

## ABSTRACT

POWELL, ROSLYNN ARNESIA. Ask an Interpreter: An Exploratory Study of the Emotional Labor of Interpreting Slavery at Historical Sites in The United States (Under the direction of Dr. Myron Floyd and Dr. Louie Rivers III).

Historical interpreters play a critical role in how history is produced at plantation house museums and similar sites in the United States. This includes depicting enslaved Africans as people with culture, agency, and humanity. This role, while emotionally fulfilling, is also emotionally heavy. This research aims to understand that emotional labor and situate it in the context of white supremacy that guides the politics, culture, and economics in the United States. Additionally, this research seeks to enter frontline public historians' narratives into the collective memory archives. The data for this study were collected using the oral histories of 15 current and former historical interpreters that interpret the history of slavery at historic sites in the United States. Findings showed that historical interpreters conceptualize their emotional labor broadly and are engaged in emotional labor at multiple parts of their workdays, not just while engaging with tourists. Also, from the perspective of cognitive capitalism, interpreters were exploited by the surplus value extraction of their vulnerability (especially for Black interpreters) and the lop-sided nature of the production-to-wage ratio. Historical interpreters also do reproductive labor through their self-care routines. Interviews also revealed that the present-day socio-political climate motivated historical interpreters to create powerful tours and programs that humanized the enslaved peoples' experiences and a form of advocacy and resistance. Unfortunately, that emotional labor can lead to racial battle fatigue (the exhaustion that people of color feel from repeated exposure to racism, as well as its negative impact on their emotional, physiological, and psychological health and well-being (Quaye et al., 2019)), leading to interpreters leaving the field. These findings indicate that interpreters need institutional support to combat the backlash of white fragility surrounding teaching and talking about systemic racism. The use of oral histories paints a picture of interpreting history that does not romanticize their service.

Ask an Interpreter: An Exploratory Study of the Emotional Labor of Interpreting Slavery at Historical Sites in the United States

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Roslynn grew up in Prince George's County, Maryland, in the DMV (Washington DC, Maryland, Virginia). She grew up in a community with a large population of successful Black people, building her confidence in what she could achieve as a Black woman. Throughout high school and undergrad, she worked at a local nature center as a park naturalist, where she conducted environmental education programs, led summer day camps, and cared for the animals that called the center their home. Through those experiences, she discovered her passion for educating others and helping them connect with the natural world around them.

Upon entering Frostburg State University in Fall 2013, she began a B.A. in Interpretive Biology and Natural History to learn how to effectively aid an audience in understanding complex topics. There she had outstanding professors and mentors that inspired her to pursue a career in higher education to nurture future generations of Black youth interested in studying fields that are predominantly white (e.g., natural resources and leisure studies). In continuing that journey, she began a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 2017, where she researched the impact of personal technology forest recreation and taught undergraduate lab sections. At North Carolina State University, she studies the emotional labor of interpreting the history of slavery at heritage, how the legacy of white supremacy sets the stage for the interpreter's emotional labor and examines emotional labor through a lens of cognitive capitalism. She enjoys camping, hiking, visiting museums, crocheting, and painting in her free time.

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### Background

Enslavement plays a central role in the history interpreted at many historical sites (e.g., historic homes, plantations, and industrial sites) (Gallas & Perry, 2015). Millions of domestic and international travelers visit American historical sites and participate in cultural and heritage touristic activities (ACHP, n.d.). By supplying a comprehensive portrait of enslavement, historic sites hold the potential to shift human consciousness and help their visitors understand that the institution of slavery was a cornerstone of the nation's economy and society, whose legacy is present today. Historical sites are not merely tourism destinations intended for education and entertainment. They also serve as cultural centers where guests can visit, ground themselves, and contemplate their identity. There has been a recent societal shift to investigate the lives of enslaved people more holistically (Alderman et al., 2016), which has pushed sites to bring in the long-repressed histories of the enslaved population and re-imagining the site to include politics, uneven power relations, and trauma. Interpretive staff is integral in reshaping the history produced at these historical sites and reinterpreting these sites could potentially add difficulty to their already emotionally laborious jobs (e.g., visitor backlash, racial anxiety) (Benjamin & Alderman, 2018; Gable, 1995; Knowles, 2019).

Historical interpreters, which for this study includes tour guides, interpreters, and docents, are drawn to this field by a passion for connecting with people using history while using their emotions to create visitors' desired feelings (Tyson, 2008; 2013). Although working on the public history frontlines is emotionally fulfilling, it is also emotionally exhausting, impacting the historic site's productivity and the staff's personal and professional well-being (Tyson, 2013). Interpreting enslavement may be particularly emotionally challenging for historical interpreters because they engage with the public on complex topics. Historical interpreters will likely struggle with the same conflicting narratives, internal tensions, and internalized ideologies about race relations as visitors (Gallas & Perry, 2015). Moreover, they must compete with visitor misinformation about slavery and engage with the uncomfortable and heavy topic of enslavement multiple times daily (Tyson & Dungey, 2014). Despite this significant threat to the well-being of the heritage tourism industry's frontline employees, there is a limited examination of the emotional labor that frontline interpretive staff contend with when interpreting enslavement. The result is a lack of knowledge which threatens the staff's health, the historic site's

operational capacity, and ultimately the overall sustainability of tourism at historic sites where chattel slavery is interpreted (Tyson, 2013).

In this dissertation, I explored how historical interpreters conceptualized their emotional labor, exposing this invisible work as integral to crafting and presenting historical narratives. This dissertation examined emotional management across different contexts by looking at emotional labor from the perspective of historical interpreters (Alderman et al., 2019). It considered the effects of the "unequal distribution of emotional labor" people of color take on in institutionally white spaces (Evan & Moore, 2015, p. 439). Thus, frontline historical interpreters are performing emotional labor within the boundaries of their workplaces and navigating their lives as a whole. Also, interpreters bring their demographic identities with them wherever they go. Hence, this approach to examining emotional labor gave historical interpreters the space to talk about their identities and how they perceived their experience compared to their coworkers and visitors.

I also situated the work done by historical interpreters in the era of cognitive capitalism, where the market focuses on extracting value from relational and emotional elements (Morini, 2007). Employees (and volunteers, for that matter) leading tours, performing demonstrations, and other components of historical interpretation are engaging in immaterial labor, where their work produces intangible goods (e.g., knowledge, a cultural product, or service) (Hardt & Negri, 2000). In this market, workers' feelings are commodified, transforming private feelings into a 'package of emotions' that can be consumed by customers through service interactions (Hazarika & Arendt, 2016.). For historical interpreters, this means their emotions no longer belong solely to them but are owned by management. This is due to management's control over timing (when they give tours), the giving and withdrawal of feelings (the emotions needed throughout the tour), and form shifts from the worker to managers.

### **Purpose and Goals**

This study aimed to expand the conceptualization of historical interpreters' emotional labor, painting a realistic portrait of the experience of interpreting slavery while living in its legacy and the effects of the commodification of emotions. Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the stress and emotional labor of the tourism workforce, with particular emphasis on tour guides (Alola et al., 2019; Carrillo et al., 2020; Chu et al., 2012; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Ross, 2006; Van Dijk, Smith, & Cooper, 2011; Wong & Wang, 2009; Yim et al., 2018). However, there is a gap in the literature identifying the emotional labor experienced by frontline interpretive staff at historical sites, more specifically those interpreting enslavement (Modlin et al., 2011; Potter, 2016; Tyson & Dungey, 2014; Tyson, 2008;

Walcott-Wilson, 2020). To bridge this gap, I reported on the oral histories of frontline interpretive staff that interpret the history of enslavement at historic sites in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question guiding this dissertation is, how does interpreting slavery affect frontline interpretive staff? I chose to focus on the emotional labor of this sector of the tourism workforce because they have direct interactions with the public, engage with the narrative of the enslaved multiple times a day, and pull from a myriad of sources (including emotional and interpersonal ones) to create an experience that their audience finds engaging so they leave inspired to learn more. The concept of emotional labor and its impacts are complex and nuanced. I wanted frontline interpretive staff's experiences and understanding of their emotional labor to guide the research and connect their experiences with structural, cultural, and historical phenomena. To capture the process each participant has gone through relative to their work and emotions, I asked:

RQ1: How do historical interpreters identify the role the legacy of slavery and social/political climate play in their emotional labor at work? (Chapter 1)

RQ2: How do historical interpreters explain the process by which they do emotional labor? (Chapter 2)

RQ3: How do historical interpreters describe how their emotions were commodified and the impacts? (Chapter 3)

### **Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation is organized into three distinct manuscripts for publication, with each chapter representing an individual manuscript. I will chronicle each chapter in the context of the research questions in this section.

Chapter 1 is based on one of the themes that emerged from the first round of interviews conducted in 2022 and incorporates narratives collected in the February to March 2023 interviews. Chapter 1 demonstrates how the legacy of slavery and the contemporary social/ political climate inform interpreters' emotional labor. This chapter recognizes that historical interpreters engage with the history of slavery at work while living in its legacy and often connect the history of their sites with present-day society. I explored historical interpreters' stories about the emotional labor of conducting historical interpretation, focusing on Trump's presidency, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Live Matter protests during the summer of 2020, and similar racialized events. An abridged version of this chapter will be submitted to the Journal of Interpretation Research.

Chapter 2 focuses on how historical interpreters conceptualize the emotional labor of interpreting enslavement, the factors that drive that emotional labor, and its impact on their well-being. This manuscript drew from interviews I conducted between June and October 2022, investigating frontline interpretive staff's career journey, connection to history, and the connection between their emotions and historical interpretation. This chapter calls for a more comprehensive conceptualization of emotional labor and identifies that emotional labor is embedded in various aspects of historical interpretation. An abbreviated version of this chapter will be submitted to the Journal of Heritage Tourism.

Chapter 3 focuses on the commodification of feelings and how emotions are critical to how visitors relate to historical sites, the information presented, and the interpretive staff that prepares and delivers the tours themselves. This manuscript frames historical sites as cultural centers and marketplaces participating in cognitive capitalism, where interpretive staff's vulnerability operates as surplus value, the accumulated product of unpaid work time. This chapter discusses the role of capitalism in how interpreters create historical narratives and the repercussions they can have on their emotional well-being. Chapter 3 uses narratives from the interviews conducted from June to October 2022 and a second set conducted from February to March 2023. Tourism Management will be the target publication outlet for this chapter.

### **Positionality Statement**

My position as a researcher, descendant of enslaved Africans, and someone that has wrestled with my emotional and mental health as it relates to my work necessitates an expanded investigation into my role and its influence on my initial questions, framing, and interpretation of the results. In oral history, researchers actively participate in the knowledge-building process (Leavy, 2011). Because of this, my identity and experiences were critical contexts, and throughout this work, I operated with my own set of assumptions.

I wanted this research to illuminate the invisible labor done by those that engage with anti-racist work at historic sites as it relates to slavery. As an African American, I came to this research connecting with my Black identity and working on my mental health. This dissertation resulted from my learning about systems of oppression and Black history from the Black perspective, thereby unlearning my internalized racist attitudes of black inferiority. While I felt empowered, I also felt conflicted. My eyes were opened because in college (undergraduate and graduate), I took African American history classes and courses that challenged me to think critically about society. However, I obtained this knowledge because I went to college, a privilege not afforded to everyone. Therefore, my mission became to make information about

African American resistance, culture, and contributions accessible to everyday people. Historical sites are crucial in disseminating reliable information about enslaved people and culture. Especially since there is no standard for teaching US history (also known as "social studies") in the American school system (Stewart, 2019), and some states have introduced legislation that limits how race and discrimination can be taught in public schools (Fortin & Heyward, 2022).

I first became interested in emotional labor and the history of enslavement after listening to a guest lecturer present on their experiences working with descendants of enslaved Africans at a historic house museum and as a Genealogy Reference Assistant at an African American museum. She spoke about the emotional reactions of guests and the internal struggle that comes with being in a former "big house" as a Black woman. After the presentation, I asked how she coped with her emotionally laborious work. Her response was a joking response of "I don't." Then I was introduced to historical interpreters Azie Mira Dungey (from YouTube's Ask a Slave) and Cheyney McKnight (from YouTube/Instagram's Not Your Momma's History). These women use their platforms to lift the veil on interpreting enslavement at historical sites. As I learned more about interpreting slavery, I noticed that those who work closely with the subject consistently mention experiencing anxiety and emotional/mental distress. However, an initial literature review suggested that the emotional labor of public history workers is under-researched. The current study was an offshoot of these interactions and my own experiences with mental/emotional health in the workplace. It focuses on a specific period in African American history (enslavement) and a particular portion of the workforce (frontline interpretive staff) to be more manageable for a dissertation.

Although I did not have the experience of being an interpreter at a historical site to open pathways for understanding interpretive staff's experiences, other elements of my position aided me in connecting with participants. I am a Black, 29-year-old woman with anxiety, raised in majority-Black Prince George's County, Maryland, which influenced my acquired identities as a Black history enthusiast and researcher. As an African American, I had a unique connection to the history of enslavement and interpreters of color. Black interpreters (especially those who interpret in costumes at living history museums) are surrounded by race and slavery. They research and speak on racism in the past while experiencing racism in the present. I hoped that the shared experiences of living in the United States while Black and my own experience studying enslavement would comfort Black interpreters (and other interpreters of color) opening up about their emotional labor. However, I could not fully understand the experiences of interpreting enslavement while being non-Black, and I reflected on that difference while I analyzed interpretive staff interviews. I acknowledged that historical sites could be hostile environments, especially when teaching "difficult histories," and recounting that difficult task to a Black person could be

uncomfortable. I suspected they would find it challenging to be honest about the severity of their emotional labor. Due to the potential for a wide array of experiences, I attempted to avoid over-generalizing and centered the voices of the frontline interpretive staff.

### **Methodological Framework**

Oral history was uniquely suited for examining the process of frontline interpretive staff conceptualizing their emotional labor while interpreting enslavement. Oral history refers to the method (the interview), the methodology (a collection of practices and principles about creating, analyzing, preserving, and presenting recorded memories), as well as the movement beyond oral history, contributing to historical understanding but also as a force for social and political change (Perks & Thomson, 2019). Like other qualitative research methodologies, oral history communicates and interprets stories and observations that can be connected to broader themes or imprinted into current narratives. Ontologically and epistemologically, oral history is built on the foundation that research is a process and that meaning is generated by the researcher and participants as the research progresses (Leavy, 2011).

In oral history research, it is acceptable for researchers to approach their participants as "outsiders" (Castro, 2015). Oral history is a co-created account that integrates the narrator's (participant) version of their experience with the researchers' efforts to illustrate the context of the participants' life and connect them with broader themes (K'Meyer & Crothers, 2007). Oral historians spend less time with participants than other qualitative researchers and are positioned as detached observers. Therefore, they are entirely dependent on what participants decide to share. Because I had no experience working at historical sites, nor had I ever had to interpret narratives as emotionally and racially charged as enslavement, I lacked the background necessary to give participants' experiences proper context. For these reasons, I used oral history to answer my research questions and reach my research goals. Oral history allowed me to document frontline interpreters' experiences, connect them with more significant themes, and give them context missing from my background and existing literature. In oral history, participants speak expansively about their stories in their own words, with their voices, through their understanding of what happened and why without restricting them with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999). I had to be vigilant in the questions and prompts I asked, so I did not box in participants accidentally and force them to conform their experiences to what I thought they should be.

Oral history also fits best within my research design. Instead of focusing on frontline interpretive staff at one or two historical sites, I analyzed historical interpreters from various plantation house museums and

other historical sites from various backgrounds. Oral history allowed me to connect with participants holistically, expose critical themes, and truthfully present and validate their narratives through a series of interviews that I conducted through various media.

Some other benefits oral history provided included capturing emotional strain events for interpretive staff and their meaning. Overall, the point of oral history is about understanding a given perspective more than securing historical 'truths' (Trapp-Fallon, 2003). Therefore, my goal was not to record the 'true' day in interpreting enslavement but to understand the interpretive staff's emotional states and their understanding of their experiences. Also, I sought to connect individual frontline interpretive staff's experiences and broader issues regarding the representation of African American history and sustainable human resource management. Oral history allows for these types of connections and emphasizes participants' perspectives. Lastly, oral histories offer researcher-participant interaction and reflexive sharing while giving a "voice to individuals, often previously neglected by the social science research community" (Trapp-Fallon, 2003, p. 301). For example, as Wilson-Wilcot (2020) points out, much of the work conducted at plantation house museums (and subsequently other heritage sites) has focused on site narratives and the role of management in curating those narratives. However, the work of historical interpreters should be more noticed at historical destinations. The use of oral history in this research gave a voice to those neglected in their expertise in the emotional labor of interpreting enslavement due to oral history's emphasis on participant's experiences and the experiential knowledge of people "living in the field sites" (Leavy, 2011, p. 3).

### **Site Selection and Ethical Consideration**

To locate participants for this study, I utilized a combination of approaches to maximize my chances of recruitment. First, I posted research announcements on professional/social networks like the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), the Association for Living History Farm & Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM), and the Black Interpreters Guild (a Facebook group). I also relied on chain-referral sampling (by which current participants provide names of others potentially interested in participating) of participant networks and personal networks. These techniques increased the likelihood of recruiting participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, sites, positions, and locations.

To protect the sites and the identities of participants, I used pseudonyms. Participants selected pseudonyms with some exceptions (i.e., the interpreter could not think of one, and others permitted me to choose when they did not want to choose a pseudonym). I created the pseudonym for the sites, which the participants approved. The names of the historic landholders and other white historical figures mentioned

by interpreters were given a pseudonym. Names of enslaved or free Africans mentioned during interviews were substituted with names of well-known enslaved and free Africans with a footnote that describes who they were.

### **Summary**

This dissertation builds on previous work on historical interpretation and emotional labor. Using an oral history method, I explored historical interpreters' perceptions of their experience and the impacts of the legacy of slavery on their experiences. I also connected experience with elements of capitalism and public history. Ultimately, I plan to further communication and collaboration between frontline interpreters and the scholars who study tourism to improve working conditions and give interpreters the confidence and support to present emotionally evocative narratives that depict enslaved people as active historical agents (Gallas & Perry, 2015). This can only be achieved if frontline interpretive staff are regarded as experts in their own experience. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge about emotional labor in public history and positions emotional labor in systems that controls our society.

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## **CHAPTER 2: “It is hard interpreting slavery while living in its legacy:” An exploration into the impact of the legacy of slavery and political climate on the interpreters’ emotional labor.**

### **Introduction**

Brower (2022) cited political and social climate as an additional condition that makes managing emotional labor challenging. Sociopolitical climate refers to society’s overall mood and opinion regarding the context predetermined by tradition (e.g., cultural, political, religious). The legacy of slavery (often referred to as America’s original sin) created a culture and institutions with long-term implications for social outcomes (e.g., demographic patterns, attitudes, socioeconomic and health outcomes, and crime) (Gottlieb & Flynn, 2021). Plantation house museums, historic house museums, and other similar historical sites are not simply institutions of knowledge but “arenas for ideological assertions” (Katriel, 1993, p. 70) and reflect the present social, racial, class, and economic order. Remembering and interpreting the past is a highly politicized and racialized process (Hoelscher, 2003; Regis, 2001), one that historical interpreters are an active participant in as they people’s moods and feelings about the past, directing tourists in deciding what and who from the past should receive emotional investment (Modlin et al., 2011). Interpreters use their own emotions to create the desired emotional outcomes in clientele; this is called emotional labor (Tyson, 2008). Suppose interpreters use their emotions as they engage in the racialized and political work of recreating history at these historical sites. How does the current sociopolitical climate driving civil unrest, political movements, and the international health crisis outside of work inform that process? Essentially, how does the societal legacy of slavery inform the emotional labor of interpreting the history of slavery?

This research aims to make sense of how the system of white supremacy rooted in the legacy of slavery and foundational to the United States’ sociopolitical climate relates to the emotional labor of historical interpretation of the history of slavery. This work is needed because although there is research that analyzes the emotional labor of frontline historical interpreters (Walcott-Wilson, 2020; Potter, 2016; Tyson & Dungey, 2014; Modlin et al., 2011; Tyson, 2008), as well as research that reflects on present-day socio-political climate informs the representation of slavery at historical sites ( Buzinde, 2010; Buzinde & Osagie, 2009; Buzinde & Santos, 2008; 2009; Hanna, 2008; Jamal & Kim, 2005; Osagie & Buzinde, 2011), there is a gap connecting the two. This work uses oral histories to understand the relationship between interpreting slavery and present-day socio-political climate from the perspectives of historical interpreters, allowing for a clear understanding of the landscape of working in frontline public history without the interference of researcher bias. Understanding this relationship is vital because it can inform

owners of the potential risks interpreters face (e.g., threats of violence toward staff members), give insight into employee motivations, and identify the early signs of the adverse effects of intense emotional labor.

## **Literature Review**

### *Legacy of slavery in the present day*

Before exploring the legacy of slavery in the landscape of the US, it is crucial to conceptualize what a legacy means. A historical legacy refers to how history matters in the contemporary world and how it can explain politics, the economy, culture, and social attitudes, in present times (Wittenberg, 2011). Historical legacy also refers to the material remnants, such as the lack of infrastructure and the destruction of the environment (Wittenberg, 2011). Slavery in the United States began in 1619 with the arrival of 20 Africans in the British colony of Jamestown. It was critical in molding America's economy, politics, culture, and principles (Berlin, 2006).

Furthermore, since being abolished in 1865, scholars have examined the various ways the effects of slavery linger and manifest in nearly every aspect of and every place in the country (Reece & O'Connell, 2016). The following section will present some of the trends in this research. First, scholars have proposed that slavery has shaped local values, political attitudes, and ethics passed down generationally via socialization and solidified by institutional reinforcement (Vandiver et al., 2006; Gouda & Rigterink, 2016; Acharya et al., 2016). For example, in their study, Vandiver et al. (2006) found that states that supported slavery accounted for a disproportionately high number of modern criminal executions and pointed to a "culture of violence" throughout the southern US that condones violence as a response to problems and thus justifies executions. Similarly, Acharya et al. (2016) found that counties where slavery was prevalent, have a lower turnout of Black voters, more constitutional violence lawsuits based on race, and more racial polarization in political party identification. This group of researchers proposed a "culture of disenfranchisement" that hinders the Black vote. These studies and studies like them show the lasting effect slavery has had on the totality of the area's political and criminal justice systems over a century and a half later. Essentially incarceration is part of a line of penal institutions used to enforce the racial hierarchy in the United States (Gottlieb & Flynn, 2021).

Slavery has also shaped many racial inequalities in contemporary society, including education, income, poverty, and entrepreneurship (Reece, 2020). For example, slavery is often cited as foundational for establishing capitalism (Baptist, 2014; Ruef, 2014), an economic system based on labor exploitation. Exploitation refers to the "unequal distribution of rewards proportionately to value-added among

participants in the same enterprise" (Tilly, 1998, p. 88), allowing dominant groups to profit disproportionately from the labor of other groups. Opportunity hoarding supplements exploitation and refers to hoarding access to valuable opportunities or resources to maintain elite and privileged status, often ensuring that other groups remain vulnerable to ongoing exploitation. Slavery stretched exploitation to its extremes as the enslaved population received no profit from their labor while the owners received it all. This hoarding continues today; O'Connell (2012) found that counties historically had highly enslaved populations continue to direct resources disproportionately to white populations. Another example of racial inequalities that are a result of the legacy of slavery is education. Lagerlöf (2005) proposed that white people invest in private schools, offering themselves quality education while denying black people similar opportunities.

Next, slavery has left a lasting impact on the Black community. Ruef & Fletcher (2003) and Sacerdote (2005) looked at material inequalities between descendants of free Black people and descendants of enslaved Black people to see if the intraracial status hierarchy was preserved post-emancipation. They found that initially, there was a hierarchy between free and formerly enslaved people. However, after a couple of generations, the gap closed as the social and economic outcomes of the descendant merged. Another study found that the formerly enslaved were more likely to be lynched than former free Black people due to the stigma of being enslaved embedded in post-emancipation culture (Price et al., 2008). Slavery also exacerbated stratification between dark and light-skinned Black Americans (Reece, 2018).

Although chattel slavery enriched some white Americans, slavery shaped historical conditions in ways that benefitted all local white people, not just those who directly owned enslaved Black people (Reece, 2020). Throughout the 246 years that the institution of slavery existed in what is now the US, it has created and re-created the concept of race and white people to concentrate advantages among themselves over time through its effect on institutions and norms (Reece, 2020). Our current system of racial classification evolved from the need to control for a permanent workforce (Ruef, 2014; Tilly, 1998; Wimmer, 2008), which triggered a widespread eugenics pseudo-science that aimed to "prove" Black people were biologically different, thereby inferior to their white people, making their enslavement not only just but charitable (Zinn, 1980). The white elites that owned the land and the enslaved people recognized that "white unity" was necessary to maintain the financial interests (Painter, 2010). To do this, they distanced themselves from the Black enslaved population and grew closer to other white people, including immigrants, who were previously excluded from the privileges of whiteness in the eyes of white society (Haden, 2001; Reece, 2020). In return, immigrants and non-elite white people received the psychological benefits of being elevated above Black people. They took on middle management positions

on plantations and other jobs on the periphery of the slave economy (e.g., shipping and bounty hunting) (Hadden, 2001).

### **Emotional labor**

Emotional labor was first coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (Hochschild, 1983) and refers to "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). This means that historical interpreters use their emotions to provide good customer service, provide visitors with an enjoyable leisure experience, and create desired feelings in the audience to shape the production of history at their site (Tyson, 2008; Tyson, 2013). The standard of service interpretive staff (like all service workers) are expected to meet is dictated by the *display rules* of their organizations. Display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1975) are a social group or culture's norms and standards that dictate how to appropriately present emotions and interact with others. Management discloses and enacts the organization's display rules during the selection process, employee training, and performance evaluations (Grandey & Sayre, 2019).

Employees utilize surface and deep acting to meet their job's display rules. Deep acting refers to creating a genuine and sincere expression using cognitive strategies like refocusing attention and reappraisal (Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is adjusting forward-facing facial expressions and body language without altering one's internal emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting requires behavioral modulation strategies like suppression and amplifying (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). Hochschild (1983) proposed that deep acting is the most effective emotion regulation technique, minimizing burnout and emotional exhaustion. Grandey and Gabriel (2015) warn against labeling surface acting as "bad" and deep acting as "good." Deep acting may have hidden costs due to the constantly shifting internal emotional signals (Hochschild, 1983) and may be related to physical strain (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). Instead of treating deep acting and surface acting as opposing forces, examining how internal and external determinants mediate emotion regulation techniques' effectiveness is more beneficial to understanding emotional labor.

### ***Internal antecedents of emotional labor***

Emotional skills like emotional intelligence, emotional contagion, and empathic concern are antecedents to emotional labor (Choi & Kim, 2015). *Emotional contagion* refers to a kind of empathy in which a person can mimic or "catch" the expressed emotions of others (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2015). People with emotional contagion find it easy to express their emotions and experience stress when concealing them (Choi & Kim, 2015). In a quantitative study of hospitality workers, Chu et al. (2012)

found a positive relationship between emotional contagion and emotive efforts. This finding suggests that employees with high emotional contagion exert more effort to display positive expressions to meet customers' expectations and are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion. Kruml and Geddes's (2000)'s empirical study on service workers presented similar findings. This study found that emotional contagion strongly influenced emotive effort and emotional dissonance (Kruml & Geddes, 2000).

*Empathic concern* is an individual's ability to accept the emotions of others (they "feel for others") but not take on these emotions as their own (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2015). There are inconsistent findings on empathic concern's impact on employee emotional labor. According to Choi and Kim (2015), empathic concern is one of the characteristics that lead to emotional labor because people with higher amounts of empathic concern often have to express emotions that differ from their own. However, Chu et al.'s (2012) study did not support this argument, not finding an association between empathetic concern and emotional dissonance, empathic concern, and emotive effort. This study concluded that an employee's empathetic concern might not strongly predict how they accomplish emotional labor. Chu (2002) also rejected the hypothesis that a deep empathic concern will result in less emotional dissonance than more emotive effort.

*Emotional intelligence* is "an individual's ability to recognize and use emotional information in social interactions" (Grandey, 2000, p. 106). Emotional intelligence is also an essential requirement of emotional labor because anyone working in a service-oriented job must use it to know the expected emotions in a given situation (İrigüler, 2015). Along with displaying expected emotions, emotionally intelligent employees use their emotions to affect those of others, which requires high levels of creativity for reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). Employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to predict organizational changes and make choices when there is inadequate information (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). There are mixed results regarding the effect of emotional intelligence and emotional labor. A study by Johnson and Spector (2007) found that emotional intelligence did not impact the relationship between emotional labor and its outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion, affective well-being, and job satisfaction). In contrast, Yanchus et al.'s (2010) findings suggested that emotional intelligence decreased emotional labor's negative impacts. Mikolajczak et al.(2007) also highlighted that emotionally intelligent employees are more efficient at managing their emotions and those of others; when in challenging interactions with a customer, they use deep acting, eliminating adverse effects of emotional labor and lessening emotional dissonance.

Personality traits like affectivity also influence employee emotional labor. *Affectivity* is an individual's tendency to experience a particular mood, react in a specific way, and express a particular emotion (Lazarus, 1993). Researchers identify two types of affectivity: positive and negative (Chu, 2002; Chu et al., 2012; İrigüler, 2015 ). People with high positive affectivity have a higher positive affect and more positive emotions (e.g., cheerfulness, enthusiasm, happiness) than negative ones . Vice versa, those with negative affectivity have high levels of negative affect and experience more negative emotions (e.g., irritation, nervousness, sorrow) (Chu, 2002; Chu et al., 2012). Individuals with different affect tendencies conceptualize the same display rules differently (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000) and adopt other acting methods. For example, Chu et al. (2012) found that hospitality workers with higher positive affectivity experience tend to act genuinely in emotional labor because their emotions align with the organizations' cheerful display rules. They are also less likely to experience less emotional dissonance and put out a lower emotive effort.

### ***External determinants of emotional labor***

Internal factors like employee's levels of empathy (Kruml & Geddes, 2000), perceived self-efficacy (Grandey et al., 2012), emotional intelligence (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018) impact the amount of emotional labor and the susceptibility to the harmful effects of emotional labor. However, these factors do not operate in a vacuum. Social constructs like race and gender, and environment also play an integral role.

### **Race and emotional labor**

*Race* is a socially constructed phenomenon that is continuously evolving (Warmington, 2014). Race acts as a way to categorize people based on physical characteristics, and although it is not 'real,' it has real effects because people treat it *as if* it is (Gilborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). As a result, race influences social relationships and interactions. Due to racial stereotyping, Grandey et al. (2019) found that customers hold Black service providers to a higher performance standard than their white counterparts. Black people are stereotyped as less warm, leading to lower performance ratings, regardless of whether their performance is the same as white employees. Therefore, Black employees must perform more emotional labor (e.g., exaggerating positive expressions) to overcome these racial disparities (Grandey et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2013), examined the relationship between demographic diversity and emotion regulation using 2,072 employees in 274 workgroups. This study found that more surface acting was used by racial minority groups when diversity is low, perhaps to supersede stereotypes. Conversely, white people engage in higher emotion regulation (surface acting) when racial diversity is high, potentially to avoid being perceived as prejudiced (Kim et al., 2013).

For frontline interpretive staff, race plays a complex relationship in their emotional labor. The institution of enslavement was grounded in race and white supremacy; therefore, sites that interpret that history or remember the past, in general, are implicitly racialized and political (Hoelscher, 2003; Modlin et al., 2011; Regis, 2001). Interpreters of color must perform the appropriate emotional labor while molding themselves to their specific race etiquette and norms. When working at sites that interpret history, Black interpretive staff (either intentionally or unintentionally) are asked to serve as "ambassadors for all African Americans" (Tyson, 2013; Wilcot-Wilson, 2020). While reporting on an instance, an older white woman approached a Black female interpreter and asked, "Why her generation was angry." Wilcot-Wilson (2020) highlights the extra emotions, energy, and dedication that Black interpreters have to exert to fill the role of an interpreter while also being activists/ advocates for Black people of the past and present.

### **Gender and emotional labor**

Gender norms moderate emotional display rules that either agree with or contradict the display rules of their jobs. For example, jobs that require positive emotional expressions align with the social norms for women (e.g., compassion and tolerance) rather than men (Hochschild, 1983). In a meta-analysis, Kenworthy et al. (2014) found that gender moderates emotional dissonance and exhaustion. The study found no differences in the amount of surface acting but more so in how men and women emotionally regulate. One explanation may be that women are more socially acceptable to present their emotions outwardly in Western cultures.

In contrast, Western society expects men to remain stoic, suppressing their feelings (regardless of positive or negative (Safdar et al., 2009). Despite this, findings confirming the effect of gender roles on emotional labor are unclear. For example, Kim et al. (2013) concluded that the effects of gender on emotion regulation were insignificant. Similar results were found by Shapoval (2019), confirming that gender acts as a moderator, not a predictor for emotional labor.

Tour leading is traditionally male-dominated (Lin et al., 2008). However, in heritage tourism, the work done by historical interpreters and other cultural workers is seen as feminine because it involves interpersonal interaction, emotional labor, and caretaking behavior (Tyson, 2013). In Tyson's (2013) ethnography, the author highlights examples of which modern-day employees are expected to perform the social norms of the period of their sites. At Fort Snelling, the male staff rarely interpreted alone (they were often running drills, military maneuvers, etc.). Female staff representing "post dependents" and

other women that would have been at the fort conducted most of the interpersonal interaction with visitors. The inclusion of women at the military fort allowed for discussions on ethnicity, gender, class, and work, and "because it was presumed that the mere presence of smiling females dressed in period costume would be a successful way to make everyone feel welcomed" (Tyson, 2013, p. 42).

### **Guest-employee interactions and emotional labor**

While discussing enslaved Africans' lives and contributions, interpreters have the underlying fear of backlash from visitors (Gallas & Perry, 2015). Rude behaviors and threats of violence have a positive relationship with worker emotional exhaustion. This relationship occurs not because of the act of incivility but the mechanisms the employees use to deal with it, leading to emotional labor (Sliter et al., 2010). Hostile encounters between employees and customers create a spiral with customers' perspectives (poor/ failed service delivery) and employees' perspectives (mistreatment), leading to adverse reactions from both parties, respectively, and can spill over to other customers and employees (Groth & Grandey, 2012).

Alongside the threat of resistance to incorporating enslavement into interpretive programs and materials, guides also face emotional distress when they do not feel confident in their knowledge and qualifications to speak on the history of slavery. Interpreters' role extends beyond serving as 'information givers'; they are active participants in shaping the meaning of the site (Pond, 1993; Dahles, 2002) and are creators of historical empathy (Modlin et al., 2011). When interpreters feel they lack the skills and knowledge or are uncomfortable talking about controversial subjects like slavery, they rely on generalized narratives that do little to emotionally capture their audience with the justification that there is a lack of surviving evidence. Modin et al. (2011) heard this response from guides at various plantations. These guides expressed that they would be willing to include more information about slavery if only they knew more about the lives of the enslaved, despite being observed making historical conjectures about details of the planter-class family to fill in the blanks left by a lack of documentation. Not all guides are comfortable relying on generic information about enslavement for fear of being called out by or challenged by visitors that are experts on the subject (Potter, 2016). Potter (2016) had a guide express hesitation about slavery because he did not want to say anything wrong.

### *The memory of slavery*

The history and memory of enslavement are preserved and cultivated at historical sites (especially former sites of enslavement). History and memory are two concepts that are fundamentally different but merge. History professor, David Blight, describes the interaction between memory and history as "two streams of

historical consciousness that flow into each other" (Blight, 2006, p. 23). History is a "reasoned reconstruction of the past rooted in research; it tends to be critical and skeptical of human motive and action, and therefore more secular than what people commonly call memory" (Blight, 2006, p. 24). Collective memory combines "what individuals jointly remember from their own lived experience and what society collectively commemorated without being personally experienced" (Rusu, 2013, p.262). History is absolute (this event happened on this date), whereas collective memory is more fluid and can get passed from generation to generation, altered, or re-interpreted (Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015). Historic sites have social justice implications in whose narratives they choose to include and exclude. Azie Mira Dungey reflects on the broader ramifications of the erasure, minimizing, and segregation of Black history. She says, "...the way that we treat black people in history reflects how we treat them today. If we dismiss their history, you know, you dismiss their legitimacy; they're not as American as everyone else if their history is not as important" (Tyson & Dungey, 2014, p. 55).

Collective memories are built with bits of history collected from the flow of time and given meaning (Rusu, 2013). Slavery could be better incorporated into the broader collective memory if those 'bits of history' were better discussed. Unfortunately, most people are poorly educated on slavery and its effects on Black and white Americans (Berlin, 2006). As James Oliver Horton (2006) explained, "Public education prepared children to think about slavery and race in ways consistent with the assumption of white supremacy built into twentieth-century American law and custom (p. 41). Thankfully there have been some advancements in history education in the United States (e.g., textbooks guided by recent research and the inclusion of slavery and the role of race) (Horton, 2006). However, these improvements are not evenly distributed, with the latest academic research not reaching high school students (Horton, 2006). In addition, many teachers teaching history in public high schools (often called social studies) do not have history training. A 2004 study found that roughly 68.5 percent of high school history teachers majored in history, 36.7 percent were certified to teach the subject, and only 30 percent were history majors and certified to teach it (Townsend, 2008). History classes generally are of higher quality at the college level, but only 18 percent of universities require students to take an American history class to graduate (Hennen, 2018). Because college educations are not accessible to everyone and not every college-educated person takes history, museums (and the subset, historic sites) bridge the gap. Outside of traditional academia, these spaces act as some of the most reliable sources of historical information (Seymour, 2015).

The creation of narratives is a dynamic and social process. Community outcry advances in research and popular media have pressured historical sites to alter their white-centric, apologetic interpretations of

history and preserve and interpret the emotionally and politically laden memories of enslavement (Alderman et al., 2016). Frontline interpretive staff play an active role in creating narratives (Potter, 2015), and their position impacts how enslavement and race are depicted to the public (Walcott-Wilson, 2020). Their biases and experiences inform their interpretations, and addressing enslavement requires grappling with their racial baggage and the same conflicting narratives as visitors (Gallas & Perry, 2015). They also have to compete with visitor misinformation about slavery and engage with the topic of enslavement multiple times a day (Tyson & Dungey, 2014).

Additionally, because the interpretive staff has direct contact with the public, they often receive visitor backlash and resistance. For example, during a tour of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, while a guide explained how enslaved people constructed, farmed and maintained a terrace of vegetables, a woman chimed in to make her annoyance known. She demanded, "Why are you talking about that? You should be talking about the plants" (Knowles, 2019). Managing these types of outbursts and even threats of violence and undoing the damage done by the American education system is a part of the practical implications of interpreting slavery and requires an immense amount of emotional labor.

Interpreting slavery in a way that represents free and enslaved Africans with humanity and honor contradicts the ideological values and tendencies of the United States. Therefore, transforming the histories of plantation house museums and similar historical sites is challenging. Historical interpreters play a critical role in this process, so knowing how the memory and legacy of white supremacy impact cognitive and emotional labor is essential if the reinterpretation of these sites is to occur.

### **Positionality Statement**

My relationship with this work is rooted in my identity as a Black American. I live in the same society as my participants, have experienced the indoctrination of white supremacy ideology, and navigate the socio-political climate that shapes the collective memory they present (and, for some trying to disrupt). This project resulted from my learning about systems of oppression and Black history from the Black perspective and the myriad of ways the institution of slavery has shaped contemporary American society. Furthermore, while I had become more enlightened about these facts, I recognized that that is not the case for society. I became interested in studying emotional labor and the legacy of slavery as I reflected on the emotional labor I do both in and out of work. The ways I manage my reactions to microaggressions, the code-switching I undertake to ensure I am not portraying negative stereotypes, how I used to conform to respectability politics, and how my voice becomes higher, gentler, and sweeter whenever I interact with any authority figure. As I reflected on how I am hyper-focused on my reactions because the news

constantly reminds me of how the incorrect reaction (regardless of how justified) can lead to harmful outcomes, I became curious about if I am doing all of this emotional labor just existing and living in the legacy of slavery, what is it like to add on the layer of talking about slavery as a career.

As with any project, my interests, experiences, and identities informed the questions I asked and how I related to people. Although I do not have the experience of being an interpreter at a historical site to open pathways for understanding interpretive staff's experiences, other elements of my position aided me in connecting with participants. I am a Black, 29-year-old woman raised in majority-Black Prince George's County, Maryland, which influenced my acquired identity as a researcher. As an African American descendant of enslaved Africans, I had a unique connection to the history of enslavement and interpreters of color. Black interpreters (especially those who interpret in costumes at living history museums) are surrounded by race and slavery. They research and speak on racism in the past while experiencing racism in the present. I hoped that the shared experiences of living in the United States while Black and my own experience studying enslavement would comfort Black interpreters (and other interpreters of color) opening up about their emotional labor. However, I could not fully understand the experiences of interpreting enslavement while being non-Black, and I aimed to reflect on that difference while analyzing interpretive staff interviews. I acknowledged that historical sites could be hostile environments, especially when teaching "difficult histories," and recounting that difficult task to a Black person can be uncomfortable. To be honest about the severity of their emotional labor, I suspected they would find it challenging. Due to the potential for a wide array of experiences, I avoided over-generalizing and centered the voices of the frontline interpretive staff.

## **Research Design**

### *Methodology*

This research utilized oral histories to understand how the legacy of white supremacy and the socio-political climate of the United States shape the re-creation of the history of slavery and historical interpreters' emotional labor. The overarching goal of this research was to understand how historical interpreters view their work concerning re-interpreting historic sites in a way that presents enslaved Africans with dignity and humanity and encourages visitors to connect with Black historical figures. This methodology allowed participants to explain why they had to do emotional labor while working at plantation house museums, historical homes, and similar historical sites and how that influenced their relationship with their work. I used oral history as an exploratory tool to examine the reality of interpreting the history of slavery in the present-day United States from the interpreters' perspective.

Oral history was best suited to answer my research questions because I conceptualized historical interpretation and emotional labor as processes, not events. Further, interpreting slavery is a political and racial topic, and I sought to link interpreters' individual experiences and issues of white supremacy and racial oppression that shape American culture. Oral history enabled these kinds of connections and emphasized participants' perspectives. Oral history refers to the method (the interview), the methodology (a collection of practices and principles about creating, analyzing, preserving, and presenting recorded memories), as well as the movement beyond oral history just contributing to historical understanding but also as a force for social and political change (Perks & Thomas, 2019). Oral history is "a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record" (Shope, 2011, p. 2). One of the primary reasons I selected oral histories over other qualitative methods is because it allows participants to speak expansively about their stories in their own words, with their voices, through their understanding of what happened and why, without restricting them with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999). I did not want my questions to box in participants accidentally and force them to conform their experiences to fit what I thought they should be. Also, my research goal was not to create "historical truth" or generalizable findings but rather propose a new perspective from which we can understand how the history of slavery is presented at historical sites.

#### *Data collection*

To recruit participants, I posted an announcement on the Association of African American Museums' (AAAM) (professional organization) community tab and on the Black Interpreters Guild's (a Facebook group) timeline and the networks and chain-referral sampling techniques to increase the number of participants. At the end of every interview, during the first round of oral history interviews, participants were asked to recommend anyone they felt would be a good fit for the project. I suspect that potential participants may have chosen not to participate because they were concerned about discussing their sites while current employees. Also, I recognize that not everyone is in a place where they can talk about their mental health and potentially traumatic experiences. Timing may have also affected potential participants deciding not to participate. Interviews were conducted in 2022 and 2023, and the collective US was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests against police brutality towards Black bodies, and there was an outcry from the media and politicians against using critical race theory to justify erasing Black history for the sake of white fragility. Interpreters may not have wanted to engage with the recent history of race and politics outside of work. For those who did volunteer to give their oral history, they signed an informed consent form (my institution's IRB approved) prior to the start of their interviews

(each round of interviews had its own informed consent form). The consent forms explained confidentiality, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the project anytime. Setting up the interviews happened via email, with some exceptions where participants requested to communicate virtually using Zoom.

In the end, I collected the oral histories of 15 participants in the first round (collected from June to September 2022) of interviews. I conducted four follow-up interviews (February to May 2023). All of the interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom, which allowed for the audio and video to be recorded. A standard list of questions to act as a guide, but interviews often moved beyond these questions or took on a different order than originally planned due to participants' openness to sharing their experiences. Overall, interviews ranged from 58 minutes to almost 2 hours (1 hour and 58 minutes). In the first round of interviews, participants reflected on their background, career journey, connection to history, and emotional labor. In the second round of interviews, participants gave more detail about their experience working in the field of historical interpretation, including salary, the communities they lived in, and their routines before, during, and after work. Participant ages ranged from 24 to 48 (at the time of the interviews), and the majority (11 out of 15) identified as Black and four as white. All but one participant work/worked at sites located in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern coast of the United States, with one coming from the Midwest. These states include Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, and Indiana. Due to some participants still being employed at these sites, which are often part of larger organizations or municipal governments, participants and site names will have pseudonyms. Names of the historic landholders and other white historical figures that interpreters mention have a pseudonym. Names of enslaved or free Africans mentioned during interviews were substituted with names of well-known enslaved and free Africans with a footnote that describes who they were.

### *Data Analysis*

I utilized thematic analysis to draw meaning from the data collected during the oral history interviews; thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Black & Ubbes, 2009). I used Leavy' (2011) book, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*, and Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni's (2015) paper, *Data analysis in oral history: A new approach in historical research*, to guide my approach to data analysis. I first began by becoming familiar with the data by watching the video recordings of each interview. I relied on the video recordings over the interview transcripts because the videos allowed me to note and analyze what participants were saying and their non-verbal cues as they recounted their experience, all of which informed my initial codes (generated using open coding). My first level of coding and analysis took place as I compiled the data as Speziale

recommended (2010). This analysis phase summarizes the data and organizes it to allow for further labeling of categories.

An example of this stage of coding:

*“I think I will give this tour right, like three to five times a day, five days a week; once I'm off, I'm not talking about this no more, I'm done for the day-”*

Codes assigned to Terry: Emotional labor/ Boundaries/ Job description

The initial codes are applied to obtain participants' lived experiences (Newton, 1965). From the collection of lived experiences, sub-categories emerge. Sub-categories refer to data with a close conception extracted from the initial codes and “set” next to one another (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015). These sub-categories, which represent the initial codes, were then reviewed. Some sub-categories contained multiple codes, determined from the initial coding stage. The codes and categories were discussed among the author and an advisory committee.

Next, similar sub-categories formed main categories, and interconnections became clear. To enhance analysis credibility, data was validated by verifying the findings with participants to recognize them as an accurate representation of their narratives (member-checking). During this process, participants received a list of main themes informed by their interviews and quotes from their interviews that were categorized with those themes.

An example of theme and definition:

Coworker-related emotional labor	The people one works with can significantly affect one's emotional labor. This theme captures the ways in which interpreters' co-workers (including upper management) can cause participants to do more emotional labor or limit the adverse effects of job/visitor-related emotional labor.
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Lastly, I developed the narrative by linking the words of the participants with the correlation of the main categories and the themes with the existing literature (e.g., books, primary and secondary sources, and peer-reviewed articles). These narratives grab the reader's attention by presenting a complete perception of the experience (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015).

## Findings

During data analysis, it was interesting to see the web of societal factors that came to bear on historical interpreters' susceptibility to doing emotional labor while interpreting the history of slavery. The socio-political climate informed by the legacy of slavery created an environment where interpreters had to do emotional labor. As interpreters recollected their experiences of interpreting the history of slavery, they revealed how current events (e.g., police violence, the COVID-19 global pandemic, Trump's presidency, the Black Live Matter protests during the summer of 2020, and similar racialized events), and cultural ideologies of white supremacy acted as motivation for them to do emotional labor. Three main themes emerged to link the legacy of slavery to antecedents of emotional labor and its effects:

1. Interpreters utilized their connections to this history and the legacy of slavery as a motive to do the emotional labor necessary to interpret history in a way that humanizes and honors the lives of the enslaved.
2. Visitors' responses played a role in interpreters' motivation to disrupt and maintain an atmosphere of white supremacy at heritage sites.
3. Motivation may not be enough to prevent the adverse health outcomes of emotional labor.

### *Interpreter's connections as motivation to do emotional*

Alderman & Modlin (2016) note that the language we speak (or do not speak) at plantations is political and has the potential to make, unmake, and remake heritage spaces (p. 280). Interviews with current and former interpreters revealed that the legacy of slavery played a crucial role in their motivations to make historical interpretations; thus motivating them to do emotional labor, utilizing their emotions to encourage their audience to connect this history to present-day systems. Many participants pointed to their connection to the history of slavery and how its legacy impacted them (and their families) when describing their emotional labor. Nicole, a former costumed third-person interpreter at a site in South Carolina, talked about the role of hearing the stories and experiences of her parents in developing her path as a museum educator. She recalled:

So just hearing those stories and hearing their experiences [dad remembering the desegregation of schools and mom being harassed by local boys when she was in middle school] and seeing how we are not so far removed where it's our parents who experienced some of these, these, these, issues and living through the civil rights movement. Even so, I think with that it's something that is a part of who I am... the way that they have encouraged us to make sure that we know our history and our culture, making sure that people know the truth, and I think that's why I wanted to-, I feel like it's my job to tell that truth.

A study on motivations and the emotional labor of teachers conceptualized motivation as an antecedent of emotional labor alongside organizational demand (Truta, 2014). Nicole's words and those of the other Black interpreters demonstrate that their connection to the legacy of slavery motivates them to dismantle

and disrupt “white-washed” narratives of these sites; thus acting as an antecedent of emotional labor. It is also interesting how interpreters’ positionality motivates their emotional labor. Exploring the role of interpreters’ positionality in emotional labor is vital because the way historical interpreters see, consume, and feel the atmosphere of the world around them influences their motivation to shape the atmosphere of their workplace, to consequential take on the emotional burden of showing that enslaved Africans were not just sad, poor, uncivilized victims but as people, people who survived with dignity and autonomy; and that the systems that oppressed did not just dissolve with emancipation but morphed into the society we live in today.

As a part of interpreter positionality, interpreters’ racial identity played an essential role in their motivations to produce historical narratives that combat the white supremacy that was foundational in creating these sites. Ty Freeman, a former third-person interpreter in Georgia, explained that he was motivated to become a historical interpreter because he wanted to reclaim control of HIS history; he explained:

Yeah. For me, it's very important that we be able to tell our stories unapologetically, I'm really tired of other people, the dominant society, trying to control our narratives, it's beyond ridiculous, this whole CRT, and they don't want to talk- they don't want to teach slavery in certain public schools, from state to state is beyond ridiculous. So for me, I wanted to get involved in it cuz I realized can't nobody tell our stories better than us. No one is going to have the same kind of passion and emotional attachment, especially telling the story, say, the history of slavery, than us; and so that's kind of one of the reasons why I wanted to get into the field in the first place...

Things like reputational politics, a term to describe how a historical person or persons' public image or reputation is not intrinsic to them but is socially constructed, controlled, and contested by social actors as they promote and protect their interests within the broader politics of memory production (Schwartz, 2000). Plantation house museums (and similar historical sites) traditionally valorize the wealth or perspectives of the elite that owned the land (and the enslaved people), as well as their families, while ignoring, minimizing, and romanticizing the lives, labor, culture of the people that allowed the white plantation class to amass their wealth (Alderman et al., 2016). Interpreters like Ty Freeman are motivated to take on the emotional labor of changing the reputation of enslaved Africans. Currently, some states have introduced legislation that limits how race and discrimination can be taught in public schools (Fortin & Heyward, 2022); as these laws relate to slavery, teachers essentially have to frame slavery as a product of individual bias; “these slaveholders are racist,” but separates them from the systems they were in, the laws that supported them, and the economy that made that business profitable (Gross, 2022). This manipulation of history does violence to the topic by elevating White historical figures and deprioritizing Black communities’ contributions and struggles. Ty Freeman’s motivation in doing the emotional labor of

a historical interpreter is rooted in activism to achieve the complete liberation that comes with dismantling white supremacy.

White interpreters are also motivated to create narratives that empower the enslaved and their legacy. For Abraham, an interpreter at a colonial site in Maryland, utilizing his privilege to uplift the voice of marginalized people. He said:

[Talking about how his identity impacts how he does this work] As a white person, it is- I'm consciously thinking of how I can empower the voice of racial minorities right, period, and so that is why I always tried to focus the story and the language, specifically the language to the people, to the enslaved people, to the people of color, things like that, um, even sitting here talking with you, I've been talking about Thomas Black, and I specifically say "the man who had that house built," not the man who built the house, he did not lift a finger for that house, that house was built on in slave labor, we know that. So why word differently? It's just true; it is just a fact. And so consciously thinking, instead-- using the language that the people who have been affected by slavery, by all of these different things, um, that they are the ones who are who tell us how we can interpret, and I specifically use that, you know, using language as an enslaved person rather than a slave, things like that (Abraham, a third-person interpreter in MD)

From these interviews, it became clear that the legacy of slavery that is foundational to the systemic racism embedded in present-day American society motivated historical interpreters to take on the emotional labor of interpreting slavery. Interpreters valued telling historical truths rather than feeding into the long-held tradition of presenting the slave-holders as "heroes" of history and to varying degrees of success, helping visitors, especially white visitors, to connect with the enslaved Africans not only as historical characters but as people. As Modlin et al. (2011) point out, it is enough for docents to address the facts of slavery or talk about the enslaved more than the "planter class," but the way tourists are encouraged to connect with these historical groups emotionally.

#### *Visitors' role in maintaining and disrupting white supremacy*

Visitors are active co-creators in the histories produced at historical sites and the meanings assigned to the past at these sites (Alderman & Modlin, 2016). Therefore, visitors play a role in disrupting and maintaining narratives of white supremacy at these sites. Their social and political ideologies, miseducation, expectations, and responses to the history being presented dictate the emotional labor historical interpreters have to do while interacting with visitors. Historical interpreters must compete with the notion of America as white and Christian (Yacovone, 2022) that stubbornly persists. Interpreters also had to cognitively and emotionally make peace with the fact that the narratives they present that honor Black people's lives in these spaces run counter to the tendency in the United States. The shift to facing the historical legacy of racist structures and ideas has also brought about a "notion of an embattled white majority which has to defend its power by any means necessary," a position once held by fringe white nationalist groups, which have increasingly infiltrated the mainstream of American political and cultural

discussion, (Clark, 2020). Terry, a former interpreter in Georgia, recalled how the language of mainstream white nationalist groups, media outlets, and politicians was shaping the expectations of the people visiting her site. However, although navigating hostile interactions added to her emotional load, it confirmed that her work was necessary.

[While describing her connection to the site] ...I think there were a lot of like things happening in the currents of the United States that also made me very certain that how important all this was, right so, it's like 2018 we got two more years this Trump's presidency, right, Charlottesville was a few years ago, there were so many people with- the misinformation has clearly spread, right, people aren't like being upset with me about Critical Race Theory because those aren't the words they're using but they're clearly not happy that they're decorative arts tourists shifted into whatever I'm doing, right, um, so I think there's like a- so whenever- there were times when I would tell people in Savannah where I worked, they'd be like, 'Oh the really good one, the really good place, that's the place where actual history is getting done.'

As Hanna et al. (2022) points out, "Visitors bring cognitive frameworks formed within narrativized worlds that they use to interpret and internalize what they hear and feel on tours (p. 1209)," these narrative worlds intersect with individual and collective group identities. From Terry's and other interpreters' interviews, it appears that managing visitor miseducation and expectation of minimal Black narratives contributes to emotional labor.

Conversations with interpreters also demonstrated how Donald Trump's presidency and white supremacy in mainstream politics shaped their working landscape. His presidency emboldened his supporters to act out their racial prejudices. It increased the emotional labor historical interpreters like Whitney, a former interpreter at a site in South Carolina, had to do while exposing her to hate. She recalls:

[Describing when her job was emotionally challenging] So, like I said at the beginning, basically that Trump's entire presidency because, as you know, certain like people felt very compelled to be very horrible human beings because their president was a horrible human being and they came to my job to make my life very difficult because they felt they could be entitled and it got old quickly and it got scary quickly because I- And I didn't realize this time worked at Carolina Plantation I had never experienced like real out loud racism in my life. You know, until I started working at Carolina Plantation. And so initiated really recognize it because I was like this is hateful, but then it started to get more personal, and I remember, as long as I live, I'll never forget this...(Whitney, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

Whitney pointed out that she had not experienced "out loud" racism until working at Carolina Plantation aligns with social scientific analyses of social norms. Mendelberg (2001) explained that racial inequality was the norm in the early 20th century in the US, which shifted to a norm of racial equality post-civil rights era. Although racial inequality is still a part of American society systems, individuals who held negative attitudes towards Black people were less inclined to admit to publicly, and presumably act on, their prejudice. Throughout his campaign (and his presidency), Donald Trump made many racist remarks, remarks that were not punished but rewarded with him winning the 2016 election (Inwood, 2019). Maintaining one's composure when confronted with racist guests exacerbates the adverse outcomes of emotional labor, especially for Black people working at a plantation house museum. This racialized space

is one of the earliest backdrops for Black inferiority and white superiority ideologies. Wang and Brewster (2019) argued that emotional labor can "deny dignity to workers by highlighting their subservience and requiring them to suppress their own emotions to elevate the status and experiences of their customers (p. 531)." The dynamic between Black service providers (i.e., interpreters) and white customers (i.e., tourists) demonstrates how historical sites unintentionally can risk affirming some visitors' ideologies of racial superiority, all in the name of customer service. The emotional labor done by Black interpreters is intensified when you consider the generational trauma they inherit from their ancestors masking their emotions to appease white people, especially those enslaved on plantations. In a Washington Post piece entitled *What PTSD tells us about the history of slavery*, Tyler Parry gives examples of how formerly enslaved people left narratives that provided vivid descriptions of the violent acts that caused them and their loved ones significant trauma—trauma that has yet to abate. Coupling the emotional labor of maintaining organization display rules while being faced with what Whitney described as “real out loud racism” for visitors and the multigenerational trauma and injustices experienced by African Americans (Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (DeGruy, 2017)) paints a comprehensive look at the reality of historical interpretation, one where even sites dedicated to telling historical truth about slavery, exploit their descendants for the entertainment of white people.

Interpreters revealed that they use current events and concepts to connect their audiences with the site's history. However, this can be ineffective, and audiences react negatively or shut down. Marley, a former interpreter from South Carolina, shared her experience ending her tours by talking about an act of racial terrorism that occurred in 2015, only 16 minutes away from the site, and how the terrorist visited Carolina Plantation and included it in his online manifesto. She shared:

[He] came to the site [Carolina Plantation] and took pictures there, and included it his online manifesto before going to the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the Southern United States and murdering nine people there, um, I would always say that my tour, when I was wrapping up the tour, that would be my way of ending the tour: is here is how another South Carolinian and about my age has approached this history um, or not approached it or I don't know...but the more I would tell that story, the more there would be-, I hate to say the wrong kind of anger, but like, 'boohoo Marley is telling this story this doesn't impact me at all,' or "I don't care," or "all we hear about as black people getting murdered," so this kind of dissonance may be of white people getting burnt out on Black tragedy that has not ended ever...(Marley, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

Based on Marley's account of how their audience displayed the "wrong kind of anger" when hearing how this history can incite modern racial violence. These inappropriate reactions demonstrated the audience's role in cultivating anti-racist messaging at historical sites. If they are not receptive, or as Marley argued, burnout from the seemingly never-ending Black tragedy, then no matter how hard a historical interpreter tries to present a narrative that encourages empathy and action, they (the interpreter) will receive the backlash. Not only was Marley engaging in emotional labor while recounting the local tragedy (multiple

times a day) but also in managing visitor backlash. De Roja and Camarero (2008) pointed out that tourists visit museums and other cultural sites based on familiarity with the site's content. Ress and Cafar (2020) found that in a study of an open-air museum, only 5% of participants desired "to be challenged," showing that audiences can be hostile towards attempts to challenge dominant historical narratives. Visitors' resistance reflects societal resistance to change, making interpreters feel misunderstood and exacerbating emotional labor's adverse effects (e.g., burnout).

Almost all interviews included examples of tourists resisting interpreters' reinterpretation of the site in a way that centered the narratives of enslaved Africans and combated the politics that come with addressing these repressed histories. However, there were instances of being encouraged by visitors, especially descendants who were coming to the sites to connect with the ancestors. Shay shared how she felt honored to tell the stories of those enslaved at York Homestead because it meant so much to the descendants of the enslaved families at the site. She recounted:

...but also mainly feeling like, Okay, I'm doing this for the descendants who still come out here, because a lot of them are older, and they really want the younger generation to kind of carry on what they're doing, um, and even if I'm not directly related to them, it still feels like I'm helping them out by telling about their family, but also just knowing that I'm being able to educate about the ancestors and speak for them, and kind of be a voice for them, because I know they probably had a lot to say and couldn't necessarily say it out loud, or scared to, or just didn't live to be able to say it...(Shay, a former costumed third-person interpreter in SC)

Skipper and Davidson (2018) found that African diasporic roots tourists acknowledge that sites where their ancestors were enslaved as home sites when they feel a sense of belonging. Focusing on creating a sense of belonging for descendants plays a part in interpreters' deep acting, specifically refocusing attention (e.g., thinking about happy things to express positive feelings). Thinking about the descendants and giving a voice to those who were historically hopeless distracts from the problematic guests' racist and unruly behaviors.

#### *The emotional labor and the limits of interpreters' motivation*

Throughout the oral history interviews, interpreters spoke about how the current socio-political climate and the embedded white supremacy motivated them to undertake the emotional labor of historical interpretation. They were motivated by their work's potential to usher in societal change. However, change has been slow, and it feels like American society is losing ground (e.g., we see history repeating itself). This persistence of white supremacy on and off of the plantation (along with other current events) is leaving historical interpreters frustrated, feeling like their work is pointless, and the harmful effects of intense, long-term emotional labor are starting to take effect, causing interpreters to leave the field. Steve,

a former first-person interpreter in Georgia, cited this and other institutional factors (e.g., pay) as his reason for leaving the field. He expressed:

That was a big turning point for me and wanting to leave because I was like, no I can't do this for another 60 years, especially with the minimal impact I'm making on people, and you know I know I'm making a minimal impact on people because I've just watched 2020 happen (Steve, a former first-person interpreter in GA)

In South Carolina, Marley cited similar frustrations around not being heard or people not caring about the work anymore.

[Describing the motivations for self-harming] Dealing with the global pandemic that is still continuing today- um, and the feeling that no one was connecting to the work anymore, it just kind of felt like- what's the point of me standing here and shouting about Black oppression and Black liberation if y'all don't give a shit. (Marley, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

Steve and Marley's (and several other interpreters interviewed) decision to leave the position of frontline historical interpretation is rooted in burnout due to their work not being valued. It appears that this is a way to protect themselves from the emotional strain of racial battle fatigue, a natural depletion response to commonplace, consistent experiences of heightened distress due to racism (King et al., 2021).

Although Marley is not a person of color, her pro-Black, anti-racism work places them close to anti-Black racism, although they are not directly experiencing said racism. As interpreters became more frustrated with their work and people's responses to it, it is possible they were engaging in more surface-acting rather than expressing their genuine feelings. Showing the audience that you are annoyed and disappointed in them for "not getting it" and showing the heavy emotions (anger, frustration, disgust) as a result of being exposed to the continued violence against Black bodies, the attempt to overthrow American democracy, and fascism and white supremacy becoming mainstream, are not in accordance of the display rule of the heritage tourism industry (or any industry). Emotional labor research has shown that surface acting was linked to burnout in emotionally intense jobs. A 2008 quantitative study on 911 dispatchers, child protective service workers, and correction officers found that when engaging in the kind of emotional labor that required employees to pretend to feel one way when they feel another (i.e., to wear a "false face") (surface acting) contributed to burnout (Guy et al., 2008). Kim (2020) found that regarding nurses surface acting was positively correlated with stress and burnout, and the stress from emotional labor was positively associated with burnout. They note that although surface acting was not directly associated with burnout, it was indirectly associated with stress (Kim, 2020). For historical interpreters, the stress of navigating the legacy of slavery and having to mask their natural emotions can override their motivations, leaving them burnt out and ultimately leaving the profession of frontline interpretation.

## Conclusion

The above words of historical interpreters demonstrate that the current socio-political climate, rooted in the legacy of slavery, informs the emotional labor they do. The analysis of their powerful stories of interpreting slavery while navigating its legacy yields three significant contributions to the literature on emotional labor and heritage tourism. First, research on slavery and heritage tourism focuses on the perspective of the owners of these sites and the people who visit them. Historical interpreters' experiences and perspectives were often framed as secondary or focused on how interpreters influence visitors. This research presents a new perspective of thinking about historical sites and frames the reality of producing the narratives of the enslaved. Second, local and national examples of white supremacy deeply impact historical interpreters, both acting as a motivator and a deterrent for them to do frontline interpretive work. These sites reflect the socio-political climate of the United States. It was interesting to see how interpreters see themselves in that reflection. Third, this research demonstrates how oral histories can be vital in centering the perspectives and reality of overlooked and marginalized groups, especially in the heritage tourism workforce. These narratives are integral in studying heritage tourism and human resources management. The 15 oral histories revealed that the socio-political climate of white supremacy set the stage for the emotional labor historical interpreters engage in, in and out of work time. Layering the micro-level analysis of working in public history with a macro, structural understanding of the cultural, social, political, and economic landscape of white supremacy and racism offered a fuller unpacking of the challenges of interpreting slavery and the actual weight historical interpreters carry in the industry.

A strength of this research is its use of oral histories to understand participants' motivation to engage in emotionally laborious work. This approach allowed a more comprehensive understanding of interpreters' experience navigating living in the legacy of slavery and informed their work by not confining participants with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999). This research has limitations and constraints, including access, time, and resources. Although I collected a set of rich narratives, it would have benefited from a larger group of participants from more sites. Another limitation of this study is that the findings are not generalizable. Although my intention was not to create a general depiction of public history workers, it is supposed to expand the existing literature in this study area.

Scholars interested in how slavery is presented at historical sites can benefit from considering employees' motivation and how that informs their emotional labor. Transformative interpretation requires audience members to be encouraged to connect with historical figures. For interpreters to foster that

connection, they must be motivated to connect with history. The narratives in the research point to how contemporary white supremacy, a remnant of slavery, motivated historical interpreters to interpret the history of their sites dynamically and compellingly but also contributed to their experiences of the adverse effects of emotional labor. Moreover, while this research demonstrates the emotional impacts of the social-political climate, there is a need to create spaces for frontline public history workers to discuss the physical risks associated with making historical interpretations. Based on the foundations laid out in this study, future work can use storytelling approaches to understand the emotional labor of other departments of the heritage tourism workforce (e.g., archives, administration, marketing) and how present-day racial attitudes influence their decision-making. Any effort to understand the transformative potential of heritage tourism must ultimately be attuned to the socio-political shifts in society and the role of emotions, feelings, and effects in the tourism workforce.

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## **CHAPTER 3: “Is this draining you?” An oral history exploration of how historical interpreters conceptualize the emotional labor of interpreting slavery**

### **Introduction**

Historical interpreters (also known as cultural interpretative staff, tour guides, and docents) play a crucial role in painting a comprehensive picture of the institution of slavery and the lives of enslaved people. They use their knowledge and emotions to encourage their audiences to connect with Black historical figures in a way that cultivates historical empathy and raises visitors’ self-image. These transformative narratives require interpreters to engage in emotional labor. Emotional labor relates to regulating and managing emotional expressions with others as part of one’s professional work role (Hochschild, 1983). The job of a historical interpreter is a multi-faceted position. To be successful in their positions, historical interpreters use their emotions to provide good customer service, ensure visitors enjoy their leisure experience, and create desired feelings in the audience to shape the production of history at their site (Tyson, 2008; Tyson, 2013). This research aims to understand how interpreters engage in emotional labor, especially when interpreters are not actively giving tours. Emotional labor is complex, and conditions like the social climate outside the site, employee mental health and well-being, and the shift away from the tradition of interpreting sites in a way that glorifies and glamorizes the lives of the planter class while erasing the lives and contributions of free and enslaved Black people can make things more challenging. A complete understanding of historical interpreters’ emotional labor will give management insight into the work environment of the site and its impact on their employees to improve morale and reduce staff turnover.

This work is needed because although numerous studies have been conducted to understand the stress and emotional labor of the tourism workforce, with particular emphasis on tour guides (Carrillo et al., 2020; Alola et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2018; Houge et al., 2013; Chu et al., 2012; Van Dijk, Smith, & Cooper, 2011; Wong & Wang, 2009; Ross, 2006), there is a gap in the literature identifying the emotional labor experienced frontline historical interpreters at historical sites (Walcott-Wilson, 2020; Potter, 2016; Tyson & Dungey, 2014; Modlin et al., 2011; Tyson, 2008). This research focuses on the everyday emotional interactions historical interpreters experience, explicitly focusing on former and current interpreters covering the history of enslavement and race at historic sites in the United States. I unpack how interpreters conceptualize their emotional labor and present different components of the job that require interpreters to engage in emotional labor. Then show how interpreters cope with their emotional labor. Lastly, I make recommendations for future practice and research implications. As Poster, Crain, and Cherry (2016) point out, it is crucial to broaden our understanding of invisible labor, like emotional labor,

because (1) work that is not visible is not symbolically or materially valued; (2) workers are less likely to advocate for themselves if they do see their work as valuable; (3) if labor is not acknowledged there cannot be policy to regulate it.

## **Literature Review**

### *Overview of the role of frontline interpretive staff*

Being an interpreter or guide is one of the oldest professions in tourism. The role can be traced back to hunter and gatherer tribes and combines the pathfinder guide and mentor guide, where guides take on the responsibility of leading physically and spiritually (Buchholz et al., 2015). Today, that responsibility has evolved into having power over the narratives at historic sites and creating/ (re)creating history. Many names describe the workers at historical sites that present information to the visitors through programs, guided walks, demonstrations, and multimedia presentations (e.g., docents, tour guides, cultural interpretive staff, and historic interpreters). Regardless of the official job title, frontline interpretive staff are heritage interpreters. Based on Tilden's (2007) definition of heritage interpretation, heritage interpreters conduct educational activities to reveal meaning and relationships through original objects, first-hand experience, and illustrative media rather than only communicating factual information.

Historical interpreters are interactive service workers. Their jobs require them to relate directly with customers, clients, or visitors through facetime or voice time. They are also given explicit instructions concerning what to say and how to act while customers and managers watch to ensure these instructions are carried out (Tyson, 2013). Frontline interpreters at historic sites are drawn to this field by a passion for connecting with people using history and their emotions to create visitors' desired feelings (Tyson, 2008; 2013). To accomplish this, these workers must be knowledgeable and provide visitors with an 'enjoyable' experience by playing actors, educators, and entertainers (Tyson, 2008). Although working on the public history frontlines is emotionally fulfilling, it is also emotionally exhausting, impacting the historic site's productivity and the staff's personal and professional happiness (Tyson, 2013).

Frontline interpretive staff are often residents of the regions where they work. They can be self-employed, site employees, or hired through third-party corporations. The minimum education requirement to be a frontline interpreter is a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. Although, some companies may require a bachelor's degree in a related subject. Frontline interpretive staff are usually part-time employees, making, on average, \$11 per hour (Glassdoor, 2020). They commonly hold other jobs (e.g., translators, researchers, or teachers (The Career Project, n.d.). Some interpretive staff work as tour guides,

giving walking tours, bus tours, or even leading river tours on a boat. Others are historical actors, and character speakers that portray historical characters are also historical interpreters. To prepare for their role, interpreters must research the period and the person they depict using archives, books, letters, and records (The Career Project, n.d.). Their preparation may also involve learning a trade using historically accurate techniques (e.g., blacksmithing) (The Career Project, n.d.). When not working directly with the public, interpretive staff have additional duties like administrative work, writing articles, giving off-site interpretation for the local community and festivals, and designing physical and online exhibits.

Professional organizations for interpreters, such as the National Association of Interpretation (NAI) (The Career Project, n.d.), offer opportunities to receive certifications. All of this preparation, training, and accreditation allow frontline interpretive staff to have the knowledge and skills to preserve the history and reconcile the conflicting and contradicting memory of the site, enslavement, and the lives/experiences of enslaved people.

### *The memory and interpretation of slavery in the United States*

Slavery in the United States began in 1619 with the arrival of 20 Africans in the British colony of Jamestown. Throughout its existence, slavery did not look the same. The lives of enslaved Africans went through different phases as time progressed, along with the conceptualization of race in the Americas. Nevertheless, at every iteration of enslavement, one consistency remained. It played a critical role in molding America's economy, politics, culture, and principles (Berlin, 2006), yet the memory of slavery is complex and inconsistent. In the public eye, some Americans believe that slavery was an unfortunate institution that European settlers engaged in either unknowingly or unwillingly. Others subscribe to the white man's burden ideology that slavery was a philanthropic institution that taught primitive Africans to be proper and civilized. On the other end of the spectrum, some believe slavery was an institution of ironclad oppression, stifling any chances of full humanity (Berlin, 2003; 2006). Research suggests that none of the above perceptions accurately describes the lives of enslaved people in the U.S. (Berlin, 2006). The truth may be more complicated, including conflicting themes of violence, power, exclusion, resistance, culture, and life (Berlin, 2006).

The history and memory of enslavement are preserved and cultivated at historical sites (especially former sites of enslavement). *History* and *memory* are two concepts that are fundamentally different but merge. Blight (2006) describes the interaction between *memory* and *history* as "two streams of historical consciousness that flow into each other. (p.23)" history is a "reasoned reconstruction of the past rooted in research; it tends to be critical and skeptical of human motive and action, and therefore more secular than what people commonly call memory" (Blight, 2006, p. 24). Collective memory combines "what

individuals jointly remember from their own lived experience and what society collectively commemorated without being personally experienced" (Rusu, 2013, p.262). History is absolute (this event happened on this date), whereas collective memory is more fluid and can get passed from generation to generation, altered, or re-interpreted (Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015). The possibility of re-interpretation leads to social justice implications. Historic sites have social justice implications in whose narratives they choose to include and exclude. Azie Mira Dungey reflects on the broader ramifications of the erasure, minimizing, and segregation of Black history in an interview with Dr. Amy Tyson (2014). She says, "...the way that we treat black people in history reflects how we treat them today. If we dismiss their history, you know, you dismiss their legitimacy; they're not as American as everyone else if their history is not as important" (Tyson & Dungey, 2014, p. 55).

Collective memories are built with bits of history collected from the *flow of time* and given meaning (Rusu, 2013). Slavery could be better incorporated into the broader collective memory if those 'bits of history' were better discussed. Unfortunately, most people are poorly educated on slavery and its effects on Black and white Americans (Berlin, 2006). As James Oliver Horton (2006) explained, "Public education prepared children to think about slavery and race in ways consistent with the assumption of white supremacy built into twentieth-century American law and custom (p. 41)." Thankfully there have been some advancements in history education in the United States (e.g., textbooks guided by recent research and the inclusion of slavery and the role of race) (Horton, 2006). However, these improvements are not evenly distributed, with the latest academic research not reaching high school students (Horton, 2006). In addition, many teachers teaching history in public high schools (often referred to as *social studies*) are not trained in history. A 2004 study found that roughly 68.5 percent of high school history teachers majored in history, 36.7 percent were certified to teach the subject, and only 30 percent of high school history teachers have both a degree in history and are a certification to teach it (Townsend, 2008). History classes generally are of higher quality at the college level, but only 18 percent of universities require students to take an American history class to graduate (Hennen, 2018). Because college educations are not accessible to everyone and not every college-educated person takes history, museums (and the subset, historic sites) bridge the gap. Outside of traditional academia, these spaces act as some of the most reliable sources of historical information (Seymour, 2015).

Frontline interpretive staff play an active role in creating narratives (Potter, 2015), and their position impacts how enslavement and race are depicted to the public (Walcott-Wilson, 2020). The creation of narratives is a dynamic and social process. Recently, community outcry, advances in research, and popular media have pressured historical sites to alter their white-centric, apologetic interpretations of

history and preserve and interpret the emotionally and politically laden memories of enslavement (Alderman et al., 2016). Their biases and experiences inform their interpretations, and addressing enslavement requires grappling with their racial baggage and the same conflicting narratives as visitors (Gallas & Perry, 2015). They also have to compete with visitor misinformation about slavery and engage with the topic of enslavement multiple times a day (Tyson & Dungey, 2014).

Additionally, because the interpretive staff has direct contact with the public, they often receive visitor backlash and resistance. For example, during a tour of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, while a guide explained how enslaved people constructed, farmed, and maintained a terrace of vegetables, a woman chimed in to make her annoyance known. She asked, "Why are you talking about that? You should be talking about the plants" (Knowles, 2019). Managing these types of outbursts and even threats of violence and undoing the damage done by the American education system is a part of the practical implications of interpreting slavery and requires an immense amount of emotional labor.

### *Emotional labor*

Emotional labor has been re-conceptualized in many ways since being coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (Hochschild, 1983). The earliest definition of *emotional labor* is "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). This study will use the definition of emotional labor Tyson (2013) mentioned in *The wages of history: Emotional labor on public history's front lines*, "when workers are asked to use their own emotions to create feeling states in clientele" (p.14). This definition of emotional labor means that historical interpreters use their emotions to provide good customer service, provide visitors with an enjoyable leisure experience, and create desired feelings in the audience to shape the production of history at their site (Tyson, 2008; Tyson, 2013). The standard of service interpretive staff (like all service workers) are expected to meet is dictated by the *display rules* of their organizations. Display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1975) are a social group or culture's norms and standards that dictate how one should appropriately present emotions and interact with others. Management discloses and enacts the organization's display rules during the selection process, employee training, and performance evaluations (Grandey & Sayre, 2019).

Employees utilize surface and deep acting to meet their job's display rules. Deep acting refers to creating a genuine and sincere expression using cognitive strategies like refocusing attention and reappraisal (Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is adjusting forward-facing facial expressions and body language without altering one's internal emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting requires behavioral modulation strategies like suppression and amplifying (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). Hochschild (1983) proposed that deep acting is the most effective emotion regulation technique, minimizing burnout

and emotional exhaustion. Grandey and Gabriel (2015) warn against labeling surface acting as "bad" and deep acting as "good." Deep acting may have hidden costs due to the constantly shifting internal emotional signals (Hochschild, 1983) and may be related to physical strain (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). Instead of treating deep acting and surface acting as opposing forces, examining how internal and external determinants mediate emotion regulation techniques' effectiveness is more beneficial to understanding emotional labor.

### ***Internal antecedents of emotional labor***

Grandey and Gabriel (2015) proposed that personal characteristics such as emotional abilities, work motives, and personality traits are antecedents to emotional labor. Emotional skills include emotional intelligence, emotional contagion, and empathic concern (Choi & Kim, 2015). *Emotional contagion* refers to a kind of empathy in which a person can mimic or "catch" the expressed emotions of others (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2015). People with emotional contagion find it easy to express their emotions and experience stress when concealing them (Choi & Kim, 2015). In a quantitative study of hospitality workers, Chu et al. (2012) found a positive relationship between emotional contagion and emotive efforts. This finding suggests that employees with high emotional contagion exert more effort to display positive expressions to meet customers' expectations and are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion. Kruml and Geddes's (2000)'s empirical study on service workers presented similar findings. This study found that emotional contagion strongly influenced emotive effort and emotional dissonance (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Choi and Kim's (2015) literature review on emotional labor and emotional labor strategies documented emotional contagion's effect on both deep-acting (Chu, 2002) and surface-acting (Choi et al., 2006).

*Empathic concern* is an individual's ability to accept the emotions of others (they "feel for others") but not take on these emotions as their own (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Choi & Kim, 2015). There are inconsistent findings on empathic concern's impact on employee emotional labor. According to Choi and Kim (2015), empathic concern is one of the characteristics that lead to emotional labor because people with higher amounts of empathic concern often have to express emotions that differ from their own. However, Chu et al.'s (2012) study did not support this argument, not finding an association between empathetic concern and emotional dissonance, empathic concern, and emotive effort. This study concluded that an employee's empathetic concern might not strongly predict how they accomplish emotional labor. Chu (2002) also rejected the hypothesis that a deep empathic concern will result in less emotional dissonance than more emotive effort.

*Emotional intelligence* is an individual's ability to recognize and use emotional information in social interactions (Grandey, 2000, p. 106). Emotional intelligence is also an essential requirement of emotional labor because anyone working in a service-oriented job must use it to know what emotions are expected of them in a given situation (İrigüler, 2015). Along with displaying expected emotions, emotionally intelligent employees use their emotions to affect those of others, which requires high levels of creativity for reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). Employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to predict organizational changes and make choices when there is inadequate information (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). There are mixed results regarding the effect of emotional intelligence and emotional labor. A study by Johnson and Spector (2007) found that emotional intelligence did not impact the relationship between emotional labor and its outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion, affective well-being, and job satisfaction). In contrast, Yanchus et al.'s (2010) findings suggested that emotional intelligence decreased emotional labor's negative impacts. Mikolajczak et al. (2007) also highlighted that emotionally intelligent employees are more efficient at managing their emotions and those of others; when in challenging interactions with a customer, they use deep acting, eliminating adverse effects of emotional labor and lessening emotional dissonance.

Personality traits like affectivity also influence employee emotional labor. *Affectivity* is an individual's tendency to experience a particular mood, react in a specific way, and express a particular emotion (Lazarus, 1993). Researchers identify two types of affectivity: positive and negative (Chu, 2002; Chu et al., 2012; İrigüler, 2015 ). People with high positive affectivity have a higher positive affect and more positive emotions than negative ones (e.g., cheerfulness, enthusiasm, happiness). Vice versa, those with negative affectivity have high levels of negative affect and experience more negative emotions (e.g., irritation, nervousness, sorrow) (Chu, 2002; Chu et al., 2012). Individuals with different affect tendencies conceptualize the same display rules differently (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000) and adopt other acting methods. For example, Chu et al. (2012) found that hospitality workers with higher positive affectivity experience tend to act genuinely in emotional labor because their emotions align with the organizations' cheerful display rules. They are also less likely to experience less emotional dissonance and put out a lower emotive effort.

### ***External determinants of emotional labor***

Internal factors like employee's levels of empathy (Kruml & Geddes, 2000), perceived self-efficacy (Grandey et al., 2012), emotional intelligence (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018) impact the amount of emotional labor and the susceptibility to the harmful effects of emotional labor. However, these factors do

not operate in a vacuum. Social constructs like race and gender, and environment also play an integral role.

### **Race and emotional labor**

*Race* is a socially constructed phenomenon that is continuously evolving (Warmington, 2014). Race acts as a way to categorize people based on physical characteristics, and although it is not 'real,' it has real effects because people treat it *as if* it is (Gilborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). As a result, race influences social relationships and interactions. Due to racial stereotyping, Grandey et al. (2019) found that customers hold Black service providers to a higher performance standard than their white counterparts. Black people are stereotyped as less warm, leading to lower performance ratings, regardless of whether their performance is the same as white employees. Black employees must perform more emotional labor (e.g., exaggerating positive expressions) to overcome these racial disparities (Grandey et al., 2019). Emotional labor is a safety precaution, done consciously and with intention. In Durr and Harvey Wingfield's (2011, p. 566) analysis of the experiences of Black women in line for promotion opportunities, one participant says, 'I always prepare because I want to make sure my temper is in check. You know, I'm mellow. I have unhooked from personal feelings and previous conversations to deal with what's ahead. I do this because so few [black] women are in managerial and executive-level posts.' This extra work is not equally distributed amongst their white counterparts. This experience of "keeping my temper in check" is further confirmed by Kim et al. (2013), found in a study examining the relationship between demographic diversity and emotion regulation using 2,072 employees in 274 workgroups. This study found that more surface acting was used by racial minority groups when diversity is low, perhaps to supersede stereotypes. Conversely, white people engage in higher emotion regulation (surface acting) when racial diversity is high, potentially to avoid being perceived as prejudiced (Kim et al., 2013).

For frontline interpretive staff, race plays a complex relationship in their emotional labor. The institution of enslavement was grounded in race and white supremacy; therefore, sites that interpret that history or remember the past, in general, are implicitly racialized and political (Hoelscher, 2003; Modlin et al., 2011; Regis, 2001). Interpreters of color must perform the appropriate emotional labor while molding themselves to their specific race etiquette and norms. When working at sites that interpret history, Black interpretive staff (either intentionally or unintentionally) are asked to serve as "ambassadors for all African Americans" (Tyson, 2013; Wilcot-Wilson, 2020). While reporting on an instance, an older white woman approached a Black female interpreter and asked, "Why her generation was angry." Wilcot-Wilson (2020) highlights the extra emotions, energy, and dedication that Black interpreters have to exert

to fill the role of an interpreter while also being activists/ advocates for Black people of the past and present.

### **Gender and emotional labor**

Gender norms moderate emotional display rules that either agree with or contradict the display rules of their jobs. For example, jobs that require positive emotional expressions align with the social norms for women (e.g., compassion and tolerance) rather than men (Hochschild, 1983). In a meta-analysis, Kenworthy et al. (2014) found that gender moderates emotional dissonance and exhaustion. The study found no differences in the amount of surface acting but more so in how men and women emotionally regulate. One explanation may be that women are more socially acceptable to present their emotions outwardly in Western cultures.

In contrast, men are expected to remain stoic, suppressing their feelings (regardless of positive or negative (Safdar et al., 2009). Despite this, findings confirming the effect of gender roles on emotional labor are unclear. For example, Kim et al. (2013) concluded that the effects of gender on emotion regulation were insignificant. Similar results were found by Shapoval (2019), confirming that gender acts as a moderator, not a predictor for emotional labor.

Tour leading is traditionally male-dominated (Lin et al., 2008). However, in heritage tourism, the work done by historical interpreters and other cultural workers is seen as feminine because it involves interpersonal interaction, emotional labor, and caretaking behavior (Tyson, 2013). In Tyson's (2013) ethnography, the author highlights examples of which modern-day employees are expected to perform the social norms of the period of their sites. At Fort Snelling, the male staff rarely interpreted alone (they were often running drills, military maneuvers, etc.). Female staff representing "post dependents" and other women that would have been at the fort conducted most of the interpersonal interaction with visitors. The inclusion of women at the military fort allowed for discussions on ethnicity, gender, class, and work, and "because it was presumed that the mere presence of smiling females dressed in period costume would be a successful way to make everyone feel welcome" (Tyson, 2013, p. 42).

### **Work environment and emotional labor**

Emotional labor is prominent in the service industry, and the workplace context, like employee-manager relationships and guest-employee interactions, are sources of emotional labor. Frontline interpretive staff have to manage their emotions not only when interacting with visitors but also with management.

### ***Guest-employee interactions***

While discussing enslaved Africans' lives and contributions, interpreters have the underlying fear of backlash from visitors (Gallas & Perry, 2015). Rude behaviors and threats of violence have a positive relationship with worker emotional exhaustion. This relationship occurs not because of the act of incivility but the mechanisms the employees use to deal with it, leading to emotional labor (Sliter et al., 2010). Hostile encounters between employees and customers create a spiral with customers' perspectives (poor/ failed service delivery) and employees' perspectives (mistreatment), leading to adverse reactions from both parties, respectively, and can spill over to other customers and employees (Groth & Grandey, 2012).

Alongside the threat of resistance to incorporating enslavement into interpretive programs and materials, guides also face emotional distress when they do not feel confident in their knowledge and qualifications to speak on the history of slavery. Interpreters' role extends beyond serving as 'information givers'; they are active participants in shaping the meaning of the site (Pond, 1993; Dahles, 2002) and are creators of historical empathy (Modlin et al., 2011). When interpreters feel they lack the skills and knowledge or are uncomfortable talking about controversial subjects like slavery, they rely on generalized narratives that do little to emotionally capture their audience with the justification that there is a lack of surviving evidence. Modlin et al. (2011) heard this response from guides at various plantations. These guides expressed that they would be willing to include more information about slavery if only they knew more about the lives of the enslaved, despite being observed making historical conjectures about details of the planter-class family to fill in the blanks left by a lack of documentation. Not all guides are comfortable relying on generic information about enslavement for fear of being called out by or challenged by visitors that are experts on the subject (Potter, 2016). Potter (2016) had a guide express hesitation about slavery because he did not want to say anything wrong.

### ***Manager-employee relationship***

Management also contributes to interpreters' work stress which facilitates emotional labor. Some managerial practices that cause work stress include the failure to recognize that employees are 'truly human' with emotions, motivations, and expectations and viewing employees as "needing them [managers] more than they [managers] need employees" (Wood, 1999). Tyson (2013) recalls the instances of management hinting to the interpretive staff that they are easily replaceable, causing instability in one's job. These working environments cultivate stress, fatigue, and burnout, affecting any employee regardless of skill or position (Ross, 2006). The effects of occupational stress include decreased creativity, stunted personal and professional development, and a negative impact on employee work

motivation and well-being (Schabracq et al., 2003). Ross (1993a; 1993b; 2006) found that management acted as a source of stress (via policy and procedure and daily interactions) or needed to be more approachable amongst tourism industry employees. This stress comes with suspicion, mistrust, and a perception of unfairness within the organization (Ross, 2006).

A critical and impactful study of the emotional labor done at historical sites needs to be done from the perspective of historical interpreters because they are active participants in the history produced at the sites, and their primary responsibility is to disseminate information to visitors. Interpreting the history of slavery requires more than just adding a tour about the enslaved to the current narratives of the sites; instead, re-interpreting the site in a way that disrupts the dominant collective memory that promotes white supremacy and that marginalizes and erases Black voices. Historical interpreters breathe life into these narratives through their labor, allowing their audience to connect with history and see how it perpetuates today. Overlooking the ways that interpreters wrestle with the display rules of the job and the persisting white-washed collective memory of slavery that visitors bring with them romanticizes the emotional labor of the job and, ultimately, without the necessary support to carry on. This research aims to understand how historical interpreters conceptualize their emotional labor and identify how they engage in it outside of interacting with site visitors.

## **Methods**

### *Participants and Methods*

This research utilized oral histories to understand how historical interpreters conceptualize emotional labor, describe when they must engage with it, and recall how their emotional labor impacts their well-being. Oral history was best suited to answer my research questions because I conceptualized historical interpretation and emotional labor as processes, not events. Oral history emphasizes participants' perspectives. Oral history refers to the method (the interview), the methodology (a collection of practices and principles about creating, analyzing, preserving, and presenting recorded memories), as well as the movement beyond oral history just contributing to historical understanding but also as a force for social and political change (Perks & Thomas, 2019). Oral history is "a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record" (Shope, 2011, p. 2). One of the primary reasons I selected oral histories over other qualitative methods is because it allows participants to speak expansively about their stories in their own words, with their own voices, through their own understanding of what happened and why, without restricting them with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De

Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999). I did not want my questions to box in participants accidentally and force them to conform their experiences to fit what I thought they should be. Also, my research goal was not to create “historical truth” or generalizable findings but rather propose a new perspective from which we can understand the emotional heritage tourism workforce.

To recruit participants, I posted an announcement on the Association of African American Museums' (AAAM) (professional organization) community tab and on the Black Interpreters Guild's (a Facebook group) timeline and the networks and chain-referral sampling techniques to increase the number of participants. At the end of every interview, during the first round of oral history interviews, participants were asked to recommend anyone they felt would be a good fit for the project. I suspect that potential participants may have chosen not to participate because they were concerned about discussing their sites while being current employees. Also, I recognize that not everyone is in a place where they can talk about their mental health and potentially traumatic experiences. Timing may have also affected potential participants deciding not to participate. Interviews were conducted in 2022, and the collective US was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests against police brutality towards Black bodies, and there was an outcry from the media and politicians against using critical race theory to justify erasing Black history for the sake of white fragility. Interpreters may not have wanted to engage with the recent history of race and politics outside of work. For those who did volunteer to give their oral history, they signed an informed consent form (my institution's IRB approved) prior to the start of their interviews (each round of interviews had its own informed consent form). The consent forms explained confidentiality, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the project anytime. Setting up the interviews happened via email, with some exceptions where participants requested to communicate virtually using Zoom. In the end, I collected the oral histories of 15 participants from June to September 2022, all conducted virtually using Zoom, allowing the audio and video to be recorded. A standard list of questions to act as a guide, but interviews often moved beyond these questions and took on a different order due to participants' openness to sharing their experiences.

Interviews ranged from 58 minutes to almost 2 hours (1 hour and 58 minutes). During the interviews, participants reflected on their background, career journey, connection to history, and emotional labor. Participants ages ranged from 24 to 48 (at the time of the interviews), and the majority (11 out of 15) identified as Black and four as white. All but one participant work/worked at sites located in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern coast of the United States, with one coming from the Midwest. These states include Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, and Indiana. Due to some participants still being employed at these sites, which are often part of larger organizations or

municipal governments, participants and site names will have pseudonyms. Names of the historic landholders and other white historical figures that interpreters mention have a pseudonym. Names of enslaved or free Africans mentioned during interviews were substituted with names of well-known enslaved and free Africans with a footnote that describes who they were.

### *Data analysis*

To draw meaning from the data collected during the oral history interviews, I used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data (Black & Ubbes, 2009). I used Leavy' (2011) book, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*, and Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni's (2015) paper, *Data analysis in oral history: A new approach in historical research*, to guide my approach to data analysis. I first began by becoming familiar with the data by watching the video recordings of each interview. I relied upon the video recordings over the interview transcripts because the videos allowed me to note and analyze what participants were saying and their non-verbal cues as they recounted their experience, all of which informed my initial codes (generated using open coding). My first level of coding and analysis took place as I compiled the data as Speziale et al. (2010) recommended. This phase analysis summarizes the data and organizes it in a way that allows for further labeling of categories.

An example of this stage of coding:

“–if you are willing to be vulnerable as a frontlines interp [interpreter], leading a tour, leading a group of people, and they'll see, they can also be vulnerable and hopefully take away that history itself is a vulnerable thing it's not meant necessarily to comfort us, but there are definitely stories of community and solace, and care- um but history is this kind of overarching narrative of where we all went really wrong in the past, so it gives us a lot of guidance and it should be a place of reflecting on ourselves, so it allows us to feel a little bit more personal and allows people themselves to interpret the interpretation”

Codes assigned to Marley: Emotional labor/ Role of historical interpretation/ Reproductive labor

The initial codes were applied to obtain participants' lived experiences (Newton, 1965). From the collection of lived experiences, sub-categories emerge. Sub-categories refer to data with close conceptions that are extracted from the initial codes and “set” next to one another (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015). These sub-categories, which represent the initial codes, were then reviewed. Some sub-categories contained multiple codes, determined from the initial coding stage. The codes and categories were discussed among the author and an advisory committee.

Next, similar sub-categories form main categories, and the interconnections become clear. To enhance analysis credibility, data were validated by verifying the findings with the participants (member-checking) to ensure they recognized them as an accurate representation of their narratives. During this

process, participants received a list of main themes informed by their and other participants' interviews, along with my definition of those themes. Participants also received a list of themes and quotes from their interviews that were categorized with those themes.

An example of theme and definition:

Interpreters coping/setting boundaries	This theme centers on how interpreters manage the emotional work they do. This includes the things they do in and out of work. This theme also contains how they handle challenging interactions with the public, coworkers, and administrators.
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Lastly, I developed the narrative by linking the words of the participants with the correlation of the main categories and the themes with the existing literature (e.g., books, primary and secondary sources, and peer-reviewed articles). These narratives grab the reader's attention by presenting a complete perception of the experience (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015).

## Findings

Several themes related to the emotional labor of historical interpretation emerged from these interviews:

- I. Interpreters conceptualize emotional labor broadly, and it extends beyond managing their emotions while giving tours.
- II. Interpreters described how emotional labor has a complex relationship with the profession, their organizations, and visitors.
- III. Interpreters' coping strategies and boundaries shape how they perform their duties and live their lives.

### *Interpreters' conceptualization of emotional labor*

Participating interpreters never mentioned the term emotional labor; however, they did describe their emotions about interpreting history, their sites, and the topic of slavery itself. The labor was not just in the emotions they expressed (although they did talk about expressing emotions during tours), but the emotions they felt. The feeling of emotions is essential in historical interpretation; as Miss Story, a first-person interpreter in Maryland said:

If you don't feel emotion with the interpretation, then you're not interpreting; you're memorizing, you're reciting, you're not putting humanity in history.

Many interpreters also told stories that captured the connection between the responsibilities of a historical interpreter and their emotions. One of these stories highlights how interpreters understand that history is

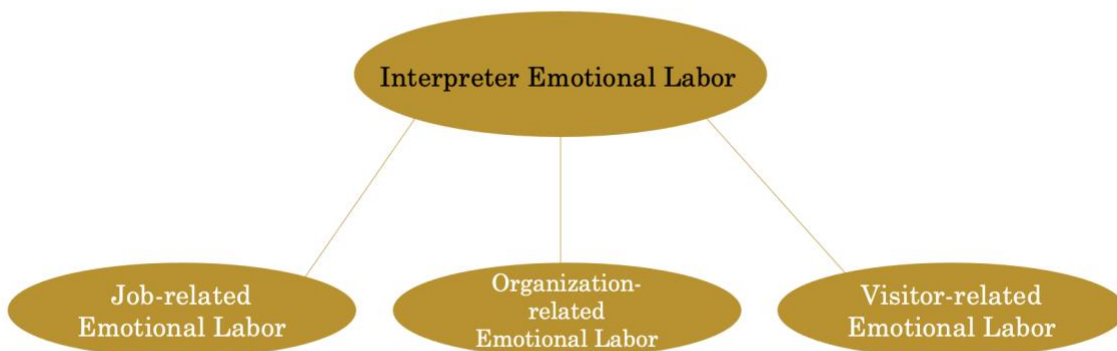
dark but essential. That balance keeps them from being "drained" solely by interpreting the history of slavery. Terry, a former interpreter from Georgia, explained:

Early in my time at Chatham Historic House Museum, once I'd really come to like the answers that I'd be giving regularly, I would say that, like, 'Well, the history that I'm talking about is important, I'm a historian, first of all, this stuff that I'm talking about is important so that on its own doesn't make it hurt as much for me, it's the fact that it's important and you guys are leaving like learning something new, that that is good.'

Interpreters' emotional labor expands beyond "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) or use their emotions to create feeling states in clientele. However, it includes how they reconcile internally with themselves. The emotional labor of interpreting the history of slavery is deeply connected to the interpreters' motivation to do this work.

Yeah, it can be very heavy, emotionally and mentally, um, on the one hand, it feels good to be able to speak for the ancestors who couldn't speak for themselves, or when people didn't want to listen, where they endured so much, so being able to talk about them more than just, [pause] more than just what they went through, but ways they were very innovative and creative, but on the other hand, it can be very tiring when we have visitors who are just set on not wanting to really hear what it was like for them, or wanting to defend slave owners or want to say, 'Oh, it must not have been that bad,' or things like that, you know there's always gonna be those people who just don't wanna really hear it (Shay, a former consumed third-person interpreter in SC)

To go along with their broader conceptualization of emotional labor, they operationalized it and expressed how it shows up in three main areas: (1) job-related; (2) organization/team-related; and (3) visitor-related (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1.** Categorization of interpreters' emotional labor.

#### *Job-related emotional labor*

Job-related emotional labor captures how interpreters describe emotional labor as a part of the general labor of historical interpretation. Every participant recounted the heaviness and emotional weight of interpreting slavery vividly, even when their organization, coworkers, and administrators were supportive,

and their audience was open and engaged during their tour. An example of this inherent emotional labor includes researching to craft their tours. The interpreters who participated in this study were not given pre-approved scripts and had autonomy over their tour's content and structure. This requires interpreters to do extensive research (sometimes off the clock) on those enslaved at the site, the history of the site, the local and national history in the period, and how the history connects to the present. Research is assumed to be neutral and objective, but emotional detachment is complicated when the topic is emotionally charged or relates to one's personal experience (Bellas, 1999). Miss Story is a first-person interpreter who portrays an enslaved woman at her site in Maryland; she explained that emotionally connecting with the materials is a crucial part of her research process.

“When I am doing the research, I often get angry or sad with what I read or things that I didn't realize or think about before; when I'm doing the performances, I feel the emotions that I want to convey in those moments, so if it's sadness, I feel sad, if it's anger or rage, I feel the anger or rage, if it's a moment of happiness for relief, I feel, those, it's- You can't effectively interpret first person if you don't feel the emotions.” (Miss Story, a first-person interpreter in MD)

Having to dress in 18th and 19th-century clothing is also a source of emotional labor for interpreters doing first-person interpretation and costumed third-person interpretation. This is particularly true for Black interpreters who are portraying an enslaved person or wearing what an enslaved person would have worn at the time while being themselves. Black interpreters have to lift the veil of detachment (solidified by modern clothes) when one has to look at themselves as an enslaved person. Clothing holds emotional power, and in this context, it can transport the wearer to a time when their ancestral identities were stripped, and they had little control over their lives (whether they were enslaved or free). Along with navigating their feelings about what they are wearing, historical interpreters must also manage the discomfort of anyone who sees them. When Shay first began interpreting history at her site, she felt uncomfortable and emphasized that she was interpreting in the third person to create distance. She also recounted instances where visitors felt uncomfortable because of her clothes, and she had to do extra emotional labor to bridge that discomfort.

[Describing wearing 19-century clothes] But the clothes, it's kind of something that you're like ‘Ahh, I don't know[mimic unsure voice] at first, but- you know- I just got used to it (Shay, a former costumed third-person interpreter in SC)

Another element of job-related emotional labor is just being in the space. Many of the participating interpreters work(ed) at former plantations. These spaces carry personal and collective memories, which can conflict depending on one's identity. For some (those that align themselves with the landholders), plantation museums and similar sites are places where "memory and illusion coalesce to shape a romanticized recollection of the plantation past (Buzinde & Osagie, 2011, p. 57)." Others (mainly descendants of enslaved Africans), despite the magnificent architecture, art, and other luxurious material items, see these sites as labor camps. For Black interpreters, and while there is a complex combination of

empowerment (because they survived despite it all), there is an underlining (maybe even subconsciously) notion of danger because interpreters bring humanity to those who were the majority and whose works generated the wealth that allowed for the landowners opulent lifestyle. Steven (a Black man) described how that notion affected his feelings at his site.

It made me feel a bit more guarded, you know, because I'm realizing that the mentality, that what I'm bringing may not be embraced by everybody; I'm realizing that, you know, if something goes down here, I'm not 100% safe at any moment ... (Steve, a former first-person interpreter in GA)

Conducting tours also require frontline historical interpreters to do emotional labor. As previously mentioned in this paper, interpreters are likely unpacking the same racial baggage as their audiences, they engage with this material multiple times a day (between 3-5x a day), and depending on the makeup of their audience, they have to simultaneously aid in the deconstruction of internalized racism and building Black self-esteem (Tyson & Dungey, 2014). Steve and Edmund both recount their experiences giving tours. Steven recalls that he had to not only demonstrate historical blacksmithing techniques, portray various men enslaved at Dorchester Plantation, and give tours but also act as a representative for all contemporary Black people.

...but as you get to Dorchester Plantation, it's more-, people tended to ask questions about everything, you know, so like they would come in and ask me questions about the election for 2016, "What do you think about this?" like, "Well, you know from an African Americans perspective, what do you think about-?" like you know, like this is, it would turn into like, 'Ask a Black Dude,' like you know. But you know, so it's like, you know, not only do I have to stay up on the history of Dorchester, and I kind of have to stay up on current events, also because they're asking me all kinds of s\*\*t. (Steve, a former first-person interpreter in GA)

Edmund, described how he triggers his emotions in his quest to create certain feelings in his audience.

[Describing a time when the job was emotionally challenging] Telling the Ona Judge story is still tough for me. It's a story where Ona Judge<sup>1</sup> was an enslaved person who freed herself but had to leave her children behind, and one of the kinds of emotional twists in the story is when her oldest son also frees himself, and they try and reunite, but they never did. And the thing is, on tour, that's a pivot point where I want to grab people emotional, so I really kind of draw it out to get the emotion, and the thing is, sometimes I do it to myself, and I start crying (Edmund, a third-person interpreter in NC)

In describing the emotional labor that is inherently associated with interpreting the history of slavery, participants connected the emotional weight of interpreting slavery and the flaws in work at historic sites.

### *Organization-related emotional labor*

Team/organization-related emotional labor is how interpreters' coworkers (including upper management) can cause participants to do more emotional labor or limit the adverse effects of job/visitor-related emotional labor. Early on, much of the research on service workers' emotional labor centers around emotional labor toward customers (Chu et al., 2012; Darvishmotevalis et al., 2018; Groth & Grandey, 2012; Houge-Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Siter et al., 2010; Van Dijk et al., 2011). However, current

research highlights that emotional labor exists everywhere between team members, supervisors, and subordinates (Grandey et al., 2012; Grandey & Mellory, 2017; Kim et al., 2007; Spencer & Rupp, 2009). Kang & Jang (2022) highlight the interdependent and cooperative characteristics of service encounters in the hospitality industry; hotel employees must frequently engage in emotional labor toward coworkers, influencing employees' withdrawal behaviors. Marley recounted her experience working with a coworker, Peter (pseudonym), who shared a vulgar story with her (one too many for any work setting), nonconsensual mentorship, and overall condescending demeanor. She and another colleague shared their complaints with their supervisor and were met with inaction, furthering their frustration.

...but Whitney and I had continued difficulties with Peter's style of coworker relationships- I guess- he didn't continue to be vulgar... but very, very condescending um..., very much trying to like influence what our future careers.. and Whitney and I were just kinda sick of it, um, so we went directly-, we had talked to Emmanuel before about how to deal with him and hadn't received great stuff in the past, so Whitney and I emailed Emmanuel's supervisor, who's a woman, because we thought we could just get more advice from a woman and this business and how she has dealt with stuff in the past, and she replied to us and CC'd Emmanuel and like- kind of shook her finger at us like "you don't need to skip Emmanuel, you need to go to your boss, first"- we were kind of in trouble, um, and when she came and sat down to us finally, she didn't tell us anything other than we need to try to work within the office to resolve these things, and so just completely missed- our issue and felt very disrespected, very, very much not really heard, both Whitney and I did- um, Whitney stopped talking to Sara after that pretty much, um, which is fair, but that is a very, very person- um, yeah um and she has the right intentions, she has good intentions, but I think she was- she thought that we were trying to overstep Emmanuel's authority, when we weren't, we were just seeking advice for how to exist as someone perceived by a young female in the office, um, so that was tough (Marley, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

Interpreters have to do emotional labor while interacting with their coworkers. One example is when coworkers invalidate interpreters' experiences. Specifically, when white interpreters invalidate the racial microaggression and macroaggressions experienced by Black interpreters, interpreters that are Black and/or women have to be intentional in whom they vent to because the responses they get back can heighten any feelings of isolation (especially since most of the Black interpreters were the only ones at their sites). Terry touched on her process of finding support at work.

I didn't befriend all of my co-workers; I befriended the ones who I thought I wanted to be friends, so those who are not responding to me in terms of like me venting in the same way because there were definitely a few who are just like, 'I don't think that's racist,' and I'm like, 'Okay, well then, I can't talk to you about this, I can talk to other people, and I will find out who, that is,' (Terry, a former third-person interpreter in GA)

Historical interpreters are drawn to the field by a passion for connecting with people using history. Many of the interpreters interviewed recognized that they were contributing to something bigger than themselves by humanizing enslaved people in their interpretation. Interpreters must unpack the sites' history and simultaneously unpack what they learned and purposely had not learned, reconciling with their own biases. Unpacking their biases allows them to be better interpreters, dismantle the "-isms" in their organizations, and encourage their visitors to do the same. However, sometimes sites' missions, policies, and programming contradicts or directly disagree with interpreters' expectations. These

contradictions stem from owners and directors balancing being entertaining to attract visitors and generate funds to run the site (e.g., make repairs and pay staff) and preserving history to be spaces of knowledge. This requires some compromises. For example, some former plantations double as heritage sites and rental venues. Rightfully, many interpreters are frustrated by this, and reconciling with those feelings requires emotional labor. Steve expressed dissatisfaction with his site rented out for weddings and that it actively disrupted the history interpreted at the site.

[Describing an experience while giving a tour] We're over by the damn Freeman's Cabin... that's where the tour used to start... we stand in front of that house, and we would talk about the house, we would talk about who lived there, um how it was built, all this different stuff- not 1000 yards away these guys are building this giant a\*\* tent for somebody's wedding reception, all this f\*\*king hammering and drilling and so on, and I gotta talk over that s\*\*t, (Steve, a former first-person interpreter in GA)

### *Visitor-related emotional labor*

Along with managing their emotions to create desired feelings in their audience (Tyson, 2013), frontline historical interpreters must manage their expressions and responses to various visitor behaviors, including racial microaggressions and inappropriate comments. These interviews were full of examples of visitors saying and doing inappropriate things. Interpreters utilized the deep-acting technique of cognitive reappraisal (reframing or rethinking an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes how it emotionally impacts the focal individual (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 1998). Reappraisal is often framed as "antecedent-focused," meaning that it occurs early in the emotional process to minimize the experience of the full intensity of emotion (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2011). Interpreters operationalize antecedent-focused cognitive reappraisal in rationalizing inappropriate behaviors with the intentional miseducation of American history. As James Oliver Horton explained, "Public education prepared children to think about slavery and race in ways consistent with the assumption of white supremacy built into twentieth-century American law and custom (pg. 41)." These inappropriate behaviors (often racial macro and microaggressions) are often targeted towards Black interpreters and reflect American's indoctrination of the racial hierarchy. As Shay recounted her experience, it highlighted that despite "never learning about slavery in school," many guests (both young and old) showed that they understood the racial hierarchy and who would be an enslaved person and who would not have. This understanding means that the tone and things visitors say to Shay were intentionally different than what they would say to her non-Black coworkers.

I remember there was a little boy there with his family, and they had, like, the plantation bell out there by the kitchen, and he goes and rings the bell and looks at me [a Black woman] and he says, 'Slave school is over.' And I was like, 'huh,' and it wasn't a Black child, so that's what made it even more, like- okay [a little side-eye], and his dad was really embarrassed. He tried to get him to like go the other way, but he's like, 'slave school is over.' I'm like thinking, 'well slaves didn't have school', ... and one of my coworkers said she felt like he only said that because I was a Black interpreter because he wasn't gonna say that to one of them [the white interpreters], it wouldn't have crossed his mind. (Shay, a former costumed third-person

interpreter in SC)

Visitors come to heritage sites expecting what they will see and hear. The amount of emotional labor frontline historical interpreters have to do is based on the visitor's reaction to not having those expectations met. The expectations include the interpretation style, the themes, and who would be conducting their tours. Interpreters explained that some visitors come out of tradition on their annual vacation to states like Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina and expect a particular experience during their annual plantation visit. Plantation house museums and other historical sites have for a long time focused solely on the perspective of the white landowners who lived on these properties while romanticizing and trivializing the system of slavery and erasing the works of the enslaved peoples that allowed the landholder's family generate wealth and the plantation to prosper (Benjamin & Alderman, 2018). Modlin (2008) equates this planter-centric focus to a continuation of the "Big House" owners' domination of the lives of the enslaved who worked at these sites (even after their death). The absence of information about enslaved people can cause some visitors to feel frustrated while simultaneously validating the ideas held by other visitors that the lives of the enslaved were not meaningful (Modlin, 2008). Marley highlights that different people can come to the same site and look at the space through different lenses. Suppose people are coming to the site looking for the *Gone with the Wind* fantasy, stories of whiteness, and the lost cause narratives (because that is what they were taught and used to), and they receive narratives that center enslaved Africans— narratives that represent them as humans and not property. In that case, it can create cognitive dissonance, which can be painful and confusing. Interpreters are responsible for guiding their audience through their uneasiness. Abraham (an NC interpreter) describes this role as honing into that traditional role of an interpreter taking on the responsibility of leading physically and "spiritually," not stating facts about the site but going deeper to connect with their audience.

[Describing the expected emotions that come with interpreting slavery] Yeah, definitely, um I think visitors with any sense in their head when they come to a slave labor camp they're expecting to hear stories of war, and violence, and oppression and brutality- and people who come to historic sites, former slave labor camps, former plantations- who have kind of fed into the American mythology, they're expecting stories of grandeur, stories of whiteness, they're expecting stories of the great white man or the great white woman and gardens- (Marley, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

I would say it's a key part of my job is not only maintaining and regulating my own emotions during the tour but others as well, having them understand that we are going to have big emotions during this tour, we're going to talk about deep things and that as long as you are on my tour it's okay- it is okay to feel these things-- what's the word I want to use-- it is acceptable to have these sad emotions or angry, these-- sometimes people get angry not only at you but at the facts that you are giving them, things like that, they don't want to accept the actual history that you're giving them, and so I've had people yell at me, have people, you know, just scream falsehoods at me blatantly and storm off during some tours because they don't want to accept America's racist past (Edmund, an third-person interpreter in NC)

Along with responding with anger, visitors also experience sadness, sadness from the brutality of the history, sadness for what they did not know, and sadness for connecting the history with the present. As a part of their job, historical interpreters must support and comfort visitors as they process these big emotions. Giving support requires, especially when the interpreters do not share the same internal emotions (surface acting). Terry voiced her discomfort about being touched by specifically white women after her tours. She understood the well-meaning intentions of the women, either offering her support, recognizing it must be hard for Terry (a black woman), or they are seeking some physical comfort for themselves. While audience members may leave the tour feeling uncomfortable, angry, or sad, that does not mean that the interpreters do.

I had a lot of white women who really wanted to put their hand right on my shoulder or hug me right after the tour, and I always- it was like nearly always why women and I don't know what kind of socialization they think that is appropriate, because, again, it was a 40-minute tour, we are NOT friends, we don't need to be having this kind of interaction um, and I mean- it's a weird social interaction...Um, I think most of the time, I was not leaving- because I got so used to it, I don't think I was leaving every day feeling sad- because like I would give a 40-minute tour, and then be back upstairs with my co-workers complaining about visitors, on Twitter chatting about stuff. (Terry, a former third-person interpreter in GA)

### *Interpreter coping strategies*

Along with discussing the emotional labor they endure interpreting the history of slavery, participants disclosed how they cope. Although interpreters work(ed) at different sites, there were consistent strategies that interpreters employed. These coping strategies occurred both in and out of work.

Interpreters have autonomy in the tours they give. Every tour is different, and every interpreter develops their sense of reading the audience and deciding what and how to focus on aspects of their sites based on how their audience is connecting with the material. Suppose the audience is not connecting with the information, is antagonistic towards the interpreter, or is disrespectful toward the site. In that case, interpreters will exercise their authority and autonomy to modify their tours (e.g., cutting it short or avoiding interpreting areas that could potentially trigger inappropriate comments). Whitney pointed that out in her interview. She explained how her audience dictated the kind of tour she would give.

I mean, there have been times when I gave a 20-minute tour because the group was just so- like shut down and uncomfortable and just being disrespectful, and there have been times that I've been out there for two hours talking to people after a tour because it was just such an incredible audience and just the dialogue, the feedback, the questions were just so amazing so I kind of had the whole range of audience influence. (Whitney, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

Whitney also discussed why she avoids discussing the unique crops grown on the site.

[describing a unique variety of cotton that is abundant on the property and how she used to stop and talk about it on her tours and let them touch it to connect with the enslaved people who had to pick it] And so this white man looked me in my face, and he said, "Oh, do they send you out there to go pick it." And I said [break in conversation] after that, I was like, I'm never gonna put myself in that position ever again

Another way in which interpreters cope with the emotional labor they do is by limiting their interaction with hostile people (e.g., visitors, coworkers). Interpreters consistently spoke about people not being "happy" talking about or learning about slavery. While interpreters enact surface and deep acting to manage their expressed emotions and the emotions of whomever they are speaking to, there is only so much one can tolerate before it becomes detrimental for the interpreters. To de-escalate intense interactions, interpreters will cut the conversation short in a respectful manner. Shay recounted noticing when conversations would shift from education to a confrontation and having to end things early. With time she learned what questions, comments, and situations act as triggers.

...it got to the point where sometimes when people would say certain things where I just would be done with it, I'd say, 'Okay, well, if you have any questions, feel free to ask me, I'll be here, you know, in this area. We have this and this going on today as well.' Just kind of to get out of the conversation because, at that point, it is too much (Shay, a former costumed third-person interpreter in SC)

Interpreters also set and uphold boundaries at work. Boundaries at work are important because they protect workers from burnout and prevent them from being placed in uncomfortable situations. Setting boundaries is especially important when interpreting complex histories because historical sites and museums are under pressure, and administrators need to focus on their priorities and goals for the site and forget the needs of their staff. This omission is not necessarily malicious and is most likely due to people's tendency to feel their pressures and struggles more than others (Brearley, 2022). Frontline historical interpreters have to hold boundaries because their work requires them to use their emotions and incorporate their vulnerability to connect with their audience. Boundaries prohibit them from giving "too much" and losing themselves. Miss Story, a first-person interpreter (portraying an enslaved woman) in Maryland, spoke about advocating for herself at her site, capitalizing on her position as the only Black woman doing what she is doing.

But I also know how to take the steps of self-care before and after, so I've talked to my co-workers, and I've said, "I can't do more than three tours in a day, and I can't do more than two or three tours a week because it is too traumatizing for me, and then you want to have a debrief after know after-, No, after about the fourth time that I have said, '...they sold my son away' to the fourth group, 12 o'clock, I'm done I'm out, goodbye, I will email you whatever I need to email you, but I'm going home right now, and I dare you to stop me," and they don't because they- me articulating it let them know (Miss Story, a first-person interpreter in MD)

Interpreters must also cope with their emotional labor outside of their work environment through rituals that allow them to decompress from their day. A routine to decompress after work is vital because it allows people to focus on things outside of work-related responsibilities. Historical interpreters (especially Black interpreters) struggle to detach themselves from their work because their work requires them to connect history with the present, and as descendants, the work is personal. Miss Story walked us through her routine and how she had to set boundaries with her children.

When I would get home from work, my kids knew I had a whole ritual; I let mom come inside, let her literally wash away the 18th century, and come back to the modern era before I ask her any questions. Don't ask me to bring you anything, don't ask me about dinner, just let me decompress and become Mom again

and wash away, Charity<sup>1</sup>, because it's hard... (Miss Story, A first-person interpreter in MD)

Frontline interpretive staff alter their lives to avoid doing emotional labor related to race and the legacy of slavery outside of work. Interpreting the history of slavery and the lives/culture of the enslaved people requires talking about violence, pain, displacement, and death. Furthermore, although the story has empowering and "lighter" elements, engaging with the material multiple times daily is emotionally challenging. Outside of work, systemic racism and racial violence persist in our society. Media outlets, including social media, make this pain highly visible. In her 2020 essay "TheTrayvon Generation," Elizabeth Alexander laments the accessibility of videos and images of violence against Black bodies, saying, "Black bodies in pain for public consumption, have been an American national spectacle for centuries from public rapes, whippings, and auction blocks, to lynchings and police beatings, African-Americans have not only been victims of racist violence, but in one way or another, black people also have been looking, forging a traumatized collective historical memory which is reinvoked at contemporary sites of conflict."

Along with contemporary racial violence, documentaries and movies (e.g., *12 Years a Slave*) that portray the horrors of America's chattel slavery can create emotional distress in their audience (regardless of their educational value). Engaging with these types of materials requires emotional labor. Historical interpreters that interpret the history of slavery are exposed to Black trauma and violence at work (during tours and their research); additional exposure via the news, social media, or television can be too much and exacerbate the harmful effects of doing emotional labor and creates racial battle fatigue (a natural depletion response to commonplace, consistent experiences of heightened distress due to racism (King et al., 2021)). Shay acknowledges her experience and why she set the boundary of not engaging with any media related to slavery or Black violence outside of work.

It [the taxing nature of historical interpretation] got to the point where I could not watch or like, read, or listen to things that deal with like slavery or anything like that outside of work because it would just be too much, cuz you're around it all day, So there's people like, 'Oh have you seen this documentary? Have you read this-?' I'm like, no, kinda don't want to [chuckling]. I have to cut it off at some point. (Shay, a former third-person costumed interpreter in SC)

One of the more permanent ways interpreters cope with the emotional labor of interpreting slavery is by leaving the field. Every interpreter interviewed was full of passion and viewed their work as meaningful. However, for many of the former interpreters, the 'started' to outweigh the good. Aside from more systemic issues (e.g., not making a livable wage, lack of benefits, etc.), the turning point was emotionally exhausting to continuous backlash from racist visitors and not seeing social change. Especially during the

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<sup>1</sup> Charity Folks was an African American woman who was enslaved in Maryland until her manumission from slavery in 1797.

presidency of Donald Trump and the protests following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, historical interpreters working during that time felt defeated and were witnessing history repeat itself.

Management and 2020 was a big reason why I wanted to leave because I just saw how much energy I was putting into this job, like, emotionally, physically, like, I'm literally wearing myself out blacksmithing; standing in the heat, standing in the cold, sweating my a\*\* off, freezing my ass off, yea, you know, my shoulder was acting up, you know, from all the hammering, you know, sometimes my ears will be ringing from, you know, the anvil, you know, I'm- I'm breathing in this coal every day, you know, we use coal, you know... So, I'm like, this is- this job is literally going to kill me, so that- I'm wearing myself out for what? You know, in the hopes that maybe one or two people will actually listen to what I have to say like... (Steve, a former first-person interpreter in GA)

...and the feeling that no one was connecting to the work anymore, it just kind of felt like- what's the point of me standing here and shouting about Black oppression and Black liberation if y'all don't give a s\*\*t. Um, if y'all aren't going to do anything, if you're just here and you're going to take pictures of yourself in front of the main house, which the facade was built in the 1920s so it's not even historically accurate to what you think the site is even- um, just frustrating- just to see any- any- I hesitate to even say gains made during 2020 but anything done during 2020 (Marley, a former third-person interpreter in SC)

As interpreters recounted how they coped with their work interpreting slavery, it showed that the weight and passion they care for this work also made them vulnerable to being consumed. The exhaustion spills into their everyday lives, leading to high turnover rates.

## Conclusion

The 15 oral histories illuminated the complexities and nuance of historical interpretation and the history of slavery. Interviews found that interpreters view their emotional labor broadly and not just occurring while interacting with visitors through facetime and voice time. Their narrative also demonstrated that emotional labor is deeply related to the job of historical interpretation (e.g., doing research, being on a former plantation, and dressing in period clothing). Interpreters also do emotional labor while interacting with their coworkers and administrators. This *team-related emotional labor* includes managing emotions while experiencing microaggressions and when sites take actions that contradict the goal of preserving and teaching about the site's history (e.g., hosting weddings). Findings also showed how interpreters exercise autonomy by setting boundaries. For example, cutting tours short or excusing themselves from argumentative guests. It was interesting to see how interpreters viewed leaving the field of historical interpretation as the ultimate boundary. All in all, interpreters painted a vivid picture of working at socio-politically charged spaces like plantation house museums.

While this was a novel approach to examining emotional labor, the findings did align with the existing literature. For example, although not explicitly stated, interpreters divulged engaging in deep acting throughout the interview, specifically, *antecedent-focused cognitive reappraisal*, when rationalizing coworker and visitors' racial microaggressions and inappropriate behaviors with intentional miseducation

of American history. This research also revealed differences in interpreters' emotional labor based on age, gender, and race. Similar to Carrillo et al. (2020) 's study of tour leaders, which found that sexual harassment was associated with more stress on female tour leaders. Female presenting historical interpreters' oral histories reported experiencing sexual harassment or inappropriate contact from male tourists and coworkers. Also, not surprisingly, Black historical interpreters perceived that they carried a more significant emotional weight than their non-Black coworkers, consistent with other research (e.g., Walcott-Wilson, 2020), where Black interpreters inevitably act as "ambassadors of the Black community." Black interpreters reported doing emotional labor in and out of work, a finding that was consistent with other research focused on the emotional labor of Black people working in white environments (Evans, 2012; Kelly et al., 2021; Robinson, 2021). Lastly, this research demonstrates that historical interpreters have greater autonomy than what was reported in works like Tyson (2013), which argued that there are explicit expectations of what interpreters say at these sites and that managers and guests closely monitor them. The participating interpreters disclosed that they could shape their tours based on their interests and did much of the research. They also had the authority to remove unruly guests from their tours, opt out of interpreting certain areas of the site, and end tours early.

A strength of this research is its use of oral histories to understand participants' emotional labor. This approach allowed a more comprehensive understanding of interpreters' emotional labor. By not confining participants with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999). For example, the openness of the interview protocol allowed for the reveal of the expansive nature of the interpreter's emotional labor. This breadth of labor included how prevailing white supremacy and socio-political values that dehumanize and oppress Black people conflict with interpreters' missions to create societal change by disrupting the American myth that ignores the country's past. Another example of an unexpected finding is how the historic site's budget can affect the emotional weight interpreters carry. This research has limitations and constraints, including access, time, and resources. Although I collected a set of rich narratives, it would have benefited from a larger group of participants from more sites. Another limitation of this study is that the findings are not generalizable. Although my intention was not to create a general depiction of public history workers, it is supposed to expand the existing literature in this study area.

Scholars increasingly interested in human resource management in the tourism industry can benefit from reconceptualizing emotional labor to include different components of service workers' responsibilities. Historical interpreters' experiences demonstrate that frontline service workers take on different roles (i.e., customer service, teacher, and entertainer), all requiring different emotional labor. Also, emotional labor

occurs outside of directly providing service to customers. The historical interpreter narratives represented in this paper point to the value of examining the emotion-laden narratives of a broad array of interpreters from different types of sites doing different types of interpretation. Even as emotional labor and employee emotional and mental well-being become more of a concern to employers, there is a need to understand better the connection between the intricate components of heritage tourism and employees' emotional labor and how that consequently affects their performance and job satisfaction. For example, future research could examine how historical sites' marketing materials compare to interpretive staff's intrinsic motivations for interpreting slavery. Based on the foundations laid out in this research, future work can use a storytelling approach to understand the perspectives and needs of frontline workers. Any effort to achieve a sustainable tourism workforce must ultimately consider the perspective and needs of its employees.

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## **CHAPTER 4: “How much do emotions cost?”: An examination of the effects of cognitive capitalism on the emotional labor of interpreting slavery**

*“Emotional labor is potentially good. No customer wants to deal with a surly waitress, a crabby bank clerk, or a flight attendant who avoids eye contact in order to avoid getting a request.”*

(Hochschild, 1983, p. 21)

### **Introduction**

The above quote comes from sociologist Arlie Hochschild, who coined the concept of emotional labor in her famous book, *The Managed Heart* (1983). While Dr. Hochschild does not support exploiting workers' emotions, her statement calls into question “potentially good” for who? It makes sense for it to be good for customers. Emotional labor is definitely good for the producers (the owners of the capital). However, what about the workers (who are the means of production)? Frontline interpretive staff are interactive service workers. Their jobs require them to relate directly with customers, clients, or visitors through facetime or voice time; they are expected to be knowledgeable and provide tourists with an ‘enjoyable’ experience by playing actors, educators, and entertainers (Tyson, 2008; 2013). Like other frontline employees, historical interpreters act as contact points between customers and the organization, serve as the source of service differentiation, and can give a competitive advantage over other sites (Tsaour & Tang, 2013). This research aims to understand the emotional labor of historical interpreters that interpret the history of slavery in the context of cognitive capitalism. Cognitive capitalism refers to the economic mode of production where the accumulation of knowledge, affects, and immaterial labor is central, where the market focuses on extracting value from relational, emotional, and cognitive elements (Morini, 2007). By examining the production of historical narratives in this way, this research expands the literature on emotional labor by incorporating Marxist economics and cognitive capitalism to understand the labor side of emotional labor, its consequences, and how it operates in the heritage tourism industry.

This research is needed because although emotions are a foundational part of cognitive capitalism, emotions and feelings are often dismissed as unprofessional and interfering (Newman et al., 2008), and emotional labor is unpaid and invisible (Hartley, 2008). Frontline historical interpreters use their emotions to produce cultural and intellectual goods consumed through customer service interactions, leisure experiences, and history productions (Tyson, 2008; Tyson, 2013). Therefore, their emotions are a commodity and no longer belong solely to them but are owned by management. Utilizing the oral histories of current and former historical interpreters that cover the history of slavery in the US, this research aims to understand the experience of engaging in the emotional labor of producing history in a system of cognitive capitalism. This research aims to make sense of the capitalistic system that controls the interpretation of history, specifically Black history, to empower tourism researchers and stakeholders

to demand change to ensure the workforce's sustainability (i.e., avoiding excessive turnover, maintaining a good level of productivity and underpinning business success) by highlighting how interpreters' emotions are exploited, the detrimental effects of that exploitation, and how emotional labor leads to the objectification of interpreters. Cultivating a sustainable workforce is important because investing in the health and well-being of historical interpreters allows them to create memorable experiences for guests to secure repeat visitation and attract new clientele. This paper explores how the expectation of vulnerability is an example of surplus labor in the industry of historical interpretation and that self-care (especially radical self-care) is reproductive labor. I then unpack how historical interpreters' are not compensated for their emotional labor and that finances exacerbate the harmful effects of emotional labor. Lastly, I make recommendations for interpreters and managers to consider interpreters as a whole being and their mental and emotional health.

## **Literature Review**

### *Cognitive Capitalism*

Cognitive capitalism was coined by Professor of Economics Yann Moulier-Boutang to describe a new form of capitalism (Moulier-Boutang, 2011). Cognitive capitalism emerged from the growth of knowledge-based production (Boutang, 2007; Fumagalli & Lucarelli, 2009) and as a response to a lack of explanation for the transitions from a Fordist to a post-Fordist model (Tsogas, 2012). The theoretical foundation of cognitive capital comes from Karl Marx in 'The Fragment on Machines,' a section of the *Grundrisse* (Tsogas, 2012). In this section, Marx anticipates that the productive value of intellectual and scientific labor will become dominant, and knowledge will become the main productive force (Vercellone, 2007). Some consequences of knowledge becoming the primary source of labor are that a theory of value based on labor time directly dedicated to production is inadequate, and the distinction between labor time and non-labor time is blurred (Tsogas, 2012).

Unlike the previous capitalist transitions, cognitive capitalism signaled an economic and social transformation (Boutang, 2007). One transformation brought on is the redefining of labor, shifting the laboring process beyond the confines of time and the workplace, diffusing into the whole society, and subsequently changing value creation. Therefore, production and commodity exchange have become biopolitical (i.e., the sense that living and producing tend to be indistinguishable) (Hardt & Negri, 2005). Cognitive capitalism relies on immaterial labor in both the work and social spheres. *Immaterial labor* is a concept brought to present-day thinking by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri and exists in two principal forms. The first refers to intellectual or linguistic labor, such as problem-solving, symbolic and analytical

tasks, and linguistic expression (Lazzarato, 1996). The second principal form of immaterial labor is ‘affective labor.’ Affective labor is ‘labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion’ (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 108). Producing historical narratives to be consumed by the public requires frontline historical interpreters to engage in affective labor. Guides think deeply about the stories they tell and use effective techniques to form emotional connections between visitors and the site (Walcott-Wilson, 2019). Immaterial labor is also biopolitical (as it is the essence of cognitive capitalism) and blurs the division between work and other domains of life. Under cognitive capitalism, social life becomes productive and does not produce material goods but social life itself.

Tsogas (2012) explained that there is a dissociation between the labor cost for many commodities and the final exchange value under cognitive capitalism. He gives the example of clothing, footwear, and lifestyle products, where we are not just buying the product but the idea of a particular lifestyle, a trend, an image, or happiness and relation. In the context of historical sites, interpreters create environments not about the past on a factual level but in a way that encourages their audience to have a complete understanding of the past and adopt, cognitively, a perspective different from their own and to establish an emotional connection with historical actors from different eras and walks of life (Modlin et al., 2011). Although their work is valuable, immaterial workers are not guaranteed higher earnings, and employment can be unreliable (Tsogas, 2012). Moreover, although cognitive capitalism is advanced, it relies on generating profits through surplus labor. *Surplus labor* is a concept developed by Karl Marx to describe the labor that produces additional value once the value of the worker’s labor-power (the ability to work, sold to the capitalist for an agreed amount of time) has been reproduced (Cornwall, 2017). In her 2020 book, *A People’s Guide to Capitalism*, Thier explains that if you work for Starbucks and get paid \$120 for an eight-hour shift, you can make \$120 worth of drinks in an hour. Even after subtracting the cost of materials and the use of equipment, Starbucks does not pay you anywhere close to the value you have generated (hundreds, maybe even thousands of dollars a day). Although you can make that value (the agreed-upon \$120) in an hour, no manager will let you leave after only an hour, so for the rest of your shift, you are working for free. Under capitalism, the employer buys the employees’ labor power, not necessarily the *fruits of their labor* (Thier, 2020). Capitalists seek to extract as much surplus labor as possible to increase profits. In the context of cognitive capitalism, invention-power generates surplus labor (i.e., the ability to create new ideas or pieces of information or knowledge that, in turn, generate profit) (Murray & Peetz, 2020). In industrial capitalism, labor power is consumed during the production process and can only occur during the workday (Popowich, 2019); however, cognitive capitalism relies on the continuous process of workers acquiring knowledge and skills acquired through lived experiences.

Cognitive capitalism exploits life itself, both extensively and intensively. Extensive because life itself has become an object of exploitation.

Managers also get a large amount of unpaid work through the reproduction of labor. Reproductive labor is a concept from Karl Marx, referring to how “every system of production involves both the production of the necessities of life and the reproduction of the tools and labor power necessary for production (Marx & Engels, 1969, p. 31).” Duffy (2007) conceptualized reproductive labor as “work that maintains daily life (physical or mental health, food preparation, and service, cleaning, personal care) or works that reproduces the next generation (care of children and youth) (Duffy, 2007, p. 218).” Women do this free labor predominately and are not considered within the labor-power’s exchange rate (Thier, 2020). In cognitive capitalism “life must work for production, and production must work for life” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.32).

### *Emotional labor*

The earliest definition of *emotional labor* is “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Like other forms of labor, emotional labor is sold for a wage and has an exchange value (Hochschild, 1983, p.7). Hochschild explains that emotional labor necessitates a worker induce or suppress feelings to maintain the outward appearance and demeanor to create desired feelings in others (Hochschild, 1983). The standard service workers, including frontline historical interpreters, are expected to meet is dictated by the *display rules* of their organizations. Display rules are a social group or culture’s norms and standards that dictate how to appropriately present their emotions and interact with others (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Management discloses and enacts the organization’s display rules during the selection process, employee training, and performance evaluations (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). Overall the primary function of emotional labor is to make customers feel good to acquire profits for the organization (Hazarika & Arendt, 2016). In her 2008 case study, Amy Tyson points out that under cognitive capitalism (she calls it the *New Economy*), the obsession with creating emotional comfort for visitors shapes the narratives produced and dictates the performance of and interpretation of the past, regardless of the pain and pleasantries that mark the past (Tyson, 2008).

Employees utilize surface and deep acting to meet their job’s display rules. Deep acting refers to creating a genuine and sincere expression using cognitive strategies like refocusing attention and reappraisal (Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is adjusting forward-facing facial expressions and body language without altering one’s internal emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting requires behavioral modulation strategies like suppression and amplifying (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). Hochschild

(1983) proposed that deep acting is the most effective emotion regulation technique, minimizing burnout and emotional exhaustion. Grandey and Gabriel (2015) warn against labeling surface acting as “bad” and deep acting as “good.” Deep acting may have hidden costs due to the constantly shifting internal emotional signals (Hochschild, 1983) and may be related to physical strain indicators (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). By controlling the display rules, or in Hochschild’s terms, employers can, to some extent, control the emotional labor of employees and affect productivity and profit (Hazarika & Arendt, 2016).

### *Emotions as a commodity*

Commodification refers to the social process that allows something to be understood as a commodity (Radin, 2001). In their review of emotional labor, Hazarika & Arendt (2016) explains that when something has been deemed a commodity, it is stripped of its life value, leaving only its use-value and exchange-value. The commodification of emotion results from the conversion of workers’ (especially service workers) feelings and economic practices, by which workers’ emotional work becomes a central part of the production of economic value (Fineman, 2000; Hardt, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Illouz, 2008; Swan & Swan, 2010). Workers lose ownership of their emotions through different situations. Hazarika & Arendt (2016) describes five of these situations: (1) Emotions (although irrational by nature) are rationalized. For example, service workers risk losing their source of income by expressing the wrong emotion (even if it is their genuine reaction); (2) The relationship between the worker and employee is unequal. As Hochschild (1983) describes, “It is often part of an individual’s job to accept uneven exchanges, to be treated with disrespect or anger by a client, all the while closing into fantasy the anger one would like to respond with (Hochschild, 1983, p. 66);” (3) Workers’ emotions are exploited beyond what is acceptable, which can affect the psychological disposition of the worker; (4) The exploitation of exploitation obscures the line between paid and unpaid labor. The increased attention to emotional labor and its importance in paid labor also highlights the large amount of unpaid emotional labor that workers do. Under cognitive capitalism, production requires so much out of workers (knowledge, motivations, opinions, desires, bodies); this makes it clear that managers/bosses are not fully paying for their (their workers) labor power (Morini & Fumagalli, 2010); and (5) everyday life appears to be consumed by labor due to the boundary between time meant for work and non-work time becoming less defined.

The commodification of emotions can result in the worker becoming objectified. Marx describes this as *alienation*, where labor, home life, and life itself becomes disrupted to the point that “external to the worker, i.e., does not belong to his essential being; that he, therefore, does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. . . . His labor is, therefore, not voluntary but forced”

(Marx, 1975, p. 326). In emotional labor, workers become (or are at least perceived as) machines controlled by their managers and automatically produce emotions based on the organization's requirements (Hazarika & Arendt, 2016). Therefore, they (the worker) become the means of production and are thus objectified. According to Marx, this objectification is, by design, a feature of all work (Sayer, 2003).

A study that critically examines emotional labor in the context of cognitive capitalism and the effects of emotional commodification on the heritage tourism workforce is needed because it legitimizes the emotional strain historical interpreters undertake. Capitalism is a system of exploitation, and this research aims to present how historical interpreters are impacted and identifies potential avenues of regulation. While historical interpreters are passionate about preserving history and humanizing marginalized histories, the mission does not pay their rent or put food on their table. Things like a liveable wage and employee benefits, especially at sites in areas with a higher cost of living, are essential if the heritage tourism and public history industry is going to thrive, especially if interpreters are going to continue doing cognitive and emotional labor.

## **Research Design**

### *Methodology*

Oral history is ideally suited for examining the impacts of emotional labor and the process by which frontline historical interpreters connect the production of historical narratives and the economic systems that structure their employment. Oral history refers to the method (the interview), the methodology (a collection of practices and principles about creating, analyzing, preserving, and presenting recorded memories), as well as the movement beyond oral history just contributing to historical understanding but also as a force for social and political change (Perks & Thomson, 2020). Like other qualitative research methodologies, oral history communicates and interprets stories and observations that can be connected to broader themes or imprinted into current narratives. Oral history is a co-created account that integrates the narrator's (participant) version of their experience with the researchers' efforts to illustrate the context of the participants' life and connect them with broader themes (K'Meyer & Crothers, 2007). Oral historians spend less time with participants than other qualitative researchers and are positioned as detached observers. Therefore, they are entirely dependent on what participants decide to share. Oral history allowed me to document frontline interpreters' experiences, connect them with aspects of capitalism, and humanize capitalism and its effects. In oral history, participants speak expansively about their stories in their own words, with their own voices, through their own understanding of what happened and why

without restricting them with specific questions and constant interjection by an interviewer (De Caro, 2012; Dougherty, 1999).

Some other benefits oral history provides include capturing emotional strain events for interpretive staff and their meaning. Overall, the point of oral history is about understanding a given perspective more than securing historical ‘truths’ (Trapp-Fallon, 2003). Therefore, the goal of this research was not to record the ‘true’ day in the life of interpreting enslavement but rather to understand the interpretive staff’s emotional states and their understanding of their experiences. Also, I sought to connect individual frontline interpretive staff’s experiences and broader issues. Oral history allows for these types of connections and emphasizes participants’ perspectives. Lastly, oral histories offer researcher-participant interaction and reflexive sharing while giving a voice to those often previously neglected by the social science research community’ (Trapp-Fallon, 2003, p. 301). For example, Wilson-Wilcot (2020) points out that much of the work conducted at plantation house museums (and subsequently other heritage sites) has focused on site narratives and the role of management in curating those narratives. However, frontline interpretive staff should be recognized more for their role in their part at heritage destinations. Using oral history in this research will give a voice to those neglected in their expertise as workers (producers of historical narratives) in a capitalist economy.

#### *Data Collection*

To recruit participants, I posted an announcement on the Association of African American Museums’ (AAAM) (professional organization) community tab and on the Black Interpreters Guild’s (a Facebook group) timeline and the networks and chain-referral sampling techniques to increase the number of participants. At the end of every interview, during the first round of oral history interviews, participants were asked to recommend anyone they felt would be a good fit for the project. I suspect that potential participants may have chosen not to participate because they were concerned about discussing their sites while current employees. Also, I recognize that not everyone is in a place where they can talk about their mental health and potentially traumatic experiences. Timing may have also affected potential participants deciding not to participate. Interviews were conducted in 2022 and 2023, and the collective US was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests against police brutality towards Black bodies, and there was an outcry against the media and politicians using critical race theory to justify erasing Black history for the sake of white fragility. Interpreters may not have wanted to engage with the recent history of race and politics outside of work. For those who did volunteer to give their oral history, they signed an informed consent form (my institution’s IRB approved) before the start of their interviews (each round of interviews had its own informed consent form). The consent forms explained

confidentiality, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the project anytime. Setting up the interviews happened via email, with some exceptions where participants requested to communicate virtually using Zoom.

In the end, I collected the oral histories of 15 participants in the first round (collected from June to September 2022) of interviews. I conducted four follow-up interviews (February to May 2023), all conducted virtually using Zoom, allowing the audio and video to be recorded. A standard list of questions acted as a guide. Still, interviews often moved beyond those questions and took on a different order than originally planned due to participants' openness to sharing their experiences. Overall, interviews ranged from 58 minutes to almost 2 hours (1 hour and 58 minutes). In the first round of interviews, participants reflected on their background, career journey, connection to history, and emotional labor. In the second round of interviews, participants gave more detail about their experience working in the field of historical interpretation, including salary, the communities they lived in, and their routines before, during, and after work. Participant ages ranged from 24 to 48 (at the time of the interviews), and the majority (11 out of 15) identified as Black and four as white. All but one participant work/worked at sites located in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern coast of the United States, with one coming from the Midwest. These states include Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, and Indiana. Due to some participants still being employed at these sites, which are often part of larger organizations or municipal governments, participants and site names will have pseudonyms. Names of the historic landholders and other white historical figures that interpreters mention have a pseudonym. Names of enslaved or free Africans mentioned during interviews were substituted with names of well-known enslaved and free Africans with a footnote that describes who they were.

### *Data analysis*

To draw meaning from the data collected during the oral history interviews I utilized thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Black & Ubbes, 2009). I used Leavy' (2011) book, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*, and Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni's (2015) paper, *Data analysis in oral history: A new approach in historical research*, to guide my approach to data analysis. I first began by becoming familiar with the data by watching the video recordings of each interview. I relied on the video recordings over the interview transcripts because the videos allowed me to note and analyze what participants were saying and their non-verbal cues as they recounted their experience, all of which informed my initial codes (generated using open coding). My first level of coding and analysis took place as I compiled the data as Speziale et

al., (2010) recommended. This analysis phase summarizes the data and organizes it to allow for further labeling of categories.

An example of this stage of coding:

*“I think I will give this tour right, like three to five times a day, five days a week; once I’m off, I’m not talking about this no more, I’m done for the day-”*

Codes assigned to Terry: Emotional labor/ Boundaries/ Job description

The initial codes are applied to obtain participants’ lived experiences (Newton, 1965). From the collection of lived experiences, sub-categories emerge. Sub-categories refer to data with a close conception that was extracted from the initial codes and “set” next to one another (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015). These sub-categories, which represent the initial codes, were then reviewed. Some sub-categories contained multiple codes, determined from the initial coding stage. The codes and categories were discussed among the author and an advisory committee.

Next, similar sub-categories form main categories, and the interconnections become clear. To enhance analysis credibility, data were validated by verifying the findings with the participants (member-checking) to ensure they recognized them as a true representation of their narratives. During this process, participants received a list of main themes informed by their and other participants’ interviews, along with my definition of those themes. Participants also received a list of themes and quotes from their interviews that were categorized with those themes.

An example of theme and definition:

Coworker-related emotional labor	The people one works with can greatly affect one’s emotional labor. This theme captures the ways in which interpreters’ co-workers (including upper management) can cause participants to do more emotional labor, or limit the negative effects of job/visitor-related emotional labor.
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Lastly, I developed the narrative by linking the words of the participants with the correlation of the main categories and the themes with the existing literature (e.g., books, primary and secondary sources, and peer-reviewed articles). These narratives are intended to grab the reader’s attention by presenting a complete perception of the experience (Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni, 2015).

## Findings

In the first round of interviews, participants reflected on their background, career journey, connection to history, and emotional labor. During the second round of interviews, participants gave more details about their experience working in the field of historical interpretation, including salary, the communities they lived in, and their routines before, during, and after work. From these interviews, several themes related to capitalism and finances emerged:

1. The expectation of interpreters to be vulnerable is an example of surplus labor
2. The reproductive labor underlying what appears to be self-care is to cope with the emotional labor of interpreting slavery.
3. The connection between interpreter finances and their emotional labor

### *Vulnerability and surplus labor*

Vulnerability includes the incorporation of the traumatizing inherited and lived experience of being Black in America. The experiences participants shared are consistent with previous research. Interpreters of color must perform the appropriate emotional labor while molding themselves to their specific race etiquette and norms. From the conversations with former and current interpreters, some managers were trying to get more out of interpreters by tapping into their vulnerability, mainly Black interpreters. Three interpreters' stories relayed the expectation that they would incorporate personal vulnerabilities into their tours, performances, and interactions with the public. While many interpreters talked about using their own experiences in their interpretations, the expectation demonstrates how those in power attempt to extract as much surplus labor out of interpreters. Whitney (former interpreter in South Carolina) described the management's expectations at her site and the effects of vulnerability.

He was like th's is a customer service job, and I was like, f\*\*\* that, it's not. I am not going to give 100% of myself to these people if I don't want to, if I don't feel like I don't have to be a vulnerable person to the strangers, all I have to do is tell them what they paid to hear and go on about my day. But that's not how my supervisors felt; my boss actually consistently talked to me about being more vulnerable with my groups, and it was like not everybody deserves that vulnerability. Because people take advantage, especially when you're talking about this, people take advantage of that, and I realized very quickly. When I was vulnerable, that's when people felt compelled to say really terrible, hateful, racist, ridiculous, shocking things to me because they felt comfortable, "This person has been on point; they're sharing this really vulnerable, difficult history and I spent last 45 minutes to an hour with them so I'm going to feel comfortable asking them to be the spokesperson for all Black people in America." So vulnerabilities can kiss my ass, honestly, when it comes to interpretation because I think it's a setup.

This oral history testimony about how interpreter vulnerability can be weaponized and the expectation of going beyond interpreting the site's history reiterates the question of who reaps the benefits of emotional labor. Her manager's inclusion of vulnerability as a part of customer service illustrates the extraction surplus of the interpreter's invention power. In Whitney's case, it is not enough that her manager and the public have access to her knowledge of the site's history and her ability to craft an exciting tour in the

allotted time; he also wants access to her vulnerabilities (even though she does not need to do her job). It is not to say that she was never vulnerable wit' her groups. Throughout her interview, she talked about times she felt comfortable being vulnerable, but it was not always; she had boundaries and enforced them to keep herself safe.

One of the participants, Shay (former costumed interpreter in South Carolina), offered her account of being asked to draw on her vulnerabilities in her performance of historical interpretation. At her site, they hold a special event for Reconstruction, recreating the event of when US officials (military) came to the area to arrest the Klu Klux Klan members who murdered Robert Smalls<sup>2</sup>, a man formally enslaved at the site, who became a civil rights leader during Reconstruction. Shay gave a monologue for the event while portraying his wife, Hannah<sup>3</sup>, explaining how she would have felt and the event from her perspective. Shay found the role difficult because she wanted to represent Hannah well and recalled some advice she received to prepare.

That was really hard because people were like, 'Oh, you gotta be upset, you gotta get into it as if it was your husband or something like that,' I'm like, I have to kind of separate myself from it because I don't want to feel that, just because the same stuff keeps happening now that-, his story is so similar to things that just have been happening over the years.

Shay's experience illustrates that drawing on heavier emotions and vulnerabilities (even hypothetical ones) can be traumatizing, specifically for Black interpreters. By encouraging her to "get into it as if it was her husband," Shay's higher-ups asked her to take on trauma without recognizing that modern-day lynchings are on full display on TV and social media. Throughout her interview, she expressed that she avoids consuming media that portrays violence against Black bodies and does not make first-person interpretations to maintain separation from the history she interprets and the experiences of African Americans living today. In her portrayal of Rosa Williams, Shay did not uphold her usual boundaries and disassociated throughout her performance.

... It almost felt like I wasn't there like during it and then just came back after it, but it was a lot like you just don't even hear anything, it's just like dead silent, and it was right off of a road, so I'm sure cars passed by but I just, I didn't- I was just ready to go

While several study participants talked about the incorporation of interpreters' emotions to convey their narratives, Kessie explains that from her experience, she is effective, even though she tries to stay emotionally detached (not in a way that is cold or callous), as to not distract from the true mission of her

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Smalls (1839-1915) was an American war hero and politician that while enslaved, commandeered a Confederate ship and delivered its 16 black men, women, and children passengers from slavery to freedom.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah (Jones) Smalls (1825-1883) Robert Smalls's wife

historical interpretation; making sure that people know the history of the enslaved people that lived and labored at York Homestead with agency and humanity.

I want there to be a disconnect because, in that moment, it's not about me, it's about the visitor and how they're getting this information, what we might be introducing them to, what we might be challenging them on, but I do know that there are others where they are literally bringing their whole selves and then some into this into-, and so that bleeds. And for some visitors that's welcomed, because then they can feel it, there's that draw to them, and it I think it's a personal choice in how you do it... In my work, I need the visitor to understand, I need for them to make and draw their own connections that aren't based on their emotional reaction off of my emotional reaction, whatever they feel, I want them to feel it because that's their conviction or that's something that's coming to them, not because... in some way that I've manipulated their emotions... I want it to be you feel what you feel, and you handle those feelings, don't let me, you know, don't let me impact that. But for some people, that's how they break the walls and how people really kind of-it might be that if they're vulnerable, then the visitor is vulnerable as well. So, it's one of those things where I feel like it's very personal. Still, I work best when it's detached because I want people to not be afraid or not feel like they can't-, I just need it to be-, and I am not cold. I am not callous, but I try to make it like, 'we're going to be uncomfortable for a minute together, and I am going to make you comfortable being uncomfortable, so let's go...

Hearing Kessie's explanation of her approach to historical interpretation highlights that there are many ways to make successful interpretations and that frontline historical interpreters should be able to decide which approach works best for them. Expecting vulnerability, especially unnecessarily, ignores interpreters' expertise and exploits their emotional labor. In her interview, Kessie talked about seeing other interpreters sit in the weight of their sites and slip into depressions that were difficult to get up from, and that was something she could not afford to do at the risk of harming family, kids, etc. In this regard, the expectation of interpreter vulnerability demonstrates extra labor to improve the visitor experience, which is not guaranteed.

### *Self-care as reproductive labor*

Throughout the oral history interview, former and current interpreters described their self-care routines to avoid the negative effect of emotional labor, maintain their sense of self and mental/emotional well-being, and the importance of these routines in allowing them to function outside of work and take care of themselves and their families. There is an emotional component to the historical interpretation of slavery, and living in its legacy further blurs the lines between the emotional 'inner world' and the professional 'outer world.' As a form of self-care, Terry, a former interpreter out of Georgia, talked extensively about maintaining her sense of self outside of work by participating in activities to "feed the other parts of herself."

I definitely would spend a lot of evenings, go back to my apartment, and then I was just like out for the day like nothing else is happening; I was probably what, like- I think that was when I really started to develop very consciously about self-care, knowing that like I'm talking about slavery that much during the week I'm like, 'I need another- I need additional outlets; I need other things to sort of balance this out; I believe that the work that I'm doing is important and crucial, I believe I'm doing a good job, my supervisors believe that I'm doing a good job; I need to be able to balance this out because I'm sure that in some way that I'm not realizing at the time, I'm not as balanced as I wanted to be;

Terry volunteered at a community garden, frequently attended improv comedy shows, and went to the beach. Her comments capture how self-care and, thus, reproductive labor can occur outside the home and expand the concept of “maintaining daily life” to include being balanced. Self-care and balance are essential for historical interpreters because they are not only talking about the past but drawing parallels between people, events, and policies of history and the disparities we live in today.

Interpreters also mentioned that although their work was important, it was painful and required mental and emotional fortitude. Self-care is acknowledging that pain and allowing oneself to. Caldera (2020) explains that self-care is not extreme consumerism and materialism nor about indulging in luxuries (e.g., manicures, fancy restaurants, and expensive vacations). It is “take care of the self even when others fail to do so (Maparyan, 2011, p. 44).” An African American woman, Miss Story, a first-person interpreter in Maryland, played an enslaved woman named Charity Folks<sup>4</sup>. She explained:

...But my self-care is acknowledging the pain and trying to just take time for myself listening to my body... There are certain things that I tried to do nutrition-wise that help you know, make sure that I get the necessary vitamins and nutrients; if I know I have a lot of tours on a certain day, then I might do a little bit more carbs than I normally would give me that energy. I think the biggest- the biggest thing that I have done for myself care is acknowledging that I need it. And once I acknowledged that I'm not superwoman and I'm not wonder woman, though nobody has ever seen us in the same place at the same time [chuckles] I'm learning that this work is hard, and often it hurts my feelings, and it makes me mad, and sometimes- sometimes I don't want to be around my coworkers after doing some of the research or reading some of the books that I've read or reading, or doing some of the performances, because they are a direct reflection of the people who did what they did to my people,

This type of self-care is essential for Black women as their role (both historically and contemporarily) is to labor, prosper, serve, revere, and save others, all of which require strength. Black feminist and womanist thought demands self-care to protect and preserve that strength (Scott, 2016). Self-care disrupts the capitalist system of exploitation and rejects the notion that Black women's bodies and minds are valuable only when profitable to others (Caldera, 2020).

Participants also discussed the importance of community and its essential role in providing self-care support. While discussing mental health resources available at the site, Steven, a first-person interpreter and program manager, spoke about the importance of a space for Black employees to commune. He said:

... for decades the Black interpreters, first-person, and third-person, and trades have all been saying to the powers that be; we need a time for just us Black employees to commune with each other, please. And I finally got high enough within management that I could go to my boss, who was the VP of the historic area, and go, “Hey, we need this.” She went, “Alright, you will have it,” and so, for the last two and a half years now, I think, we have had a monthly historic area Black employee meeting. We brought in some of the Black employees from some of the other areas because there's only one Black employee in marketing. So we invited her, saying, “come on, come on join us,” And so we all sit there every month. Sometimes we

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<sup>4</sup> Charity Folks was an African American woman who was enslaved in Maryland until her manumission from slavery in 1797.

just talk about our lives, or you know, see how everybody's doing, or if someone needs help with something, or you know, we will teach people you know something about interpretation, or share books, or that sort of thing it's our time two hours, for that day, the first Thursday of every month, where we get to do that, and that has been the most helpful thing actually.

Self-care support refers to the external factors influencing the practice and engagement in self-care (Miller et al., 2019). A community is important because not everyone has the skills and access to resources to practice self-care. It took time (decades) to receive the institutional support to create the space for Black employees, but now that they have it, they are using it to ensure that everyone has what they need to take care of themselves. Care for each other (even those in different departments) is undervalued labor, a key element of individual and community resilience, and the ability to thrive in challenging environments (Hobert & Kneese, 2020).

### *Finances and emotional labor*

Every interpreter interviewed either alluded to or explicitly stated that “frontline historical interpretation does not pay well.” Moreover, after hearing about the vast amount of cognitive and emotional labor historical interpreters were doing, it became clear that they were producing more than their given wages. According to Marx's analysis of capitalism, there cannot be profit without surplus labor and the surplus value that it results in. Increasing profit margins means increasing the ratio between surplus and necessary labor (Tolman, 2019). The disproportionate production rate versus wage exacerbates emotional labor's adverse effects. Terry describes this unequal rate of wage increase in her interview; she says:

I was getting fed professionally in some sense, but I was also not getting paid like I was getting fed, I arrived at an \$11 an hour job for 40 hours a week, and with cost of living adjusted, less than a year, they gave me 13 cents and I was like, ‘you probably should’ve- could have just not told me, and I wouldn’t have noticed that I got an additional 13 cents,’ I’m just like, who would notice 13 cents in particular- nobody;

Lucarelli and Fumagalli (2008) explained that when society shifted from Fordist capitalism to cognitive capitalism, there also was a transition from a stable structure of accumulation to an unstable one due to the absence of a relationship between supply conditions and demand conditions (i.e., confining production to the workplace and the production of tangible goods). There is no fair compensation for the instability of the labor force (e.g., the production of immaterial goods) (Lucarelli & Fumalli, 2007).

Interpreters also talked about how being employed part-time influenced their emotional labor. Whitney, a former interpreter in South Carolina, talked about the strain of the emotional labor in culmination with being part-time and not having benefits made it feel like she was subjecting herself to the strain. She said:

...because it takes a lot out of you, and it takes a lot out of you in a lot of ways, in a lot of ways that I wasn't anticipating. Especially when you're not being paid fairly anyway, and then you're like I'm not even getting paid for this like, “boy I should be subjecting myself,” that's how it felt towards the end, as I was subjecting myself to it.

She later went into greater detail about being part-time at Carolina Plantation:

... You know what the worst part about it was? We did not have health insurance, dental insurance, vision insurance, life insurance; We didn't have sick days. We didn't have personal days, so really it wasn't so much the pay. It was the lack of benefits that, like, really sucked, especially like during the time of COVID like if you were sick like and you just wanted to, like, test, like you didn't know if you had COVID like you would miss like a day's pay because you don't have sick leave. But then, if you had COVID, you did get sick leave because of but like-, other than that, if you were just sick... So yeah, that was the worst part.

Whitney's emphasis that the lack of benefits as the worst is consistent with the literature about the employee benefits system. A 2022 study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 90% of survey respondents said healthcare is an extremely or very important employee benefit. Eighty-three percent say flexible work and leave time are extremely or very important (the Society for Human Resource Management, 2022). Even participants that were full-time employees at historical sites did not have certain benefits like paid leave, as they were hourly employees. If they did not work, they did not get paid, so taking a personal or wellness day means sacrificing a day's wages – a sacrifice many interpreters I spoke with could not afford. Interpreters were inclined to overwork themselves, take a second job or work on their days off when the site was short-staffed. One respondent described their experience this way:

I didn't really take a lot of days off, I probably should have taken more days off during my time in Savannah, but I didn't really have- I was making so little money that I just didn't feel like the right thing to do... so, because people were so in and out in terms of those positions, whenever someone was let go, or quits I was one of the first people my lead interpreter would call the like, can you fill in on this day and I'm like, 'yeah extra money, I need to pay rent, I should do this,' (Terry, A former third-person interpreter in GA)

## **Conclusion**

Oral history interviews of current and former historical interpreters revealed how in doing emotional labor, their emotions, knowledge, and lived experiences have become commodities in the economic system of cognitive capitalism. These accounts humanized capitalism, showed the production of history as a tangible process that harmed workers, and the continued legacy of exploitation of these sites.

Three major themes emerged from former and current interpreters' oral history interviews:

1. Interpreters' vulnerability, especially Black interpreters, has surplus value, and managers try to extract as much surplus labor as possible. Many of the Black interpreters interviewed revealed that they were the only Black interpreter employed at the site, meaning that along with the expectation of vulnerability, they bore the responsibility of everything "Black" at their sites.
2. Historical interpreters' reproductive labor is rooted in self-care practices.
3. Interpreters produced more than they were compensated for, exacerbating the adverse effects of emotional labor.

Previous works related to heritage tourism and commodification focused on the commodification of history (Adamkiewicz, 2016; Bright et al., 2018; Butler, 2001; Yankholes & McKercher, 2015). Buntin (2008) explored how Native American professionals in the heritage industry respond to the threat of commodifying sacred Native culture through *commodified persona*. This work is necessary because it expands these constructs of the commodification of culture and history by grounding it in cognitive capitalism theory and focusing on the emotional labor by which these processes occur. Although few studies have examined emotional labor through the lens of capitalism, the findings aligned with other research on capitalism and historical interpretation. First, Black interpreters at historic carry extra weight, and though this is inequitable, it is consistent with previous research. Tyson (2013) and Walcott-Wilson (2020) both found that Black interpretive staff (either intentionally or unintentionally) serve as “ambassadors for all African Americans.” Also, interpreters not being compensated at the same rate that they produce is embedded in the design of capitalism. The goal of capitalism is profit (e.g., generating more significant revenue, out-competing competition).

A unique that came out of this work is how interpreters perceived self-care as a way to maintain themselves to continue interpreting the history of slavery. Reproductive labor is often framed as unpaid labor that provides workers with the means to tolerate, circumvent, and alter exploitative relations that emanate from advanced capitalism, usually done by women (Armstrong, 2020; Griffith et al., 2018; Thier, 2020; Weeks, 2017). Self-care is rarely included in this maintenance labor. This exclusion could be because self-care is anti-capitalistic, as it fundamentally disrupts the notion that workers should “neglect their personal and communal well-being for the sake of thriving industries and robust economies” (Caldera, 2020, p. 712). According to bell hook’s, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), self-care serves to rectify the imbalance and heal wounds. Interpreters’ interviews showed that they need to heal the wounds received every time they go to work, humanizing the lives of the enslaved and crafting programs to create historical empathy and encourage action to liberate their descendants in a society dominated by white supremacy.

The foundations laid out in this study have practical implications and implications so for future research. For the practical implications, storytelling is critical in many social movements, so social actors can use narratives about the effects of capitalism on employees’ working conditions and well-being to justify and demand strategies to close the production wage gap and regulate the free market. For example, strategies that allow interpreters to receive a liveable wage, access to employee benefits (including mental health resources, and bargaining power. Research such as this also gives interpreters the tools to advocate for

themselves by being able to describe their labor using the language of the system. Future research needs to explore how to utilize sustainable research management practices to avoid the harmful effects of cognitive capitalism. Sustainable human resources management is “a new approach to managing people, by identifying broader purposes for HRM, through its recognition of the complexities of workplace dynamics and the explicit recognition of the need to avoid negative impacts of HRM practices” (Kramar, 2014, p. 1085). This approach includes providing the fundamental human right of sustainable employment (Baum et al., 2016). A critical component of sustainable employment is maintaining employee health and safety (Baum, 2018), including emotional and mental health, which emotional labor can negatively impact (e.g., negative emotions, stress (Xanthopoulou et al., 2013), high blood pressure, increased heart rate (Grandey, 2000)). An approach that centers on the perspectives of overlooked and marginalized groups is important for future research because it allows researchers to frame questions in a way that is based on the reality of these groups’ worlds and not preconceived notions about their marginality and positions. Also, it acknowledges and utilizes the expertise of these groups in the experiences.

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## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

### Introduction

This dissertation started with a question to a guest lecturer about how they coped with the emotionally heavy work they did for descendants of enslaved people and in a genealogy lab. Her joking response was the catalyst that started me on a journey to uncover the emotional labor central to interpreting the history of slavery. Being a frontline public historian is intricate work, it is a delicate balance of physical labor, emotional management, vulnerability, exhaustion, and frustration. It calls for those that take on this role to be experts, not just in the history of their sites but experts in conveying history in a way that is compelling, engaging, and captivates their audience in a way that they connect with the Black people in the past and present. Historical interpreters' work is situated in the past, greatly impacts the present, and can potentially change the future. I organized my chapters around this point. Essentially, each chapter centers on the interpreter's understanding of their emotional labor and how that labor is situated within the systems of United States society: white supremacy and capitalism.

In the remainder of this chapter, I conclude by returning to each of my research questions and summarizing my conclusion and contributions from chapters 1, 2, and 3.

### Conclusions and contributions

As a whole, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of knowledge around emotional labor in the heritage tourism workforce, especially concerning interpreting the history of slavery. Most importantly, this work centers the experiences of historical interpreters from their own perspective and, with so much power of the narratives presented at historical sites, a population deserving of study. The majority of extant tour guide literature focuses on modeling guide behavior with the objective of enhancing guides' and management's ability to serve tourists (Cohen, 1985; Hansen & Mossberg, 2017; Holloway, 1981; Modlin et al., 2011; Pond, 1992; Potter, 2016). The labor, emotional connection, and overall impacts on interpreters are often not captured. Individually, the chapters contribute to three dimensions of the emotional labor of heritage tourism that are under-researched: the legacy of slavery, interpreters' conceptualization of their own emotional labor, and emotional labor and capitalism.

#### *The emotional labor of interpreting slavery while living in its legacy*

In Chapter 1, I used the results from two rounds of oral history interviews to show that the legacy of slavery that is foundational in contemporary American society acted as a motivator for interpreters to enter the field of public history and endure the emotional labor that comes with it; and that it can as

exacerbates the harmful effects of emotional labor. It addressed my first research question about the relationship between the present-day socio-political climate and the emotional labor of interpreting the history of slavery. It also showed insight into how visitors' social and political ideologies, miseducation, expectations, and responses to the presented history dictate the emotional labor historical interpreters have to do and visitors' role in disrupting or maintaining white supremacy at these sites. The findings from interviews with current and former historical interpreters are essential because they provided insight into interpreter motivations and triggers and showed the risks of working at racialized and political spaces like historic homes and former plantations.

### *Interpreters' conceptualization of their emotional labor*

Chapter 2 explored how historical interpreters understand the emotional labor they do. The interpreters I spoke to had power and autonomy in the narratives they presented at their sites, and they described their emotional labor more broadly than what has been captured in previous emotional labor research. The findings showed that emotional labor was embedded in every aspect of historical interpretation, demonstrating that even material labor comprises immaterial labor. Chapter 2 builds on a large foundation of research about emotional labor that investigates the expansive implication of emotional labor and its effects on the heritage tourism workforce. My goal with this oral history project is to understand the reality of interpreting slavery and emotional labor unique to working with “difficult histories.”

### *Emotional labor and cognitive capitalism*

Since I analyzed emotional labor in the context of the current socio-political climate, I also wanted to look at it in the context of the current economic system, framing emotional labor as labor. Chapter 3 focused on how elements of the emotional labor of interpreting the history of slavery fit into cognitive capitalism (i.e., surplus labor, reproductive labor, and the production-to-wage gap). I also was interested in looking at how the vital role of interpreters' emotions in re-creating history at these sites has made emotions a commodity. The findings from this chapter humanize capitalism and demonstrate the reality of this economic system for frontline workers.

### **Limitations and avenues for future work**

The findings shared in these chapters were constrained by access, time, and resources. Although I achieved a rich understanding of what it is like to interpret the history of slavery at some of these historical sites, this research could benefit from a broader scope and larger groups of participants. While the interpreters that participated came from sites in different sites, they were similar in that they all were committed to telling the truth about slavery. So only a few participants spoke about feeling restricted by

their administrators. Future research could expand this project to include the experience of historical interpreters that work at sites that are hesitant to reinterpret history in a way that honors their enslaved Black population. For example, historic house museums, whose mission is to uphold the reputation of a prominent historical figure or family, may minimize or erase that person was a slaveholder or supported upholding the institution of slavery. I plan to continue the work I started here through my career as a scholar.

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