 'I'm always afraid that I'm going to open a door for a bigot to walk right into and it's going to make me mighty uncomfortable, so I just avoid that'.

Elijah, who had more than 10 years of experience working as an interpreter at the site, had the following to say about interpreting controversy at Fort Snelling:

You know, we try and make it real 'PC' out there, 'oh no, the Indians are our friends, la de da'. Nuh uh. The soldiers were attacking the Indians, and doing all sorts of horrible stuff to the Indians. There were some shootings down by the river in the winter: the Indians were constantly coming to Taliaferro [who was the United States Indian Agent] and complaining about the soldiers, on how just awful they were; there were some rapes of the Indian women in one of the local villages and Taliaferro and Snelling were trying to figure out what to do about it. [Fort Snelling] was not a fun place to be, it was not a cheery site.

While Elijah acknowledged that the history of Fort Snelling was more complicated and vexed with conflict and turmoil than its promotional brochures suggests, he also acknowledged that he was not simply free to talk about 'any subject' because of his position as an employee for the Minnesota Historical Society:

I'm on the pay roll for the [Minnesota Historical Society] and if I'm in costume and I'm spouting all kinds of terrible things and *that* visitor is upset and goes away, [saying] 'I'm never going back there again, those schmucks' you know, that's not what we're trying to do. But I think if I meet some visitors who are willing to get involved in some controversial things, the most I can hope to do is to peak their interest enough and say hey, yeah, there were some ugly things that went on here, and I'll talk about them a little bit, but you can read more at the library, or you can talk to some other people about that more, you know, I don't try and give them the whole story, I try and say, well, yeah, slavery was alive and well, in fact, Taliaferro and Snelling had some, and when you go over to the house you might want to ask them about that. You know?

Elijah captured quite beautifully the difficulty of interpreting slavery or other sensitive issues in the context of a service economy job. While performing the past and delivering historical narratives, these workers were expected to serve museum visitors by smiling, greeting them,

and looking out for their comfort cues. Meanwhile, like other workers in the new economy whose job it is, largely, to produce feelings, these workers tried to protect their own emotions and feeling states often by resisting exposure to situations that might cause distress for either party. As Elijah reminds us, he was 'on the payroll' for the Minnesota Historical Society. In this light, an interpreter's shying away from slavery should be understood as a condition of their labour as workers in the service economy.

In terms of training, during my tenure at the Fort, we certainly received more training on how to create a pleasant and welcoming environment than we had on how to interpret controversial subjects. The Fort instructed its living history interpreters: 'You obviously won't be expected to smile while making soap or chopping wood, but do smile when a visitor asks if that is a real fire you are cooking over' (*Staff Administrative Handbook*: 9). This service directive was reinforced at various training events throughout years. At a 2001 training session, for example, a site manager took the podium at the front of the auditorium, informed us that we were 'in the customer service business' and put up an overhead that read: 'The customer is paying for a personal service as the product, rather than 'carry away merchandise'. It sets us apart and above similar attractions'. With this on the white screen behind him he said: 'Our visitors leave with a smile on their face, ...we hope that our corporate culture here makes customer service your priority at all times'. Afterwards, we watched a corporate training video called 'Customer Service Superstars'.

At Historic Fort Snelling, delivering excellent customer meant tailoring one's performance according to one's perception of any given visitor's interest. Providing such individuated service often had the effect of taxing the emotional reservoirs of the workers. As Karl noted, 'Teaching and acting at the same time is taxing, especially when you are moving about in the middle of your audience'. Specifically, Karl felt that the taxation he experienced came from constantly adjusting his self presentation to the public, in an effort to best meet the publics' varying needs and desires:

Each visitor has a different personality and interest. I strive to accurately read those and shift my mental and emotional gears constantly to effectively relate to them with courtesy and sensitivity. Consequently, I'm emotionally drained at the end of the day. Just exhausted. And I'm not alone. Talk to interpreter after interpreter, just bushed, whipped, wiped out at the end of the day.

When I asked Karl how he dealt with subjects like race or slavery or Native American issues, he answered: 'Succinctly, candidly, graciously, and with sensitivity. Don't expand on the subjects unless asked to. Do your research so you can expand if necessary'. Such an individuated approach to talking about controversial subjects suffused the interpretive exchange with a concern about emotional comfort, for service worker and customer alike.

Conclusion

For as different as they were with regards to their approach to interpreting painful histories, this paper has argued that the state-funded Fort Snelling, and the corporate-endowed Conner Prairie found common ground in ensuring that their visitors were *emotionally comfortable*, and it was in this customer service directive that a multiplicity of interests converged.

While the experience of pretending to be a slave was not meant to be pleasant, at every possible turn Conner Prairie staff suffused their presentations of the past with reassurances that could serve to make the visitors feel emotionally comfortable. Prior to the excursions that I participated in, we were told several times that we would not be hurt, reminded that the people we would encounter were Conner Prairie employees, given sashes of invisibility ('escape hatches'—as one guide called them), told what situations we might find ourselves in, and reminded that we had purchased this product—and that we would get more out of it if we invested more of ourselves into it. Furthermore, during the excursion, unbeknownst to visitors, a plain-clothed Conner Prairie staff member accompanied the groups (disguised as a customer) in order to ensure that the groups stayed on task and on time at each stop, thus protecting visitors and interpreters from the likelihood that anyone would go off script—a kind of quality control so the museum could deliver a consistent product.¹⁹ At the end of the excursion, visitors

were offered lemonade and cookies during the debriefing session that punctuated the end of each role-playing experience.

Speaking to this, in the May 2008 issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*, a travel feature on Conner Prairie Living History Museum's wide array of programming quoted Conner Prairie's head of immersion programs, Dan Freas, who said that the Follow the North Star Program 'can be so intense... that when it's over, we do a debriefing with psychological professionals, to make sure everyone's OK'.²⁰ It is significant that following their excursion, visitors are rushed into a room with a psychological professional—not with a scholar of slavery. Because this living museum functions in the service economy and self-consciously offers a service wherein visitors might glean insights about the more painful aspects of the historic past (through sadomasochistic rituals), a therapeutic concern over visitors' emotional comfort has trumped (though not erased) the concern over history's pedagogical effect.

In contrast to Conner Prairie's highly structured role-playing event, at Historic Fort Snelling, interpreters offered the service of discussing the site's more controversial history on a case-by-case basis. In this setting, historical interpreters could elect to 'expand if necessary' on any number of historical subjects—and without a doubt, many interpreters did. Nonetheless, discussions about the more controversial parts of the Fort's history were not marketed to would-be consumers as the product offered by the Fort, so that even while interpreters could bring their own interpretations and ideological investments to bear on their presentations of history, the site itself promoted a pain-free programming—one that privileged the telling of a white story and 'symbolically annihilated' slavery.²¹

My purpose in examining Historic Fort Snelling, however, was not to critique the site for its erasures, but rather to understand why those erasures often occurred. I have argued that they occurred because interpreters understood each interaction with visitors as—first and foremost—a service encounter. In this manner, interpreters were constantly faced with the task of emotionally shifting gears to meet what they perceived as the customer's needs. The interpreters I interviewed and worked with in my seven years at the Fort tended to look for comfort cues to discern whether visitors were *emotionally comfortable* with the historical narratives that they interpreted through their unscribed conversations with visitors. Without the luxury of a psychological professional to meet with visitors at the end of their self-guided tours, interpreters often avoided (what they perceived as) controversial subjects, thereby looking out for their own, and the visitors' emotional comfort.

In sum, because both of these museums positioned their living history presentations as products to be consumed within the New Economy, a preoccupation with emotional comfort suffused the historical narratives produced and directed the performance of and interpretation of the past—whether that past be marked by pain or pleasantries. With concerns about emotional comfort taking center stage in the market context of the living museum, it should be our charge as teachers, museum workers, and public historians to consider the extent to which the expectation of and preoccupation with emotional comfort has entered our own terrains.

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Notes

¹ A living history museum or a living museum is one that employs costumed workers to interpret the past in a total-sensory environment designed to evoke a moment or moments in time. These workers are referred to as 'guides' or 'interpreters' and I will use these terms interchangeably.

² That Roth chose the phrasing 'the freedom to discuss just about any subject' for her interpretive guide is significant, for while Roth herself would like to see interpretation based on academic research and the principles of social history, as a writer of a practical guide, Roth acknowledges that most interpreters may not have the freedom to discuss any subject within the tenets of their job. Indeed, Roth herself does not uniformly urge all museums to

integrate 'sensitive material' into their programming. 'First and foremost' Roth urges, museums considering such integration of 'sensitive material' should ensure that it 'be meaningful within the purpose of a program and complement sponsors' larger missions'. Secondly, she urges, 'museums...should analyze their image and their audience before acting. They must assess the value of shaking complacent audiences who are more accustomed to idyllic pasts. Institutions that would rather avoid public backlash may want to leave well enough alone' (161-162).

- ³ The term 'interactive service worker' was coined by Robin Leidner in *Fast Food, Fast Talk* (1993), 1.
- ⁴ B-3. Employees on nonfarm payrolls by major industry sector and selected industry detail, seasonally adjusted, <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empst.ceseeb3.txt> Accessed 5 April, 2006.
- ⁵ An email to all staff dated June 2007 even quoted my dissertation on the Fort as support for why they needed to shift their interpretive programming to include heretofore silenced narratives.
- ⁶ As of Autumn, 2008 visitors would pay \$19 to participate in the program or \$16 if they were members of the museum.
- ⁷ Conner Prairie Living History Museum, <www.connerprairie.org>, accessed 12 March, 2005.
- ⁸ This same ad copy is still in use on the Conner Prairie website in 2008. See <http://www.connerprairie.org/events/follow_the_north_star>, accessed 12 September 2008.
- ⁹ Qtd in Saidiya V. Hartman (1997): 'the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible' (18).
- ¹⁰ In angered response to the cultural changes in tribal life, and because of US government corruption, some Dakota warriors attacked Minnesota Forts and settlements. Losses to both Dakota and Americans tallied incredibly high. At the end of this War (some call it a 'conflict', some call it an 'uprising'), Minnesotans took Dakota captives and imprisoned them at Fort Snelling. Many of these prisoners had no hand in the violent events of that year, yet still faced the harsh winter with inadequate shelter and food. Perhaps hundreds died there, by the river, just below the Fort Walls. Furthermore, this imprisonment eventually led to what is still the largest federally sanctioned mass execution in US history. Space alone prevents me from expanding more here. Suffice it to say that during my time there, Fort programming did not deliberately deal with this part of history, and in fact, there was no mention of the Fort's role in policing the War in the Fort's history center, or in our training materials.
- ¹¹ Colonel Josiah Snelling, Journal of 1827, Minnesota Historical Society Manuscript Collection, 130.
- ¹² \$5 each, roughly \$2.50 per month for clothing allowance and 20 cents per day for food rations.
- ¹³ Kim is a pseudonym.
- ¹⁴ See Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephan Small, 2002, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, Smithsonian Institution Press, who apply the term 'symbolic annihilation' to sites that erase slavery through euphemisms such as 'servant'.

- ¹⁵ Conversation with the Author, Minneapolis, September 2005.
- ¹⁶ Notably, although I began working at the site in 1999, the first I saw of the guide was in 2004.
- ¹⁷ This *Guide* later served as the foundation for Grivno's article, 'Black Frenchmen' and 'white settlers': Race, slavery, and the creation of African-American identities along the northwest frontier, 1790-1840', published in *Slavery and Abolition*, Volume 21, Issue 3, Dec. 2000, pp 75-93. It is the unfinished 'Interpretive Guide' that interpreters were furnished with once during my seven years working at the fort.
- ¹⁸ Role-Playing hand out, photocopy, Fort Snelling Training Materials.
- ¹⁹ In the early stages of the 'Follow the North Star' program some visitors decided to take matters into their own hands. Before the logistics of moving visitors from one station to the other were fully worked out, visitors would, on occasion, cut and run into the fields that adjoin the living history museum, forcing Conner Prairie staff to look for and retrieve the role-playing visitors.
- ²⁰ See Donovan Webster, (2008) "Back to the Frontier," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2008, < <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/da-frontier.html?c=y&page=2>> accessed 13 September, 2008.
- ²¹ As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, as of 2007, the Fort self-consciously began to address the absence of slavery in its interpretation. But even as it begins to tell this story as part of its product-line, the quandary of the history of slavery being produced in a market context will not be solved. Will efforts be made to connect the legacy of slavery's past to the institutional racism that persists in our present? Or will slavery be interpreted as part of a narrative of progress, as a deplorable relic located in the Past that has no bearing on our more enlightened present?

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