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by

Antony Cherian

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The Dissertation Committee for Antony Cherian Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

I Give You My Word: The Ethics of Oral History and Digital Video Interpretation at Texas Historic Sites

Committee:

____
Loriene Roy, Co-Supervisor

____
Martha Norkunas, Co-Supervisor

____
Patricia Galloway

____
Philip Doty

____
Suzanne Seriff

I Give You My Word:
The Ethics of Oral History and Digital Video Interpretation at Texas Historic Sites

by

Antony Cherian, B.A.; M.S.Info.St.

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Dedication

To my Ammachi and Appappan, Mary and K.C. Antony. And to my Ammamma and Appappa, Eunice and P.J. Cherian.

I Give You My Word:
The Ethics of Oral History and Digital Video Interpretation at Texas Historic Sites

Antony Cherian, Ph.D.

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Supervisors: Loriene Roy and Martha Norkunas

This dissertation examines the process of using oral history and digital video to revise interpretation and represent more inclusive histories at three rural Texas historic sites—Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, the Lyndon Baines Johnson State Park, and Varner-Hogg Plantation—21st century sites that, to varying degrees, have persisted to interpret a Texas master narrative that is no longer socially tolerable in its silencing of marginalized Texas voices. In particular, the dissertation focuses on complicated and rarely discussed ethical issues that surfaced during my work from 2001 to 2006 shooting, editing, and situating interpretive documentary videos at the each of the three sites.

Historic sites in Texas, like others across the United States and worldwide, have been receiving increasing pressure from scholars and community groups to represent women, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups more prominently in the narratives they interpret. Oral history and digital media have played key roles in this ongoing movement. Oral history has widely been touted as a tool to democratize history, and advocates of digital video interpretation cite its affordability, relative ease of use, and its ability to "say so much in so little time." These factors are all the more compelling for

local, regional, and state-wide historic sites that are chronically under-funded, under-staffed, and that must often interpret multiple, complicated narratives with very little time or space in which to present them. However, little has been done to explore the unique and complicated ethical issues that arise from using oral history and digital video at historic sites.

This dissertation takes a case study approach and uses as its intellectual framework ideas of reflective practice, part of the contemporary discourse among public history practitioners. Each case study introduces the site through a critical analysis of the images and texts produced by the site; presents the central historical silence at each site; describes the solution that oral history and digital video interpretation was expected to provide; and then uses the project's process-generated video footage and records to examine key situations that led me to raise ethical questions about the individual projects and the overall enterprise.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Oral history has widely been touted as a tool to democratize history, and historic sites across the United States and worldwide have been receiving pressure from scholars, public historians, and members of marginalized groups to do just that—to democratize their representations of history to be more inclusive in the stories that they tell. In the realm of museums and historic sites, many museum professionals and others have regarded digital video as something of a "magic bullet" for changing or shifting the interpretation of a given site. This new medium has been lauded by some in the world of public history as having revolutionary potential for education and interpretation at historic sites and museums. Among the characteristics valued by these champions of digital video are its affordability, relative ease of use, and its ability to "say so much in so little time." These factors are all the more compelling for local, regional, and state-wide historic sites that are chronically under-funded, under-staffed, and that must often interpret multiple, complicated narratives with very little time or space in which to present them.

And so with digital video cameras now achieving near ubiquity in the United States and with editing software and skills more accessible than ever, sites of cultural heritage are turning more and more to the twin promise of oral history and digital video to introduce new narratives on site and to do so quickly and inexpensively. Because of the perceived potential of oral history and digital video, and because of the low entry

barrier to experimentation with these methods and tools, they have gained many converts in public history and the heritage industry. However, little has been done to explore the complicated and somewhat unique ethical issues that arise as a result of this process. Although in the past ten years, a small but growing literature in the fields of folklore, public history, and oral history has begun to outline some of the main issues faced by this type of digital representation, much work remains to be done.

This dissertation takes an initial step to add to and expand upon that literature by exploring how the process of using oral history and digital video to "democratize history" unfolded in projects that I undertook at three specific historic sites in the state of Texas—all of which, to one degree or another, could be characterized as twenty-first century sites that were stuck, both historically and interpretively, in a Texas master narrative that is no longer socially tolerable in its almost total erasure and neglect of marginalized Texas voices on the landscape. In particular, this dissertation focuses on complicated and rarely discussed ethical issues that surfaced during this process.

The three Texas sites that I focus on in this dissertation are Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site in Washington County, the Lyndon Baines Johnson State Park in Stonewall, and Varner-Hogg Plantation in Brazoria County. At the time the projects took place, from 2001-2006, all three were Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) sites. Washington-on-the-Brazos and the LBJ State Park are still TPWD sites. Control of Varner-Hogg Plantation has since shifted to the Texas Historical Commission (THC) as part of a controversial transfer of twelve historic sites from TPWD to THC in the 80th Texas Legislature's House Bill 12, signed into law on June 15, 2007.

I undertook these projects under the auspices of the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past (ITP), founded by Dr. Martha Norkunas in 1999. ITP works to research, interpret, and present the histories of women and marginalized communities. Initially, ITP worked primarily with museums and historic sites in Texas to help represent these marginalized voices in their narratives, to ask new questions of the sites, and to offer new, more inclusive narratives at the sites. More recently, however, it had expanded its scope. When I began working with ITP and Dr. Norkunas, they had engaged in an agreement with TPWD and worked primarily but not exclusively with TPWD historic sites.

For each of three core chapters in this dissertation, I will introduce one of the three case study historic sites and frame my discussion of that site in terms of a central theoretical issue that my work with ITP was addressing through oral history fieldwork and digital video interpretive documentaries at the site. After introducing the central theoretical problem and the role that digital video could play in addressing this problem, the chapters will proceed to an analysis of a central ethical issue that arose in the process of producing the documentary and installing it at the site. Each of these three chapters introduces the site; presents the central historical silence at each site; describes the solution that oral history and digital video interpretation was expected to provide at the site; and then examines the situation or situations that led me to raise ethical questions about the process itself.

CHAPTER TWO SYNOPSIS: WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS

We begin our journey at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site in Washington County, Texas, on the Brazos River near the Grimes County Line, about halfway between Houston and Austin. The metaphor I use for Washington-on-the-Brazos is the frog preserved for dissection. I do so to highlight the site's function on the landscape of Texas heritage as a perfect specimen of the national origin myth. I relate the founding of the site to the rise of the American museum movement in the late 19th century and the form the site takes to the legacy of taxonomy, naked eye science, and natural history museums. The central concept of the chapter deals with the necessity to "fix" seemingly static heritage narratives like specimens in a museum collection in order to naturalize these narratives as the "true" and only possible narratives that may represent a community's past.

My major work at Washington-on-the-Brazos was producing, with my colleague Mark Westmoreland, an oral history documentary video intended to introduce African American voices to the narrative of the site. The site at that point offered almost no interpretation of African American history, even though its mission is to represent Texas history from the Texas Revolution to the U.S. Civil War and even though one of its central attractions is a working, "living history," antebellum cotton plantation. I present my role at the site in the context of David Lowenthal's concepts of the practice of heritage, whose hallmarks include the practices of "updating," "upgrading," and "excluding" central to maintaining heritage narratives. I relate the history of upgrading, updating and excluding at the site and situate my activities at the site within this history, as an update and upgrade to the existing narrative in order to meet contemporary

expectations among public history professionals and site visitors. I also introduce the inherent tension between upgrading/updating heritage narratives and the need for those narratives to appear static, unchanging, sacrosanct, and fixed.

I conclude the chapter with a close reading of the film we produced for the site as well as readings of key oral history interviews conducted for the site and the film, especially the interviews with Venieta Marshall. I call into question my role in "fixing" a particular representation of Ms. Marshall in the documentary for the site in order to produce the particular heritage narrative that the site required. I examine the ethical dimensions of "fixing" this narrative and of failing to listen deeply and closely to the actual narrative that Ms. Marshall presented.

CHAPTER THREE SYNOPSIS: THE LBJ STATE PARK

Chapter Three introduces the site, the LBJ State Park in Stonewall, Texas, as I first came to it, silent and in repose, like a sleeping dog.[1] It goes on to illustrate some of the ways in which the master narrative—the silent threat, the coiled potential of the sleeping dog—functions at the site. I ask how the master narrative functions in the rhetoric of the site's interpretation as well as in the rhetoric of its two revered personages, Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson.

In the process, I also make explicit the definitions of both "master narrative" and "patriarchy" as I have requisitioned and used the terms. My use of the master narrative has percolated through a specific tradition of literary criticism, and I am taking the

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[1] Thanks to Suzanne Seriff for suggesting the metaphor of the sleeping dog for the LBJ State Park.

[2] While the question of the "real birthplace of Texas" may still be up for debate in the real world, the matter

terminology most directly from Toni Morrison (Toni Morrison, 1992b). For my understanding of patriarchy, particularly as it functions in narrative and chronology, I rely heavily on Donna Haraway's articulation of Teddy Bear Patriarchy (Haraway, 1984, 1989a). In the course of this discussion, I also introduce puppy dog patriarchy, a humble conceptual descendant of Haraway's Teddy Bear Patriarchy.

Next, I describe how I encountered both the master narrative and subaltern narratives of resistance in the voices of those long silenced at the site. In particular, I revisit my dilemmas and decisions editing the digital video footage we shot for the oral history documentary *Hill Country*. I reflect critically on choices I made to draw on—and to silence—specific voices to construct what I thought would be a narrative counterpoint at the site.

Chapter Three then is an account of resistance and acquiescence to hegemonic pressures in the making of *Hill Country*, a new, inclusive, 21st century narrative for the LBJ State Park that, in the end, looked disturbingly similar to the weary old narratives of patriarchy and exclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR SYNOPSIS: VARNER-HOGG PLANTATION

In Chapter Four I turn to my work at Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site, in West Columbia, Brazoria County, south of Houston, along the Gulf Coast. The operative metaphor for Varner-Hogg Plantation is the snake. I use the idea of snakes because they loom large at the site and also because they have come to represent temptation and desire, important motivators in the collection of antiques and decorative arts, which was the central activity of the site's founder, Ima Hogg. The snake has also

been used, since Civil War times, to represent, in racist narratives of white supremacy, the role of people of African descent in Adam and Eve's fall from grace, and then to provide quasi-biblical justification for anti-black oppression. In the context of this dissertation, I use the metaphor of the snake to introduce the other side of the site, the silenced African American narratives.

At Varner-Hogg, much of the story of the site is invisible, both the stories of Miss Ima—as she was called—and African American stories too. Here I invoke Jacques Derrida's hauntologies, particularly as used in Michael Bowman's performance-oriented site critiques, to discuss how visitors and volunteers invoke metaphorical ghosts in their own performances of the site.

In this chapter, I narrate the process of revising and re-orienting the historical interpretation at the site through my production of a new introductory film for the site. The ethical dilemma I present at Varner-Hogg is the question of the public historian/filmmaker's responsibilities for the repercussions of his or her work.

CHAPTER FIVE SYNOPSIS: CONCLUSION

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by tracing the arc of my journey across the three sites and three film projects to elicit the deeper meaning of my reflection on public history and oral history practice at these Texas historic sites. It situates the dissertation in the context of other examinations of ethics in oral history practice, points out the dissertation's most significant contributions to this literature and asks the question, "What next?" in discussions of ethical practice in oral history work.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this dissertation, and in part to facilitate analysis as case studies, I am considering my work as three separate projects. But it is important to understand that all of the work is also part of one larger umbrella project. The subject of this dissertation is a project (singular) in that my work at all three sites (Washington-on-the-Brazos, the LBJ State Park & Varner-Hogg Plantation) was under the aegis of the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past, under the supervision, guidance and training of Dr. Martha Norkunas. All the work was funded either through grants Dr. Norkunas wrote or through direct negotiations Dr. Norkunas undertook with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the University of Texas at Austin, and others. Dr. Norkunas provided me with mentorship, encouragement, advice, and instruction. Although in this dissertation I examine moments when I may have faltered in the course of the projects, these missteps have been solely due to my own lapses in judgment or preparation.

I treat the three as individual projects here because there are important site-specific and project-specific distinctions to be made, because the dealing with these three as distinct segments better suits a case study approach, and because the tradition in public history has been to focus on site-specific fieldwork and interpretation. Because public history literature is so often site-centered, in following the same route I have the benefit of being able to draw more easily on the models and examples that my predecessors and colleagues have provided.

The overall approach this dissertation takes to my public history project work owes its debt to a self-conscious search among public historians for an intellectual framework that allows practitioners to engage in a productive dialogue based on their

professional experiences, a dialogue that may help practitioners synthesize knowledge gained in the field into a more generative apparatus than how-to manuals, discrete nuggets of wisdom, or catalogs of dos and don'ts can provide. One direction gaining currency centers on the idea of reflective practice and is heavily indebted to Donald Schön's writings on the subject (Schön, 1983, 1987). The Winter 2006 special issue of The Public Historian was dedicated to the discussion of "Public History as Reflective Practice," and public history professionals drew on Schön's ideas to develop new ways of learning from and building on their work as practitioners (Conard, 2006; Corbett & Miller, 2006; Stowe, 2006). Following this model, I too have drawn on Schön's ideas but adapted them to the peculiarities of this project. Schön's conceptions rely heavily on reflection-in-action as self-conscious, reflexive, awareness as one practices one's work, like a "self-correcting "feed-back loop" (Corbett & Miller, 2006, p. 18) In taking Schön's critical stance—the practitioner as self-aware, self-conscious, self-reflexive and self-critical actor—and applying it to the public history projects in this study, that feedback loop cannot function in the same way, since the projects took place in the past and have since been formally completed.

In each of my case studies, however, there are moments still lodged in my body and mind that are the kind of stimuli that would have generated the kind of reflection-in-action feedback loop Schön articulated. As I began my reflective practice-inspired inquiry, I culled these moments from each of the case study sites and selected a few from each site that I felt might be most productive to study in depth. Each of these moments—these visceral stimuli that had remained present like a dull ulcer, some ten years or more—represented ethical dilemmas of particular kinds. The particularities of the ethical

questions lay in the way they floated just outside the contemporary and historical discourse on ethics in oral history and public history. Therefore, when I confronted them in the field, I had no direct apparatus to engage them, no evident touchstone to understand them. So I tried to ignore them or step aside them. This is perhaps the reason for the decade-long dull ulcer.

Having settled on the moments to examine, the stimuli for the feedback loop, the next step was to decide how to examine them. Since these ethical questions that had disturbed me for so long came in the context of producing public products for the sites, documentary videos, it seemed logical to study the production of these videos. They seemed in some way to be the catalyst or the amplifier for these ethical dilemmas. Michael Frisch has long been an advocate for the study of and the transparency in the production of historical narratives:

> I think a strong case can be made for the proposition that more may be learned from studying the process than from a focus on the position to which it has brought us. For one thing, the central issues in oral and public history are confronted first and most deeply in practical application, whether in conducting and transcribing interviews, organizing a collection, preparing an exhibit or a documentary, or drafting historical script or text that seeks explicitly to engage a general audience. (Frisch, 1990, p. xv)

And even more than encouragement, I found models for examining the production process in his critique of the broadcast documentary film *Vietnam: A Television History* and in his line-by-line revelation of the editing process of his own oral history transcripts. The two essays provided a model for me in examining both the edited films we produced

for the case study sites and the oral history source footage we recorded to make them and helped me understand how to discuss and analyze my decisions as I moved between one and the other (Frisch, 1990, pp. 81-146, 159-178).

In order for the reader to understand the context of the project, and particular nature of our work at the site and the nature of the ethical dilemmas that arose, it seemed necessary to give the readers the lay of the land, to give them the opportunity to understand the sites. Rather than a straight description of the sites, I have opted for a critical analysis of the rhetoric of the sites. This also contributed to the reflective nature of the dissertation project in that it replicated my first step in each of the site projects the first time around. Before beginning our work, I wrote a detailed analysis of the historic site, in the model of museum and exhibit reviews. So within each of the chapters, I begin with an in-depth analysis of the site that lays out the narrative of the site, critiques the narrative and places both the narrative and the site within the context of the production of history and heritage in Texas. Only then do I move on toward my reflection on the film and the project at the site. So each of the three body chapters functions as if it were two chapters in one.

At each site, key texts informed my analysis. At Washington-on-the-Brazos, David Lowenthal's Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's Theorizing Heritage proved crucial (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995; Lowenthal, 1998). At the LBJ State Park, it was Donna Haraway's Teddy Bear Patriarchy (1989b). And at Varner-Hogg Plantation, it was Michael Bowman's Tracing Mary Queen of Scots and Eric Bruner's Culture on Tour (Bowman, 2010; Bruner, 2005).

The source material for my reflection on these three case study projects and sites has been: the three edited films, oral history source footage from the three projects at each of sites (archived at the sites, in community repositories and in my possession); additional archival oral history footage related to the sites; copies of and notes on primary documents from my archival research at the time of the projects; my grant proposals written for work at the sites; my fieldwork journals, emails, project reports, and process-generated notes from my work on-site; unpublished research from other scholars relevant to the site that I acquired over the course of the projects; and internal TPWD publications given to me during my work at the sites.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The literature on the ethical dimensions of oral history work is one of the most productive and interesting areas of oral history scholarship. This dissertation contributes both to that growing literature as well as to the closely related but less prominent literature on ethics and public history. In both arenas the ethical questions that the dissertation addresses falls outside the conventional discourse on ethics in the two fields. This work also addresses and contributes to the growing scholarship on museums and historic sites as both products of and creators of the growing "heritage industry" in America and globally. It also joins the sometimes parallel literature on the self-reflective role of the public historian in that process of producing heritage.

Through this dissertation, I hope to offer a timely addition to a very active growing literature on heritage sites and the process of “heritagization” of states’ history in general. Within this literature, the dissertation addresses and redresses a curious and

significant scarcity of works of this type that focus on Texas, one of the largest and most flamboyantly heritagized states of the nation—with the prominent exception, of course, of Richard Flores' landmark work on the Alamo, as well as others on the Alamo in recent years.

The dissertation also adds to the growing literature on the production of digital media and the ethics of digital media. And although much is being written about historical documentaries on broadcast television and in cinema, comparatively little has been written on the use of digital video in interpretive media at historic sites. And although currently and indeed over the last twenty years, oral history has seen an explosion in the use of video as the recording medium of choice, the published literature on oral history and video continues to lag behind the adoption of digital video in oral history practice.

Situating Myself within the Context of the Study

I do not wish to make a glib self-identification, place myself in reductive cultural categories, or pass the reader a specious crib sheet to my point of view. However, it seems appropriate to discuss a few elements of my background that have factored explicitly in my initial project work and on my reflection on that work.

Even given the recognition that parsing out factors to situate my perspective is problematic at best, it seems relevant to note that I am a man and that my gender has had an especially noticeable impact on my ability to perceive certain gendered relationships to the land and to the past, especially in my initial fieldwork and in the production of the three films for the case study sites. This becomes particularly apparent in my close

reading of my interview with Ms. Marshall in Chapter Two, in which she, I posit, was giving me a narrative of motherhood, sexual politics and loss, but I, for many reasons, gender among them, heard a story of economic transition and migration.

It also bears noting that I am a South Asian immigrant, born in southern India and that I emigrated with my parents to Bryan/College Station, Texas at the age of eight. I have dark skin and a fairly standard "television" or Midwestern American accent. For many people in the extremely hierarchical and racialized research settings of the three case study sites, I am not easy to place. So much so that "Where are you from?" or "What are you?" are often among the first questions that I heard upon meeting someone in my fieldwork at two of the case study sites, Washington-on-the-Brazos and Varner-Hogg. Having spent much of my childhood and youth in a town not far from either of these sites, by distance or culture, I was also neither unfamiliar nor uncomfortable with these queries and interactions. Furthermore, being neither black nor white nor Mexican-American placed me outside the most racially charged relationships within the hierarchies of the case study sites' communities. More than once, TPWD staff members remarked on the real or perhaps at least partially imagined expediency of my racial and cultural background in my fieldwork.

When I speak about my work at each of the case study sites, I use the first person singular, "I," most of the time. I do so with no small amount of chagrin, knowing that in nearly every "I" there is a "we," a collaborator or multiple collaborators that I worked with so closely that we took nearly every decision together and performed most activities related to the project together. Yet in reflecting on the process, I am also very often voicing on my own memories and feelings or critiquing stances that I explicitly took and

others may not have shared. Therefore, I have thought it more appropriate to use the "I" to avoid eliding my perspective with others' perspectives, to avoid implicating these others in actions and decisions that are solely my responsibility, and to avoid reducing our individual aims and motives to a "false we." The concomitant complication of this decision is that I risk taking—or rather will inevitably take—credit for others' labor and talent. For this, I wish to offer my sincere apologies to my many collaborators, named and unnamed in this space. I particularly wish to offer thanks and credit to Mark Westmoreland and Brian Rawlins whose work on *Truth I Ever Told* and *Hill Country*, respectively, is inseparable from, and at least as crucial, as my own.

Finally, you may already have noticed my use of animals as metaphors, conceits, and imaginative fictions—frogs, dogs, and snakes—in my discussions of each of the sites. They are, I believe, productive metaphors that help to identify and understand certain key aspects of the sites. But I also intend them as signposts that situate and signal my subjectivity. I intend them to call attention to the necessarily imaginative aspects of any reading of a site or situation, text or action, regardless of how well grounded the analysis may seem.

Chapter Two: Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

Personal Narrative as Specimen: The Ethics of Editing and Fixing Representation at a Texas Historic Site

INTRODUCTION

In Texas schools, in the seventh grade, life science and Texas history intersect in curious fashion. Year after year, seventh grade schoolchildren visit Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site by the busload. Seventh grade is also when most of them first dissect a frog.

Both the town of Washington-on-the-Brazos and the seventh grader's dead frog are specimens. As such, they have gained life anew. These two entities have been preserved, just so, as specimens for education and examination purposes. Their absence of vitality is the precondition of both the anatomy lesson and the field trip because both the dissection frog and the historic site are products of epistemologies of order: taxonomy and positivist history, respectively. Michel Foucault connected the two explicitly, proposing that the objective, positivist approach to history grew out of natural history, the precursor of biology. And both natural history and positivist history depend on stasis rather than flux. One needs a static (preferably dead and preserved) organism to measure, sort, and standardize its properties. Correspondingly, as Foucault pointed out, to claim objectivity and reliability in history one needs a static past that can be preserved and accessed in sites and systems of filing—archives, conserved landscapes, catalogs, inventories, and indexes (Foucault, 1994, pp. 125-132).

Washington-on-Brazos exhibits this ossified, static past. The seventh graders visiting Washington-on-the-Brazos (the historic site, not the defunct town) would be hard pressed to find any trace of bustle and vigor there today, but Washington (the old town, not the historic site) was "a major political and commercial center in early Texas" (Christian, 2010). Folklorist and museum theorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett would point out that this obsolescence was a precondition for Washington's transformation into a heritage site. In fact heritage, according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, is this very second life, the resuscitation: it is "the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead . . . through a process of exhibition" (1995, p. 369).

The historic site of Washington-on-the-Brazos bills itself today as "The Birthplace of Texas." At least three sites lay claim to this disputed title: Deer Park, and West Columbia along with Washington-on-the-Brazos (Brazoria County Chambers of Commerce, Date Unknown; City of Deer Park, 2011).[2] It might seem logical that a state that touts its six flags could have at least as many births and, therefore, birthplaces. However, all three of these competing "birthplace" sites agree on one point: the seminal event in the history of Texas was its establishment as an independent nation. Therefore, the only birth that they pay tribute to is that of the Republic of Texas, and all three towns petition events during the years of the revolution and the republic to stake their birthrights.

[2] While the question of the "real birthplace of Texas" may still be up for debate in the real world, the matter is settled online, as Washington-on-the-Brazos has laid claim to "birthplaceoftexas.com."

UPDATING & UPGRADING THE PAST

Washington-on-the-Brazos points to two founding documents to substantiate its claim as the "true" birthplace of the Republic of Texas. It was where Texas revolutionaries signed the Declaration of Independence of Texas and where they drafted the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. To further validate its claim as the Birthplace of Texas, Washington-on-the-Brazos also points out that it had the honor of two turns as the seat of government of the short-lived nation, briefly in 1836 while revolutionaries drafted the founding documents and again from 1842 to 1845 (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2004; Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, 2010-2011).

Both the defunct town and the contemporary historic site are located in the same place by latitude and longitude, but in terms of metaphysical distance, the bygone town is like a foreign country, conjured in this same geographic location with careful attention to the needs of the present (Hartley, 1953; Lowenthal, 1985). The birth of Washington-on-the-Brazos as a historic site (and perhaps the death knell for Washington, the town) came in 1900 when a monument first marked the rough location of the building that served as the town's first makeshift capitol, dubbed "Independence Hall."[3] Since the very beginning then, the idea of Independence Hall has been central to the historic site. Although today nothing remains of the frame building where in 1836 delegates signed the Declaration of Independence of Texas, the site has twice built replicas to evoke the original structure (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, p. 13). In 1926, ten

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[3] Appropriately enough, the population responsible for bringing the site into being is also the one whose visits keep it alive today: schoolchildren. In 1900, encouraged by E.W. Tarrant, the superintendent of Brenham Public Schools, the children of Washington County began raising money to erect the first Independence Hall monument (López Trujillo, 2000, p. 78).

years after the State of Texas purchased the site, the Washington State Park Commission erected the first Independence Hall replica building there. And in 1969, a new, “more authentic,” replica of Independence Hall replaced the old one (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, pp. Appendix 48, Appendix 95).

We can read Washington-on-the-Brazos’ establishment as a historic site and its expansion and development over the past 111 years as an attempt both to cement its claim as legendary birthplace of the republic and to create an idealized representation of the national creation myth. At Washington-on-the-Brazos, part of what is being preserved is a specimen of the more general taxonomy of national origin myths. Like the seventh graders’ frogs, the site is significant for what the specimen can teach about the more general taxonomy. The frogs patiently awaiting examination by Texas middle-schoolers are no ordinary frogs. Carolina Biological Supply Company, which enjoys a near-monopoly on classroom dissection animals, assures us that we have procured for the students a trademarked “Perfect Solution® Preserved Frog”:

> Your next frog dissection lab can be "perfect" . . . your students deserve the very best quality and safest preserved specimens available. Organisms preserved with Carolina's Perfect Solution® retain more lifelike color and texture. Because students study more natural-looking specimens, it's easier for them to identify the structures and, as a result, learn anatomy (Carolina Biological Supply Company, 2011).

These frogs have been bred, harvested (killed), and preserved with special attention to an idealized form. Any perceptible malformations would make them unsuitable for study. The preservative solution aids in this reductive, didactic process by making them more

"natural-looking" and "lifelike" . . . more "Perfect®." In their arrested state, Carolina Biological frogs are not just more Perfect® than other dead frogs but more perfect, more worthy of examination, than even the living, breathing animal.

Historian Steven Conn explains the importance of this perfection. In his history of museums and American intellectual life, Conn traces the American Museum movement to the work of 19th Century naturalists, to "naked-eye science" and the primacy of the representative object in Victorian epistemologies. In naked-eye science, the naturalist understood, described, and classified objects based on their expressed traits. A thing was nothing more than the sum of its observable facts (Conn, 1998, pp. 32-36). The era from the 1840s to the turn of the 20th century saw the rapid establishment and expansion of museums across the United States. These institutions, such as the Smithsonian, the Academy of Natural Sciences, and the American Museum of Natural History were founded on this proposition, that one learned about the world through the observation of objects—not through the strange objects of wonder collected in earlier museums and cabinets of curiosities but through idealized specimens that represented established taxonomies (Conn, 1998; Macdonald & Silverstone, 1999, p. 426).

Both the practice of dissection and the tradition of museum display as we know it are the legacy of the natural history museum and the naturalist, who collected specimens from the field, and ordered, pickled, and exhibited these specimens in an institution for the purpose of study. One learned more from an ideal specimen than a flawed specimen, and the ideal specimen was the one that exhibited all the agreed-upon ideal manifestations of these observable traits. The prized object was the specimen that most closely adhered to the taxonomy (Conn, 1998, pp. 33-34). As products of this object-

based epistemology, Washington-on-the-Brazos (the historic site) and the Carolina Biological frog are specimens created for display. Just as a frog teaches anatomy, a historic site teaches heritage. Washington-on-the-Brazos teaches, in particular, the national origin myth of Texas. And just as a dissection frog's perfection is measured against its anatomical ideal, Washington-on-the-Brazos is judged in comparison to those things classified as national birthplaces and, more generally, as historic sites.

Texans commemorate Texas' birth as a republic—as opposed to its acceptance to the Union, its European settlement or its indigenous roots—in part because it most closely mirrors the archetype of modern origin myths, the national founding myth of the United States. In fact, even when the object of Texans' celebration is the American patriotism or Confederate pride, the narrative celebrated is still that of Texas Independence (Buenger, 2007; Lang, 2010). Historian David Lowenthal notes that national creation myths thrive on their inaccuracies and distortions. These myths exist and persist precisely because their version of the past makes the present more agreeable for that nation's powerful and elite (Lowenthal, 1998, pp. 127-147). When Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls heritage "a value-added industry," she stresses that cultures look to the past to produce heritage, by design, to add value to their present. Often, as in the case of Washington-on-the-Brazos, heritage adds value by conferring upon its producers the merit of exceptionalism and indigeneity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 370). The narrative of the Texas Revolution uses the model of American exceptionalism to justify the Texan exceptionalism that persists today, 175 years after revolutionaries formed the republic. By dating the origin of Texas to the revolution, those who trace their heritage to the Anglo-Texan revolutionaries take on the semblance of indigeneity. Adding

insult to injury, this move also relegates the American Indians who came before the Anglo-Texans, the Mexican people who invited them, and the enslaved African Americans they brought with them to the status of interlopers.

The Texas founding myth bears repeating here to emphasize its crafted perfection: The best and brightest among Anglo-Texans, statesmen, gathered at Washington-on-the-Brazos, in a humble building, little more than a shack, to sign the Declaration of Independence of Texas and draft the republic's constitution. As they drafted and signed these documents, their compatriots were fighting to the death at the Alamo. After working night and day to establish the legal and moral groundwork for independence, they would flee Washington en masse to escape Santa Anna's forces, the advancing Mexican Army. But before they joined their fellow Texians in the "Runaway Scrape," they laid down at old Washington the civil and intellectual framework for a new society founded on "the righteous cause, the cause of LIBERTY, PHILANTHROPY, and RELIGION" (Holley, 1985, p. 180; McLemore, 2004, pp. 22-23)

This narrative has many elements that evoke the American founding myth: selfless and enlightened statesmen, democratic creation of the documents to match the democratic ideals of the republic, a revolutionary war against insurmountable odds, a dictatorial and corrupted opponent, and the noble ideals of new nation.

But even with so many traits in common, perfection is a relentless pursuit. Furthermore, a heritage narrative needs constant maintenance to ensure its effectiveness: as Lowenthal points out, heritage narratives continually revise the past to meet the needs of the present. They do so by updating, upgrading, and excluding particular facets of their representations of the past (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 148). Upgrading began early on, as we

have seen, in the retelling of the Texas founding myth: the assembly building in old Washington became known as "Independence Hall"—like Philadelphia's Independence Hall—bringing it still closer to the prime specimen of the American founding myth. Later the state's purchase of the land and construction of the 1926 replica, what was considered at the time "a realistic representation of the original Independence Hall," was another upgrade that required significant investment of political will and capital.

The changes communicate a shift in the heritage value of the site. As Lowenthal suggests, upgrades often reflect a need to claim traits valued in the present, idyllically associated with the past (Lowenthal, 1998, pp. 153-156). Miguel Ángel López Trujillo, in his meticulous case study of historic preservation at Washington-on-the-Brazos, notes that interest in the development of Washington-on-the-Brazos as a historic site has spiked alongside efforts to boost local tourism and commerce or to foster patriotism (2000). These two sets of motives often dovetail in preparation for anniversary commemorations, such as Texas' centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations and the American bicentennial.

In addition to upgrades, similar motivations often prompt updates to heritage narratives. In the 1960s, amidst the heat of the civil rights movement and counter-culture challenges to mainstream doctrine, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) commissioned a new round of historical research and archeological surveys at Washington-on-the-Brazos. This research culminated in the construction of a new replica, re-sited and re-figured to correspond to new evidence of the location and design of "the original Independence Hall." This replica presented a more rustic and even less stately structure, with "hand–hewn oak siding and hand-split oak shingles," true to the

technology of the era and to documented descriptions of the original structure (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, p. 15).

The reconstruction of Independence Hall fetishizes authenticity and historical accuracy, as do updates at many historic sites and museums. However, Lowenthal reminds us that “Presentism seems most egregious when perpetrators claim to be truly authentic” (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 153) . Lowenthal observes that the more fervently updaters claim authority from the past, the more intensely presentist their motivations are likely to be. In the case of the 1969 replica of Independence Hall, the changes were motivated by a 1962 article by R. Henderson Shuffler in Southwestern Historical Quarterly, which Texas Parks and Wildlife used as a blueprint for the reconstruction (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, p. Appendix 65). Shuffler issued a blunt challenge to Washington-on-the-Brazos’s boosters to get the story straight: “Recently,” he remarked, “plans have been discussed for ‘raising a million dollars’ to create a shrine to Texas liberty at Washington State Park. It might be well to spend the first few hundred on research” (Shuffler, 1962, p. 332). Shuffler punctuated his detail of the inaccuracies at the site by questioning the commemoration of these inaccuracies. By calling into question fundamental aspects of the founding myth of Texas Independence, from the very date of its celebration to the dubious authenticity of the 1926 Independence Hall replica, he portrayed Texans engaging in misinformed observances driven by suspicious motivations. He quietly deflated the notion of “Washington State Park” as a “shrine to Texas liberty” by pointing out that the site’s early backers had chosen Confederate President Jefferson Davis’ birthday to dedicate the 1926 Independence Hall replica and that the ceremony’s speaker of honor was former U.S. Senator Joseph

Weldon Bailey, who had most recently been in the public eye for his race baiting 1920 gubernatorial campaign. While the site might have commemorated the "liberation" of Anglo Texans, the ceremony also implicitly validated the repression of African American Texans.

Turning then to the updates at Washington-on-the-Brazos in the 1960s, one can again see the outlines of the presentism that Lowenthal alerts us to. It is understandable that a white—and, frankly, white supremacist—Texas elite would feel threatened by changes in the national landscape from the late fifties and into the sixties: the strengthening civil rights movement, the second wave of American feminism, and the emergence of a mass counter-culture movement. Locally and across Texas, struggles between blacks and whites over land appropriation, school integration, and social and sexual boundaries manifested in outright violence and in renewed efforts to maintain the culture of fear (Ladino, 1996, pp. 123-144; Riches, 2004, p. 73; Sitton & Utley, 1997, pp. 268-270; Southern Poverty Law Center. Civil Rights Education, 1989; Sweed & Cherian, 2001; Wells, Cherian, & Westmoreland, 2002). So when Shuffler cast aspersions on the authenticity of the Independence Hall replica, he did not just dispute historical details. Read against the backdrop of these larger challenges to the authority of America's racist social order, Shuffler's criticisms called into question the legitimacy of the white power that had established Independence Hall. The vulnerability of white elite power in the moment gave urgency to the updates. The revision of Independence Hall went from the critiques in Shuffler's article, published in an academic history journal in 1962, to a commissioned historical survey and archeological excavations, and to a re-sited,

reconstructed replica, funded by the park's "friends association," by 1969, less than 7 years total and light speed by the standards of state agencies.

Excluding: Marginalized Histories at Washington-on-the-Brazos

From its earliest days as a historic site, the heritage function of Washington-on-the-Brazos has been to assert the birthright of Anglo Texans. By marking the signing of the Declaration of Independence as the birth of Texas and by designating the predominantly Anglo settlers brought in by Stephen F. Austin as the founders of this Texas, the site confers upon the descendants of these settlers—both the actual descendants and those who symbolically claim this heritage—status as rightful heirs. This is heritage at its apex.

As noted earlier, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett tells us that where possible heritage adds the value of indigeneity (1995, p. 370). In keeping with the larger narrative of the Texas revolution, in the heritage narrative of Washington-on-the-Brazos, the Austin colonists, present at the birth of Texas (as defined by the site), have become the historic site's indigenous population. Judging the site's narrative, the Austin colonists could well be the only population associated with the site: the site induces visitors to forget the existence of anyone but the Austin colonists and their progeny. Erased from the site are the Native peoples who preceded them in Washington town by 5000 years (Carlson, 1995, p. 229).4 Absent too are the Tejano leaders who participated in the Texas Revolution and the African American people who had been the majority population of Washington County

[4] Of course, the Tonkawa, Karankawa and other tribes were the colonists' contemporaries in the region also, and archival records place Texian army volunteers "Indian-fighting" up to the day before they engaged Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto (López Trujillo, 2000, p. 78).

during its most politically influential and economically productive years (de la Teja, 2010, pp. 6-9; Nieman, 1994, pp. 543-544).

David Lowenthal notes that this impetus to expunge histories that are either shameful or harmful to heritage narratives is an integral component of the production of heritage. Along with "upgrading" and "updating," Lowenthal counts "excluding" as the third hallmark of the transformation of history into heritage (1998, pp. 156-162). At Washington-on-the-Brazos, the site's prominent stakeholders—the park administration and private funders—had a vested interest in excluding the history of African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. To narrate these marginalized pasts would undermine the legitimacy of the distribution of power in the present.

THE SILENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AT WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS

Since the very beginning of the public history movement and more intensively over the last 20 years, outspoken scholars, public history literature, and community outcry have called for incorporating previously marginalized voices at historic sites, on public landscapes, and in museums (Buenger, 2002; R. R. Flores, 2000; Hayden, 1995; J. O. Horton, 2006; Kelley, 1978; Linenthal, 1995; Linenthal & Engelhardt, 1996; Norkunas, 1993; Ruffins, 1992). By 1999, this message had gained enough currency within the Historic Sites Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department that the department began working with Dr. Martha Norkunas and the University of Texas at Austin's Project in Interpreting the Texas Past (ITP) to examine the historical interpretation at TPWD historic sites. The students in Dr. Norkunas' ITP graduate seminars worked in collaboration with TPWD staff to review and revise interpretation at

a different historic site each year. In the 2000-2001 academic year, the ITP project and seminars focused on representations of race and gender at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Parks and Wildlife staff felt that the contributions of African Americans and women had been, from their perspective, "overlooked" at the site. However, as a student studying the site in Dr. Norkunas' seminars, I, like many of my classmates, read this absence at the site as the product of the prolonged and active exercise of power.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot has pointed out that events and figures presumed "lost" to history are more likely buried and exiled in service of power (1995, pp. 70-107). The Texas Revolution itself provided Trouillot rich material to scrutinize the intense bond between power seized by force and power rendered from narrative (1995, pp. 1-14). Trouillot remarked that the Texian combatants at the Alamo and San Jacinto narrated their war even as they fought it. Although TPWD staff seemed to think of themselves as observers functioning outside the historical process, the parallels we saw between Washington-on-the-Brazos' succession of administrators and boosters and the revolutionary "founding fathers" they commemorated in their work did not seem far-fetched. Following Trouillot's model, both groups functioned simultaneously as agents, actors, and subjects of history (Trouillot, 1995, p. 23). As agents and subjects of history, they acted and were acted upon by the currents of power. And although TPWD staff might have resisted seeing it this way, they were also actors in the historical narrative that they interpreted. At times, some had been active participants in the silencing of women's history and African American history at the site. This silencing of African American history at Washington-on-the-Brazos had become all the more conspicuous because the park had just completed a multi-million dollar visitor center with new digital interactive

exhibits and revised traditional interpretive displays. Yet these new exhibits still presented slavery as, at most, a footnote to the legacies of the founding fathers of Texas.

UPDATE & UPGRADE: RECOVERING AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

As part of the collaboration between the TPWD and the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past, each semester, one or two ITP seminar students received fellowship funding to carry out the projects they proposed at the TPWD case study site. Anthropology graduate student Mark Westmoreland and I were students in Dr. Norkunas' ITP seminars the year that Washington-on-the-Brazos was the case study site, and, in August of 2002, we received fellowships to produce an oral history documentary video of African American rural life in Washington County. This oral history project and the documentary video that would come out of it were intended as a first step toward "updating" and "upgrading" the site to include the stories of African Americans in acknowledgement of contemporary standards in public history.

However, it is not easy to change or upgrade the fundamental story of a historic site because the very nature of heritage production depends on the problematic relationship between its story and the instruments of its representation. Heritage production depends on the "fiction" that the story is complete and true and not, in fact, a construct in the present time for the purposes of the present time. It depends on singular narratives, like that of Washington-on-the-Brazos as the "real birthplace of Texas." But as public opinion changes over time, historic sites inevitably face the dilemma of needing to upgrade their narrative to fit current sensibilities. To change the narrative would, however, acknowledge that the earlier narrative was at least in part a fiction. Drastic—or

even just perceptible—changes invite scrutiny of the narrative and risk yet another crisis of credibility. As a consequence, heritage updates and upgrades, like the revisions to Independence Hall, must be cautiously incremental to avoid attracting undue attention. Often the only question that these changes beg is, “Why bother?”

The value of these incremental changes becomes evident in scenarios such as Washington-on-the-Brazos’ handling of African American history at the site. The extremes that Washington-on-the-Brazos takes in its exclusion of African American history evokes the phenomenon of “symbolic annihilation,” a concept borrowed from feminist critiques of mass media and applied to silences regarding slavery at Southern Plantation House museums by Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small (Eichstedt & Small, 2002, pp. 105-146; Tuchman, 1978, pp. 3-38).

When I completed my work at Washington-on-the-Brazos in 2002, there was no shred of indication in the signage or literature of the site that the issue of slavery played any role in the Texas Revolution, even though it has long been accepted in scholarly circles that protecting slavery was a major cause and a primary result of the revolution (Campbell, 1989, pp. 48-49; Lack, 1985). There has been little reference to the role of African Americans in the cotton plantation life that the site also interprets. The only mention of African Americans in the exhibits came in a panel in the Visitor Center that noted that Anson Jones and his children “worked alongside their slaves” in the cotton fields.

It is significant that this mention of slavery came in connection with Anson Jones, the last President of the Republic of Texas. In 1936 as part of the Texas Centennial celebrations, the state had moved Jones’ former home to the Washington-on-the-Brazos

park site (Carlson, 1995). The home, which Jones had built on the plantation he named Barrington, now stands about half a mile south of the visitor center where this exhibit panel was displayed. TPWD opened a living history farm at Barrington in 2000, the year that the ITP seminars began using Washington-on-the-Brazos as a case study site.

The mission of "Barrington Farm" was to "inform and educate the public about the agricultural heritage of the Central Brazos Valley, and especially of Washington County, through the development of an operating farm of the antebellum period" (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2000, p. 4). It was TPWD's hope that the ITP seminar projects would provide new interpretive material specifically for Barrington Farm. The Barrington Farm Site Manual was one of our texts for the course, and our site visits focused more on Barrington Farm than on the other elements of the historic site—Independence Hall and the Washington Townsite, the Visitor Center Complex, and the Star of the Republic Museum, which Blinn College operates independent of TPWD. The first funded fellowship project to come out of the ITP seminars' Washington-on-the-Brazos case study, in the Fall 2000 semester, did focus on Barrington Farm. American Studies graduate student Jessie Swigger conducted primary archival research and revised the living history farm's interpretive scripts to better reflect the experiences of the women, black and white, who lived on the plantation.

One point of discussion—and often of difference—between seminar students and TPWD staff was where the interpretation of groups historically marginalized at the site would take place. Swigger's fellowship project challenged existing notions of "whose story is told where" at the site, and our work on the oral history documentary continued to wrestle with this question. Barrington Living History Farm does have two replica

“slave quarters,” where site staff provides some third-person interpretation of slavery, and, based on our site visits and discussions with TPWD staff, they clearly envisioned the interpretation of African American history at Washington-on-the-Brazos taking place either at these cabins on the farm site or in the detached kitchen of the Barrington farmhouse.

However, these cabins were, quite literally, on the margins of the site, at the edge of the cleared portion of the property, near the patch planted with heirloom cotton, next to the hog pen, and surrounded by brush and woods. The kitchen building too was “out yonder.” To relegate African American history to these fringe locales when the story was so central to the narrative of the site would have been an injustice in and of itself. This practice at historic sites of sequestering uncomfortable narratives in out of the way locations is commonplace, especially with stories of peoples of color at shrines of American history.

Joanna Melish refers to this convention of relegating African American history to “appropriate spaces” of historic sites like kitchens, smokehouses, fields, and slave quarters, as a “containment strategy” designed to keep these stories from infecting the idealized narratives that dominate every other space on the site (2006, pp. 114-119). Eichstedt and Small call it “segregated knowledge,” and point out that at plantation museums this segregated knowledge allows both interpreters and visitors to practice willful amnesia by avoiding designated areas and creating specialized tours (2002, pp. 170-202). For example standard tours at many Southern plantation house museums talk about African American history at designated worksites—the kitchen, the barn, blacksmith’s shop, the fields—and at the slave/sharecropper cabins. As with the

outbuildings at Barrington Farm, these are usually the last stops on the tour. Often, visitors can opt either for a racially coded "house tour" (white) or "house and grounds tour" (white and black). Interpreters and docents who don't care to discuss slavery or race can likewise end the tour early.

The Problem: A "Bundle of Silences"

This exclusion, segregation, and containment of African American narratives at Washington-on-the-Brazos was not all a product of TPWD's willful amnesia. At the core there remained the problem articulated by Trouillot, that silences, like the ones at Washington-on-the-Brazos, begin long before the creation of narratives. Silences, Trouillot points out, start at the moment we create sources, primary evidence. We compound these silences as we assemble sources, create archives, and form collections. What appears to be a singular silence is more accurately a "bundle of silences" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 26). The specific problem that faced Washington-on-the-Brazos was how to represent this history erased from the site when there were few known primary documents concerning African American history at the site, no surviving slave narratives from the heyday of old Washington, and few provenanced artifacts of African American history from the site. Simply put, there was little evidence on hand to recover these stories and few objects, so central to museum practice and epistemology, to tell the stories.

There were, however, some intriguing options to explore. The plantation economy that boomed in Washington County in the 1830s and 40s survived into the 1960s. Vestiges of it still remained. Prison farms hung on where plantations once were. Families

descended from plantation owners and from people enslaved on plantations still lived in the area. In fact, many African American families still lived on the land that their ancestors worked successively as slaves, sharecroppers, and independent farmers. As we began conducting interviews in the area for Dr. Norkunas' oral history seminar, we began to learn that many of these descendants still carried on the stories that their ancestors passed down from slavery times.

Furthermore, this problem was not unlike others the site had faced and addressed before. When Washington-on-the-Brazos was first established as a historic site, little remained of the old town, and as we have seen, even Independence Hall was more an object of lore rather than history. The site was essentially created out of whole cloth. The built environment and constructed landscape at Washington-on-the-Brazos are novelties in that space, invented to signify that this is a historic site and to communicate what this site is about. Independence Hall is a replica. Barrington Farm was moved on to the site. Every other structure on the site is of recent construction. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett pointed out, heritage does not begin with an object of value. Quite the opposite, it begins with the object of little value, "the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead"—in this case the abandoned townsite of Old Washington—and imbues it with value through the process of exhibition (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 369). A handful of Texans had committed to telling the story of the state's birth at Washington-on-the-Brazos and then mustered the political and economic will to do so. There seemed no reason to doubt that some limited version of this scenario could not be achieved for African American history at the site.

SOLUTION: ORAL HISTORY & DIGITAL VIDEO

The State of Texas and private donors had spent millions over the preceding century to create and maintain a shrine to Texas revolutionaries at Washington-on-the-Brazos. The solution that we proposed to incorporate narratives of African American history at the site would cost the site a few thousand dollars at the very most, only a fraction of what it had already been willing to spend on just one of the slave cabin replicas.

Just across highway 105 from Washington-on-the-Brazos, or if you prefer, not even half a mile upriver on the Brazos by water, lie the African American communities of the Post Oak and the Bluff. The geographic boundaries of the Post Oak and the Bluff are difficult to discern, and the two names are sometimes used interchangeably, to refer to the same general place. The two communities center around two churches, the Baptist congregation of St. Matthews on the Bluff and the Catholic congregation of Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the two communities occupy roughly the same geographic space and share strong social and kinship ties, the Baptist members of St. Matthews are more likely to call their community "the Bluff" or "old Washington" and the Catholic members of Blessed Virgin Mary are more likely to refer to their community as "the Post Oak." Both communities trace their roots in the area to the Spann Plantation established in 1848 by the white Spann family and the African American men, women and children they enslaved (Cherian & Westmoreland, 2002; Vanderholt, 1995).

The Spanns and their slaves moved to Washington County from South Carolina in the 1840s to start the cotton plantation, which thrived until Emancipation ended the slave economy. After the end of slavery, some of the families the Spanns enslaved, many of

whom were also Spann descendants by blood, gained large tracts of the Spanns' landholdings by deed and by purchase (McQueen, 2000, pp. 74-80; Vanderholt, 1995). To this day, many of the descendants of the men and women the Spanns enslaved still live on land that was once part of the original Spann plantation.

I became aware of the rich oral tradition that these families maintained in my initial interviews in the area as part of my fieldwork for the ITP Oral History Seminar. Their stories document their families' histories from their ancestors' journey on foot from South Carolina to Texas in the 1840s to their own present-day struggles and triumphs. This initial fieldwork and the oral histories that came from it were the basis for the oral history documentary proposal that Kerry Webb, a fellow ITP Oral History Seminar student and I submitted in May 2001. One solution, as we saw it, to address the silence of African American history at Washington-on-the-Brazos was to make a digital video documentary based on oral histories interviews with members of these families and communities. Recording and archiving the raw footage from these interviews would act as a first step in attending to the silences of primary evidence related to African American history in Washington County. We proposed that the park could screen the edited documentary at the Visitor Center and stream it from their Web site to confront in some measure the interpretive silences of African American history at the site (Cherian & Webb, 2001).[5] TPWD had already shown some commitment to reorienting the

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[5] When we asked people in the Post Oak and Bluff how the project might fulfill some of their needs also, the most common response was that they wanted educational opportunities for their children. So we planned the project as a collaboration: we would provide these educational opportunities for junior-high and high school students from the two communities in the form of training in oral history methodology and digital video production. The students then would help conduct and record interviews and participate in shaping the edited documentary. This collaboration also held the added promise of a deeper understanding of their history for the young students, and for us, a documentary that reflected the concerns and perspectives of the communities as well as those of the site.

interpretation at Washington-on-the-Brazos by enlisting the help of the Project Interpreting the Texas Past and by selecting funding projects like Jessie Swigger's and ours. The hope articulated in our project proposal was that by placing the documentary in the Visitor Center, the comfortable, new, multi-million-dollar facility where all who arrive begin their visit, and by featuring the documentary prominently in its online presence, Washington-on-the-Brazos could demonstrate to the public its commitment to recentering the site to incorporate African American history at the core. Ideally, this commitment and a fruitful initial collaboration with the Post Oak and the Bluff would open up opportunities for future work with these and other African American communities that dotted the landscape surrounding Washington-on-the-Brazos. Over the course of the next year, Mark Westmoreland and I carried out this project largely according to the plan set out in the proposal, and on May 11, 2002, we screened the completed documentary, at the Visitor Center of Washington-on-the-Brazos. However, as we shall see, what I had hoped would be a solution, turned out to reveal even deeper problems; what I thought would be an answer only raised more questions.

"Failure" Foreshadowed: Upon Reflection, an Unheeded Warning

At the root of the proposal for the oral history documentary, and of all the work at Washington-on-the-Brazos, was the idea that marking space was rhetorically significant, and, furthermore, that this rhetoric established and reinforced unjust relationships of power. Since its self-conscious inception as a scholarly field, public history has stressed the practical utility of history (Kelley, 1978; Scardaville, 1987). It has also, therefore, been particularly sensitive to the uses of history both in the past and the present.

Tensions between advocacy and objectivity have continually been part of the conversation as public historians struggle to define the field and their practice (Grele, 1981; Karamanski, 1999; Tobey, 1986). The acts of reinterpretation that public historians deliberate and undertake, the "painstaking process of confronting old interpretations, removing layer upon layer of ideology and obfuscation," often lead to questions about the distinctions between revision, revisionism, and advocacy (Grele, 1981, p. 48). Predictably, the responses run the spectrum. Some, like James Green, view activism as central to their research (2000). Others see them as indictments of validity of their research (Karamanski, 1999). For us, at Washington-on-the-Brazos, confronting these old interpretations in public history meant recovering the stories of those forgotten or silenced in the site's traditional historical narratives. Furthermore, it meant placing added emphasis on exactly where these recovered stories would be told.

The segregation and containment of narratives of slavery is only one example of the cutthroat economy of space at sites of public history. Although heritage may begin with the discarded, it quickly manufactures scarcity. In the case of Washington-on-the-Brazos, what was once a stretch of abandoned fields, has now become what Norkunas has called, "highly visible civic space" (2002, p. 60). Norkunas notes that Lowell, Massachusett marks its highly visible civic space with relative fluidity, moving monuments and commemorations from visibility into shadows in accordance with the power shifts within the town (2002, pp. 147-148).

We see this fluid negotiation of power in space even what seem to be the most rigid contexts. Edward Linenthal calls the Washington Mall "the ceremonial center of the nation" and regards the establishment of the Holocaust Museum adjacent to the mall as a

visible marker of the Holocaust's place in the national consciousness (1995, p. 2). The significance of the National Museum of the American Indian taking "the last place on the National Mall" was widely regarded as a high profile—though woefully belated—acknowledgement of indigenous cultural contributions (Blue Spruce & National Museum of the American, 2004; Cobb, 2005). The National Capital Planning Commission had declared the Mall unequivocally full (2001). However, when it came time to locate the National Museum of African American History, other opportunities opened up on the Mall, such as taking over the Arts and Industries Building and the option chosen, building fresh on a five acre green space between the National Museum of American History and the Washington Monument which was once considered a "reserve," off limits to future development (National Capital Planning Commission, 2001; Trescott, 2004, 2006).

The ITP initiative as a whole, and by extension our documentary proposal at Washington-on-the-Brazos, was part of this larger movement in public history to recover marginalized historical narratives. As with the high-profile cases of the National Museum of African American History and the National Museum of African American History or the highly charged local and regional examples of the Arthur Ashe Monument on Richmond's Monument Avenue or the proposed Tejano Monument on the Texas Capitol Grounds in Austin—the question at Washington-on-the-Brazos was not just *whether* to tell the stories, but *where* to tell them (Leib, 2002; Tijerina, 2007).

In her study of Monterey, California sites, Norkunas breaks down the pattern repeated in each of these negotiations to recover and locate historical narratives:

> The ruling class carefully controls the form and content of historical recreations and tourist landscapes, legitimizing itself by projecting its own contemporary

> sociocultural values upon the past. This struggle, the tension between groups with power and groups with varying but lesser degrees of power, is replayed in the many spheres in which the public enactment of identity is staged. The erection or nonerection of statuary and the placement of statuary is a physical manifestation of that tension. (Norkunas, 1993, p. 97)

The placement and narration (or non-narration) of historical narratives on the landscape are also physical manifestations of that tension. The premise of these struggles of representation, the reason that they matter, its that they have tangible consequences. In contemporary American society, in which the majority consent to be ruled by ideas rather that submit to brute force, these dialogues between power and resistance, consensus and dissent, threat and force, constitute the hegemonic relationships that govern us (Hebdige, 1993, p. 15). Landscapes, and in particular the carefully constructed landscapes of public history, are texts that express these hegemonic relationships. The representations on the landscapes then are not just manifestations of power relationships, they are exertions of power, the very means of submission and dominance (Schein, 1997, 2006). Visual and material culture theorist John Dorst posits that, "if there is a single, overriding quality of postmodern hegemony, it is that dominance becomes almost entirely a matter of texts or images, of the rhetorical deployment of discourse practices" (Dorst, 1989, p. 176 and quoted in Norkunas, 1993, p.97). The underlying premise of most initiatives to revise public history landscapes is that by altering these texts one can affect power relationships. I hoped that by placing African American narratives at the center of Washington-on-the-Brazos, we could, in some very small way, redress contemporary and historical power inequities.

When we embarked on the oral history documentary project, I believed finding the stories and making the film would be the difficult part, but that the process of adding these stories to the site would be relatively straightforward. After all, TPWD had agreed to the collaboration with ITP knowing that Washington-on-the-Brazos needed to revise its interpretation and represent more inclusive histories. TPWD staff in Austin and site staff at Washington-on-the-Brazos had agreed that the fellowship funding should go to the oral history documentary project, whose stated goals were to represent African American history more prominently at the site and to build connections with the African American communities surrounding the site.

There appeared to be little foundation on which to add these new narratives or build these relationships, but as noted, the site had a long history of creating something out of nothing. Committing to the oral history documentary project meant that the site would have to cede some of its institutional and interpretive authority to its public. It would begin this participatory project in an incremental and low-risk way, following the established practice of cultural institutions prototyping projects by involving only small groups of people and conducting activities behind closed doors (Simon, 2010, Chapter 2). In many ways, the documentary project mirrored the collaboration that the site had already undertaken with the ITP seminar students and seemed like a natural next step. And in comparison to the low risk of the project, it held the promise of high-reward. Collaborative projects that brought more inclusive narratives to museums and historic sites were gaining national attention. Due to their proximity to the site, a successful collaboration with the Post Oak and the Bluff communities could increase engagement, volunteerism, and visitation significantly at the site, decreasing the site's dependence on

"commuter friends" from Brenham, Bryan/College Station and Houston. Washington-on-the-Brazos seemed to have little to lose.

At first, our experience held true to my expectations. Early on, as outsiders in so many ways—graduate students, coming from Austin, working across racial lines—it took a while, more than a year after I began my fieldwork, before people in the Post Oak and Bluff began granting us interviews and opening up to us. The project would never have existed at all without the help of one person, Limas Sweed. From my very first visit to Old Washington, Limas, the deacon at Blessed Virgin Mary Church, had been generous with his time and dedicated in his help. He became our primary contact in the communities. He provided us with introductions in the Post Oak, took us to meet people in their homes, encouraged his children to volunteer on the project, and gave us time during Mass to make announcements and space at the church to conduct interviews and shoot footage. Limas was the one who suggested we include the Bluff community in the project also and who took us to St. Matthews to introduce us to the pastor there, Butch Marshall, and his congregation.

One day, months after Limas and I first started working together, I said something to Limas about a park manager at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Limas mentioned that he knew the manager and that he, Limas, used to work summers at the site when he was in high school and the manager was a park ranger. Limas asked if I knew those big trees along the side of the road at the park entrance. Of course, I said. These mature oaks provided much of the sparse shade at the park and gave the entrance an air of institutional majesty, like an old plantation house or a sanatorium. "I planted those trees," Limas said.

I was shocked when I heard these words. Limas had in fact been to the park with us several times and had shuttled the teen volunteers to and from the training workshops we held at the Visitor Center Complex. He had never mentioned anything about his connection to the park before. He never even gave any indication that he had been there before.

When Limas told me that he planted the trees along the entrance, I sensed he felt deep pride in his work. If so, his pride would be justified. He had planted the oaks more than twenty years earlier. They must have been saplings at the time. Now their canopies stretched to cover the entrance road and form a virtual tunnel to the Visitor Center. Just prior to Limas' work at the site, a 1977 development plan for Washington-on-the-Brazos had that lamented the visual appeal of the site and the limited "vegetative values" due to "excessive human disturbance and long years of use as an improved pastureland" (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, p. 36). The planning document had recommended allocating funds for the plantings to improve "visual/aesthetic effects to enhance the visitors' perspective of the park and its purpose" (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, p. 74). The document and aerial photos from the time suggest that that the vegetation and visual appeal of the site was inconsistent with its historical significance. This inconsistency caused an experiential dissonance for visitors: If this is the birthplace of Texas, then why does it look so desolate? The plan seems to have worked. The entrance portal is now lush and inviting, and the tree-lined entrance road clearly conveys to visitors that they are headed to a revered locale.

The next time I saw the park manager, I was eager to talk to him about my discovery. I thought I would open a conversation that would confirm the existence of an

established connection, one that could help us with our current, shared goal of building a long-term relationship with a local African American community. I told him that I heard that he knew Limas Sweed, and that Limas had told me that he worked summers at the site as a teenager, that he planted the trees out at the entrance. I still remember his response: “I remember Limas. He used to mow the grass here.”

The park manager’s response ended the conversation, and though he may not have intended to do so, it seemed to close the door on the relationship. I am now describing a brief exchange ten years after it took place, and I can understand how innocuous it might seem. However, at the time, the effect was startling. Planting those trees had been an act of heritage production on the part of the site, imbuing space that had little to say with new, palpable meaning. But when Limas tried to lay claim to this heritage which he helped produce, his claim was rejected.

In the time between when I first heard about Limas Sweed’s history at the park and before I had this conversation with the park manager, I wondered why no one had mentioned their connection earlier. I had brought Limas’ name up when we were first proposing the project to the manager and other TPWD staff and again when we were embarking on the project, trying to make inroads into the nearby communities. I wondered what we were doing trying to build a relationship between the site and the community when two of the principals already knew each other and had worked together.

Perhaps neither Limas nor the park manager mentioned the connection earlier because it did not seem to matter much. For Limas, when he spoke about it, he was talking about the distant past. When I spoke to the park manager about it too, it was clearly not a recent memory. But after I brought it up, there was a note of correction his

voice that gave this past a certain immediacy. "I planted those trees" is a significantly different statement than "He used to mow the grass." "I planted those trees," conveys permanence. "He used to mow the grass," on the other hand, communicates evanescence. Grass is ephemeral. Oaks are enduring. Limas stressed that he has left his mark on the site. The park manager countered that Limas' trace was fleeting.

The park manager's statement may very well be more true than Limas'. Perhaps he never saw Limas planting a tree. Certainly the grounds crew at Washington-on-the-Brazos spends much more time mowing grass than planting trees. Limas is also plainly orienting the story with himself at the center. He would have been one of four seasonal workers working with five permanent staff members, and it is highly unlikely that he was the only one planting trees (Texas Historic Sites and Restoration Branch, 1977, p. 87). But it is the norm for individuals to place themselves at the center of narratives, whether historical or personal (Portelli, 1990b). That Limas is recalling events from when he was a teenager would only compound this effect.

The park manager's response, however, could also easily be read as a measure to put Limas "in his place." The practice of recasting roles, from, for example, "planting trees" to "mowing grass," has served to racialize tasks in a way that creates occupational segregation among workers performing similar duties. This occupational segregation has historically been used to maintain wage inequalities and racial and class hierarchies in the workplace (Browne & Misra, 2003, pp. 493-498). Historian David Goldfield and many others have noted the significance of "placing people" more generally in traditionally segregated regional cultures (2008). Cultural Geographer Steven Hoelscher reminds us that to "know one's place" in the contemporary American South reflects the coded

expectation that one will self-curtail liberties in patterns that have been forged over time through the restrictions both of legal segregation and culturally enforced norms (2003, pp. 659-660). In the past, members of the Southern white elite sought to control the tension and violence of the race and class relations by "placing" individuals according to race, family connections, religion, occupation, and adherence to local norms (Goldfield, 2008, p. 226). "Knowing one's place" and knowing how to act accordingly was essential for "getting along" in the South, and even for survival.

Growing up one county over, in the de-facto segregated Brazos Valley, remarks like the park manager's recalled the stylized verbal one-upmanship I had often witnessed among neighbors and friends. These seemingly reflexive and unconscious performances of whiteness served to remind each other of the persistent racial order. They also function as systems of heredity, passing on cultural practices that bestowed the privileges of whiteness from one generation to the next (Robinson, 2003, pp. 97-98).

Upon reflection, my reaction to the park manager's response was not surprise at hearing what I perceived to be a state employee monitoring racial and class boundaries in a professional setting, at a historic site. Given my experiences growing up in the region, that would not have registered as unusual. The surprise lay in perceiving this check from a colleague who had ostensibly committed to breaking down these boundaries in the workplace he oversaw. Though at the time I tried to minimize and set aside the concerns that this conversation raised, it should perhaps have alerted me of difficulties to come. Examining this exchange in retrospect, I have come interpret it as a negation of the resolution we had just made, the resolution to bring voices from the margins of the site to its center.

When Limas Sweed looked at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, he saw a site that he helped build, a site that bore the lasting mark of this labor. But when the park manager looked at the same landscape, he saw no evidence of Limas. The manager declined to validate the labor of an African American worker at the site at the same time that we were collaborating (with the very same person!) to redress the site's own refusal to acknowledge the agency of African Americans in Texas history over the previous century and a half. This negation is not simply a matter of ironic coincidence. Rather, I would propose that it is evidence of a fundamental limitation in our endeavor to revise the narrative of the site. In the hegemonic practice of the site, dominance had, to borrow John Dorst's phrase, become almost entirely a matter of texts or images (Dorst, 1989, p. 276). My miscalculation lay in the premise that revising these texts and images would alter, in some small way, power relations at the site and perhaps beyond.

Dorst himself points out there are important corollaries to "the rhetorical deployment of discourse practices" that affect these hegemonic relationships in particular and sometimes unexpected ways:

> One corollary of this fact is that postmodern hegemony has the potential of penetrating more deeply and colonizing more completely every sphere of experience than those orders of dominance that require visible forces of coercion and external control to sustain themselves. A second corollary, the flip side to the first, is that post modernity is vulnerable not so much to external critical forces as to internal textual practices that are not entirely in keeping with its self-reflexive discourse" (Dorst, 1989, pp. 176-177).

The first corollary, that rhetorical deployment of texts and images in hegemonic discourse can dominate and suppress more completely and more deeply than visible and physical forces, is a key motive behind efforts to alter narratives at public history sites. However, it is the second corollary that explains both the apparent contradictions in my exchange with the park manager and as well as certain fundamental oversights in our oral history documentary project at Washington-on-the-Brazos—and oversights, perhaps, in broader efforts to alter narratives at many public history sites. Countering imperceptible and unconscious orders of dominance with deliberate, self-reflexive discourse is a precarious endeavor, perhaps even a losing proposition. So at Washington-on-the-Brazos, the manager could consent to changing the story at the site and yet be totally unable to do so. In fact it is more likely that he would participate in reinforcing this hegemonic discourse than countering it, precisely because these unconscious forces of hegemonic discourse are more powerful and pervasive than conscious efforts to alter the discourse. Although I registered quickly and viscerally the contradictions in my conversation with the park manager so many years ago, reflecting on that dialogue and placing it in the context of power dynamics has helped me understand concerns about my own role in discourse practices at the site that, over the years, have disquieted me in subtle but persistent ways.

The Ethical Question

In making the oral history documentary *Truth I Ever Told* for Washington-on-the-Brazos, I thought that we were rewriting—or at least altering, shifting—the narrative of the site. To return to our earlier metaphor, I thought that we were taking the perfect

specimen that was Washington-on-the-Brazos' heritage narrative, the founding myth of Texas, and complicating it—pointing out imperfections and blemishes that would make it more authentic and even more captivating, presenting history with warts and all. I thought we would take this dead frog and make it come alive.

In the course of conducting the oral history interviews and making the documentary video, there were a handful of moments that raised profound ethical questions that gave Mark Westmoreland, my partner on the project, and me pause. However, the nature of these ethical questions seemed new, or at least outside the realm of our training and experience. These moments had alerted our conscience, but we struggled to address them with the tools that we had. Perhaps the greatest difficulty was understanding what exactly the ethical questions were. They were not simply the traditional ethical questions in public history, oral history and their cognate fields—consent, representation, intellectual property, academic honesty, and conflicts of interest—although many of those questions also arose along the way. In the end, the question was so basic—not in the sense of simple, but as in fundamental—that I overlooked it. The persistent question was: Is my work challenging power inequities, or is it reinforcing them? Was it not presumptuous and disingenuous to maintain that "the public" or the site staff were subject to the dominance of hegemonic textual practice but that I, as a scholar, an external critic, was not? After reflecting deeply on the project, I have come to recognize that while I could criticize the park manager for unwittingly saying one thing and doing another, I must acknowledge that I was doing the very same thing. We were both endorsing self-reflexive discourses of change but enacting hegemonic discourses of dominance. My interaction with the manager should have

served to warn me, not of any difficulties I might have with the site, but that I may find myself at the mercy of the same Byzantine forces that I believe seized him.

In examining a set of interviews with Bluff resident Venieta Marshall and the cluster of editing decisions related to these interviews, it becomes apparent that I needed this warning, that I was indeed reinforcing the perfect narrative at Washington-on-the-Brazos more than challenging or altering it. In failing to heed this warning, rather than making the frog come alive, I set it in resin and made the specimen shinier and more rigid than ever.

VENIETA MARSHALL'S STORY

Venieta Marshall was the mother of Butch Marshall, the pastor of St. Matthews on the Bluff.[6] She came to represent, for me, the story that *Truth I Ever Told* took on, the story of the Post Oak and Bluff Communities over the last 70 years, the story of independence, prosperity, diaspora, integration, and ultimately solitude and uncertainty. She took on this role almost immediately after Mark Westmoreland and I met her. I was taken by Ms. Marshall's kindness, her ease, and her openness. Then one hour into the interview, she told us what I thought was the story of the community through the tale of her redemption. "It used to be happy times around here. And it used to be a lot of peoples around here," Ms. Marshall told us. "We used to walk from house to house. On moonshine nights, we'd go to visit . . . sit and laugh and talk . . . but now, no more" (Cherian & Westmoreland, 2002). What followed was a harrowing tale of personal despair in the face of her community's struggles, a community that had largely dispersed.

[6] Ms. Marshall passed away in November of 2006, at the age of 91.

The agricultural work people relied on had been industrialized. There was little room for small farms and even less need for farmhands. So people left, en masse, looking to make a living. We had heard this story time and time again from the people we interviewed over the course of over a year, and we knew that this was the story we were going to tell, but we were still searching—almost frantically at this point, only two months before our premiere screening date at the state park—for some coherent way to tell the story.

For Ms. Marshall, a single mother and lifelong farm worker, there came a time when there was nothing left to live for. "I tried to suicide myself when all my children left and left me here by myself," she said. Ms. Marshall led us through her story of attempting to overdose on pills and alcohol, her helplessness, her embarrassment and then her salvation, both medical and spiritual. It was through this experience that she found God and some semblance of peace.

I was stunned. We had known Ms. Marshall for less than half an hour, yet she didn't hesitate to talk on camera about her depression, alcoholism, and attempted suicide. Immediately, even as she was telling it to us, I knew that we would want to use the story. But something felt not quite right.

When we felt the twinge that we may be on uncertain ethical ground, our instinct was to revert to protocol. That day, at the end of the interview, beyond asking for her signature on the release form, we explained the project again, asked Ms. Marshall whether she was sure she was comfortable making her story public, reminding her that the edited documentary would be playing at the park and online. We asked her the same questions a couple of weeks later when we came to conduct our second interview: "Can

we use this story? Were we invading her privacy? Was she comfortable sharing such an unguarded story with the public at large?"

Why not? She replied. "I did it to myself," she said. Venieta Marshall attributed her growth and redemption to a higher power, and, in narrating this journey, she was in fact giving greater praise to this higher power. Her higher power guided her through dark times, home to St. Matthews, the church of her ancestors which was now the church of her descendants. This conversation changed our understanding of the project. Until that point we had been searching, however earnestly, for stories that fit external notions of the community's saga—cycles of stories about black victims and white perpetrators. We had heard the whispers about the Klan, lynchings, night raids, and arson, about landowners' exploitation of sharecroppers, about long-ago slavery times, and about Black families cheated out of their land recently and in the distant past. But so many of these narratives cast community members as victims. And Ms. Marshall clearly did not see herself as a victim. As uninhibited as she was talking about her suicide attempt, she was equally uncomfortable discussing the effects of racism and violence on the Bluff Community. And other Bluff and Post Oak community members felt the same way, especially when they were speaking—directly or mediated by video—to the younger generation.

PASS ON/PASS ON: A GAUGE

Amidst all our ethical questions about appropriate uses of footage during the production of *Truth I Ever Told*, Venieta Marshall gave us a gauge to assess how to use material that we recorded. When she told us that she had no problem with us using the story of her suicide attempt by saying, "I did it to myself," it became clear to us, myself

and Mark, that the line between self-determination and victimization was the line between essentially unconstrained footage and more sensitive material. Most of the Bluff and Post Oak residents that we talked to hesitated to speak in the context of our interviews about violence and injustice in the past. With Ms. Marshall's interview, we began to understand that this resistance was to passing on to their children and grandchildren a version of their heritage in which they and their ancestors were merely acted upon.

At the March 2003 Race/Gender/Nation Conference on the University of Texas at Austin campus, anthropologist Jafari Allen moderated the discussion at a screening of *Truth I Ever Told*. There he pointed out the resonance between the gauge that Ms. Marshall and others had given us and the delicate balance that Toni Morrison evokes in the last pages of her novel, *Beloved*. In the final pages of the novel, Morrison repeats the refrain, "It was not a story to pass on . . . It was not a story to pass on," (Toni Morrison, 1987, pp. 274-275). But by the last time Morrison uses the phrase, "pass on" it has changed from a taboo to a resolution, from a warning to a vow: "This is not a story to *pass* on." Morrison struggles with the problematic and contradictory mandates to remember and to forget traumatic pasts by playing on the multiple meanings of "pass on." The story of Beloved was both "unspeakable" and uncensorable (Levy, 1991, p. 121). In telling the past, narrators must navigate between the immediacy of testimony tension and its "power to arrest" and the "distortions of memory" that allow us to maintain the "the image of . . . solidarity and survival" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 152). Those who survive must decide how much of the trauma to let into their lives, how much to carry with them, and how much to pass on.

The dilemma of whether to pass *on* (remember) or *pass* on (forget) memories in the Post Oak and the Bluff represented the competing needs of the communities and individuals both to remember and to forget the past, to pass on a heritage of survival and to cast off the burden of trauma. Ms. Marshall, and others taught us how to attend to this dialectic in our work in the Post Oak and Bluff. In a different context, however, the dynamics of "passing *on*" or "*passing* on" necessarily change. Many indigenous communities regulate this tension through rules determining who can tell what story, to whom and when. A growing literature is establishing standards for how researchers and community representatives may work together in consultation to respect community practices and restrictions (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2000; J. Anderson, 2005; Nakata, 2002; Nakata et al., 2008; Stevenson & Callaghan, 2008). In the absence of a specific code for our work in Washington County, we followed the professional standards of our training, and when we asked Ms. Marshall directly, we received unequivocal consent as well as a rule to guide our interviews and our editing (Ritchie & al., 2000). However, if I had listened more closely to Ms. Marshall, I would have understood that the answer was more complicated than that.

PERFECTION & EXCLUSION

Understanding the significance of agency in representing the narratives of the Post Oak and the Bluff was an important realization. Without Ms. Marshall's statement, "I did it to myself," we may never have understood how important the distinction between self-determination and victimization was to the members of the two communities. However, for generations, residents of African descent had clearly been

victims of brutal violence, even beyond the institutionalized oppression of slavery, sharecropping, and Jim Crow. The reign of terror by the Klan, ruthless landowners and white supremacists specifically in the Post Oak and Bluff and across Washington, Grimes and Brazos Counties is well documented (Buenger, 2007; Lipscomb & Alyn, 1993; McQueen, 2000; Nieman, 1989, 1994; Osman, 2008; Sitton & Utley, 1997; Vanderholt, 1995). So it would be fair to ask why we would not want to confront directly these deep memories, encounters, and accounts of violence and racism.

Mark and I wrestled with this question at length, and we came to the decision that we would allude to the violence, but not focus on it in depth. First, this approach approximated the narrative strategies we encountered when references to violence came up in our interviews. Since the personal narratives of oral history are valued precisely because of the complex interactions between experiences, memory, and the priorities of the present, we decided it was best to try to preserve these subjectivities, what Michael Frisch referred to as interviewees' "variable weave of pure recall and reflective synthesis," in the edited documentary (Frisch, 1990, p. 11; Grele, 2007; Portelli, 1990b). Second, since we sought out these interviews of private citizens to use at a public site, we decided, in keeping with oral history standards, that it would only be fair to respect the concerns of the narrators in our use of the interviews (Ritchie & al., 2000; Yow, 1995).

Despite our attention to these ethical standards and guidelines, the "not quite right" feeling that I experienced during the interview has lingered, even grown, over the passing years. A central debate in the ethics of social science research of rubrics, rules, informed consent releases, and review boards put in place, not to protect interviewees/subjects, but to protect researchers and institutions (McNutt et al., 2008, p.

93; Portelli, 1997a, pp. 55-66). The focus on securing copyright and minimizing liability in discussions of oral history and the law lend credibility to this perspective (Neuenschwander, 2009; Neuenschwander & Kay, 2002; Shopes, 2007). Alessandro Portelli admitted that he finds legal and ethical standards more useful in shielding himself than protecting those he interviews:

> "Once we have gone through the prescribed steps, anything goes; they can't sue us. I myself have realized that I take the most pains to secure written releases and approvals of transcripts and notes when I am in political opposition my interviewees and might therefore use their material in ways they might not appreciate (1997a, p. 56).

With Ms. Marshall, I knew that I was on safe legal ground, but as Portelli indicated, there are lingering ethical questions that were not answered by these procedural discretions.

One position is to do away with disinterestedness and to acknowledge that by engaging in the public process, public history research is necessarily an exercise in advocacy. This position makes transparent one's advocacy but requires that one be an advocate for only one party (Tobey, 1986, p. 28). The more common notion is that public historians are beholden both to a sponsoring entity and to a more nebulous "public" (as in "the public good") that changes from one context to another (Thomas, 2008, p. 87). The "Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association delineates "Responsibilities to the Interviewees," "Responsibilities to the Public and the Profession," and "Responsibilities of the Sponsoring Institution or Archives" (Ritchie & al., 2000). These multiple perspectives are at odds with each other, and perhaps contain some internal inconsistencies also. And although at various points, I assumed approaches derived from

each of these perspectives, if we return to Ms. Marshall's interviews, it becomes clear that, wedged in these dilemmas, I fulfilled none of these responsibilities convincingly.

With Ms. Marshall's interviews, the most profound difficulties came not in conducting and recording the interviews but in interpreting and editing them. Filmmaker and public historian Selma Thomas describes the unsettling effect of presenting in public settings oral histories that she has conducted: "interviewing is invasive . . . but the most invasive aspect of these interviews is the museum exhibit. Here, what began as a relatively private exchange becomes a public program" (Thomas, 2008, p. 98). The language that Thomas uses suggests that her actions injure or betray in some way the people that she interviews. Betrayal and injury would also be a fair, if perhaps overly dramatic, description of my persistent concerns about the interviews with Ms. Marshall.

When we returned for a second interview with Ms. Marshall, as I said, we began by asking again how she felt about the story of her suicide attempt. She reiterated her earlier stance: her story was for others to know, a cautionary and perhaps inspirational tale. She insisted we were free to use the story.

Then Ms. Marshall continued with many other stories, about her childhood, about her son, and about other people in the community that we had interviewed. She herself was in a lighthearted mood, and it became apparent that this is what she was like when she was at ease: playful and mischievous. In one wonderful, eerie story, she was talking about the games she and the other children played roaming the countryside. There was one game called "Smoking the Rabbit Out the Holler" in which they would light piles of grass on fire at the openings of underground hollows. One or two children would be running or crawling through the hollows and would have to jump through the bonfire to

escape. Ms. Marshall seemed transported back to her youth as she told the story, transformed in voice and manner to the impish little girl she described. She told us about a time that they nearly killed one of her playmates in this game, when a little boy got trapped in the tunnel and almost died of smoke inhalation. Even as we listened to these finely crafted tales with equal parts horror and laughter, I knew that we could not use them in the film, just as surely and immediately as I knew we would have to use the story of her suicide attempt when we heard it. "Use" is the operative word here because it is in these moments that it becomes apparent that Venieta Marshall's narrative functioned in service to Washington-on-the-Brazos and the narrative that the site would need to display.

As soon as I heard Ms. Marshall's story of despair, I knew that this personal story would be "the perfect vehicle" to talk metaphorically about the overarching themes of the documentary, the large scale social, economic, political, and psychological factors that result from the historical context of the end of slavery, the end of commercially viable manual farms, the mechanization of the labor force, urbanization of the population, and the decline of small rural communities. In acting on this knowledge, I objectified both the story and Ms. Marshall. I then needed her to be the somber, matriarchal figure that this story called for, the enduring, somewhat broken—though healing—character that she enacted as she told the story.

The impish personality that Ms. Marshall displayed in her other stories did not fit with the matriarchal character necessitated by the narrative for site, a character that was so much less complicated and so much more uniform, flatter, and less interesting, than the Venieta Marshall that we experienced. Stories like those of "smoking the rabbit out

the holler" were so rich, yet I knew immediately that they would be excluded. At the time, I was so focused on constructing the film and meeting our deadline that during in the interviews, I was mentally engaging in the editing process rather than being completely focused on the interview itself, in the dynamics of that space and of those moments. I also did not question at the time why one narrative was "in" and another would be "out."

In reflecting on this process, however, it becomes clear that even in my attempts to alter the perfect, specimen narrative of Washington-on-the-Brazos, I was still constructing a heritage narrative to place alongside the dominant narrative. As such, this process of inserting a narrative that increased the diversity at the site was a kind of update and upgrade to the dominant narrative because now the absence of diversity had, by contemporary standards, reached the point at which it undermined the credibility of the dominant narrative. I understood implicitly, if not altogether consciously, that his new narrative that acknowledged the reality of an African American presence was still part of the dominant heritage narrative. It could not directly contradict the dominant narrative, and it had to exhibit the same qualities as the heritage narrative. Specifically, this new or revised narrative still had to manifest the properties of an ideal specimen, still had to display perfection.

Oral historian Valerie Yow has pointed out that "in situations where we edit, what we do has a disturbing similarity to censorship" (1995, p. 65). And in highlighting Ms. Marshall's somber reflection and excluding her playful, lighthearted side, I do feel that I censored her, in a manner of speaking. The narrative of the edited documentary could not accommodate her multifaceted, lively—perhaps mercurial—character because it was not

fixed, not perfect. The authoritative tone that heritage narratives demand cannot reconcile the fluidity and multiple dimensions of a "real live human being."

THE GENTLE VIOLENCE OF "FIXING" A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

If I was worried about betraying or injuring Ms. Marshall, as Selma Thomas implies in her critique of editing and display of personal narrative, Ms. Marshall and her family certainly did not express any corresponding concerns (Thomas, 2008). Quite the opposite. The year after we finished making *Truth I Ever Told*, the Marshalls invited us back to the Bluff for Venieta Marshall's 88th birthday party. Ms. Marshalls' relatives expressed to us how happy they were with our portrayal of her and how grateful they were that we had "captured her story" for future generations.

There were five generations of family gathered for the event, held at St. Matthews on the Bluff on a Saturday evening. The elders were in the church hall, the younger adults talked outside, and the children ran back and forth. *Truth I Ever Told* played on a television in the background and as the children ran, they would quote lines from the documentary, their great-grandmother's lines. They had two favorites. One was the closing line from the scene in which Ms. Marshall talks about her suicide attempt. Once she finishes her story, the documentary cuts from Ms. Marshall sitting in her La–Z-Boy in the living room where she has been holding court to Ms. Marshall making her bed in the room next door, rearranging the little pink and red stuffed animals on the bedspread. Then she says, in a baby voice, as if she's one of the animals, "Grandma got to put her in the bed here . . . No one here but me and my pets and the Good Lord" (Cherian & Westmoreland, 2002). That last line was the one that her great-grandchildren, lighted

upon, as they scampered around St. Matthews, "No one here but me and my pets, and the Good Lord."

The other thing that the kids screamed as they went by was, "Olly Whiting used to be my boyfriend" (Cherian & Westmoreland, 2002). This exclamation was also in reference to a line from the movie. Venieta Marshall had heard through the rumor mill that we had been to see Olly Whiting, a man in his nineties, who used to umpire the old baseball games behind the Forest Inn, the local juke joint in the woods of the Post Oak/Bluff. Ms. Marshall asked us what we talked about, then paused for dramatic effect, and said, "Olly Whiting used to be my boyfriend." It worked. She bowled us over. There was Ms. Marshall's mischievous sense of humor again. That was what the edit attempted to capture—the suspense and release of the moment, the impeccable timing of Ms. Marshall's wit.

The children of the Bluff, Ms. Marshall's great-grandchildren, recognized and connected to the two fleeting instants in *Truth I Ever Told* that allow the tenderness, cleverness, and humanity of Ms. Marshall's personality to shine through. One might argue that this is evidence that we did not, in fact, violate Ms. Marshall's narrative, that this audience was still able to appreciate her in full. These brief glimpses of Ms. Marshall's other sides were a compromise, to let at least some of her humor and vitality into the film. However, I see this editorial concession as little more than the veneer of politesse. It is small compensation for the gentle violence that I did to her narrative as a whole.

In Michael Frisch's influential articulation of "shared authority," the concept refers to mutual authorship, the "co-creation" of "story, frame, analysis and

interpretation" by the interaction between interviewer and interviewee in oral history, he concedes that this interaction may be one of cooperation or of tension (Frisch, 1990, pp. xx-xxi). Since then, others have taken this concept and expanded it to refer to the collaboration over the entire life-cycle of oral history practice, from interview to public product, as a "broadly democratic cultural process," and Frisch himself suggested this more comprehensive potential for the metaphor (Frisch, 1990, p. xxii; Shopes, 2003, p. 103). Particularly in Frisch's use of the term, the "sharing" is most likely to occur through scholars relaxing their monopoly on interpretive authority, interviewers sharing narrative authorship with scholars, and both acknowledging each others' expertise and training. As a caveat, Frisch also points out that those who exert cultural authority or dominance are unlikely to share it willingly.

However, in my work at Washington-on-the-Brazos, this caveat trumped any more democratic alternatives suggested by our oral history and public history practice. In the case of Ms. Marshall's interviews in particular, any truly shared authority proved to be illusory. Though we as fieldworkers and Ms. Marshall as a narrator may have wanted to share authority, the promise was empty, like an agreement between parties who lack the power to enter into a binding contract.

In oral history fieldwork, although the interviewer does profoundly influence the context, form, and progression of the interview, the open-ended nature of life history or semi-structured interviews also invites the interviewee to shape meaning and identify significance in their story—to say, "This is who I am." However, there remains the possibility that once the interviewee voices this personal narrative, the interviewer will lack the authority to ensure that it is not appropriated or manipulated. This is what I

found happening in my interviews with Ms. Marshall. After I offered Ms. Marshall the promise of a collaborative endeavor, I found myself implicated in a hegemonic project to "extract knowledge from human history mines" and place it in service of the dominant narrative, to wrest authority rather than share it (Frisch, 1990, p. xxii).

The most curious aspect of this project was that although I was intimately involved in the process, it seemed to transpire outside of my awareness. As soon as Ms. Marshall began talking about her attempted suicide, I knew, as I said earlier, that it fit perfectly with what had become the theme of the documentary-in-progress: the uncertain fate of two rural African American communities whose youth had, for generations now, left the communities. When I heard the words come out of Ms. Marshall's mouth, I was riveted: "I tried to suicide myself when all my children left and left me here by myself. Mama and Papa was dead and gone. My baby had got grown and gone . . ." (Cherian & Westmoreland, 2002).

There appears to be little question that the story supports the themes of urbanization and the lack of opportunity in segregated rural communities. Ms. Marshall's words had come in response to the question, "Was it hard to see all your kids leave?" And after the story of her suicide attempt, when I asked if there was any way her children could have stayed, Ms. Marshall responded: "No, I don't think so. Farming and everything had gone out. They had consolidated the schools. There wasn't no schools around here" (Marshall, Cherian, & Westmoreland, 2002).

Clearly there are connections between Ms. Marshall's despair and the Bluff community's struggle to survive. Her loneliness and despair set in when her children left. They had no alternative but to leave, although significantly, one child did not. Her

daughter, Minnie Lou stayed either with Ms. Marshall or nearby, a stone's throw away, her entire life, even up to the time we were interviewing Ms. Marshall. And here is where, if I had been listening, either while we were conducting the interview or in the countless times I watched through the interview in the course of editing the documentary, I would have seen that Ms. Marshall did not despair so much because others left, but primarily because she had to stay behind. Ms. Marshall was telling me a story of gender, of gender and race, of motherhood. I could only hear the story of race and migration, the story of urbanization and industrialization, the story that we had decided to tell for the site.

Ms. Marshall had already told us the reason she had not moved to town. Yes, she liked the quiet of the country, but there was something else also. At regular intervals, every 15 minutes or so, over the course of three hours and two interviews, Ms. Marshall said, "It's hard being a single parent, raising five children on your own." Each time I raised a new topic, she would circle back to this one—yet it never registered for me at the time or later, reviewing and editing the footage. Ms. Marshall lived all her life with her parents, until they died. Unsolicited, she cataloged all the people that stayed with her in that house:

> [Ms. Marshall's father] built a shed room on the east side of the house for the boys. And he had two beds in an outer room, me and—I called her Coot--Mary and Becky slept together and me and Coot slept together. 'Til they up and got married and left me here by myself. [Laughs. Pause.] I've been engaged to be married, I think five times. (Marshall, et al., 2002)

But Ms. Marshall had never been married. And given that she was a single parent with five children, whose father was a married man in the community who never acknowledged them publicly, she had little choice but to stay at home and avail herself of her family's help raising the children.

Ms. Marshall's despair set in not only when four of her children had left (the fifth, Minnie Lou, stayed with her), but also just after her mother and father had died. After her parents died, Ms. Marshall tells of being forced out of the house she lived her entire life by Otto Gindorf, the landowner she had sharecropped for on halves on her family's own 40 acres, the land her father inherited from his father, and that Gindorf had gained the deed to after her father went in arrears on property taxes. The family remained on the land as tenant farmers until after her father died, when according to Ms. Marshall, she and Gindorf faced off over Minnie Lou:

> You see, he was a white man that liked to mess with young black women. And I told him, "No, you ain't going to mess with my daughter, and I mean you and not no white man going to mess with my daughter, not so long as I'm living. Shit. So then he hauled off and sold it Edward Keller and I had to start paying rent. (Marshall, et al., 2002)

Ms. Marshall did not specify what sort of tenancy agreement she and Gindorf had, but she made it clear that once he sold the house to Keller, she then had to come up with cash for the rent. This too was a heavy and unexpected financial burden. Not only were all these trials facing Ms. Marshall directly at this time, but she was also helping Minnie Lou take care of her two young children, seeing Minnie Lou struggle as she herself had. Like

Ms. Marshall, Minnie Lou was also a single mother raising young children, and Minnie Lou too had to watch as her siblings left Washington County and left her in the Bluff.

Ms. Marshall had told all these details, given all this context to her state of mind at the time of her suicide attempt without my asking directly. Like a seasoned politician, she had answered the questions she wished I had asked rather than the questions I had actually asked. And until I revisited her interviews now, I had managed to block out nearly everything that she had told me except the particulars that related to the story I wanted to tell, a story I had deemed suitable for Washington-on-the-Brazos. So when Ms. Marshall told us, in a remarkable understatement, "when you're staying by yourself, your energy gets kind of low and you feel like nobody cares," I registered this low only as part of a community-wide phenomenon without taking in the gendered particulars of her own story. While Ms. Marshall was no doubt distraught over the departure of her children, she was also at that moment coping with novel and extreme financial hardships, predatory sexual threats, the death of her parents, dislocation from the only home she had ever known, and the constant suffering of seeing the father of her children provide for his "legitimate" family while turning a blind eye to her and his children by her.

Feminist oral historian Daphne Patai has notably proposed that ethical research is not possible in an unethical world that operates on embedded hierarchies and inequalities (1991, p. 137). In the case of my work at Washington-on-the-Brazos, Patai's warning has borne out: being transparent about the nature and goals of our project, being aware of power differentials and cognizant of our privilege, being willing to challenge the expectations and priorities of our sponsoring institutions, using collaborative methods in our fieldwork and production, all had little effect on the power dynamics at play in our

relationship with Ms. Marshall. Ideally, the interview process bears out a co-creation, as Frisch observed. However, in reflecting on our interviews with Ms. Marshall, "shared authority" does no justice to the "gentle" violence that I observe in my interaction with her: Ms. Marshall shared the meaning of her story with me, and then I imposed a more convenient meaning on her narrative.

In the end, let us ask, like Trouillot, "Where is the power in the story?" In applying Trouillot's test, tracking power in the process of production of Ms. Marshall's story in *Truth I Ever Told*, it is apparent that little has changed in terms of the existing power structure through recording and presenting her story publicly at Washington-on-the-Brazos (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 22-30). It clear becomes also that even against my intentions, I have acted as an agent of the site, an agent of heritage production, and, in a larger sense, an agent of hegemonic cultural practice. I wielded a certain amount of power, drawn from my association with Washington-on-the-Brazos, with TPWD, and with the University, to shape and present a narrative that ultimately reinforces the dominance of these institutions and sites. In the interview process, the exertion of power was again evident in my extraction of a "useful" narrative from Ms. Marshall. I then placed Ms. Marshall's narrative in service of power by imposing a meaning on it that serves both my interests and the interest of heritage production at Washington-on-the-Brazos. The site, and I, as an agent of the site, take Ms. Marshall's narrative hostage, or even enslave Ms. Marshall's narrative, to use a loaded but not inaccurate metaphor.

There may be reason, however, for some faint optimism. Ms. Marshall's agency in tenaciously reasserting her meaning on her narrative is unmistakable. It reveals a keen understanding of the power relationship at play and a refined strategy for resisting

dominance. Her spirit and tenacity haunted me—for ten years the song that she sang telling us about her dangerous game, that simply repeated the phrase, "Smoking the Rabbit Out the Holler," would surface in my consciousness every few weeks or so and get stuck in my head—until I had to return to her narrative here to put the ghosts to bed. Or perhaps this is my attempt six years after Ms. Marshall's death, to allow the "perfected" version of Venieta Marshall, embalmed and preserved in the edited documentary, to pass to ashes and dust, and bring back the woman, so full of vitality, with so many sides to her, that I experienced and, at times, overlooked.

POSTSCRIPT

On May 11, 2002, we screened the completed documentary—which at that time we called *Right Here in Washington County*, now titled *Truth I Ever Told*—at the Visitor Center of Washington-on-the-Brazos. Despite our effort to tell a story suitable for the site, the documentary has never screened there after its premiere.

Chapter Three: The Lyndon Baines Johnson State Park

The Ethics of Silencing Marginalized Voices (Or How I Learned to Let Sleeping Dogs Lie)

INTRODUCTION

In his 2003 poem, Sleeping Dog, August Kleinzahler refers to Willie, the dog of the title, paradoxically only in his waking state. The poem focuses on Willie and his "fearsome arsenal, its plenitude of feints, its murderous sorties" (Kleinzahler, 2003a; 2003b, p. 34). Kleinzahler's quiet choice reminds us that the salient characteristic of a sleeping dog is that he will awake. He will growl. He will lunge. And there is always the threat of the bite.

If the operative metaphor in the Washington-on-the-Brazos story (see Chapter 2) is the dissected frog, at the LBJ State Park, where I began my next project, it is the sleeping dog that embodies the site and its narrative. At Washington-on-the-Brazos, I tried to replace a perfect specimen of a national founding myth with an alternate narrative. In this process, I witnessed the once-vibrant alternate narrative begin to desiccate and take on the rosined luster of a pristine and inert specimen, until finally I realized that I had simply transplanted one perfect specimen for another. At the LBJ State Park, however, nothing appeared quite so perfect or painstakingly fixed. It all seemed quite . . . natural. Quite satisfied. Calm. Content. Like a sleeping dog.

The ethical question that this chapter on the LBJ State Park presents is the mirror image of the question posed in the Washington-on-the-Brazos chapter. Whereas the preserved frog seems more than alive, perfect in its very deadness, the sleeping dog is

motionless but very much alive. He is best left undisturbed precisely because this dormant state mobilizes his coiled potential.

In this chapter, I ask what it means when one calculatedly silences a voice by wielding the same editorial and interpretive power that one uses to give voice. Though the LBJ State Park had recruited my colleagues and me at least in part to address the silences of marginalized groups, I found myself perpetuating and extending silences that have historically existed at the site. In time, I realized my work reinforced, amplified, and intensified the master narrative, the narrative that legitimated white aristocratic heterosexual male power—the narrative of patriarchy.

Finally, before we begin our journey, a personal note. Although this chapter will engage many individuals—public figures and private citizens—including myself, as individual actors and agents of their position in an acutely gendered and racialized hierarchical structure, it too is an exercise in representation, like the representations that I examine on screen, in other historical narratives, and on the landscape. Like all such representations it is necessarily reductive, and tells nothing close to the story of their lives. I hold a profound and enduring respect and admiration for all my interviewees. Despite my intensely conflicted relationship to Lyndon Johnson as a historical figure and human being, I admire many of his egalitarian impulses and social policies. I owe him a debt of gratitude that I will not be able to repay: had he not signed the 1965 Immigration Act into law, I would not be able to write these words or enjoy the life I live today. The irrepressible patriotic Texan in me looks up to Mrs. Johnson as yet another in a long and flourishing line of strong Texas women who have resisted and, as at times all of us have, succumbed to the strictures that this hierarchical and patriarchal has society placed on

them. So it is my hope that you will accept my representations and any critiques of these and other individuals in the spirit that I give them, as sincere efforts to re-examine tropes of villainy and heroism and to contribute to a more ethical dialogue at our public sites.

The Lyndon Baines Johnson State Park and Historic Site

In comparison to the urgency surrounding the preservation of myth and nation at Washington-on-the-Brazos, the Lyndon Baines Johnson State Park and Historic Site presents a decidedly more relaxed countenance. Like the family dog, little is expected of it, and relieved of this pressure it turns its focus to leisure.

The LBJ State Park can afford this leisure because it enjoys a unique relationship with the LBJ National Park, which it neighbors and which does most of the heavy lifting of interpreting Lyndon Johnson's life and legacy.

The state park was established in 1970 in an unorthodox act of public service and private gain emblematic of LBJ's political career. Friends of the Johnson family had raised money and bought the land across the Pedernales River from the Johnsons' home. They donated this land to the state in 1965. Five years later, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission dedicated the park to honor LBJ as a "national and world leader" (Parent, 2008, p. 80). The state park was, quite literally, the Johnsons' front yard.

His home and his back yard, the LBJ Ranch, became part of the LBJ National Park, and although he joked that he donated it (in portions and famously reluctantly) for a tax deduction rather than out of philanthropy, the site is significant for its role initially in coalescing and now in maintaining Johnson's image as "the last frontier president" (Department of the Interior, Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, & Harpers

Ferry Center Interpretive Planning, 2002; Solak, 2010, p. 90). While he might have made light of turning his home into a national historic site, LBJ was keenly aware of what he was doing. In the fine tradition of presidents proactively managing their legacies, he aimed to craft an image of himself that drew attention away from the Vietnam War and the social and cultural conflict that marked his time in office. This neatly cut image emphasized instead his seemingly benign roles as cowboy, rancher and conservationist.

While the national park interprets the "circle" of Lyndon Johnson's life, birth to death, "beginning with his ancestors until his final resting place on his beloved LBJ Ranch," the state park has no correspondingly clear narrative mandate (National Park Service, 2011). TPWD's own website refers to the LBJ State Park as "a unique facility," a predictably vague description considering it's not apparent what the site's primary function is. It has a heavily used public swimming pool, several lightly interpreted historic structures from many different eras, some of which have been moved to the site and others that are in their original locations, a visitor center, and a living history farm. The state park's website goes on to say that "the park's location is historically significant since it is in the heart of the former President's home country," which is a little like saying that Hot Springs is historically significant because Bill Clinton grew up in the town—a claim that the Hot Springs National Park does not make but that the Hot Springs Visitors Bureau does (Hot Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2011; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2010). Bill Clinton may have lived in Hot Springs, but he left little mark on the place.

However, if LBJ did not profoundly influence the state park named after him, Lady Bird Johnson did, molding the park in her image of beauty and of Texas, creating

her own ideal native specimen. While it may have been LBJ who decided to establish his ranch refuge, the "Texas White House," in the rugged hill country and to embrace the cowboy mystique, Mrs. Johnson was determined that the spot would flaunt its regional flair. She liked to say that she "wanted Texas to look like Texas and Vermont to look like Vermont" (Russell, 1999b, p. 313). And look like Texas it does. Even—or perhaps especially—from the windows of passing cars, the park is iconic Texas. It is only fitting, considering Mrs. Johnson's leadership on the 1965 Highway Beautification Act and her lifelong dedication to scenic and natural landscapes, that the park presents its best face to the highway (Lady Bird Johnson, 1980, p. 11). The signature image of the park is the view from Highway 290 of the 1860s dogtrot cabins of the German Danz Family amidst a sea of wildflowers, bluebonnets at the right time of year. The scene beckons passers-by to stop and linger a while, to smell the roses—or rather, the wildflowers.

The visual appeal of the site, though painstakingly maintained and curated, cultivates—perhaps paradoxically—a natural and relaxed atmosphere. The interplay of the site's unassuming beauty and unfussy grooming holds value for travelers looking to unburden themselves, making the site both attractive and approachable. From its founding, the state park was not only an exemplar of the highway beautification that Mrs. Johnson advocated but it became the mecca of it also. It was where she hosted her annual barbecue to recognize the best maintained rights-of-ways across the state and to honor state highway maintenance workers (Lady Bird Johnson, 1980, pp. xix-xxii). The criteria for the awards Mrs. Johnson gave out at the event stressed her particular aesthetic, which embraced both the natural and the ideal, the propagation of wildflower stands and

planting of native species, all within the parameters of what ought to be there or what might occur naturally (Lady Bird Johnson, 1980, p. xix).

This emphasis on beauty as represented in the "natural" and the "authentic" extends to Sauer-Beckmann Farm, the living history farm at the state park. Sauer-Beckmann Farm aims to interpret life in the Texas hill country as it was in 1918 but like many living history sites, actually celebrates an idealized version of the antiquated and the everyday. LBJ emphasized the profitability of the ranch, now part of the national park—"That's where the cattle go out and the money comes in," he would say. He stipulated that it should remain in operation as a business and not as a "sterile relic of the past" (National Park Service, 2010a). On the state park in contrast, the farm and structures are, even when populated, exactly that: relics of a constructed past. The literature for Sauer-Beckmann Farm explains some of the activities at the site that spectators may observe: "the house is cleaned, meals are cooked, butter is churned and cheese is made. Visitors may see the 'family' scrubbing the floors with homemade lye soap, or plowing the garden with a team of horses" (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2010). The "family" (i.e. the farm's staff who for the most part are from the hill country, whose families have worked the land in the area since long before 1918, and who most likely *are* family from a generation or two back) carry out these everyday activities in crisply laundered, fastidiously made clothes faithful to a particular population during the era, all on a farmhouse that is as picturesque as it is meticulously maintained. The "living history" at Sauer-Beckmann farm does not so much refer to history coming alive as it does to a space in the park that continues to be inhabited, however self-consciously, by living people. And it does not so much exist in opposition to the "living

present" as it does to "dead history," which is just as picturesque—and equally represented at the state park by other elements, such as the iconographic Danz dogtrot cabins. It is telling that a report to the Texas State Legislature on possibilities for capital improvement projects at Texas Parks and Wildlife sites determined that the Danz Cabins are "on the brink of being downgraded from historic cabins to ruins" (Pros Consulting, 2008, p. 44). That the cabins are in ruins or near ruins has no negative impact on the appeal of the site, and the report admits as much. Provided it does not cave in and injure a visitor, there is even aesthetic and aristocratic cachet in having a ruin on the property. The cabins' value is in their quaint beauty, which is visually or metaphorically defined in contrast to some equally metaphorical present, a present that is deemed modern and therefore ugly. This dialectic between the past/beauty and modernity/ugliness was part of both LBJ's and Mrs. Johnson's rhetoric in the beautification movement (Lady Bird Johnson, 1980, pp. 1072-1075; Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1966). The patina the cabins have gained over time only heightens this contrast with the modern and consequently increases their aesthetic value.

In this context, the near-ruins of the cabins, the wildflowers, the heritage-livestock and costumed interpretation staff, and the studiously rugged landscape are all native specimens of beauty on the site. The unity at the state park, therefore, exists not in the narratives it represents or interprets but in its aesthetics. The mandate there is the same for the flora, the fauna and the workforce alike. It is tacit but clear: look pretty and act naturally.

REAL FILMMAKERS

My colleagues Mark Westmoreland, Brian Rawlins, and I first came to Stonewall, Texas and to the LBJ State Park on an invitation from Donnie Schuch, the park manager. Dr. Martha Norkunas and her Interpreting the Texas Past (ITP) graduate seminar students at the University of Texas at Austin had been working with Donnie for the past year. The state park had been the graduate students' practicum site. In February 2002, Donnie and Dr. Norkunas discussed the possibility of commissioning an interpretive video for the site. Dr. Norkunas had suggested that Donnie talk to us and mentioned the film that Mark and I had made for Washington-on-the-Brazos. Donnie sent word that he would like to talk to us about a potential project. We began our conversations with Donnie soon after, and sent him a proposal for a documentary video project.

After the difficulties we encountered making the documentary at Washington-on-the-Brazos—working with the communities neighboring the park, rebuilding bridges that had been burned many times over, trying to find a place for the film at the park, and convincing TPWD staff that it was relevant to the site—the opportunity at the LBJ State Park felt refreshing and inspiring. Donnie was enthusiastic about the idea of a documentary video that explored the connection between the people of the Texas hill country and the land, which over the years had become the story of the site and which also described him and his family. He already had an idea who the film would feature—people like them and others who had been in the hill country for generations. People who had eked out a living (or in some cases done much better) and struggled to maintain the land as it maintained them. The park had a good relationship with the communities surrounding the site and those most invested in the site, German-American families and

LBJ boosters, and felt secure enough in their place at the site to be open to a more inclusive narrative there.

The state park also has a 200-seat movie theater. Although it is a utilitarian room, its stadium seating and largish screen recalls bygone times of prosperity in state budgets. Few sites on the scale of the state park could invest in such a luxury now. On the hour, the theater screens a wonderfully anachronistic video, part of an NBC special that aired in 1966 called *The Hill Country: Lyndon Johnson's Texas*. The film features LBJ and Lady Bird Johnson riding around their ranch in LBJ's massive white Lincoln convertible while Ray Scherer, a reporter in a skinny tie and dark suit, asks him about what it was like to grow up in the hill country and about his connection to the land. Donnie wanted the new film to screen in that theater too, alongside this LBJ film from the 1960s. There would be a home for the film upon completion.

Between the support of management, the openness of the communities to telling their stories and making room for others' stories, and the availability of this beautiful theater, we had opportunities that we never had before. Furthermore, since our work at Washington-on-the-Brazos, the Project in Interpreting the Texas Past had received grant funding from the Houston and Summerlee Foundations to set up a $14,000 digital media production studio, including a new Sony "prosumer" digital video camera, several new Apple computers, production software, scanners and a professional digital audio recorder. So we had the equipment to create, comparatively speaking, a polished product. The icing on the cake was that we would have what seemed like adequate funding for the project before we shot a single frame. In a sweetheart deal that Donnie said was brokered by LBJ himself, the LBJ State Park was allowed to keep some of its revenue. It had 1 year to use

that money for discretionary purposes on site before having to kick back any remaining funds to Austin to enter the collective budget. This allowed us enough funding to add Brian Rawlins, a professionally trained director of photography, to the project team. So in addition to the equipment, we had the personnel to create a more polished product, and we felt like real filmmakers.

For once, we were swimming with the current, that was how it seemed when we started talking to Donnie about a film for his site. The only off-note of that first visit came when we encountered work crews eradicating invasive plants from the park's ravines and thickets. Although this is considered, I know, an innocuous and perpetual struggle in native habitats, hearing the viciousness that the park staff ascribed to Japanese ligustrum and chinaberry trees came as a shock to my immigrant ears and sounded a cautionary tone. It would have been wise to listen.

The Cosmetic and the Profound

To say that the site concerns itself with its image does not mean that it does so to the exclusion of its other facets. I have described here how the park operates and how it might be perceived on the surface. That it pays attention to surface appearances does not automatically correspond to an absence of depth. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The substance of the LBJ State Park is buried deep, deep beneath the surface, and it takes some digging to get to it.

Mrs. Johnson herself felt and regretted the false dichotomy that equated a pleasing aspect with superficiality. Although the vocabulary of beauty and beautification had served her political ideals well, towards the end of her public life, Mrs. Johnson grew

sheepish about the words and the connotations that percolated from them. In 1965, in the push for the Beautification Act, she confessed uninhibitedly that her "interest in Beauty dates way, way back to [her] girlhood," an offhand comment that might suggest either that the "interest" is little more than dilettantism or that there is something inherently childish about the pursuit (L. L. Gould, 1999, p. 1). That was early in her career as First Lady, but, on the cusp of retirement, at the other end of her career, she had become guarded but not defensive about the nomenclature she had chosen:

> "Beautification" became the word that was used but our interests were vastly more—clean water, clean air, clean roadsides, safe waste disposal, preservation. "Beautification" makes the concept sound only cosmetic, but I see it as representing the whole quality of life (Lady Bird Johnson, 1980, p. xvii).

Mrs. Johnson had recognized that the references to "beauty"—a profoundly gendered terminology that echoed her profoundly gendered role—made her efforts seem safe and gave them broad appeal. However, at the same time they made Mrs. Johnson and her message easy to accept, they also made it easy to dismiss their gravity.

This tension between the "cosmetic," what appears on the surface, and the "vastly more" that exists within, describes Mrs. Johnson, the Beautification movement, the LBJ State Park, and, of course, the sleeping dog.[7] Mrs. Johnson was right to defend herself and her choice of vocabulary. Beauty, it turns out, is more than skin deep. It is in fact part of a profound system of belief that looks quite harmless, but in fact conceals the "plenitude of feints and murderous sorties" that have propped up power imbalances of all manners and kinds (Kleinzahler, 2003a).

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[7] Is it really a coincidence that in *King of the Hill*, Mike Judge's satire of everyday life in contemporary Texas, Hank and Peggy Hill's ancient bloodhound is named "Ladybird"?

Over the years, some biographers have read Mrs. Johnson's life in proto-feminist and proto-environmentalist terms (Caro, 1990; L. L. Gould, 1988, 1999; Russell, 1999b). These interpretations are more than just wishful thinking. Time and again, Mrs. Johnson articulated her priorities and figured out how to realize that agenda—neither rejecting nor succumbing to the societal roles prescribed to her as a Washington wife and a woman who came of age in the Great Depression. Financial independence was important to her, and she took a minor investment in a local Austin radio station and parlayed it into a multi-million dollar media empire (Russell, 1999b, pp. 141-167). While LBJ was at war in the Pacific, Mrs. Johnson took over many of his congressional duties and performed them so well that constituents and political operatives suggested that she seek the Democratic nomination against her husband (Caro, 1990, pp. 62-70). Once she began her advocacy as First Lady, she turned expectations on their head as she articulated Lyndon Johnson's policy positions more convincingly than he or anyone else could, even while facing the toughest of audiences (Russell, 1999a).

But refusing to be defined meant Mrs. Johnson would neither be trapped nor liberated against her will. When biographer Jan Jarboe Russell tried to pit Mrs. Johnson in opposition to LBJ in a 1997 Slate article, poking fun at LBJ and suggesting Mrs. Johnson's heroism in tolerating him, Mrs. Johnson ended her cooperation with Russell and her book. She explained in a letter to Russell that her "conclusion about me may well come at Lyndon's expense. There is no way to separate us and our roles in each other's lives." (Russell, 1999b, p. 13; Schwartz, 1999). Even a quarter century after his death, Mrs. Johnson willingly sacrificed her own legacy to conserve his. Mrs. Johnson's advice

to Russell was, in essence, her philosophy of life or at the very least, her coping mechanism: Let sleeping dogs lie.

The surprising element of this story is not that Mrs. Johnson gave Russell this advice or ended her participation in Russell's project, but that after three years of research and interviews, Russell seemed to come to see things Mrs. Johnson's way. Russell had embarked on the biography because she "realized that this was a woman who had never really been looked at in her own right." But in time, after Mrs. Johnson withdrew her support, Russell conceded the point and changed the focus of her book, echoing Mrs. Johnson's own words: "Even when I had [Mrs. Johnson's] cooperation, she would always bring [LBJ] into the picture. There was no way to separate them. So it became a love story, a book about a marriage" (Schwartz, 1999).

PUPPY LOVE

What happened to change Russell's mind? Her initial observation that no one had looked at Mrs. Johnson in her own right contains within it an acknowledgement that this perspective had some validity, that it was possible and even meaningful to consider Lady Bird Johnson in a more independent fashion, not solely through the lens of her relationship with LBJ. This was not a fleeting thought. It lasted more than three years, at least until Mrs. Johnson took issue with Russell's Slate article.

So what made her decide later that there was no way to separate them? Her explanation points more to Mrs. Johnson's resolve ("Even when I had her cooperation, she would always bring him into the picture.") than to any change in Russell's understanding of the story of Mrs. Johnson's life. One possibility is that Mrs. Johnson's

resistance paired with her censure of the project finally wore Russell down. Faced with the threat of losing several years of work and perhaps even her long-term livelihood, the profoundly human response would be to give in, to submit.

By stonewalling her project, Mrs. Johnson teaches Russell how patriarchy functions, and the patriarch, LBJ, continues to wield his power, even from the grave. The consequence of questioning, ridiculing authority is that you lose your access to power. Unable to extricate her own legacy from that of her husband, Mrs. Johnson must alter the narrative to conform to their proscribed gender roles. If power dictates that the story of Mrs. Johnson's life is a love story, then that is what it will be, a love story.

Having been educated in patriarchy, Russell now narrates it. Russell did indeed write a love story, but this love story is a dark romance. It looks ugly. It is a story of abuse and neglect. Of the litany of voices weighing in, Alabama patrician and civil rights activist Virginia Foster Durr characterized the Johnsons' relationship most succinctly: "He yelled at her. He ordered her around. He left her alone at the most important times of her life and made no secret of his affairs. Still, she stayed loyal" (quoted in Russell, 1999b, p. 22). This unquestioning loyalty and one-sided devotion is the hallmark of their marriage, and indeed, the hallmark of all LBJ's conquests. Even when Mrs. Johnson acted to defend her marriage, she could only narrate her submission: "All I can say is that I had a great love affair. No matter what, I knew he loved me best" (Russell, 1999b, p. 22). Her protestation itself contains within it the acknowledgement that she is one of many. Her consolation is that she is first among the unequals, loved best of all the conquests. Russell sees Mrs. Johnson's "understanding" not as a personal arrangement between herself and LBJ, but as an institutionalized role in both the American and

Western Classical tradition: To her, Mrs. Johnson is another of "history's line of long-suffering first ladies . . . Like Hera, her identity and her power came solely from her husband" (Russell, 1999b, pp. 12-13). Having accepted the price for her access to power, the task of the marriage was not cooperation, but simply coping:

> Over the years, the way Lady Bird would sustain herself in the hard periods of her marriage was to perform a solitary, private ritual. When she was alone, at night or in the early morning, she would take out her Episcopal prayer book, read the vows, and recommit herself to love Johnson, to honor him, to keep him, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, keeping only unto him. She trained herself not to think about or notice whether he was honoring his vows. (Russell, 1999b, p. 25)

This inversion of marriage vows, turning the Christian sacrament of the union of two into a "solitary, private ritual," represents both the Mrs. Johnson's pragmatic philosophy and the master narrative of the state park. It is the tale of puppy dog love, of devotion and submission. And Mrs. Johnson is both dominant and submissive in this strict hierarchy of pack survival. She too is complicit in enforcing this patriarchal submission, as when she enacts her practiced denial of LBJ's predatory sex life or insists Russell repeat another version of the mantra: "the story of my life is a love story."

It does not matter that Mrs. Johnson's denials are unconvincing or whether Russell believed what she said. It matters only that they both said the words. Like a game of uncle, domination and submission hinge on the utterance of the word, not the sincerity of the tone. All of us must repeat the mantras of patriarchy to achieve and maintain access to power. All of us that is, except the top dog, the alpha male.

Perhaps, it's time we address this pack of hounds now trailing us. There is the sleeping dog, who has been our companion for most of this journey. He is a versatile creature and therefore a versatile metaphor. Kleinzahler knows this too. Such generative power this image has that readers cannot resist taking his spare poem about "Willie," a very real dog in repose yet charged with energy, and stuffing it with all kinds of meaning.

So we see Willie or his brethren embodied in the state park and its staff, amiable but ready to respond to the rustle of an interloper, animal or vegetal. We see him in Mrs. Johnson too, emitting a low, chilling snarl when provoked. We see the sleeping dog in the narrative of the park, quite harmless on the surface but suppressing a dark violence that perpetually threatens to return. The sleeping dog circumscribes the dialogues between power and resistance, consensus and dissent, threat and force that constitute hegemony. And the many faces of Willie and company represent ideological equilibrium in its multiple forms. Just as each iteration of hegemony varies in the distribution of ideological power among its players, so too the temperament of these sleeping dogs reveals their varying proximity to power, as well as their need and willingness to use it (Hebdige, 1993, p. 15).

In our stories, dogs loom large because of the significance they play in our characters' lives and also because our dogs, real and imagined, are products of American culture. They, like nature itself, are "constructed as a technology through the social praxis" (Haraway, 1984, p. 52). As a culture, we have characterized and domesticized dogs for own purposes, ascribing and parsing traits via narrative as well as genetics. And following the cultural example, I have done the same in this chapter. LBJ and canines are particularly strongly linked. No biography of LBJ—and there are dozens—is complete

without a picture or account of LBJ and his dogs. The LBJ Presidential Library devotes a lengthy page on its website to “President Johnson’s dogs” (LBJ Library Staff, 2011). After the picture of LBJ being sworn in on Air Force One, the most iconic photograph of Johnson is of him lifting his beagle by the ears while a shocked and amused press corps looks on. The photo provoked public outcry when *Life Magazine* first published it, with many readers calling the act inhumane. Others cited a rural/urban cultural rift, protesting that it was common practice among country folks to tug beagles’ ears. Discussion coalesced on the question of whether the gesture was loving or abusive. Said the SPCA: “If somebody picked you up by the ears, you'd yelp too." Johnson’s take? "It's good for them. It does them good to let them bark” (Life Magazine, 1964). Either way, the gesture is important to us because it allows us to discuss the two remaining canine characterizations mentioned earlier: puppy love and the alpha dog. Domination is the operative dynamic depicted in the photograph, loving or not. LBJ exerts absolute control over the beagle. He is the alpha dog, unquestioned leader of the pack. The beagle’s submission is equally absolute. There is no hint of Him (of Him and Her fame, one of the two White House beagles) reaching back to nip at his master’s hand. This is puppy love, the unquestioned and one-sided devotion that LBJ demanded from all those around him, not reciprocal love, and it is part of the reason dogs were so important to him.

Robert Caro sees absolute subservience as the single characteristic LBJ valued most in those around him. He reads the divergent careers of two early LBJ aides as one example of this fixation. One “brilliant” and “hard-working” aide, L.E. Jones, was ushered out while his counterpart, mediocre in comparison, stayed on Johnson’s staff for most of his life:

What are the implications of this contrast? Was brilliance not enough to qualify a man for permanent work for Lyndon Johnson? Was hard work not enough? In fact . . . the crucial qualification was subservience. Dignity was not permitted in a Johnson employee. Pride was not permitted. Utter submission to Johnson's demands, the submission that Jones [the aide] called "a surrender of personality," a loss of your individuality to his domination was required. Otherwise, no matter how brilliant or hard-working, a man or woman could not work for Lyndon Johnson" (Caro, 1982, pp. 239-240).

LBJ's exploits with and exploitation of women are well catalogued (Caro, 1982, 1990; Dugger, 1982; Muslin & Jobe, 1991; Russell, 1999b). He demanded the same "slavish single minded devotion" of his "private secretaries" that he did of his male assistants, with the added "bonus" of sexual harassment; George Reedy, former White House Press Secretary under LBJ, thought that "sex to Johnson was part of the spoils of victory . . . he collected women like some men collect exotic fish" (Russell, 1999b, pp. 168-173). Reedy was unquestionably correct about Johnson's compulsion to "collect" women. And his choice of vocabulary is significant too. This was a project of empire for LBJ, conquering women. But it was not so much that his subjugation of women was a spoil of victory. Rather, we will see that these conquests composed LBJ's very path to victory.

THE MASTER NARRATIVE

LBJs depredations, Mrs. Johnson's subjugation and the dark side of the state park's beautification come together at this point and take their places in a much larger narrative. Early on in the history of the term, Jean-François Lyotard defined "master

narratives" or "metanarratives" in opposition to "local narratives," "les petites histoires." The master narratives occupied the position of dominance. They were usually official histories that served to legitimate authority. The local narrative represented subaltern perspectives (Klein, 1995, pp. 280, 283). While the overall themes of dominance and resistance, legitimation of power and challenge to power, continued over the next two decades, the particulars of the nomenclature of "the master narrative" across the disciplines and practices of ethnography, philosophy, literary criticism, and historiography varied significantly (Klein, 1995). Even within a given practice, usage of the term has proven highly malleable. Historiography, for example, sometimes employs the term "master narrative" as an epistemological descriptive denoting "authoritative," "objective," or "Olympian" narratives and at other times as a metaphorical container for multiple historical narratives on a given matter (Cox & Stromquist, 1998; Megill, 1989; Megill, Shepard, & Honenberger, 2007, pp. 63-71). However, I am using the term here as received through the tradition of literary criticism and articulated by writer and critic Toni Morrison.

Morrison's articulation of the master narrative does well to distinguish it from ideology as a whole and places a slightly more literal emphasis on the first half of this duologism. It is especially relevant to our discussion, given that we have dealt with and will deal with masters and slaves, masters and servants, the Master Race, the narrative mastery of the gifted storyteller, as well as, of course, dogs and their masters (Toni Morrison, 1992a). Morrison never lets us forget that these words are related, that in fact they only have meaning in opposition to each other. To her, the master narrative does not only imply the slave narrative. The two exist because of each other and are inscribed by

each other, like Rubin's optical illusion in which a vase defines two faces—and vice-versa. Morrison also addresses explicitly the master narrative's intimate connection to another dialectic crucial to our discussion, silence and voice. Finally, but not least, I return to Morrison because her work proved so instrumental in understanding our work at Washington-on-the-Brazos (see Chapter 2).

From Morrison's perspective, the American master narrative is rooted in race but also intimately tied to conceptions of gender and class. It represents the collision of two dilemmas at a particular historical moment. There surfaced not long after colonial times a need to create a separate New World identity, an American identity befitting the new republic. The defining characteristics of this identity were its claim to freedom and its dedication to the moral rights of man, the sentiment so powerfully expressed the founding document of the United States, the Declaration of Independence. The first dilemma surfaced as no one at home or abroad could ignore the importance of chattel slavery to the economy and social order of the young nation. The inherent flaw was the "presence of the unfree in the heart of the democratic experiment" (Toni Morrison, 1992a, p. 48). The response to this dilemma was to author an American identity that kept the lofty ideals intact but accommodated the troubling realities. In this process, "American" came to mean white, male and new—a white man born apart from the old country, born anew in America, shaped by his murderous encounter with the indigenous peoples he massacred and displaced and the Africans he enslaved: "Feeling within himself a sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others, he emerged a distinctive new man, a borderland gentleman, a

man of property in a raw, half-savage world" (Bailyn, quoted in Toni Morrison, 1992a, p. 42).

The second dilemma grew out of the first. It was the inability to discuss any of the nation's matters, without continually reinforcing and reminding one another of the fundamental contradiction, dilemma number one, that of the "free republic deeply committed to slavery." Morrison asks:

> How could one speak of profit, economy, labor, progress, suffragism, Christianity, the frontier, the formation of new states, the acquisition of new lands, education, transportation, (freight and passengers), neighborhoods, the military—of almost anything a country concerns itself with—without at the heart of the discourse, at the heart of definition, the presence of Africans and their descendants?" (1992a, p. 50)

But the citizens of the new republic did indeed find a way to write the narrative of slavery into silence. The American master narrative excised "the presence of Africans and their descendants" because of the discomfort that discussing slavery caused. Furthermore, slavery's very centrality and pervasiveness made it unnecessary to refer to it directly. So whether to disguise matters or merely to avoid stating the obvious, the narrative of the master, predicated on this unspeakable mastery, became embedded in the cultural expression of the nation.

Morrison's explication of the American master narrative recalls Marxist articulations of dominant ideologies: "The ruling ideas," Marx and Engels tell us, "are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make one class the ruling class, therefore its ideas

of its dominance" (quoted in Hebdige, 1993, p. 15). The material relationship of white dominance in American culture was so deeply rooted, so consistently reinforced and so violently maintained that the country could write the ideology of dominance into silent, devout ritual. Morrison's explanation of the endurance of the American master narrative also incorporates Gramscian ideas of hegemony and negotiated consent. She notes that the master narrative remains ingrained in our language, our rhetoric and our consciousness, because of its elastic resiliency, an ability to "make any number of adjustments to keep itself intact" (Toni Morrison, 1992a, p. 51). Like the boundaries of exclusion in this country, the master narrative has changed with the times. Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, is largely about its characters' encounters with the American master narrative (Jiménez, 2010). Morrison was asked in a 2008 *Time* interview if African American girls are still dealing with self acceptance as Pecola Breedlove did in the 1970 novel, praying each night for blue eyes, "No. Not at all . . . that was thirty-something years ago. I find young African American women now much more complete," she replied (Sachs, 2008). Although current research seems to indicate that girls of color still privilege dolls with lighter skin and eye colors, the parameters of the master narrative, at least to some degree, have changed in the intervening years (K. Davis, 2005; Kurtz-Costes, DeFreitas, Halle, & Kinlaw, 2011).

Morrison's conception of the master narrative also presents a choice. Unlike ideology, it can be seen, and it can be confronted. Those affected by it, even the little girls who cherish these coveted dolls, retain agency: "when those little girls [in *The Bluest Eye*] see that the most prized gift they can receive at Christmastime is this little white doll, that's the master narrative speaking. This is beautiful. This is lovely, and

you're not it. So what are you going to do about it?" (Toni Morrison & Moyers, 2004 quoted in Jiménez, 2010). They have a say—resist or acquiesce and to what degree?

These qualities of Morrison's definition are important for us in this discussion of the LBJ State Park: historicity, fluidity, visibility, and agency. The master narrative of the state park grew out of a particular historical moment and was deeply influenced by specific historical actors, not a nameless collective. The master narrative at the site also changed significantly over time. The master narrative when the state dedicated the site in 1970 was not the same as the master narrative when I came to it in 2003. It had mutated to accommodate cultural shifts and new realities. And it presented those who encountered it with a choice. But to understand both these choices and the changes in the master narrative itself, we must first understand the deep historical roots of the master narrative of the LBJ State Park.

Teddy Bear & Puppy Dog Patriarchy

Although LBJ, Mrs. Johnson, and others are co-authors of the master narrative of the LBJ State Park, they draw heavily on the founding myth of the American frontier. This mythology of the frontier and of man's mastery over nature came filtered to them—and to contemporary American society—from the Gilded Age, from Theodore Roosevelt and the late 19th and early 20th century barons of monopoly capitalism. More to the point, these conceptions of the frontier, of man and nature paired with these early capitalists frenzy of institution building manifested themselves, beginning with the American Museum of Natural History and Yellowstone National Park, in the proliferation of American museums and birth of the National & State Park movement.

These coinciding and deeply connected initiatives have given us many of the landmarks and cultural heritage institutions revered across the United States—the LBJ State Park and the LBJ National Park, among them (Runte, 1997, pp. 11-32; Schwarzer & American Association of Museums, 2006, p. 3).

The names are familiar: Rockefellers, Vanderbilts and Carnegies, J.P. Morgan, George Eastman, and others. Despite building his political career on the rhetoric of progressivism and trust-busting, Teddy Roosevelt's primary allegiance was to these fellow elites. He "embodied their politics and their ethos" of "natural" hierarchy (Brechin, 1996, p. 232; Haraway, 1989a, p. 56). Corporate lawyer, public intellectual and popular author Madison Grant was their leading thinker (Brechin, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 12; Spiro, 2009, pp. xi-xvi, 168-179). Princeton professor and curator and president of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, Henry Fairfield Osborn, spearheaded the scientific research and public education initiatives of their project (Brechin, 1996, p. 233; Rainger, 1991, pp. 1-4).

Taxidermist and sculptor Carl Akeley was one of the few outsiders admitted into this circle of East Coast privilege. He was their creative genius, their artist-in-residence. Akeley mastered the new visual technology of their time, taxidermy, to reveal nature's laws for all to see. And as Donna Haraway explains, these men believed the key to nature's laws lay in the "science" of eugenics and the objective of racial purity. Haraway gave a "pet name" to the story Akeley and these elites told, calling it "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" (Haraway, 1984, 1989a). Her reading of Akeley's life and the American Museum of Natural History's display of his taxidermy "tell the tale of the commerce of power and knowledge in white and male supremacist monopoly capitalism" (Haraway,

1984, p. 21). Teddy Bear Patriarchy, Haraway tells us, began with Akeley's earliest forays into taxidermy and achieved its pinnacle in the great stuffed ape in AMNH's African Hall:

> Restoration of the origin, the task of genetic hygiene, is achieved in Carl Akeley's African Hall by an art that began for him in the 1880s with the crude stuffing of P.T. Barnum's elephant, Jumbo, who had been run down by a railroad train, the emblem of the Industrial Revolution. The end of his task came in the 1920s, with his exquisite mounting of the Giant of Karisimbi, the lone silver back male gorilla. (Haraway, 1984, p. 20)

In her explication of Teddy Bear Patriarchy, Haraway goes on to connect meticulously the visual display of the AMNH and taxidermy, Akeley's practice of killing and stuffing animals, to the eugenic, racist, conservationist, project of Roosevelt, Grant, Osborn, and their circle of power brokers, industry tycoons and high-profile heirs.

LBJ's dominance—patriarchy of the puppy dog kind—shares much in common with the Teddy Bear Patriarchy of Roosevelt and his contemporaries. Both are projects of manhood, undertaken to claim power and to legitimate the concentration of power. As we shall see, Roosevelt and his contemporaries' practice of institution building to further these goals, particularly of establishing parks and museums, served as both precedent and template for the LBJ State Park.

One institution founded by Roosevelt, Osborn, Akeley, along with George Grinnell, Henry L. Stimson, Gifford Pinchot, George Eastman, Owen Wister and others of America's cultural and political elite was the exclusive Boone & Crockett Club, "the nation's earliest conservation organization" (Brechin, 1996, p. 233; Spiro, 2009, pp. 4-6).

The stated aim of the club was distilled in the pithy and masculine slogan, "To promote manly sport with the rifle." However, the deeper concern of these men was the threat to manhood posed by social and personal decadence (Brechin, 1996; Haraway, 1984, 1989b; Kühl, 1994; Spiro, 2009). Decadence, in this context, was, according to Haraway, "a venereal disease proper to the organs of social and personal reproduction: sex, race, and class" (1984, p. 53). At the personal level, these Teddy Bear Patriarchs believed that the feminizing forces of urbanization, civilization and industrialization led to the decadence of the Nordic (read white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) male. On a social scale, they believed that decadence could be directly traced to the immigration of "Alpine, Mediterranean and Semitic races" and the presence of "darks and degenerates"; reproduction of these groups threatened "race suicide" of the Nordic race to which these elites belonged (Brechin, 1996, p. 235; Spiro, 2009, p. 174). Race suicide then was the "clinical manifestation" of social decadence, and its mechanism was "the differential reproductive rates of anglo-saxon [sic] vs. 'non-white' immigrant women." (Haraway, 1984, p. 53). Haraway writes that this group of East Coast elites, "the great capitalists," founded and fashioned the another institution, the American Museum of Natural History (not coincidentally the site of the 1921 Second International Eugenics Congress) as an inoculation against the death of manhood and the extinction of the Nordic race:

Three public activities of the Museum were dedicated to preserving a threatened manhood: exhibition, eugenics, and conservation. Exhibition was a practice to produce permanence, arrest decay. Eugenics was a movement to preserve hereditary stock, to assure purity, to prevent race suicide. Conservation was a policy to preserve resources,

not only for industry, but also for moral formation, for the achievement of manhood (Haraway, 1989a, p. 55).

As Haraway suggests, most of these Teddy Bear Patriarchs embraced conservation not for nature's sake but for the sake of man—man, not as in mankind but as in manhood. Even when nature was to be pristinely preserved, it would be for the education and pleasure of man. Henry Fairfield Osborn, a leading Paleontologist, one of the founders of the Bronx Zoo, and the eventual president of the American Museum of Natural History, was committed to bringing "the aesthetic and educational value of nature within the reach of millions of people." He wished to impress on the public "the idea that our generation has no right to destroy what other generations may enjoy" (Osborn, quoted in Haraway, 1984, p. 41). Osborn contended that exposure to the wild and communion with nature revealed an embedded code and hierarchy: "Nature teaches law and order and respect for property" (Osborn, quoted in Haraway, 1984, p. 20). Madison Grant, the most noted author of the group, aside from Roosevelt himself, wrote that "nature itself has some rights," among them the right to be spared the hand of humans, "so as to preserve as far as possible their pristine condition of wildness" (quoted in Spiro, 2009, p. 71). Here Grant separated humans from nature to protect nature. This was a right that he may have allowed nature, but Grant, the author of *The Passing of the Great Race*, a celebrated treatise on eugenics which moved Adolf Hitler so that he announced "This book is my Bible," was not so generous toward human life (Grant, 1916; Kühl, 1994, p. 85; Spiro, 2009, p. ix).[8] "The laws of nature," Grant proclaimed, "require the obliteration of the

[8] The Führer wrote Grant a fan letter to the same effect, which, at least in 1934, Grant kept proudly at his fingertips, on his desk (Kühl, 1994, p. 85).

unfit, and human life is valuable only when it is of use to the community or race" (Grant, quoted in Brechin, 1996, p. 236).

The vehicle for bringing to the people, lost in urban decadence, the “laws of nature”—eugenics, that is—was Osborn’s museum, the AMNH, and the media it contained: “If these people cannot go to the country, then the museum must bring nature to the city” (Osborn, quoted in Haraway, 1984, p. 20). Haraway elegantly connects these dots, explaining that the primary medium for this message was taxidermy, and the master of the medium was Osborn’s right hand man, Carl Akeley, the man who stuffed Jumbo.

The same public education initiatives that communicated the doctrine of Roosevelt and his associates—manhood, patriarchy and eugenics—to New York residents, tourists and schoolchildren in the museum display and outreach programs of the AMNH reached young Lyndon too in the media technology of his place and time: It came filtered through newspaper accounts or from the occasional traveler and was then disseminated via the front porch, the domino games and the barbershop, the gendered sites that young Lyndon frequented. There he received his education and entertainment from his father and the old timers of the community.

Johnson did not allude to the Republican Teddy Roosevelt much during his decades in Washington. However, Roosevelt, whom the young Lyndon always pictured leading the charge on a white horse, was one of his boyhood heroes, and in his youth Johnson drew on this imagery to fashion his own precocious swagger (Muslin & Jobe, 1991, pp. 105-106). We find the genesis of this vision in the reminiscences of his father and visitors on the front porch:

> Some could remember the thrill when Teddy Roosevelt came to San Antonio to organize his Rough Riders for the "War of Eighteen and Ninety-Eight" with Spain. Every afternoon Teddy, astride on his horse, would come galloping down the Alamo Plaza near the hallowed shrine, toss his reins to an orderly, and plow into the Menger Hotel for his big daily ration of snorts at the bar. (Steinberg, 1968, p. 21)

LBJ was a product of the semiotic machinery of Teddy Bear Patriarchy, this imagery of manhood touted and propagated by Teddy Roosevelt. Even in his childhood, LBJ craved absolute power, to be top dog, the alpha over omegas:

> He had to be the head—first in line, first on the communal donkey, first in games. Friends and relatives as well as schoolmates recognized his need for attention. He had to be the leader and he needed to make sure everyone knew it. No matter what the activity—marbles, baseball, card games—Lyndon had to be first. (Muslin & Jobe, 1991, p. 99)

LBJ's aunt, Jessie Hatcher, explains his role among the local children even at the age of five: "Whatever they were doing, Lyndon was the head. He was always the lead horse. Made no difference what come nor what went, he was the head of the ring" (Caro, 1982, p. 70). After relating several stories about young Lyndon's cruel exercise of dominance among his peers, his cousin Ava Johnson explained his behavior by remarking that, "He wanted to be somebody" (Caro, 1982, p. 70). To be somebody was to have real power, beyond playground dominance, and the path to power was through manhood. As we see, even very early on, LBJ was developing his persona in Theodore Roosevelt's image. A lifetime later, Johnson called on Roosevelt's model again overtly to cement his legacy.

As his presidency drew to a close, and as time came for him to return home to Texas, he began calling on Roosevelt's legacy more and more often, so much so that LBJ proclaimed that he would have been content to be remembered as a "conservation president" and that as president he had only "wanted to continue the good work begun by Theodore Roosevelt . . . to leave to future generations 'a glimpse of the world as God really made it, not as it looked when we got through with it.'" (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1971, p. 336).

This change in focus at the end of his presidency may represent an effort to divert attention from his failures in the Vietnam War and the crushing unpopularity that came with them. However, it is also understandable that LBJ, who developed a persona in Teddy Roosevelt's image, might want to shape his legacy as Teddy Roosevelt did also, through parks and cultural institutions that dispatched a certain narrative. This narrative was that perfection had existed in nature, that nature had fallen, that we must conserve some small glimpse of it for our own understanding and for the edification of future generations. He believed this so deeply that he said it over and over again, using the very same words. The passage in his memoirs about continuing Theodore Roosevelt's "good work" quotes the line, "a glimpse of the world as God really made it . . ." directly from a speech he made at the signing of the bill that established Maryland and Virginia's Assateague Island Seashore National Park (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1965). He repeated the words again in a speech urging the passage of the Water Quality Act (Johnson quoted in Federer, 1996, p. 337). As LBJ acknowledged, he was carrying on Teddy Roosevelt's legacy, and in doing so, he was using words that Roosevelt himself might have spoken.[9]

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[9] See, for example, Roosevelt's admonitions upon visiting the Big Trees Redwood Grove: "This is the first glimpse I have ever had of the big trees . . . put a stop to any destruction of or marring of the wonderful and

While in an explicit sense, Roosevelt bookends LBJs life, figuring prominently in his formative years and again at the close of his career, the ideology of manhood Roosevelt embodied and espoused shaped LBJ's thought, action, and speech throughout his life in the most profound way. After his retirement LBJ wrote in his memoirs about the influence of his early years in forming his political philosophy:

> My entire life, from boyhood on, had helped me recognize the work that needed to be done in America. My view of leadership had always been an activist one. I had first run for public office in 1937 under the slogan "He gets things done." I built my record in the House and Senate on the same philosophy. Now, as President . . . I believed I could . . . really get things done. (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1971, p. 71)

Despite LBJ's early admiration of his father, Sam Johnson fell short as role model. As he revealed in his memoirs, LBJ saw himself as a "doer" and Sam Johnson's dreaming and talking never matched Lyndon's drive to accomplish: "Sam wanted to discuss. Lyndon wanted to dominate" (Caro, 1982, p. 76). In Roosevelt's example, he found instead a path to be somebody and do something. He found a map to manhood, and he followed it assiduously.

In the tradition of Teddy Roosevelt, to become the alpha of alphas, one had to "express manhood's highest forms." This was no nebulous aspiration. There was a list. Manhood's highest forms were "anglo-saxon, male, heterosexual, protestant, physically robust, and economically comfortable" (Haraway, 1984, p. 38). LBJ set about

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beautiful gifts you have received from nature, that you ought to hand on as a precious heritage to your children and your children's children" (Roosevelt, 1903, p. 55). Or at the Grand Canyon, "Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it" (Roosevelt, 1904, p. 371).

assimilating these characteristics, expressing them in his persona as if checking off items on a scavenger hunt.

By accident of birth, LBJ was Anglo-Saxon and male. However, it is no accident that LBJ's heterosexuality or hypersexuality was not only well documented but also well advertised. LBJ rarely missed an opportunity to brag about his sexual exploits. Narrating his sex life allowed him to multiply his dominance. The women were once conquered physically, then conquered again as LBJ displayed his mastery over them in story, preserving the experience as a trophy for all to acknowledge, like one of Akeley's taxidermy specimens. Then in broadcasting his dominance over women he was also able to exert his dominance over his competitors for manhood. It "satisfied Johnson's competitive urge to outdo personal and political rivals" (Dallek, 1998, p. 408). Irked when people talked about John F. Kennedy's philandering, as if it were an affront to his own manhood, LBJ's standard response was, "Why, I had more women by accident than he had by design" (Dallek, 1998, p. 408). This constant one-upmanship was a competition that LBJ played with his words and other people's lives. He was a sportsman in Teddy Roosevelt's image, and anyone could become game.

Protestantism was another trait that LBJ expressed with ease but that he could also inflate through narrative. In a March 1960 interview, Johnson, equally at ease speaking of himself in the third person and telling the writer how to do his job, offered the journalist a lead for his story: "you might say," he instructed, "that Lyndon Johnson is a cross between a Baptist preacher and a cowboy" (as quoted in Dugger, 1982, p. 25). In his own narrative, LBJ is never among the congregation but always at the pulpit—be it bully or ecclesial.

In actuality, LBJ had converted as a young teenager from his family's Baptist faith to the Disciples of Christ at a First Christian Church of Johnson City revival and remained a member of that church until his death. Still, he "didn't really feel identified with any particular denomination" and his pastor at the First Christian Church could only describe his relationship to religion as "very practical" (G. R. Davis, 1969, p. 8; Russell, 1999b, p. 197) . He spoke less of God than most Southern politicians of the time but "could talk religion" with facility when called on, as in the 1960 Presidential Campaign when he both brandished his Protestant pedigree and "defended" Kennedy's Catholicism (Dallek, 1991, p. 586; Russell, 1999b, pp. 197-198).

That period in the 1960 campaign was a relative anomaly. More often Johnson placed his faith in the cowboy half of the hybrid he claimed to represent. Here too he crossbred yet another hybrid that expressed the last two characteristics of a Teddy Bear Patriarch: cowboy and rancher came together as one to express both physical prowess and wealth. Early on in LBJ's political career, he looked more like an accountant or the teacher he had been than any cowboy. Perhaps the most famous photograph of him in this time is of his first election victory, in 1937, in the 10th District U.S. Congressional race. He lies in a hospital bed, gaunt and baggy-eyed, covered with congratulatory telegrams after collapsing on the campaign trail from appendicitis and exhaustion two days before the election. It is a far cry from the stock photographs that circulated in his later days, in a pasture or leaning on a fence rail, in boots and cowboy hat, wearing a western suit or jeans.

Johnson cultivated this image of cowboy rancher, man of action and man of means, for political as well as personal reasons. Johnson began looking seriously for

property in the hill country about 1948, soon after he was elected to the Senate and after Mrs. Johnson's broadcasting enterprise began to make them wealthy. In 1951, in yet another ethically questionable LBJ deal, they bought the old Martin Place, "what he would quickly dub the LBJ Ranch" from his Aunt Frank (Conkin, 1986, p. 123; Goodwin, 1976; Russell, 1999b). The ranch was a mile from the house where he was born, and it had belonged to his father's sister, Frank Martin, and her husband, Clarence Martin. However, that connection was not close enough for LBJ, who saw it as his Mount Vernon or Monticello (Conkin, 1986, p. 125; Steinberg, 1968, p. 333). He would fabricate stories about how it was once his grandfather Sam Johnson Sr.'s ranch, lost in hard times, and about how his grandfather built the stone ranch house (Dugger, 1982, p. 358). In reality, although LBJs family had long-standing ties to land in the area, William Meier, a German immigrant, had built the house, and the Martins purchased the property in 1908 (Polden & Robb, 2011, p. 81). Politically, though, these embellished connections must have seemed necessary to him, to emphasize that this was his native land, especially since journalists and fellow politicians alike thought—rightly, early on—that he "knew next to nothing about ranching" and that the whole endeavor seemed staged (Conkin, 1986, p. 124; Dugger, 1982, p. 358).

LBJ is co-opting the American mythic tradition here, consciously hearkening back to the planter elite among the American founding fathers and, at the same time, to the rugged lonesome cowboy. Johnson's use of the LBJ Ranch marked a new variation on this age-old template to power, prefiguring Reagan's Rancho del Cielo, Bush's Crawford Ranch, and the intricately choreographed press junkets that are the staple of modern presidential public relations:

As soon as the LBJ Ranch was in good enough shape to be shown to journalists from Washington and New York, Johnson began to invite them down, because he wanted to use the ranch to create a picture of himself in the public mind—the picture of a self-made man who had pulled himself up by his bootstraps, of a man who, no matter how high he had risen, still had his roots firmly in his native soil. He wanted his image to be that of a westerner, or to be more precise a southwesterner—a Texan. A true Texas image: a rancher with a working, profitable ranch (Caro, 2002, p. 427).

What is interesting about Caro's analysis is that all the traits he says Johnson sought to project at that moment, Johnson more or less already possessed. He was a somewhat self-made man, with no family money but his wife's, and a hit and miss ancestry. Some part of him was always deeply rooted in his native hill country soil. He was very much a "southwesterner"—neither quite western nor southern, like the hill country land he came from. And he was undisputedly Texan. The only thing he decidedly was not at that time was a rancher with a working, profitable ranch.

This irony reveals the intense power of the image of the rancher as well as the primacy of the imagery over actuality. When LBJ purchased the ranch, a local banker told him, "Lyndon, if you want to just walk around in yellow cowboy boots and proclaim yourself a rancher, that's one thing. But if you intend to make money ranching, I hope you know something about cattle" (National Park Service, 2010a). To access the mythic power of the rancher/cowboy/westerner, however, he didn't have to hand over the accounting books. It was enough to don his felt Stetson, put on those boots, and buy a tall horse and prize bull. Even when he was ridiculed, it was often on the grounds that he didn't get the markers right—that his barbecues were catered from Fort Worth or that his

western shirts were monogrammed—not on the ranch's bottom line or on his own competence as a rancher (Leuchtenburg, 2005, p. 238). The qualities LBJ possessed mattered less than that he expressed them properly through these coded images.

Byron Price, curator of the Autry National Center of the American West's *Cowboys & Presidents* exhibit (which traveled to the Texas State History Museum in 2008), posits that for American presidents, the effectiveness of the cowboy image "lies in its ability to transcend the boundaries of race, class, gender, and religion" (2009, p. 20). I would propose that it is not that the image transcends these boundaries. Rather, the historical archetype of rancher and cowboy as manifested by Teddy Roosevelt and utilized by Presidents Johnson, Reagan and George W. Bush, is in fact composed of particular idealizations of white race, natural aristocracy, male gender and Protestant Christian religion. The image exploits rather than transcends these boundaries.

In the narrative of North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park, the four years that Roosevelt spent as a (largely absentee) rancher in a failed cattle operation in the Badlands laid the foundation for every significant triumph in his life:

> Although the ranching venture had spelled financial disaster for Roosevelt, the physically and psychologically transformative experience proved priceless. Roosevelt had sought to test his mettle and his manhood in an exceptionally rough part of the West, and had excelled in every degree possible. He had transformed from a scrawny asthmatic to a burly, barrel-chested, bull-necked man with a dark suntan and tireless riding ability. Not only was he physically more mature and larger in stature, he had grown immensely in the minds of the local Medora people and, later, in the eyes of the nation. (National Park Service, 2010b)

Rather than the message of unity that Price reads in the cowboy presidents, the image functions to convey authority, leadership, individualism—master of an environment, whether that environment is the range or Congress. The imagery is powerful and transferable but imprecise. Marshall Blonsky points out that in time, the qualities associated with the cowboy or the rancher have been transferred to the symbols associated with him, like cowboy boots, that even city dwellers in New York completely removed from life on the range are able to access: "The wearer of cowboy boots handles the world masterfully. He is virile, self-reliant, free to roam over the wide-open spaces that New Yorkers lack, and has or supplies virtually limitless energy" (quoted in Pines, 1982a, p. B6). As we saw with LBJ, in communicating this code, it matters little whether the boots ever see a stirrup, or whether they would ever survive a roundup. It is the idea of the boots that holds currency, not the boots themselves (Pines, 1982b).

The cowboy image was so powerful and versatile that when LBJ put on his hat and boots in the 1950s and 60s, it triggered references to the sunbaked workers on the frontier, the Hollywood glamour of Gunsmoke and James Arness, as well as the squat and presidential Roosevelt, all without any apparent contradiction. And the imagery has now come full circle for LBJ, who regardless of the authenticity of his initial claim to it, has become a part of the cowboy iconography himself. His cowboy hat of choice, the Stetson "Open Road," is now marketed as "the LBJ Hat" and his ranch, the "Western White House," has become the model for presidential hopefuls.

But Johnson's allusions to Roosevelt and the cowboy life were not all callous propaganda. He also saw in them genuine role models. His grandfather, Sam Ealy Johnson Sr. had been a working cowboy, and his grandmother, Eliza Bunton Johnson,

was too. They drove cattle together on the Chisholm Trail from the hill country to the Kansas railhead (Caro, 1982, pp. 18-21). Young Lyndon spent day after day listening to his grandfather's stories of life on the trail and believed that his grandfather "had lived the most exciting life imaginable" (Johnson quoted in Goodwin, 1976, p. 28). As a little boy adventure and politics were all mixed in one. He "pictured Teddy Roosevelt" as trust-buster, Rough Rider, and cowboy all in one, "riding, always moving, his fists clenched, his eyes glaring, speaking out against the interests on behalf of the people" (Johnson quoted in Goodwin, 1976, p. 35). He saw Roosevelt as a doer, a man of action, and aspired to be the same as politician also.

Just as there was some sincerity in Johnson's affinity towards Roosevelt and cowboys, it would be a mistake to read the LBJ State Park's narrative merely as a mercenary power play. Just as megalomania and public service weave indistinguishably together in LBJ the man, so too do humanitarianism and colonialism entwine seamlessly in LBJ the historic site. However, embedded within all his paternalistic desires for the public good, the hallmarks of exclusion and domination remain. The forces of patriarchy remain there, but they take on a different tone. The expression is different. LBJ offered some insight into this shift when he said that in the 1960s, "conservation could no longer be approached in the manner it had been in the time of Teddy Roosevelt" (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1971, p. 336). In the context of this passage, he is apparently talking about the need to make nature accessible to an increasingly urban population disconnected from life on the land: "What could the beauty of our continent mean to them if that beauty was too far away to be enjoyed?" (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1971). Therein lies the rationale for the existence of the LBJ State Park, to bring beauty to the people.

HILL COUNTRY, THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

Introductory films, as interpretive tools, are often used to resolve some dissonance at historic sites. Such is the case at the LBJ State Park. The film from 1966, a half-hour excerpt of the NBC broadcast, *The Hill Country: Lyndon Johnson's Texas*, plays every hour on the hour in the theater of the Visitor Center at the state park. The film is what marries the two sites that neighbor each other: the national park, which narrates LBJ's dominance by offering up his legacy as a cowboy and statesman, and the state park, which represents Mrs. Johnson's vision of the land and which, at its core, teaches submission. Even though it was made years before either park was established, and though it was never intended to be used at any historic site at all, the film manages to answer the question visitors understandably might have upon arriving at the patchwork state park, "What does all this—a living history farm, wildflowers, historic homes from various families and eras—have to do with Lyndon Johnson?"

The film answers this question with blunt elegance. It is blunt in that it asks LBJ the question directly, but his response is shrewdly elegant in the way it mouths Mrs. Johnson's perspective while muzzling Mrs. Johnson herself, upstaging her initiatives and allowing her to speak for only a few moments. In a reversal of what Mrs. Johnson saw as their roles, LBJ instead acts instead as her mouthpiece—after all, it would be unseemly for Mrs. Johnson's point of view to be placed on par with her husband's.

The film achieves this sleight of ventriloquism by elevating the audience to the privileged position of being LBJ and Mrs. Johnson's personal guests:

> When visitors come, the president often takes them on a tour in his car and shows them the ranch and the surrounding countryside. These occasions are relaxed and informal. The President likes to tell his visitors about the land, some of its history, what it was like when he was a boy and what it has meant to him. Recently, we had the rare opportunity to go on such a tour with the President and to record it on film. (Freed & Scherer, 1966)

There is a disarming intimacy to LBJ's performance in this tour and interview. Though the stories are well rehearsed, there is a fresh tone to LBJs canned responses. As noted earlier, LBJ had been taking dignitaries, friends, and most importantly the press on these tours since he first bought the ranch. Many of the anecdotes he relates on camera are the same ones he told visitors, journalists, biographers—any audience he had—time and again. Hundreds of thousands of viewers saw this special when it aired on NBC in primetime on May 9, 1966. It was *TV Guide*'s cover article that week. In an era with a television set in nearly every house but only three network channels, it was, to use the vocabulary of the medium, the television event of the week (Podesta, 2004, p. 4). Hundreds of thousands more have seen the program in the forty years that it has been playing at the state park, and though I have seen it at least half a dozen times myself, each time I feel like LBJ is talking directly to me, uttering these words for the first time, thinking through his answers as if he never anticipated the question.

In one moment, towards the end of the program, Ray Scherer, the interviewer, asks LBJ if he thinks he will be the last president to come up off the land. The question feels like a lob, a setup. It harks back to a point that LBJ had made many times before: "Every man in public life," he would say to visitors, "should own a plot of land," . . . as if

he, Lyndon Baines Johnson, were the first to discover the merits of agrarian life (Johnson quoted in Caro, 2002, p. 428). But this time, his response and his delivery are different enough to suggest that he really is giving it some thought. He won't be the last, he says, because of the unique qualities this environment nurtures: "I think there is something about the land that is helpful, that gives you an understanding of humanity, and gives you an appreciation of other countries and civilizations" (Freed & Scherer, 1966). This explanation justifies the role of the state park while at the same time passing the baton to the national park, which then uses the one-room schoolhouse, LBJ's birthplace, his boyhood home, the ranching operation, and the Texas White House to convey that the land did indeed leave an impression on him. But LBJ did not say what exactly was that understanding he gained. It is in this vagueness that he commits to telling Mrs. Johnson's narrative of the land. He talks around the "something about the land that is helpful" but he never defines it, never verbalizes it. Nor does the National Park communicate exactly what impression all this left on LBJ. Teddy Roosevelt would understand this reticence about the land and its effect. He professed that "There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery" (Roosevelt, quoted in Haraway, 1989a, pp. 27-28). LBJ also adopts the rhetoric of sanctity to imbue hill country land with the same animist mystery. Though Roosevelt is talking about "unspoiled nature" and LBJ is talking about land that is at least partially in agricultural use, they are both talking about places that stand in opposition to the decadence of the city and of modernity.

William Cronon has shown that ideas of nature are themselves cultural inventions that have changed over time, just as the land itself has, and that "Far from being the one

place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation" (1995, p. 69). By talking about that "something" that the land holds, LBJ is acting out the process that Cronon describes. He is revising the ideal of nature, just as he revised the ideal of the cowboy/rancher.

Specifically, what LBJ is doing is adjusting the alchemy of two traditions of describing nature, the twin doctrines of the sublime and the frontier, which "converged to remake wilderness in their own image" (Cronon, 1995, p. 72). Cronon traces the roots of the frontier mythology to Rousseau's ideas of primitivism, "the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modem world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (1995, p. 76). As Frederick Jackson Turner told it, the frontier was the national creation myth of America. He located this American creation in the consumption of the idealized "native":

> The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in a birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasin . . . at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. . Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe . . . The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. (1920, p. 4)

Here in plain language, is the American master narrative that Toni Morrison identified: the American as new, white and male, formed in response to the European and the "Native" and superior to both. In Turner's account, and indeed in the mythology of the frontier, at first, "wilderness masters the colonist," but the colonist is destined to triumph

in the end because of his ability to digest land, indigenous technologies, and indigenous bodies, to metabolize its constituent parts and synthesize a new and superior American product that combines the "strength of the Native" and the "complexity of the European." Just as Morrison remarked, this cannibalistic narrative is silent about the people of color consumed, using instead the image of the land as a surrogate for the people. In the colonist's ultimate mastery of the "wilderness," America and the American are born.

LBJ did identify most with the frontier mentality of conquest, but the dilemma that he, Roosevelt, and others faced was, "What happens when the white man's destiny is manifest?" What happens when wilderness, the "Native," and the interlopers have been conquered from the Atlantic to the Pacific? The invention of manhood is not quite possible without the metabolic process of transforming the land and consuming darker peoples.[10] The strategy of conservation for exploitation does not quite work for the hill country land of the 1960s because the presence of man and the absence of people of color are all too apparent. Indeed, by that time, little land remains in the United States that meets the expectations of wilderness and that can still be exploited in a manner that sustains the frontier experience. Even the word "wilderness" no longer fits anymore.

In order to meet the challenges of this changing landscape and to continue the project of defining manhood and race on nature's terrain, LBJ engages in a project to adjust our cultural constructions of the land. In his own way, LBJ came to see what Cronon called the central paradox of wilderness, that "If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall" (Cronon, 1995, pp. 80-81). Fallen nature cannot function to rehabilitate degenerate

[10] This darkness is in the eye of the beholder. As scholars have noted, darkness—as well as whiteness and blackness—is not simply the reflection of light on bodies but a cultural construct (Frankenberg, 1997; J. O. Horton et al., 2003; Jacobson, 1999).

man or make men out of boys. LBJ must, therefore, untangle this riddle by making the argument that nature may verily exist in the same space as man.

So when LBJ says to Ray Scherer, “there is something in the land,” he is saying this land, recognizably domesticated hill country land, contains the power to transform in the same way that the “unspoiled” wilderness transformed Roosevelt. He implies that the sublime resides not only in the monumental cathedrals of nature, but also in this comparatively humble and unmistakably cultivated topography. This is not necessarily a large leap, given both the American mythology of the cowboy/rancher and the ancient pastoral traditions of establishing patrician identity through cultivation of the land. It is also LBJ’s own practiced narrative. Still, LBJ proceeds gingerly into this territory. By not naming the “something” of this narrative of hill country land, he does more than repeat his standard story, he hints at ancient taboos against naming mystical powers. Through this omission, he refers to the sublime without articulating it—a proposition that, as Roosevelt told us, is futile anyway. In not naming the sublime, LBJ conveys that it is one of the mysteries of life. If it is not divine, it is at least nearly so.

LBJ’s—and Roosevelt’s—vocabulary of manhood, empire and commerce would no longer do to describe nature. It was the language of frontier, and the frontier had disappeared. So we see LBJ in this 1960s documentary tweaking the vocabulary of the pastoral and sublime, mixing them in novel proportions to continue to extract power and legitimacy from the land. In doing so, he drifts more and more to the romantic, to the expression of the sublime that Cronon speaks of and into Mrs. Johnson’s linguistic territory. LBJ in fact voices Mrs. Johnson’s narrative. However, LBJ must speak first because, as Jan Russell pointed out, Mrs. Johnson’s power comes directly from him. It

waxes and wanes in proportion to her proximity to him. So even Mrs. Johnson's most cherished ideals must appear to spring from him, especially in a national broadcast sure to be closely examined. Though LBJ may be voicing her perspective, she must appear to be voicing his. She must be perceived as taking her lead from him, and as we have already seen, in this milieu perceptions trump actuality.

When Mrs. Johnson does speak, her observations on nature are deeply romantic. Her rhetoric of beauty is tailor-made for expressions of the sublime. She sees beauty in nature, wherever it may be: in the humble "rain lilies" and "delicate ferns," in the lumbering nutrias, in the lizards (Freed & Scherer, 1966). Mrs. Johnson's ideals are spiritual in their intensity, in their conviction, and in their origins.

And unlike Madison Grant or Henry Fairfield Osborn who would shield nature from human hands, Mrs. Johnson welcomes the human presence on the land. It elevates, rather than adulterates the landscape. Mrs. Johnson possesses a certain humanist sensibility that allows her to perceive the human hand in nature as an ascent rather than a fall. Mrs. Johnson waxes lyrical in the documentary as film footage matching the scene she describes plays on the screen: "I love particularly to come upon a stretch of pasture where there is one of these old stone fences that wander over hill and dale, and a herd of deer approaches it and suddenly they leap in the air and over they go. It is as pretty a ballet as you will ever see" (Freed & Scherer, 1966). The pasture and the old stone fence are every bit as important as the deer in this tableau. With just the right human touch, neither modern nor folksy but decidedly rustic, the landscape for Mrs. Johnson becomes art, that is to say, high art, a ballet, European in origin and haute in pedigree.

Our film, *Hill Country*, took its lead from this 1960s documentary. We took our central question from LBJ and our aesthetic from Mrs. Johnson. We took at face value that there was, as LBJ said, "something in the land," particularly this hill country land that made its people different in some way, special. So we asked ourselves, what is this mystical unnamed thing, this connection between the people and the land in the Texas hill country? How does living on and off of this land shape a person? Discomfortingly grandiose in retrospect, we aimed to reveal not just the unknown but the perhaps unknowable. To know the unknowable, to peer into the void, an analytical approach would not do. So like LBJ, we followed Mrs. Johnson's lead. We went on a quest for beauty, to make art from nature. We would come to understand the land by looking deep into the souls of its people. We would learn the people in our encounter with the land.

Our question and method gave the film a focus that fit neatly within the site's traditional interpretive mission. We accepted that there was something unique and desirable about the land of the Texas hill country. This squared with the existing narrative of the site, and we chose not to challenge this notion. Our approach fit the safe parameters of the site. Though we did not say it in so many words, it was clear from even our earliest footage that we focused on the idyllic and sublime, on beauty. Following the unspoken mandate of the site, the film was set to look pretty, act nice, and let sleeping dogs lie.

The significant difference between our approach and the existing interpretation at the site would be that we would try to answer our question in a way that included voices that had previously been silenced at the park—voices that the park in fact had silenced. Just as we had set out in *Truth I Ever Told* to bring African American voices to

Washington-on-the-Brazos, we made clear that in addition to the German-American and Anglo-American perspectives that dominated the site's interpretation, we would work to bring in the perspectives of women, American Indians, African Americans and Mexican Americans. As much as we had a mission, that was it.

THE PEOPLE OF *HILL COUNTRY*

We began our work on the film by recording oral history interviews with people who grew up working the land in Kendall, Gillespie, and Blanco County. We interviewed them in their homes, and then we would usually follow them while they worked, recording all along. At Washington-on-the-Brazos, it took months before we were able to convince anyone to sit for an oral history interview, and over a year before people spoke freely and agreed easily to interviews. At the LBJ State Park, the situation was quite the opposite. We had more volunteers for interviews than we had time. Donnie Schuch had suggested that we start by interviewing a few people who worked at the park and work our way outwards from there. Many of the staff members were born and raised in the hill country and still farmed or ranched in addition to working their jobs at the park. They were deeply invested in the site and the documentary project and were willing participants and advocates. Site staff took us into their homes, sat for interviews, introduced us to their families, and actively helped us make contacts with other community members.

We focused on a handful of families or individuals whose stories taken together we thought would form some meaningful impression of the place. Brian Rawlins and I were both deeply influenced by Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology and Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, once-popular specimens of early 20th century

American literature that portrayed small town life through distilled studies of its residents. For the film, we culled eight stories from interviews with 47 people and about 111 hours of footage. This focus on individual vignettes mirrored the narrative technique of these early 20th century literary works.

Robin Giles opens the film. He sees himself as one of the last independent ranchmen. "We're just dinosaurs," Robin said. "We're left over." "How will we keep this ranch running?" and "Who will take over when I'm gone?" were the questions that kept Robin up at night.

Next are the Weinheimers. Ricky Weinheimer had worked at the park for 30 years. He introduced us to his parents. His father, Calvin Weinheimer began his interview by telling us, "It all comes out of the ground. All your dollars come out of the ground. That's where it originates. Everybody can have a job, but you can't have food unless you have it out of the ground."

Perry Hohenberger is the focus of the third segment. Though he has a college-degree and is a landowner, Perry has opted more often to do backbreaking—literally, he had just recently had back surgery—wage work for others than to live off what either his land or education might bring him. At the time, he was cobbling together a living ranching his land, managing others' ranches and shearing sheep for extra income.

The fourth segment is about Lawrence Barrientes, who had recently retired from the park. He feels a deep connection to the land where he grew up, in Rocky Creek at the border of Blanco and Gillespie County. He also has a profound understanding of the significance of narrative, of symbol, and particularly of the trope of the land in hill

country narratives. And he reinterpreted this trope to insert his family into a narrative from which they had long been excluded.

We had seen a bearded man pulling a little girl in a Radio Flyer wagon on the side of Highway 71 in Stonewall. When we inquired about this unexpected sight, we were introduced to Ester De La Cruz, her granddaughter Susan De La Cruz, and her sister Pauline Rivera. Ester's son, Guadalupe De La Cruz, and her great-granddaughter Natasha De La Cruz were the ones we had seen along the highway. This extended family was to become the focus of the fifth segment. Only later did we learn that Ester and Pauline were also Lawrence Barrientes' sisters.

The Phillips family is next. Paige Schildt, a friend helping us with research for the film found in the Gillespie County archives a manuscript written by veterinarian Paul Phillips Jr. that recounted his family's 150-year history in the hill country. We had heard stories in our interviews about "Doc Phillips," a self-taught veterinarian of black and German descent, who ended his house calls saying, in German and tongue-in-cheek, "Us Germans got to stick together." Paul Phillips Jr. was his son. Paul Jr. had recently died, but we interviewed his wife Thelma Phillips and their four children.

Donnie Schuch's parents, Marvin and Vera Schuch are the focus of the seventh segment. Vera noted with a heavy heart and sharp wit how times had changed. And she worried about Marvin out in the fields. Marvin had just turned 90 and promised his family that next year he would quit farming.

Virginia Grona's segment closes the film. She too worked at the park for more than twenty years while raising goats on her property in Doss, in northwestern Gillespie County. Strong, silent and solitary, she upended the iconology of the cowboy in the film.

Her image became the cover art for the film's DVD, and because of the way it drew on the cowboy mystique but challenged its gendered expectations, her story became an emblem for how we were trying to rethink representations of people and the land.

The Handbook of Texas tells us that although the hill country was home and hunting ground to Apache and Comanche groups for hundreds of years, they "left little imprint" on the land (Jordan, 2011). However, pushing out these American Indian peoples and the buffalo they hunted, and fencing the land and overgrazing it, changed the entire landscape from grasslands and forests of dense biomass to hardscrabble, erosion-prone cedar brakes.

We did not have any American Indian families in our documentary. For one, when living on the land becomes difficult, those on the margins are the first to be displaced from the land. We saw this with Lawrence Barrientes, who moved to Leander, a suburb of Austin, because of health concerns and economic pressures and also with the Phillips family, who had moved to Fort Worth thirty years earlier both for work and to escape being the only black family in town.

For another, I found the question of "authenticating" indigenous heritage overwhelmingly troubling—so much so that I froze, foreshadowing my similar response to a difficult interview later on in the project.[11] Early on, I met the organizer of the Fredericksburg Inter-Tribal Powwow, a local Anglo man who said he had been adopted by a tribe in Oklahoma. I had no reason to disbelieve him, but I found the claim itself, coupled with his unclear economic relationship to the powwow, disconcerting, so disconcerting that I allowed my resolve to find American Indian voices to fade.

[11] See my discussion later in this chapter of my interview with A.C. City.

My own complacency in allowing American Indian voices to remain silent (Why would I so easily drop a story that seemed so essential early on?) like the curious ubiquity of jokes like "Us Germans got to stick together," and the zealous eradication of non-native plant life at the park, should have prompted some critical vigilance. Instead I found myself with my analytical guard down.

In retrospect, I feel I had been seduced by the opportunity the work provided. Looking back, it is clear that I accepted our mandate from the park with an enthusiasm that blunted close examination of its terms. The situation felt so right that I wanted the project to work out. It was comforting for a change to have the full support of the site manager. Donnie was happy with the cuts-in-progress we were showing him and was willing to help whenever we asked. And since the state park was funding the project itself rather than using department funds, no one at TPWD headquarters seemed to care much about the project, but no one hindered its progress or interfered either. It was a deliberate process gathering, culling, and fitting together these various stories, but we had no hard deadline. The schedule and the amount of work took a toll on the production team. We went well into the red in time spent and travel money, but our working relationship with the participants in the project and with the site could not have been better. And we were very happy with the results, artistically that is.

Again, however, as with my experience interviewing Venieta Marshall at Washington-on-the-Brazos, ethically, something felt not quite right.

ART IMITATES LIFE

In the first narrative from *Hill Country* that I will discuss in this chapter, Lawrence Barrientes sees his parents' burial in the Stonewall Cemetery as a sign that his family had arrived, had "made it." Similarly, when Donnie accepted our terms and priorities for the documentary, we considered that a sign that we had arrived. And although it would only be a matter of weeks before the exchange in Donnie's office would replay in the field, on tape with Lawrence at the Stonewall Cemetery, it has taken seven years to understand the resonance between the two experiences.

This lack of awareness was our trouble. We thought that we were setting the terms for the project when in fact we were only ever operating within the parameters, deceptively strict boundaries, that the site set for us. What the LBJ State Park asked us to do was to tell the story of the people and the land. Because they were aware of our approach, they knew that for us, this effort would include "adding voices." This was our modus operandi, and that of the tradition within which we worked (McLemore, 2004). However, what we interpreted as a revolution, the site and TPWD thought of as a minor concession, a concession that in the end served to maintain hegemony. The subtext of their request was this: you may add voices to the narrative, as long as the narrative remains the same. And although we arrived at this agreement by amiable consensus, it was enforced through swift and violent consequences, by the proverbial snarls and bites.

So I became complicit in reproducing the master narrative at the site. The new product added previously silenced voices, but did not fundamentally disturb the mythic quality of the land itself. In fact, the focus was this mythic quality that hill country land possessed, and our job was to add to this myth. The ethical questions I faced came not

only as I accepted the terms of this agreement, but also, even more pointedly, as I came across counterhegemonic narratives. When these narratives contradicted the site's perspective, I silenced them, obscured them, and represented them obliquely because they disrupted the comfort of the master narrative that I had, both willingly and unwittingly, been commissioned to reproduce.

LAWRENCE BARRIENTES

Lawrence Barrientes' family has worked the hill country land for four generations. When I interviewed Lawrence for the documentary, he talked about how he still sees his father, José Barrientes, everywhere he looks across the landscape, even now, years after José has passed away. People of color have long been silenced in the narrative of hill country land, but looking through particular lenses they become visible, even embodied, in the land. And so it was when Lawrence pointed to a seemingly empty field along the highway. Through Lawrence's eyes we came to see it as full rather than vacant and as the terrestrial representation of his family's labor. Lawrence's story is the story of the colonized. However, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith tells us, and as we will see with Lawrence, the colonized of the world have at once "struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view" (1998, p. 33).

Lawrence, like his father, José, was a storyteller. Some of José stories were sagas, like the tale of him crossing the border with Lawrence's grandfather, Elojio, following the railroad line so visibly starved and parched that an engineer would throw them sandwiches from a passing train. Other stories, like the one of the field, tallied little more

than a line but cut straight to the heart. In a single sentence, José hinted at hundreds of years of history hidden in the layers of the hill country landscape.

"That's where we poured our souls out," he used to tell Lawrence, in Spanish, when they passed this particular field in Gillespie County. In unraveling the meaning of this sentence, Lawrence explained the ravages that humans wreaked on the landscape and that the landscape inflicted on humans. The Texas hill country is known for its sweeping vistas, limestone ledges, resilient junipers that Texans call cedar, prickly pears and rattlesnakes. It has become a tourist destination and a retirement Mecca. Visitors marvel at its rugged beauty. My colleagues and I did too. This natural beauty of the land, so artfully constructed by culture, is part of what drew us to the project. It evokes the legendary American West and the hardscrabble farmers, ranchers, and herders who have eked out a living on this land for generations.

So when Lawrence recalled his father, José, pointing to a flat, grassy, seemingly empty field, saying, "That's where we poured our souls out," to the untrained eye, and indeed to me, it meant nothing. I saw only emptiness in the field. But Lawrence saw beauty. He saw his father's soul there, in the blades of grass. As Cronon points out, these divergent readings of beauty elucidate the difference between a cursory relationship with the land and a deeper understanding of it: "Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal. In contrast, elite urban tourists and wealthy sportsmen projected their leisure-time frontier fantasies onto the American landscape and so created wilderness in their own image" (1995, p. 79). Cronon believes that the farmer sees something elemental that the tourist, through unfamiliarity, simply fabricates. Perhaps this was the something in the land that LBJ alluded to.

José's field had been covered with cedar scrub before he and his fellow workers arrived. They dug out by hand all those sinewy trees whose roots were embedded in the limestone and what little dirt remained. They had made the land productive once again, allowed those blades of grass to grow anew. Only through Lawrence's narrative could I, a tourist in this place, glimpse the beauty of this worked land. Similarly, I learned that the cedar and stone landscape that I had admired, the landscape prized by hill country tourists, was the product of neglect, of overgrazing and erosion. Far from unspoiled land, to the knowledgeable eyes it was once-productive land made infertile by human greed and sloth.

Two hundred years earlier, before the land was settled and fenced there was hardly a cedar tree or any tree in sight. The hill country, also known as the Edwards Plateau, was all grassland and springs. It was part of the buffalo migratory path and constituted the southern end of the Penateka Comanche range. By the mid-1800s, Anglo colonists were settling the area en masse, the buffalo were largely slaughtered and the Penateka were relocated to a reservation. When settlers fenced the grasslands to raise livestock, they put more animals to pasture than the land could support. The livestock overgraze the fields and kill the grasses. Falling rain then eroded the bare topsoil and allowed the hardy cedar and prickly pear, which nothing would eat, to come up. Since the grasses no longer filtered water to the underwater aquifers, the rainwater caused further erosion, revealing the limestone. The runoff evaporated even more quickly and springs began to dry up. And so we ended up with the bleakly beautiful land that most people now associate with the hill country. So when Lawrence Barrientes looked at the field, he saw his father, and when José Barrientes looked at the field he cleared, he saw full

springs and abundant food for livestock. They both saw prosperity. José's sweat brought water and abundant life back to that land. So he did not pour out his soul for nothing. But neither would he ever reap the benefits of his backbreaking labor. That went to his employers.

The connections that Lawrence made in his narrative echoed those of the Johnsons and of the site. He made the connection between the land and himself, and his family. He imbued the land with a certain spiritual power, although in his story, it was through the labor of his father and others that the land took on this spiritual dimension. The workers poured their souls out into the land, and the land, therefore, had soul. This part of the narrative is not spoken so literally in the narratives of LBJ and the German immigrants, largely because the narrative takes both their labor and their connection to the land for granted. They own the land. And the lore of the geography says that the land is difficult to work. The lore tells us that those rugged men have eked out what they can from their hardscrabble farms and ranches.

Lawrence's family did not start out as landowners in any sense. Now they own at least the lots on which their homes sit. Their more enduring connection to the land is through their work on others' property. As Lawrence's story reveals, they may lay claim to the land, even without title or deed because along with their sweat, they have deposited their soul. In doing so, they have not beautified the land, not in the abstract, but in the most American of ways, by making it productive and profitable once again.

While Lawrence tells the story of the field as a heroic tale, there are cautionary elements. That they were not the beneficiaries of their investment is left unspoken but not unnoticed. In the story of the field, both Lawrence and his father realize that they did not

get their rightful share in that transaction. His father and grandfather left something in that field that they will never retrieve. In fact, they left the most vital part of themselves, their soul. And as a result, the owners of that land and their descendants prosper. José walked away with only the days' wages, while Lawrence and his siblings were left empty-handed.

There is, however, something worse than being left empty-handed, as Lawrence told us. That is being left holding another's waste. At this point Lawrence drew a sharp distinction between himself and his father. His next story underscored what he saw as the difference between them as individuals and perhaps also between the two generations. "Dad always thought," Lawrence began, "that no matter how little they gave you, be satisfied with it." This was Lawrence's opening line to the tale of his father sending him and his brothers to a rancher's house to help with the butchering of a hog. For their trouble, the family doing the butchering would share a little of the meat with them. This time they returned home with only "the feet and the tail of that animal and the snoot [sic]." Did they give you some meat, his father asked. "No," Lawrence answered, holding up the bag containing the hog's extremities. "That's what they gave us" (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

His father's response—the punch line that brought Lawrence's story full-circle—was, "Be satisfied that they even gave you that." But as in many autobiographical narratives, it is not the plot but the subplot that contains the substantive message (Goodley, 2004, pp. 130-132). The stories contain symbolic value and communicate deep convictions. Frederick Douglass' story of his time under the slavemaster Edward Covey, for example, is not about the beatings from Covey nor his final beat-down of Covey, all

of which Douglass describes in assiduous detail (Douglass, 1986, pp. 101-118). Instead, Douglass uses the tale to reveal the prior domination and subsequent liberation of his spirit that both underlie and trump the facts of the matter.

Similarly, Lawrence's story and the punch line are vehicles for articulating his own philosophy and how he came to it. The experience at the hog-butchering was certainly influential, but its primary function as a narrative is to present his father's attitudes and place them as a counterpoint to Lawrence's point of view, which Lawrence articulates as he concludes the story:

> Well, I never was happy with that. You work hard and you deserve to make what you've got coming, what you deserve. Don't settle for mediocre. Put some values on yourself. That's the way that my wife Irma taught me too, 'Speak up!' And for the longest, I was real bashful about that. I was satisfied with whatever came my way, but then after she taught me different, you know, 'Say something! Defend yourself!' And I started doing it, and I felt so much better. That's probably why you try to provide for your kids and move them along a little better. So that they don't have to do that. (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005)

This coda introduces both Lawrence's partner in the journey (Irma) and his motivation for making the change (his children). It is a story of resistance, but this resistance is not a struggle against the inegalitarian social order or even a negation of it but a request for passage out of the working class. Paul Willis famously asked why working class kids allow themselves to get working class jobs (1977, p. 1). Here Lawrence asks a similar question of himself: "Why should I resign myself to being a working class kid?" His wife Irma has a ready answer for him: he should not. And Lawrence's explanation also reveals

why he should not: he must "provide for [his] kids and move them along a little better." Lawrence has decided to trade in the posture of his father and grandfather and indeed of his younger self, what Willis called "caged resentment" (José's sense of loss experienced each time he passed the cleared field, for example, or Lawrence's disgust at being given the offal that he refused to recognize as meat) to petition for redress, for fair compensation. He resolves to do what working class kids so often "stop short" of doing, engaging in "outright confrontation" (S. Jones, 2006, pp. 67-68; Willis, 1977, pp. 12-13). Whether Lawrence follows through on that resolution, however, is less clear.

MARK YOUR SPOT

The next time we met, Lawrence took us on a small pilgrimage to his site of triumph: the Stonewall Cemetery. Lawrence and Irma's resistance to "being satisfied" constitutes a demand to move outside the group that Gramsci would call the dominated, those who lie outside the hegemonic bloc, and into the realm of the subaltern, those whose consent the dominant group must obtain and manage. Lawrence's story at the cemetery narrates a successful petition to "alter the shape of the hegemonic bloc itself, as it is forced to respond to the aspirations of its subalterns," in this case, namely, Lawrence and his family (S. Jones, 2006, p. 68). They identify a space circumscribed and patrolled by the dominant group and demand entry. That they gain entry constitutes a victory, but it may only be a victory of sorts because as we shall see, it comes at a cost.

This was the second time we had met Lawrence, and he had grown his winter beard since we last saw him. He looked different enough for us to worry how we would edit this new footage with the footage we recorded a couple of months earlier. But there

he stood in front of his parents' grave, oblivious to our petty production concerns, and told us why he had brought us there:

> This is where my dad always wanted to be buried, in the Stonewall Cemetery. So that's where he got buried. But the biggest majority of the Mehi—Mexican people, Hispanics, are all buried in the old Mexican Cemetery. And I can remember them saying, telling us, that they wouldn't allow him to be buried here, that he'd have to be buried over there. But when Dad died, we—Buddy Weinheimer and him were friends—and we talked to him about a plot up here and he said, "Sure. Mark your spot" (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

Lawrence was talking here about more even than the sacred and private act of interring his parents. He was also placing a monument to his family heritage in community space. In a sea of German names and a scattering of English ones, his family inserted a relative fleck of marble that carries two Mexican American names, those of Lawrence's mother and father: José and Remuelda Barrientes.

The contested terrain of history is not just a metaphor. Many have noted how groups measure and mark their political power on public space (Richard R. Flores, 2002; Foote, 2003; Green, 2000; Levinson, 1998; McMichael, 2007; Nora, 1989; Norkunas, 1993, 2002; Portelli, 2003; Trouillot, 1995). The cemetery spoke to the distribution of power in the hill country, to white dominance. In Stonewall, there is no town hall or even a government office, not a single traffic light and only a couple of gas stations that double also as cafés. Aside from the two LBJ Parks, national and state, the most prized civic space is at the cemetery.

Martha Norkunas describes this hegemonic negotiation of power on public space in downtown Lowell, Massachusetts through the placement of monuments at Lowell City Hall. In the early 1990s, the Cambodian immigrant community, relative newcomers to Lowell, proposed a monument to their cultural heritage near city hall. Where Franco-Americans, Irish, Polish, Greeks and Italians had previously each marked their arrival as a political force through cultural monuments on the grounds of city hall, the Cambodians' petition was denied by the city council, a denial that Norkunas reads as a referendum on the Cambodian immigrants' power—or lack thereof—within the larger Lowell community (2002).

In testing their welcome on the grounds of city hall, the Cambodian community of Lowell received confirmation that, in Gramsci's terms, they remained among the dominated, as opposed to a subaltern group that would have to be addressed and accommodated by the dominant group (S. Jones, 2006). In testing the cemetery's waters, the Barrienteses took the same risk, and as Lawrence explained, they very nearly experienced a similar rejection: The anonymous "they" of the power structure said they "wouldn't allow him to be buried here [in the Stonewall Cemetery], that he'd have to be buried over there," in the Mexican cemetery, off the highway, outside town. The initial verdict is clear: Mexicans "have to be buried over there." But Lawrence makes an appeal, and this appeal takes the discussion out of the realm of the cultural dynamics and into the realm of individual exceptionalism. In doing so, Lawrence distances himself from the collective of Mexican Americans in Gillespie County, in favor of marking himself and his family as individuals, and exceptional individuals at that. He also identifies as an ally an individual from the power structure capable of brokering an exception. The Stonewall

Cemetery may not be Paradise and Buddy Weinheimer is not St. Peter, but he is a gatekeeper of sorts. And here, like St. Peter, he gives a name and accountability to mystical and impenetrable judgment. Knowledge of and access to this accountability is what gives Lawrence and his family the opportunity even to make their petition.

THE HILL

Lawrence was open about his desire to make a break from the largely poor and disenfranchised Mexican American population of Gillespie County. And just before we pulled into the cemetery, he took us to what some people—again the nameless "they" that Lawrence intermittently invoked—call "the Hill." Lawrence identifies himself as being from Rocky Creek, a tiny community between Stonewall and Johnson City, near the town of Hye, which itself consists only of a post office. That's where his small plot of land was, the land where his father built their small rock house, the land that Lawrence inherited from his father, and that he had now passed on to his son. But he also felt kinship with those from the Hill, this small Mexican American neighborhood which gave the impression of poverty but not squalor, even as he strived to leave behind what it represented to him:

> This is what they refer to as the "the Hill"—[here] you find good ones and you find bad ones. I tried to get away from this and make a better life for my family. And even though you sacrifice and work hard, in the end, you get to the point where you're at and you thank the Good Lord that he gave you guidance enough and the strength to get away from however your people, my family, been raised up in poverty" (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

Lawrence told us all this somberly, as we crept along the road that divided what Lawrence had identified as the most exclusive property in Stonewall, the cemetery, from the least desirable, "the Hill." There was a remarkable symmetry across the two sides of the road. The little plots with headstones that spoke of belonging sat surprisingly comfortably across from the larger plots with the trailer homes that marked their residents' exclusion. As Lawrence rolled down the window so that we—and the camera—could get a better look, our voyeurism was unmistakable, and I began to feel deeply uncomfortable with our role in drawing this distinction between the putative chosen ones like Lawrence, whom the "Good Lord" had guided out of poverty, and those that, in Lawrence's lexicon, "He had abandoned on the Hill."

Lawrence's victory, carving out a space for his family in the Stonewall Cemetery, and more generally, Lawrence's drive to "better himself," comes with a price. That price is solidarity with the group. Lawrence never said that Mexican Americans have every right to be buried in the Stonewall Cemetery, and he knew that to make such a demand would end not only in rejection, as the Cambodian immigrants' petition did in Lowell, but it would also result in relegating his family to the dominated masses. As much as Lawrence narrates this as a triumph, in a larger sense, we can read this also as a loss, in which "Buddy Weinheimer and them" strengthen their hegemonic control by fragmenting the opposition, appeasing a small minority while continuing to exclude, both metaphorically and literally, the vast majority of the Mexican population.

Lawrence had brought us to these spots, the cemetery and the Hill, and told us these stories to show us the full span of his journey. He hinted at the central tenet of his philosophy in the hog-butchering story, when he cited his children as the reason he

fought to “better himself.” Lawrence appeared to place more stock in the incremental rewards of assimilation, than he did in the other, earlier resolution he voiced, buoyed by his wife’s encouragement, to confront race and class marginalization. He repeated the philosophy of incremental rewards even more distinctly on this trip to the Stonewall cemetery: “That’s the way I was taught by my father,” he told us, “and that’s the way that I taught my kids—each generation get a little bit better” (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

UNTIL GOD CARRIES ME HOME

Trouillot has pointed out that the very act of creating a narrative—any narrative—entails silencing some voices even as one amplifies others. But rather than focusing on this inevitability, Trouillot posits that we may learn from narratives by tracking the role of power in producing or eliminating silences (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 22-30). As we confronted Lawrence’s story it felt like the net effect of including his perspective did not remedy the long-imposed silence of Mexican Americans in the history of the hill country. Instead I began to see that Lawrence and I were together voicing the dominant narrative through the body of the marginalized. It was an exercise in ventriloquism. I had thought that just by virtue of including a Mexican American voice, we were bringing a more diverse perspective to the site. However, the more I worked with the footage that we shot of Lawrence, the more I came to think of his narrative as privileging individual achievement over progress of the collective, and the more I began to question whether his personal triumphs came at the expense of others’ losses.

What’s more, I came to see how my willingness to let Lawrence “mark his spot” in the film paralleled “Buddy Weinheimer and them’s” willingness to allow him to mark

his spot in the cemetery. I was more than just an accomplice in this hegemonic project. I felt like the prime mover, like "Tony Cherian and them."

I faced a dilemma. I had embarked on this process in part to give voice to Lawrence and "Mexican Americans in the hill country," the marginalized group I wanted him to represent. Now after doing the fieldwork, recording interviews and getting to know Lawrence, I felt that using his narrative as an exemplar or as a stand-in for the larger narrative of Mexican Americans was problematic to say the least. On the other hand, I did feel that his point of view was interesting, insightful, and important. I also knew that in filmic terms, he was a compelling character.

So now I asked myself, "Who was I to silence, correct, or reframe his narrative?" My resistance to tempering—or as I then felt, tampering with—Lawrence's story also stemmed from a wholehearted faith in the oral history interview process. I believed that interviewing and recording people, especially those underrepresented in the archival record, was indisputably good. I also made some questionable but key extrapolations based on my training as an interviewer. I had learned not to contradict in the narrator in the course of an interview (Portelli, 1990a; Thompson, 2000). And I had learned that oral history offered an opportunity for sharing authority, for finding a middle ground between professional, scholarly authority and experiential or grassroots knowledge through the co-creation of a narrative (Frisch, 1990). Though these understandings, which soon became deeply held convictions, hold great potential and have generally served me well, they led me to make two dubious leaps. The first was that if one does not challenge the perspectives of a narrator in an interview, one should also avoid doing so in the interpretation of the interview. The second was that if sharing authority equally was

good, then sharing even more authority was even better. In my flawed logic, I failed to take into account that the balance in power was precisely what made shared authority such a promising prospect and that, as dictators and monarchs know, abstaining from wielding one's authority is sometimes the most stark expression of one's power.

These were the most visible reasons I hesitated to use my editorial voice to confront Lawrence's narrative directly. However, there were certainly others. Although at the time I was not conscious of this as a factor in my decision, I am certain that I understood on some level, that to contradict Lawrence would be to contradict the narrative of the park and to bite the hand that fed me. In telling the story of his experiences growing up on this land and of how these experiences enabled him to transcend all expectations of him and surpass the achievements of his peers, Lawrence reproduced faithfully LBJ's very American story of individual exceptionalism. So to silence, negate or footnote his story would be to silence, negate or footnote the very narrative of the park. Furthermore, I like Lawrence very much personally—a common occurrence among oral historians that nevertheless often makes for unsettling research relationships (Yow, 1997). I hesitated to use his openness with us to portray him even in a mildly negative light. Last but not least, Lawrence was simply a first-rate storyteller.

Lawrence's narrative is so dramatically compelling in part because he understands the semiotics of hill country culture so intimately. He manipulates these symbols in his stories in a manner that is raw, immediate and emotionally powerful. His narrative is about rejecting many of the emblems he has inherited and demanding others that are his due. The grave, the cleared field, the offal, and the Hill are all signifiers in his narrative. The grave and the field are symbolic of the dominant culture's birthright. In the case of

the gravesite, Lawrence wants and gets the entry he seeks. As for the field, in which the stakes are economic as well as symbolic, he and his family can only look on in longing.

The offal is literally what the dominant culture discards. And the Hill represents who and what they metaphorically discard. In this place where Lawrence brought us resided the evidence, in the same terms that LBJ uses the ranch to define his masculinity, that Lawrence is a man in full. He may not possess all the accouterments of the title, but by his definition, which is progress ("Each generation get a little better") he has done his duty and then some. Lefebvre tells us that, "the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space," and Lawrence understands the meaning of Stonewall's space every bit as much as LBJ did (1991, p. 38). He has both deciphered its meaning and, by securing his parents' gravesite, appropriated it in a small but symbolically significant way. In Lawrence's terms, it is proof positive that he has arrived.

However, there were alternative ways of understanding and manipulating these symbols that would not align so neatly with the master narrative of the park or with the values of the dominant culture. Members of subcultures perform their resistance to the hegemony of the dominant culture by embracing symbols of their marginalization (Hebdige, 1993, pp. 1-4). However, Lawrence chooses accommodation over resistance, and so he does not challenge the dominant culture's definition of symbols. Still, especially after the experience of driving through "the Hill" pointing our camera out the window, "hunting with the camera" as Haraway puts it, it felt imperative to see if we could find another way of looking at this space and a different narrative of the Mexican American experience in the hill country (1984, p. 38). Not only did we want to seek out

some sort of symbolic resistance, if it existed, but we wanted to try to represent "the Hill" in a way that did not objectify its residents or their circumstance.

When we went back to Stonewall, we asked at the Lindig Store, one of the two café/gas stations, if we might be able to talk to anyone who lived in the neighborhood called "the Hill." The people at the store introduced us to a woman named Susan De La Cruz, and Susan told us that we could come to her home to talk to her family. The house—actually a couple of closely situated mobile homes on the same property—turned out to be one that we recognized, one of the first down the road that Lawrence had taken us to. That was no great surprise, but what we learned afterwards was. Susan lived there with her uncle Guadalupe, her daughter Natasha and her grandmother Ester. A few minutes into our visit, we realized that Susan's grandmother Ester was Lawrence's sister. Susan was Lawrence's great-niece. Her uncle was Lawrence's nephew. Although they clearly were in touch and seemed to speak to each other relatively often, Ester spoke about her brother as if he were removed, distant. For us, with the revelation of this new knowledge, Lawrence's speech about the Hill took on a more literal tone, as well as a certain hardness that we did not perceive before.

Although we did not talk to the De La Cruzes directly about the subject matter of our interviews with Lawrence, Ester certainly had a different perspective on her land than did Lawrence. She rejected Lawrence's and the dominant culture's assignation of value to the space by affirming that to her, her land is meaningful not because of its productivity or monetary value but because of personal connections:

> I want to be here because of this . . . Guadalupe and Susie. There could be a place where I could move to or marry in or something, but I'd rather be here. I'd rather be here until God calls me home, the way daddy would want me to be.

And again:

> And me, sometimes I want to move far away but this land, grandpa gave it to us. You know I could find me little apartments for old people in Fredericksburg and all that. But I don't want to go because I don't want to leave him [Ester's son, Guadalupe De La Cruz] alone (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

Ester, by saying that she would "rather be here until God calls her home," both echoes and subverts the dominant narrative of hill country land. Her connection to the land and even her resignation to staying echoes the words of the farmers and ranchers of the hill country, the representatives of the power structure. But for her, it is not that there is something special about this land. She subverts narrative of the idyllic landscape of the hill country by positing instead that there is something irreplaceable about its people. Rather than the land making the people unique, as LBJ's narrative suggests, from Ester's point of view, it is the people that make the land unique.

Ester here is manipulating symbols as deftly as her brother did. She affirms bell hooks' claim that the margins—in this case in the mobile homes on cemetery hill at the edge of Stonewall—are a "central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse" (2010, p. 239). Ester's narrative "provides us an oppositional world view," one that is unknown to the patriarch and ignored by most of us participating in the economy of patriarchy (bell hooks, 1990, p. 341).

By contrast, Lawrence, in his assessment of "the Hill," calls on the dominant culture's discursive tradition of stereotyping Mexican Americans, so much so that he does not need to say the words to convey the sentiment (Limón, 1973, pp. 257-258, 261). Though he focuses on his concern for his progeny and his struggle to better himself, with the weight of historical stereotyping behind him, by defining himself in contrast to them, Lawrence suggests that the Mexican American residents of the hill country don't try to better themselves and don't care as much about their children.

But even without having heard what Lawrence told us, Ester anticipates and responds to his critique in her narrative. In his seminal study of the corrido tradition, folklorist Amèrico Paredes described how Texans of Mexican descent challenged the dominant narrative by transposing the roles of murderer and agent of justice in their retelling of the story of Gregorio Cortez—who himself earned his living at times clearing land for German Texans—shooting Sherriff Morris (1958, pp. 39-40).[12] Throughout her story, Ester questions Lawrence's and dominant culture's ideology by giving us alternative perspectives on the seemingly common-sense assessments that they both make. While Lawrence "and them" look on the Hill as discarded land, Ester imbues her small parcel of the Hill with honor and esteem by privileging its connection to the generations that have come before—Grandpa and Daddy—and the generations after—Guadalupe, Susie, and Natasha. This reclamation of the symbols of oppression and memorializing family, friends and elements of cultural significance, is a political act, what folklorist Suzanne Seriff describes as creating a "sacred sense of place" (1989, p. 183). In analyzing the cultural production of sculptor José Varela, Seriff notes that Varela

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[12] See pp. 36 & 56 for parallels between Gregorio Cortez's work history and those of the Barrientes family.

creates a “sacred sense of place” by taking a symbol of his community’s oppression, the clay from the brick factory in the factory town of D’Hanis, and making grave markers, monuments, and statuary that honor his family and friends and display culturally-significant images and motifs (Seriff, 1989, pp. 179-199). Similarly, Ester reclaims the symbol of her oppression, segregated land, by imbuing it with her own value and esteem, privileging the presence of her descendants and invoking the wishes of her dead husband.

In asserting the unrecognized significance of this devalued land, Ester also calls on another precedent of folk tradition and Biblical authority. Just as Gregorio Cortez alone saw that the little sorrel mare was “worth a dozen horses” or in the way a low rider sees the potential for a “crafted revival” of an stodgy second-hand vehicle or even in the way a farm laborer sees the beauty in a cleared field that the urban elite do not, Ester reminds us that the oppressed both recognize and embody the value contained in stones that the builders refuse (Bright, 1995, p. 95; Paredes, 1958, pp. 42, 118).

We see this dual identity of arbiter and bearer of concealed value in the way the family talks about its youngest member, Natasha, whom they call “the miracle baby.” In Susan and Ester’s narratives of Natasha’s life, Natasha experienced a traumatic birth but repeatedly defied the expectations of experts and outsiders:

> And then the baby, they call her the miracle baby. She wasn't going to make it. We never thought that she was going to walk. This Easter she started walking (Ester De La Cruz on Natasha De La Cruz in Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

And again:

> She had a hard start in life. I had ruptured when she was born. I didn't know I was pregnant with her. We took her to the emergency and they had to take her by

> helicopter to San Antonio and she basically was born dead and they did CPR and put a breathing tube down her. And she came back to us.
>
> They thought she would never be able to walk or talk. They told me she was going to have a lot of problems, but she's been able to do everything so far. She's a little behind, but she's doing it (Susan De La Cruz on Natasha De La Cruz in Cherian & Rawlins, 2005).

Especially in Susan's description, the external and detached "they" of power and authority looms large, and Natasha is a living reminder of the entire family's resistance and resilience. She is a miracle baby who started walking on Easter, a child who was "born dead" and then "came back to us." Natasha embodies the improbable reality of their own survival and also represents the high stakes at play when challenging denigrating assessments of their circumstances and conditions.

Without a doubt, this challenge to the dominant culture's assignation of value was an important and relevant perspective to include in the documentary. Even so, it would be a mistake to forget that we only met the De La Cruzes because we sought out a response to Lawrence's perspective. And although the De La Cruzes narrative performed an important function in the overall story of the film, it still also served as a direct counterpoint to Lawrence. Whereas for Lawrence, "trying to get a little better" is the foremost objective, for Ester, roots are more important than progress.

In moments of candid self-assessment, I realize that I sought out and tracked down Ester's point of view at least in part because I needed someone to voice my own perspective. I wanted to temper Lawrence's judgment of "the Hill" and his narrative of assimilation, but my sense of politeness, of camaraderie and collaboration made me

hesitant to do so openly. So instead when I met Ester and "found" this "other" narrative, I inserted it and obliquely framed it as a dialogue between Lawrence and Ester. This dialogue was real: they did differ in their points of view. But it was also manufactured: I did place their narratives, carefully edited, alongside each other.

Editing was an effort to hit just the right note, one that would allow a casual viewer the leeway to take in the De La Cruzes' story as separate and unconnected to Lawrence's but that would allow an attentive audience to discern the dialogue between the narratives. A heavy-handed comparison and contrast may have come off as clumsy or lacking in narrative flow. My editing choices were also exercises in tact. I wanted to suggest the connections but stop short of pointing them out. For example, Ester told the story of a car accident that put her in a coma and killed her eldest son Louie at the age of nineteen. Although this was a life-changing event for Ester, in some of the comments from our screenings of early cuts, viewers asked why we included this seeming digression. Co-editor Brian Rawlins and I also went back and forth on whether to include the story. I believed then and still do believe that this story reveals as much about Ester as Lawrence's story of his father's grave says about him. Since she had neither the health and mobility nor the financial means to carry us down to Louie's grave in the "Mexican Cemetery" the way Lawrence took us to the Stonewall Cemetery, Ester pointed us there by piquing our already primed curiosity. She gave us vivid descriptions of the accident, of Louie's role in their lives, of the trauma she suffered and even of his grave, but the stories did not have the impact on screen that they had on us in the field. They did, however, allow us to hit that perfect combination of clarity and obscurity in making the

analogy between Ester and Lawrence. So much so that we included the stories, in brief, in the final cut of the documentary, despite their apparently tenuous relevance.

If the narrative relevance might have seemed tenuous, the visual impact was striking. Including the story offered the opportunity to insert visuals of Louie's grave and of the Mexican Cemetery. Even thirty years later, Louie's grave was alive with colors and regalia whereas Lawrence's parents' grave looked officious in comparison. Seriff notes in her discussion of sculptor José Varela and cultural expression on camposantos, mexicano burial grounds, that Anglo and Mexican Texans "decorated and maintained their graves in dramatically distinctive ways," with Texans of Mexican descent opting for handmade styles and individualized embellishment over uniform convention (Jordan, 1982 cited in Seriff, 1989, p. 186; Seriff, 1989, pp. 186-189). Louie De La Cruz's grave in particular displays nearly all the hallmarks of Texas-Mexican graves of its time: a curbed concrete outline, cast concrete sculpture (a large, brightly painted Madonna and a small rabbit), decorative ceramic planters, and an abundance of silk and plastic flowers. Its humble grandeur speaks to the pride and devotion of the family, not only to the one interred but to its culture also. Like the intricate memorials created by José Varela, this tableau operates as a marker "not only of an aesthetic preference but of an ethnic presence; of pride of race as well as pride of place" (Seriff, 1989, p. 191). On screen and in the cemetery, Louie's grave says, for all those who care to read the image, that the De La Cruzes embrace their racial and cultural heritage in a manner that Lawrence would prefer—from his point of view—to transcend.

In retrospect, however, I find my editing choices troubling. Though my choice may have been more intuitive than deliberate, I decided to obscure the relationship

between Lawrence's and Ester's stories, just as Lawrence withheld the information that he was looking at his sister's house as he talked of the plight of the people on the Hill. And I continued that haziness by making only passing reference to fact that Lawrence and the De La Cruzes are related, relegating that information to a lower-thirds title card, underneath the narrators' names. This willful obfuscation is a common strategy in film and video editing. Walter Murch articulates it as a design principle, "doing the most with the least" but he also ascribes to a certain quality of filmic representation that led John Huston to say that film is "more like thought than anything else . . . the closest to thought process of any art" (Murch, 2001, pp. 15-16, 60, 63). Since it is like thought, by suggesting rather than representing connections, editing for the movie in the audience's head rather than the movie on the screen, the editor pulls the audience into a more active role. The choice to leave things out requires the audience to engage in the process of constructing the meaning of the film, resulting in a livelier and more satisfying viewing experience.

However, in my situation at the LBJ State Park, these choices also silenced and obscured the narrative in order to give me the shelter of plausible deniability: I did not contradict Lawrence. Ester did. I did not critique the dominant narrative. The story just plays out that way. This too is a technique among producers of documentaries and narratives at many cultural institutions, to adhere to the expectations of the dominant narrative but to insert yet downplay aspects of the narrative that may be recognized by some segments of the audience as potentially countering the hegemonic perspective (Richard, 2004; Sorensen, 2009, pp. 75-82). Just as I did not want to offend Lawrence, I

also wanted to play nice with the park. After all, they did give me the opportunity to make this film.

The greatest irony of all was that I did not see the parallels between Lawrence's decisions and my own. I felt that in talking about the influence he possessed, like the access to Buddy Weinheimer that got him the gravesite, Lawrence was calling all the more attention to his lack of power. I would propose now that I had been doing the same thing all along, using my tenuous connections to the LBJ State Park to gain some modicum of entry—inserting some token diversity into the narrative of the park without altering the substance of what that narrative said. Still it felt good to talk about transforming the interpretation at the site. It felt good to be shooting with "real" equipment, just like Lawrence wanted "real" meat. It made me feel like a "real" filmmaker. And it felt good to have people so willing to give their time to us, both on and off camera. We were making a film. That was the first thing we told prospective interviewees when we met them: "We're with the LBJ State Park, and we're making a film . . . " Strictly speaking, neither part of this statement was true. We weren't "with the State Park." We were working for them. We weren't making a film. We were making a video. We were recording on videotape, but we chose to call it a film in the hopes that it might elevate our status and that of the project.

MAKE MYSELF ORIGINAL

As oral historians, we sometimes allow narrators to speak for themselves because in fact they speak for us, a circumstance suggested by Michael Frisch's observation of "how closely issues of authorship and interpretive authority are linked" (Frisch, 1990, p.

xxi). Although more emphasis has been placed on the scholarly authority giving weight to the words of "everyday" people in the process of interpretation and contextualization, the opposite can also hold true. The seemingly "organic" narratives of lay narrators can give an immediacy and unpretentious credibility to scholarly interpretations. I allowed Lawrence to speak, gave him voice, because he reproduced the master narrative at the site so faithfully. I introduced his sisters, Ester and Pauline, and their families because of a deep-seated desire to challenge this master narrative. Yet I also had an equally earnest desire to remain in the good graces of the site. So I muffled their voices by obscuring their relationship to Lawrence and by framing their narrative in a way that might let its critique of the master narrative pass undetected. But there was a point in my work for the LBJ State Park that my role in silencing the voices I had pledged to amplify went from blurry and obscure—as with the De La Cruzes—to acute and undeniable.

It happened in September 2003, about ten miles east of Blanco at Peyton Colony, one of the first freedmen's communities established in the United States. Peyton Colony has a reputation these days among ghost chasers as a site of paranormal activity, but for me, it is this moment of silencing in September 2003 that haunts me, even eight years later.

While working on *Hill Country*, Brian Rawlins and I recorded an oral history interview with Alvie City, an African American man just shy of his 90th birthday. Mr. City was born and raised in the Peyton Colony. He was kind to us, gracious and generous with his time. We conducted a very long interview, nearly three hours long, but what I remembered was that from almost the very first moment, Mr. City matter-of-factly spouted what struck me in the moment as hateful anti-Black rhetoric. I recalled that he

said, among other things, that slavery was a boon to African Americans, that it brought them Western culture, and he did not see anything wrong with returning to the system.

In the moment, I did not see Mr. City's perspective as a valuable counter-narrative, or sub-narrative of the effects of racism. Though it seems apparent now, at the time I could not read Mr. City's narrative as an attempt to access cultural capital in a hierarchical racialized society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 71-106). Nor could I process it as a public transcript that enacted false consciousness, a ritual of dominance within this racialized structure (Scott, 1990, pp. 75-76). Instead I shut down, paralyzed by my shock. I never returned to that interview, never watched it, certainly never transcribed it. I never contacted Mr. City again. And yet in time I began to see it as perhaps one of the most important interviews I had conducted.

Mr. City was a spry eight-nine years old when I met him. But once upon a time, Mr. City was also a very ambitious young man. He pursued education with great zeal. There was no option available locally for an African American to go to high school. So he left Peyton Colony and moved to Austin while barely in his teens to continue his studies at Anderson High. He did well enough at Anderson to move on to Prairie View State College, where he studied history and where he again did well, graduating in four years, working multiple jobs to support himself along the way.

From what I could tell, Mr. City had been deeply affected not just by his education in general, but specifically by his history education. I remember him showing me a book that he had carried with him for about 70 years. It was a book of African American history from the 1930s. It may have been regarded as cutting-edge scholarship at the time Mr. City was in college, but now one could see that it was part of what W.E.B.

Du Bois even then called, in his 1935 critique of contemporary American history texts, "one of the most stupendous efforts the world ever saw to discredit human beings, an effort involving universities, history, science, social life, and religion" (1986 [1933], p. 1046). Mr. City had not just read this, he had been taught it in class, and he had internalized texts like this and others into his very being.

In shunning Mr. City and silencing his narrative, I fell prey to some of the same pitfalls that Verne Harris describes in his critique of archival practice in post-Apartheid South African oral history projects. In many ways, both implicit and explicit, our work for the LBJ State Park, like the other oral history documentary projects that I embarked on, were exercises in activism that responded to Zinn's call to address silences in the archival record (2001). The oral history interviews, the foundation of our project, were attempts to amend the archival record of hill country life by creating new primary evidence. Making the documentary video was just as much a venture in archival outreach, giving the public a point of access to these records, as it was in education for the historic site. Harris points out that archival outreach often tends to "the neatly packaged information product rather than the rich contextualisation of text" (2002, p. 83). Michael Frisch notes that in documentary film in particular, there is a bias toward a "simple, modular strategy" in the use of oral history voices, and *Hill Country* is no exception to this rule (1990). In the editing process, simplicity, elegance, clarity, drama, coherence, and representativeness, all weighed heavily in our discussions on what to include and what to leave out. In the end, our strategy was both simple and modular: we used eight narratives of individuals and families that we thought taken together told a credible story of life on hill country land. Settling on these eight stories left little room for

competing narratives. And in as much as the editing process is an analog to archival appraisal, we were, as Harris warns, in many ways constructing the very "reality" that we purported only to represent. Because I was creating a public product and because I feared propagating racist perspectives, I further marginalized Mr. City's voice. It can be argued, perhaps quite credibly, that Mr. City's voice belongs in the margins. But the reality of Mr. City's presence on hill country land undermines the "reality" of the representation that we constructed. And our exclusion of his narrative and other outlier narratives perhaps "denies our audience the very space in which democracy thrives" (V. Harris, 2002, p. 84).

I had framed my work in terms of a moral imperative, of addressing silences, of reviving forgotten stories. Yet it was a moral decision to silence Mr. City too. In that situation, at that time, I reacted in shock. But in the intervening years, at times I have felt that my action was justified, even just. Derrida proposed that the opposite of "forgetting" may not be "remembering," but "justice." Mine was a project to remember certain voices whose pasts had been forgotten, excluded from the dominant narrative on the basis of race, class and gender. But in my eagerness to mete out justice, I encountered my own transgression. Facing Mr. City, I found myself "dumbfounded with dread before the virtual injustice one risks committing in the name of justice itself" (Derrida, 1995, p. 50). Mr. City espoused unfiltered the narrative of those "other" in my figuration: the writers of the dominant narrative, those who had silenced their "others" for so long. Tempting though it may be to take an eye for an eye, Derrida asks us to consider an end to this cycle of violence and to contemplate instead the cycle of otherness. If it is just to remember, he advises, then "it is no less just to remember the others, the other others and

the others in oneself . . . Tout autre est tout autre": Every other is every other, which is altogether other (Derrida, 1995, p. 50).

Harris suggests that one path to the contemplation of the other and the understanding that this contemplation may reveal is through contextualization of the archival record of this other, "contextualisation to reveal the multiple layers of construction in text," and to reveal our own "archival contextualisation as yet another layer." In the spirit of understanding, I decided to return to Mr. City's narrative to see what this contextualization would look like, because for Harris as well as Derrida, the process holds great hope—the possibility of some reconciliation or even of profound revelation: "Such an awareness would transform archival endeavor into an exercise in releasing meanings, tending mystery, opening the archive. It would foster passion for the different, the wholly other (Jacques Derrida's tout autre), the impossible" (V. Harris, 2002, p. 84).

When I silenced Mr. City, I silenced him so thoroughly that the consequence wasn't just excluding him from the film. I was trying expel him from my consciousness. I would not even return to the tape to see what he had to say. He sat on a shelf for eight years. But now in contextualizing Mr. City's narrative, I have come upon the irony of my work. In making the film, I had held the authority to receive or reject Mr. City's narrative. And I acted on that authority, regardless of whether my authority was legitimate or not. What I thought I was doing was acting on behalf of the marginalized but as it turned out, I was, yet again, reinforcing the master narrative in profound and troubling ways.

Here is the beginning of Mr. City's speech that shook me so deeply on the day of the interview, September 9, 2003:

> Tony Cherian: Mr. City, how did you come to know about your family and how they got here, and other folks from Peyton Colony, how they got here?
>
> Alvie City: Well, just through—it started with our parents telling us a little and when you go to school and try to learn, you get a lot of it. Not particularly Peyton Colony, but when I went to school, after I left high school, I specialized in race relations. I just studied. I wanted to know about slavery. I wanted to know all of these things. And when you have a desire to know and to learn, all that you learn I guess you just keep it in your head . . . The United States, from my historical knowledge in school, didn't start slavery for their needs particularly. They took it from the standpoint of how Africa was living in those tribal conditions, and they were trying to destroy one another without a cause. So the white man, when they went over there and saw that, the ones in the South, they said, "That's a waste of money, of human beings. Just because of power they're killing up one another. Some of those weak ones," he said, "we could use those on our farms. We could use the help. So we'll give these Africans a string of beads and have them round up these men and we'll come and pick them up. We could use them over in America," you see. That's the foundation of the whole thing. And today Africa hasn't moved very little farther than about six or seven hundred years ago. Right now today, that's why Africa is in the shape it's in now.
>
> TC: You really think the slave owners were trying to do good, Mr. City?

> AC: Well, from all indication I've seen. And now you've got to understand what you're reading and you've got to direct your knowledge as, what they said, was it for evil or whether it was for good. And whenever you, historically, when you see these men that said things like that, they actually helped us rather than hurt us by buying us out of that condition and giving us a chance at life with comfort, not having to fight and run. (City, Cherian, & Rawlins, 2003)

Transcribed, on paper, Mr. City appears to enact a speech of shame as described by Du Bois in *On Being Ashamed of Ourselves*, a phenomenon whose most prominent public expressions have surfaced in literary texts, such as in Ralph Ellison's account of the loathing the college community felt for Jim Trueblood in his *Invisible Man*, or in Charles Fuller's description of the hatred the Sergeant Waters felt for Private Memphis in *A Soldier's Play*: This was the intense manifestation of antipathy and self-loathing that the privileged and educated of a race felt when confronted by representatives of the "untrained and uncultured" of their own (Du Bois, 1986 [1933], p. 1020; Ellison, 1952; Fuller, 1982). Yet in watching the video footage of the interview, I could discern no negative emotion in Mr. City's demeanor at all. His delivery was relaxed, even jovial, and he spoke as if he was pointing out the most uncontroversial matters. He spoke with the authority of one with incontrovertible fact on his side. Most of all, he spoke with the comfort of a man reciting an agreed-upon narrative. This was Mr. City conserving the social order, attributing to blackness—and to himself—only what the established order attributes, enacting the role of a dominated agent (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471). I could not see it at the time, but Mr. City stripped the veneer of beauty to repeat the master narrative in its most unforgiving, malicious, and unvarnished form: white supremacy, paternalism,

patriarchy all were on display. And here was Mr. City, enacting one of the few roles available to him, subservient to the narratives of patriarchy and racial domination, like one of LBJ's debased assistants, like Mrs. Johnson enacting her well-rehearsed obliviousness, like an eager puppy dog.

For the remainder of the interview, I was, to use a metaphor apropos to the hill country, a deer in headlights. I was in almost silent shock, not wanting to offend this nice old man, but unsure of how to extract myself from this situation. I could hear myself drifting between being unresponsive and overly polite. Given my catatonia, perhaps it should come as no surprise that he may have had a better grasp on the facts of the matter than me. At the time I thought that in silencing Mr. City, I was silencing racist perspectives. I might have thought that I was muting the master narrative, had I been thinking in those terms. I see now that, first, to put Mr. City's narrative on display would not have reinforced the master narrative at the site. In fact it would have done the opposite. I would have forced audiences to confront the master narrative directly, to acknowledge its existence and reconcile its presence with their own narratives of history, and with injustices past and present.

Second, I see now that my interview with Mr. City's is not primarily about his racist diatribe. It is about the transactional nature of patriarchy. Reviewing the footage from the interview, I can see that Mr. City was much more uneasy before he embarked on his racist speeches. In fact, I see a dynamic between us that I missed at the time. Mr. City was repeatedly trying to read us, Brian and me, and ascertain what we wanted from him, an effort hampered by the professionalized demeanor we assumed in our fieldwork and the open-ended questions I was asking him. The first time we see Mr. City on camera, we

had just walked up to his home, and he must have said something off-camera that I thought was worth recording, because I ask him to repeat himself once the camera is rolling:

> TC: Say that again, Mr. City.
>
> AC: How we lie about nothing. I used to test guys. They say, "Chesterfield is my brand. I don't like nothing but Chesterfield." But I found out whenever they wanted a cigarette, they'd smoke any brand. And they all tasted the same. So we fool ourselves with a lot of, I don't know, fauverism[?] or whatever that word means.
>
> TC: And how did you say you figured this out?
>
> AC: Oh just by looking at him and looking at you, and how to figure how my brain works. Just observation, more or less. That's the best way, I think, to communicate, is through observation. You know what I mean?
>
> TC: I do. (City, et al., 2003)

I can't recall what Mr. City said off-camera, but it was probably not exactly what he said on camera. What is clear, however, is that the dialogue is about his attempt to assess us. A few moments later, when he sits down and we are about to begin the interview, he returns with another observation on observation, which, as he has just told us is "the best way . . . to communicate."

> Alvie City: I was thinking about it, and I said to myself, I'm going to make myself as informal as possible. Give you an idea of, you know, whatever you're trying to do, it'd be original. And I look at you. You got on blue jeans, and he got on blue jeans [Gesturing to Brian]. This is the worst pair of blue jeans I had. But I wanted

> to put these on to make myself original. You know what I mean. So I didn't fall out of your category." (City, et al., 2003)

Here Mr. City is both observing and communicating. He communicates his understanding that he is participating in a performance. So naturally, he has paid attention to his costume. He also senses that we don't want him to be noticeably putting on this performance, hence his concern about "making himself original." Though we would like to think that we have come to talk to Mr. City with no overt agenda, Mr. City knows, perhaps better than us, that we have "a category" in which we are trying to fit him. And he is anxious not to fall outside these parameters. He knows that we have come to him for an "authentic performance" but he is still trying to discern what that performance should be. By the end of the first tape and the first 60 minutes of the interview, Mr. City had become slowly more frustrated with our reluctance to communicate—and his inability to divine—what sort of performance we wanted from him. But once the new tape is in, he seems ready to steel himself again for the process. This conversation, that carried over from the break in the interview as Brian put a new tape into the camera, gives further insight into Mr. City's concerns:

> AC: If you can't do it all today, it's a pleasure for me to just mess with you. Because I want my reward, when you get through. Because I want you two to be the ones to show it. Whatever you do, whatever the good things that we have done, what we are trying to do is help humanity. I would like for us to put it where man can see what has been done by who in Blanco County, around the Peyton Colony's domain . . . What we want to do is be able to present your knowledge, you two or you three knowledge. How you can put the travel of man,

when he's traveling from one point to the other. That's the thing. We don't want to do it for ourselves. We want to let man know what kind of knowledge we have in trying to promote righteousness. I'll use that word. Of course, that's what it's all about. We're trying to do right and the ones of us that have the intelligence of what's good and what's bad, as far as man is concerned, then we should identify ourselves. And then if you two are still going—I mean you're going to the University of Texas, aren't you?

TC: I am, sir.

AC: Oh, he's not? Well, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. But you, [Points to me] that's a great help to you. And then whatever he's in, [Points to Brian] it's going to be a great help to him. If we can call anybody, regardless of how many or how little, if we can advance knowledge to any human being, then that's our job in this world.

TC: Well, sir, we believe that you probably have a lot more to tell the world than we do.

AC: Well then you have to—I've been trying to study, "Now how?—They've got to give me—I don't what they are after." That's the way I said to myself. I said, "But then they have to ask me to get my mind all stirred up. But now I think you've got it stirred up, and I think that we can do so much better than what we are doing now, you see. If we are going to make a show where it's worthwhile. If you're going to take my time—Now it's not worth nothing no how, but I don't want you to take it. But then if it'll help you, if it'll help whoever comes in contact—We want to show the things that's good in this world. (City, et al., 2003)

Mr. City is very concerned about "making a show where it's worthwhile," about conducting the interview well and later, about the importance of getting good video footage, something more dynamic than "us sitting around talking." He understands that there is a possibility of a reward, for everyone involved, including the potential audience for our work. The opening lines of this exchange is one of the few instances over the course of the recorded interview in which Mr. City ever mentions explicitly wanting any reward, but as he says later in a sort of correction, "We don't want to do it for ourselves. We want to let man know what kind of knowledge we have in trying to promote righteousness." Mr. City is not necessarily talking about remuneration but the nebulous reward for doing good work, promoting righteousness and knowledge, recognition. He wants to be heard, and he wants us to be heard. He also understands that recognition carries very real currency, especially in the academic world.

There is a peculiarly endearing generosity of spirit in Mr. City. He clearly wants this endeavor to benefit Brian and me. At another moment, he makes sure to include the University as a whole, and particularly Tracy Swann, the first student he met who worked with Dr. Norkunas' Project in Interpreting the Texas Past. And quite naturally, Mr. City wants to get his share too, if we're going to take his time. Even if it seems like "it's not worth nothing no how," he doesn't want us to take it. He says that it's a pleasure for him to "just mess with" us, because he enjoys the company, but eventually, this time or the next, he wants us to get to business. And he tells us outright that part of getting to business, spreading worthwhile knowledge, is that we have to tell him what we're after. We have to get his mind "all stirred up," and then we can do much better. Up to this point in the interview, I had been taking a fairly straightforward life history approach, asking

him about his life growing up on the farm, his education and his working life. Mr. City was patient with me in this process, but he clearly did not think that was the path to making "a show where it's worthwhile."

In a telling moment, later in the interview, Mr. City is showing us around his house as he looks for some things, among them the history book from which he got much of his knowledge about slavery and Africa. He has been having trouble finding things, he tells us, because a kindly woman came to visit him and took it upon herself to clean while she was there. In a turn perhaps familiar to some of us, he could no longer find anything in the house. He was grateful for her help, he said, but she should have been more respectful of his concerns. "You got to learn to be helpful," he said, "but not in your way, but in a way that's compliant to the person that you're trying to help." This was Mr. City's philosophy for our interview also. He was searching for a way to help that complied with our needs, but we weren't making our needs known to him. It was also an admonition to us. He was happy to help us, but he wanted his due also, when we got through.

Given Mr. City's pragmatic philosophy of cooperation, his eagerness to help, and his insistence that everyone involved in this project to spread righteousness and knowledge "get theirs," it should not be a surprise that his narrative veered quickly into the master narrative. Repeating the master narrative assures some modicum of reward for everyone involved. As Mr. City knew, it gives one the opportunity to be heard. At the very least, it ensures that one will hang on long enough to tell another tale. This is the fundamental transaction of cultural hegemony: the exchange of freedom for security. The real trouble for Mr. City was that he recited the master narrative of Teddy Roosevelt, or

even of 1939, when Mr. City had graduated from college and a time when eugenics and ideas of sociocultural evolution were deeply entrenched in United States academia. But as we have seen, the vocabulary of the master narrative had shifted. By LBJ's time, one could no longer speak openly about a patriarchal agenda in the way Roosevelt and his cohort did, thus the necessity of Mrs. Johnson's vocabulary of beauty at the state park.

There was no way to present Mr. City's narrative or, as Verne Harris would have it, to contextualize it, in any way without calling attention to the master narrative of the site. Where Lawrence's tone was pitch perfect in reproducing the master narrative, Mr. City's was off-key. I came to him under the premise that I wanted to listen to his perspective and help empower his voice. I had thought that when his voice did not jibe with my worldview, I summarily silenced it. I had thought, as I mentioned earlier, it was a moral decision on my part to silence Mr. City. However, in retrospect, I see that it was a decision every bit as pragmatic as Mr. City's to recite his version of the master narrative.

To present Mr. City's narrative in any form would upset the status quo of the park, and the park would not allow me to do any such thing. I had to silence him if I was going to be heard. So I decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

CONCLUSION: SILENCE

This chapter has been an account of the response to hegemonic pressures in the making of the oral history documentary *Hill Country*. I believed our earnest effort to add voices previously unheard at the LBJ State Park—voices from marginalized groups, stories that had been excluded from the park as well as the larger narrative of hill country land—was in some small way an act of resistance to hegemonic pressures. Some of these people, these voices in the margins, produced a genuinely counter-hegemonic narrative. I

revisited Ester De La Cruz's stories here, but there were others also, like Paula Phillips and Virginia Grona, whose counter-hegemonic narratives I have not described here. Alongside this limited resistance, however, came acquiescence also. And sometimes it is hard to detect where my resistance ended and acquiescence commenced.

I wanted to edit Ester's narrative, as well as Paula's and Virginia's, so that some of their counter-hegemonic elements would pass in veiled form, perhaps subtly undetected except to those looking for particular signals, like a letter sent west from behind the iron curtain, images in Pinochet's Chile, or an old Hollywood film complying with the letter of the Hays Code (Patton, 1995; Sorensen, 2009). Did I craft these messages in defiance or out of self-preservation? If I did not know the answer, or did not want to admit it to myself, my experience with A.C. City made it abundantly apparent. I silenced Mr. City because I was wary of the sleeping dog, of "the fearsome arsenal" of the park, to be sure but also of a more enduring reprisal from the culture of patriarchy and racialized dominance. Each time I excluded a story that challenged the master narrative, in toto as with Mr. City's or more surgically as with Ester's, what was to be a new, inclusive, 21st century narrative for the LBJ State Park began to look more and more like the tiresome, resilient narrative of hegemonic dominance. Faced with the same choice that Mrs. Johnson posed to Jan Russell—repeat the narrative of patriarchy or be silenced—I myself capitulated and parroted the master narrative. I let the sleeping dog lie.

And what did I think was the reward for my compromise? Mr. City's idyllic vision of everyone getting what they want: that is the reward for letting the sleeping dog lie. I imagined Donnie and the park, the people in the documentary, and, of course, me

and my partner Brian, all getting what we wanted. Donnie and the park would get a new film to play at the Visitor Center that recounted their version of life on hill country land. The people in the documentary would receive the validation that came from others listening to their stories and appreciating their life's journey, as well as of the magical aura that comes from having one's face projected four feet high on a cinema screen. Brian and I would feel the glow of appreciation for our work and would perhaps get funding to continue making films. How could I resist all this for the mere price of subtle suppression of counter-hegemonic narratives? But then, of course, I must ask, can there be anything subtle about suppression? Is even this price not deceptively steep?

And what exactly did I fear from challenging the master narrative? What makes this arsenal so fearsome? It is the threat of being silenced, of irrelevance, of being vanished, of being made to disappear. This fear makes the struggle for cultural capital almost as fierce as the struggle for survival. Perhaps this fear led AC City to spout racist rhetoric. I thought I could see this fear in his eyes when he asked me, almost pleaded to know, what I wanted. And what is there to fear from me? Although it is sound policy to beware of strangers bearing cameras, Mr. City understood patriarchy and racialized dominance well enough to know a deeper truth, that even those with the most tangential relationships to power can silence you, rub you into obscurity. Such is the diffuse power of puppy dog patriarchy.

Two years after we began the project, intoxicated with the act of completion, that finished feeling, we headed to the initial screening of the completed film with park staff and the families featured in the documentary, those who could make the screening. When a child is born we don't scrutinize its birthmarks. That it exists is miracle enough.

Though these characteristics may register in some small way initially, only in time do they become part of our consciousness. In the darkened theater of the Visitor Center, we were mindful of the usual fears, that in some way our work did not measure up or that the film came off as indulgent or ran too long, wasted the audience’s time. But those were merely the baseline anxieties of production. They had less to do with this particular context than with the nature of the work and the workers. There was, however, amid my pride in our creation, already the niggling, burrowing sensation of being ethically compromised. Over time, this feeling would lodge itself deep within me and grow. I did not admit it to myself yet, but I knew that I had silenced and suppressed, severed and cauterized these people’s stories to produce a narrative acceptable to the park.

The world itself changes over the course of projects of even modest scale. So what one describes has usually changed significantly by the time one describes it. The circumstances of a project’s creation change also, and so it was at the LBJ State Park. Donnie Schuch took the state’s retirement incentives and went back to the family farm. A new manager took over at the park. I remember trying to gauge her response in the light from the projector and studying her face after the film, but I could not read her.

We never heard back from the park after this small, private screening. When we inquired about what was next, the new manager informed us that the park was declining to use the film. We received no explanation, no requests for changes, and no promise of any future reconsideration. Hill Country never screened publicly at the site that it was made for. And so I found myself silenced.

Later, when we pressed for an explanation, we received from the manager a cryptic two-word response: the language. “What about the language?” She could not say. “Is there anything we could change?” No.

As far as we could tell, there were only two instances in the film in which anyone used strong language. In one scene, Robin Giles, a rancher, says:

> Hell, I'd die in a minute for this place. I mean if it was a decision that we have to sell a few acres or die . . . say I didn't have any money and I needed a heart operation, but it was going to jeopardize the land, for debt or something . . . Hell, I'd die before I'd sell the land. It's more important to me that the land stays in the family than I live. (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005)

In another scene, Paula Phillips, part German, part African American, describes what it was like in the 1960s to become, as a first-grader, the first student of color in an all-white Fredericksburg school:

> I remember everything that Mom has just told you, actually. It's kind of come rushing back in a flood, and I remember when I was just about ready to go to first grade, at five years old. I remember Mom asking me, "Well what will you do if the children call you names?" Now, I'm thinking in my five-year-old mind, I'm thinking, "Okay, what could that be? Is she saying that maybe they'll call me sweetie or sugar pie?” But actually, she meant, “They're going to call you a nigger. They're going to call you black, when black was not popular then. They're going to do things to you." That's what she meant, only I didn't know. But had she not asked the question, I wouldn't have figured it out. And I did figure it out, in first grade. (Cherian & Rawlins, 2005)

While I was worried about what I left unsaid, the park management was worried about what was said. But the real irony is that we were both worried about the same thing: letting sleeping dogs lie.

Through this experience of compromising, capitulation, then being compromised and being silenced, I learned in earnest the capricious power of hegemonic dominance. Though I tried to tiptoe around the sleeping dog, he stirred, and I felt the consequences of waking him. The possibilities afforded by the new technologies of digital video led me to this encounter with the sleeping dog, and once bitten, I could not help but look at the technology itself differently. Donna Haraway tells us that there is a direct relationship between technology and the social interactions of domination: “Social relations of domination are built into the hardware and logics of technology, producing the illusion of technological determinism” (Haraway, 1989b, p. 54). For a long time after this experience of silencing and being silenced, I dwelt on the first part of Haraway’s observation, that as a product of social relations, the technology reproduces these relations. But the second part reveals an alternative that I have more recently begun to consider. Perhaps this glimmer of hope percolated up for Haraway also, since it appears in only a later version of Haraway’s essay on Teddy Bear Patriarchy, four years after she published the first. These relations, she says, only present the illusion of technological determinism, not the determinism per se. There can be other possibilities.

We may see this is not the end of the story. Just as this technology of digital video led us into this alley, it might also lead us out. The process of this escape, however, may mean editing myself out of the picture and writing myself out of a job.

Chapter Four: Varner-Hogg Plantation

Ethical Dimensions of Enacting Change (Amidst Snakes, Ghosts and Gothic Performances of Texas' Past)

A Field Guide to Brazoria County Snakes

"Watch Out for Snakes" reads a brown sign with warning-yellow lettering on the entry road to Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site. It is the most prominent signage at the site, and while it is highly successful at creating generalized anxiety, it provides little guidance in navigating the sundry ophidian life present on the site. On the other hand, it might also be the ideal way to orient visitors to the place.

The sign made an impression on me the first time I drove up to Varner-Hogg Plantation in West Columbia, Texas, as the new Project in Interpreting the Texas Past (ITP) Scholar-in-Residence for the site. I was still turning the sign over in my head as I was getting my introductions to the park staff. While saying my hellos and shaking hands, one of the park rangers, Roger Woolsey, looked down at the black oxfords on my feet and said, "You're gonna want to get yourself some boots."

Among the bits of not-so-trivial trivia that the Site Manager, Kandy Taylor-Hille shared with me that first day was that Brazoria County accounted for more emergency room treatments for snake bites than any other county in Texas, and that the site was home to all four types of poisonous snake found in Texas—cottonmouths, rattlesnakes, copperheads and coral snakes. Snakes undoubtedly loom large in the area. And in the almost two years that I spent going down to Varner-Hogg every week, staying at the site and in a cabin in the woods near its sister site, Levi Jordan Plantation, I saw the

occasional snake, but nothing to warrant their prominence in the local consciousness and lore.

But stories about snakes have a way of wriggling in and lodging themselves in our minds, and they seemed ideally suited to the plantations in this profoundly Southern part of Texas. This herpetocentric mindset just has a way of creeping in. I saw it happen to me too in my acculturation to the place. At Levi Jordan Plantation, near the cabin where I sometimes stayed, someone certainly saw a snake, because time and again I heard the story of the dilapidated plantation house being guarded by a 7-foot brazos water snake that lived under the front steps. There are of course apocryphal elements to this story. First, I doubt the snake found much of value to guard in the crumbling house. Second, if someone placed it there, traditionally, poisonous snakes or at least constrictors are better choices for guard-animals. Third, I never saw a snake under the steps there myself, and I know because I did look, every time.

But the point is that there was probably a snake at one time, and it was probably big. And it was probably scary, very scary. A study of common phobias found snakes to be by far the most prevalent and intense focus of fear (Öhman & Mineka, 2003, p. 5). Even talking about snakes gives us a morbid thrill. Eliciting these morbid thrills is a hallmark of the gothic plantation houses of the South, and Brazoria County was no exception. Snake stories and ghost stories about the Varner-Hogg, Levi Jordan, Orizombo, and Abner Jackson Plantations are routine conversation in Brazoria County, and telling these stories was as much fun as hearing them (Foster, 1977).

These stories, like the sign at the entrance to Varner Hogg, serve a purpose beyond exhilaration too. They serve as a warning, not only of snakes, but of the need to

look beneath the surface, under steps, behind rocks, and in logs, because things are not always what they seem.

Objects of Desire

Driving into West Columbia, just as I turned on to the park road, I could see, more often than not, a Holy Ghost revival tent set up along the highway. In this cradle of old time religion, the snake's role as seducer and manipulator of desire is ingrained in the psyche (Carr, 2003, pp. 39-45).

A little temperance against desire might be in order at Varner-Hogg Plantation, historically speaking. Ima Hogg, revered Texas philanthropist and daughter of former Texas Governor James Stephen Hogg, spent much of her adult life making the plantation house a museum filled with of objects of desire.[13] Since 1958, when the plantation house opened to the public, and even more so after Jackie Kennedy recruited Miss Ima, as she was called, to help the White House search for historic furniture, enthusiasts of American antiques and decorative arts have made pilgrimages to the house to view the first cohesive collection that Miss Ima assembled (Bernhard, 2011, location 2672).

In 1901 Governor Jim Hogg bought the plantation as a rural estate for the family, and it remained a country refuge for the Hoggs even after Governor Hogg died. Born in 1882, Miss Ima was, during her youth, a fixture at her father's side at political events and on business trips. Miss Ima seemed headed for a promising career as a concert pianist and, after she turned eighteen, she left Texas to study piano in New York and later

[13] My choice of wording here is a direct reference to *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (Forty, 1992) and *Objects of Desire: The Lives of Antiques and Those Who Pursue Them* (Freund, 1995).

continued her studies in Germany. She returned to Texas in between to look after her father in his last year of life (Texas Historic Sites Restoration Branch, 1983a, pp. 86-88). His death in 1906 hit Miss Ima hard and prompted the first-documented of several depressive or depression-like episodes that left her in a doctor's care. Miss Ima never played piano professionally, nor did she ever marry. Her biographer, Virginia Bernhard surmises that Miss Ima's struggles with mental illness likely influenced both of these decisions (2011, locations 1161-1239).

Upon returning from Europe, Miss Ima was instrumental in founding the Houston Symphony Orchestra and served as an executive for the Houston Symphony Society for many years after (Bernhard, 2012). However, it was not until she became interested in antiques and collecting that she found her calling. Miss Ima cut her teeth as a collector of American decorative arts in the renovation of Varner-Hogg Plantation. Along with her brother Will, she undertook this early collecting after the family struck oil on the plantation land and gained tremendous wealth. Even early on, Miss Ima had an eye toward developing a collection of early American decorative arts for a public museum. "From the time I acquired my first Queen Anne armchair in 1920, I had an unaccountable compulsion to make an American collection for some Texas museum," confessed Miss Ima (Warren & Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1975, p. vii). She realized this dream several times over, most notably in 1957, when she donated her River Oaks home, Bayou Bend, to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and in 1958, when she donated Varner-Hogg to the State of Texas (Brown & Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2007, p. 28; Texas Historic Sites Restoration Branch, 1983b, p. 8).

As a progressive and an avid colonial revivalist, Miss Ima believed that an American collection for a Texas museum could serve multiple pedagogical purposes. The objects themselves could teach the museum-going public to appreciate American democratic ideals and the colonial-era virtues of "stability, purity and plainness" that they embodied (Neff, 2000, p. 16). For the elite of Texas, the collection could serve to instruct them, as would-be collectors in a relative backwater of colonial revivalism, in the proper manner and mode of collecting American antiques. Finally, by situating the collection in Texas and presenting Texana, frontier iconography, and Native American art alongside colonial artifacts, she hoped the collection would symbolically integrate Texas from "an empire in itself" into the heritage of the nation at large (Kirkland, 2009, p. 231). This logic of collecting—like the logic of the biblical serpent, urging Eve to break a simple rule to achieve a greater purpose—also offered the pretext of tasteful, philanthropic consumption while indulging Miss Ima's "unaccountable compulsions" (Belk, 1994, pp. 319-320; Bernhard, 1984, p. 62). Although she was not a spendthrift—her brother Will's nickname for her was "Miss Titewadd"—the acquisitions did give her solace (Neff, 2000, p. 18). Bernhard contends that Will Hogg encouraged Miss Ima's early collecting and planned their legendary antiquing ventures to help her pull out of a three-year bout with another unspecified but depression-like mental illness that kept her in Philadelphia, under a specialist's care, from 1918-1921 (Bernhard, 2011, location 1491-1503).

BEHIND THE VEIL: THE HIDDEN STORIES OF VARNER-HOGG PLANTATION[14]

Snakes, at least the mythical ones, also mislead, dissemble and hide. While the renovations and collections at the plantation house presented an alluring façade, the secrets of Varner-Hogg lay just under its skin. The remains of slavery and subjugation, the exploitation of life and land, invisible on the site's surface rot beneath its idyllic public face. Varner-Hogg was, at various times in its recent history, a Karankawa winter camp, a sugar plantation, a cotton plantation, a ranch, and multi-million dollar oil field. In the process of making the plantation's "big house" a decorative arts museum, much of its prior history has been erased from the rest of the landscape also. Few traces remain of the cane fields, the slave cabins, or the oil derricks. In fact, there is not much to hint that any significant manual or industrial labor ever took place on the site. This has been, for the most part, by design.

The solution to confronting the unsightly residue of slavery, convict labor, and oil production at Varner-Hogg Plantation has been, since land use shifted to cultivate a veneer of refinement on the site, to camouflage these and other unsavory aspects of its history. The elements that conveyed harsh labor—the cabins of sharecroppers and the enslaved, and the sugar mill and its machinery—were destroyed, sold off, or allowed to fall into ruin. The path that ran past the "slave cabins," on the way to fields that once were planted with sugar cane and cotton, had long since disappeared. In fact the fields no longer exist either, having been cleared as oilfields early in the last century and now

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[14] In my use of the metaphor of the veil, I allude directly to W.E.B. Du Bois' use in *The Souls of Black Folk* of the "the Veil," which Du Bois pulls back to reveal to his "Gentle Reader" the "strange meaning of being black," but also more immediately to Toni Morrison's act of "ripping the veil," which Morrison in *The Site of Memory* says is her role as a writer who is a woman and black—laying bare what many black memoirists in the past had deemed "proceedings too terrible to relate" (Du Bois, 1986, p. 359; Toni Morrison, 1990, pp. 301-302)

developed as a gated residential community and, predictably, a golf course—recalling the mantra that folklorist Toni Hill-Kennedy would repeat about the transitions at Varner-Hogg, "from labor to leisure": "That field over there . . . the cane fields. Now it's golf course, a place of leisure. From labor, to leisure. From labor of the enslaved who worked on the Patton Plantation, to leisure of people who can afford to live in a gated community and play golf, on their free time" (Cherian, 2005).[15]

Tranquil pecan orchards, oak groves, and lawns now sit on a landscape once ravaged by decades of raising cane and cotton, of grazing and drilling. The big house was scrubbed and given a facelift, in Ima Hogg's words, to "make it more comfortable and practical" (1957). The walls, built of bricks hand-made by those enslaved on the site, were covered up with plaster—certainly more practical to plaster a wall than to face the discomfort of seeing the fingerprints of dead slaves in its bricks.

Like a fugitive, Varner-Hogg Plantation has even changed its name to escape its past. Until the state dedicated it as a historic site, the Hoggs had referred to as it "the Varner," after Martin and Elizabeth Varner, "Old Three-hundred" colonists who settled the land in 1824 as part of the Stephen F. Austin's original land grant from Mexico. The Varners stayed for ten years, the minimum required to gain title to the land. When the Hoggs christened the site "the Varner," it had been known as "the Patton Place," since the 1830s, after Columbus "Kit" Patton who moved down from Kentucky and bought the land from the Varner. The Hoggs, who dropped the "Patton Place" moniker and began referring to the site as "the Varner" about a year after they purchased it, may have chosen

[15] In urban landscapes the ultimate ignominy is to put a parking lot on a revered site. The rural equivalent may be the golf course. Both are homes for choice obscenities and four-wheeled vehicles traveling at slow speeds.

to emphasize the connection to Martin Varner, a man remembered chiefly for distilling the first rum in the Austin Colony and for dying in a gunfight with a neighbor, than to Kit Patton because by the standards of many white Southerners, the Patton legacy of "miscegenation" was even more sordid (Texas Historic Sites Restoration Branch, 1983a, pp. 47-51, 84).

A Snake is not just a Snake

Being wary of snakes carries another meaning, one peculiar to the American South. Since at least the 1860, white supremacist demagogues have interpreted the biblical snake to justify slavery and continue race-based oppression. Most often, these Eden revisionists recast the serpent in the garden as a black male and asserted that "miscegenation" was the true cause of the Fall (Stokes, 1998, pp. 719-722). Lest the moral of the story be lost, one early Eden revisionist, writing under the name Ariel spelled it out:

> a man can not commit so great an offense against his race, against his country, against his God, in any other way, as to give his daughter in marriage to a negro—a beast—or to take one of their females for his wife. (Buckner Payne, writing as Ariel [1867], quoted in Stokes, 1998, p. 723)

Perhaps it was this "offense so great" that prompted the Hoggs to gloss over the history of the Pattons. Kit Patton, according to his disinherited heirs, "lived in disgraceful intimacy" with "a certain Negro woman slave named Rachel" whom he had brought down from Kentucky when she was about seventeen (Charles F. Patton et al., 1857; Cordova, 2000, p. 131). What was common knowledge during Kit Patton's lifetime

became the stuff of courtroom drama after his siblings and nephew decided to contest his will, in which he “in effect set free” Rachel and provided for her a modest annual allowance (Charles F. Patton et al., 1857). The testimony portrayed her as a fiery, proud woman who exerted great influence in the home. Charles Grimm, Kit Patton’s white overseer testified that “The Negro woman Rachel occupied the position of a white woman as much as any I ever knew” (Cordova, 2000, p. 127; Grimm, 1857). All agreed that “She seemed to be the mistress of the place more than a servant” (Cordova, 2000, p. 128; Minard, 1857). Rachel reportedly had a horse that she alone used. She “bought more fine dresses than lady in the community” (Adriance, 1857; Cordova, 2000, p. 129). She fought back when Kit or white family members tried to beat her, but felt free to beat other slaves as their mistress. All indications are that she was a woman who did not “know her place” or rather, who was determined to make a place in a world that had none for her (Goldfield, 2008).

In a gothic tale for this gothic setting, Kit Patton disinherited his nephew for beating Rachel and then cut his brother out of the will for coming to the nephew’s defense. Soon after, the family committed Kit to an insane asylum in South Carolina, where he died of typhoid dysentery (Texas Historic Sites Restoration Branch, 1983a, p. 60). Historian Mark Carroll suggests that the family had Kit declared non compos mentis and institutionalized as a ploy to separate him from Rachel and restore the family’s inheritance (Carroll, 2001). However there is also some testimony indicating that Kit began behaving erratically at about the same time he started having trouble with his eyes, symptoms that could be consistent with a stroke or tumor (Adriance, 1857).

Sarah Ford, who was born into slavery on the Patton Place, remembered the saga well, even in her eighties, and told it poetically in a WPA Ex-Slave Narrative:

> Marster Kit has a African woman from Kentucky for he wife, and dat's de truth. I ain't sayin' non iffen she a real wife or not, 'cause I don't know, but I know all de slaves has to call her "Miss Rachel." She sure was uppity over de slaves but she do try an' teach us chillen manners.
>
> But iffen a bird fly up in de sky it mus' come down sometime, and Rachel jus' like dat bird, 'cause Marster Kit go crazy and die an' Marster Charles [Patton] take over de plantation an' takes Rachel, too, an' puts her out in de field to work like de rest. (Ford & Federal Writers Project, 1972 [1937])

Over the years, there has been very little mention at the site of the Patton family, who established the plantation, who had the big house built, and who lived on the site for longer than any of its other owners. Of course, there had been even less attention paid to Sarah Ford and the many exploited, predominantly African American laborers—enslaved men and women, sharecroppers, leased convicts, and wage workers—who had made this a tremendously profitable site for its owners, often at the expense of their bodies and their freedom.

UNSPOILED NATURE

One reason interpreters at Varner-Hogg have given for resisting telling the story of labor on the site or the story of the Pattons is that these stories are invisible on the landscape and that they have few relevant artifacts to tell the stories. When visitors come to Varner-Hogg Plantation, they see a park not a historic site. And a park is what the site

is used for more than anything else—barbecues, family reunions, weddings, gathering pecans, fishing, and most of all, taking in the scenery. The plantation house, the only imposing element of the built environment, basks in this scenery, like the centerpiece on a cake, largely unused but essential to the overall visual impression.

These public sites that we have set aside for our leisure have also been shaped by our changing notions of nature and of beauty in the landscape. The urge to conform to these ideals, in turn, has led us to further mask or obscure the past at public sites. Before the mid-nineteenth century, American audiences were much more likely to marvel at the built environment or cultivated land. This preference has gradually shifted in favor of the ideal of untouched wilderness. As a culture, we have come to value places that look "pristine," that efface our own presence even though we ourselves have constructed them (Cronon, 1995). This aesthetic predilection complicates efforts to represent inclusive narratives at public sites—for how do we tell the story of labor at historic sites whose landscapes we design and maintain to provide refuge and sanctuary from work?

The most prominent American "builder" of landscapes of "undisturbed nature" is Frederick Law Olmsted, best known as the architect of Central Park. In some of its details—the sweeping lawns with thickets and orchards acting as counterpoints, the framing of Varner Creek, the bridge, and the softer, more casual interplay between nature and the built environment—the elements of the landscape at Varner-Hogg owe as much to Olmsted's British counterpart and predecessor, landscape architect Capability Brown, as to Olmsted himself (R. Turner, 1985, pp. 68-91). Others, such as the sharp precipices of the creek and the semblance and the presence of a "natural" habitat for animals are drawn more from Olmsted. And both Olmsted and Brown were instrumental in the move

away from formal gardens and towards a "naturalesque" landscape. Olmsted especially was expert at concealing his hand and those of his workers. So much so that after finishing Central Park, the public began to forget that it was in fact a built environment. As photographer and landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn has pointed out, even those savvy to Olmsted's contribution to urban landscapes are often naïve to the influence of his design on icons of the natural environment such as Yosemite National Park or Niagara Falls by framing views, structuring access, and planning conservation efforts (1995, pp. 91-99). So when visitors experience these sites, while they often feel that they are amidst unspoiled wilderness, they are in fact in a landscape painstakingly designed to convey a *distinct impression* of wilderness.

While this misinterpretation of the landscape can, by and large, be innocuous, it can also carry consequences. A visitor to Central Park or the Boston Fens oblivious to its construction may unknowingly ignore the considerable resources required to conserve, maintain, and manicure this environment. Furthermore, it also relegates to invisibility the work of those who labor to build and maintain the landscape. It is only when something goes wrong or when someone intervenes that this labor becomes visible. When a limb from an aging tree tragically fell and injured a mother and killed her 6-month old daughter as they posed for a picture in Central Park, public attention focused on whether it was "an act of god" or lack of proper maintenance of the landscape (Grynbaum, 2010). Among the revelations in this public discussion was that the trees do in fact require significant maintenance--it costs the Central Park Conservancy one million dollars annually to prune approximately 6,000 trees per year. Questions centered on what constituted an acceptable risk in the park and whether the park was a natural environment

or a controlled environment. Women and men interviewed on the street tended to frame the discussion as a choice between wilderness and control, between the life of a tree and that of a human being, between cutting down trees or saving peoples' lives. These binary constructions clearly made it difficult to assimilate notions that the tree had most likely been consciously planted there in the first place and had been monitored and tended to by human hands over the course of its life (Adler, 2010).

GIVE AND TAKE

As conceptual artists Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, in their 1986 project *Give and Take*, sought to call attention to the value of the labor and the contributions of the workers who maintain Central Park, they faced the same dilemma confronting Varner-Hogg: How does one reveal human intervention on a landscape designed to obscure human presence?

To represent and transvalue labor at the park they collected broken tools used by maintenance crews, preserved them in polyurethane and used them to create an installation piece at a New York art gallery. The broken rakes, shovels, and brooms were then sold individually to collectors as artwork, and Ericson and Ziegler returned a portion of the proceeds of the sale to purchase new tools for the crews. But the "give and take" in this deceptively simple exchange refers not only to the objects and currency changing hands but also to the profoundly interdependent transfer of the value ascribed to the objects. This give and take reveals the transactional nature of heritage production as a whole.

The tools, which were once junk, took on new value for the collectors when Ericson and Ziegler manipulated and reframed them as objects of art. The collectors' desire for the objects as commodities—and their willingness to pay for them—increased the exhibit audience's esteem and valuation of labor on the site. But the tools bear value as artifacts as well as art. They convey meaning through their scratches and scars, evidence of the labor of Central Park work crews. As the collectors possess a tangible connection to the workers, they also gain an intangible appreciation for their labor. But the necessary precondition for this production of value was the destruction of value. Only after the labor of the workers broke these tools and created worthless objects could Ericson and Zeigler begin their self-conscious production of heritage, grafting new value onto these once worthless tools. As an audience observing a process of heritage production, we see now see the work of these crews in a different light, through the absurdity of the relative valuation of the broken tools. When the workers broke them, they became worthless, but they also became unique. When the artists hung them in the gallery, they became priceless. Ericson and Ziegler reveal in practice what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett revealed in prose, that heritage production adds value to existing assets by imbuing them with pastness, by emphasizing their difference and by placing them in exhibition (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, pp. 369-370).

In making explicit the transactional nature of exhibition, Ericson and Ziegler offer a lens that changes one's vision of Central Park permanently. No one who knows the project can help but recognize on some level that Central Park is a product of human labor, not a manifestation of unblemished nature.

DIGITAL VIDEO AS MEANS OF HERITAGE PRODUCTION

This was the dilemma Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site faced in 2003, when I came on as Scholar-in-Residence at the site: How does one reveal the impact of people on a landscape that has been designed to obscure their presence?

In fact, this was the question long before I got to Varner-Hogg. This question led the site manager at the time, Kandy Taylor-Hille, to seek out the help of Martha Norkunas and the ITP. Kandy knew that she needed help, specifically to address the breach between the visible landscape of the site and its larger history. So she lobbied TPWD headquarters to choose Varner-Hogg Plantation as its site for the ITP Scholar-in-Residence. Over the years, the site had tried many strategies to evoke these silenced pasts—just two years earlier, Varner-Hogg had been the site of a highly successful ITP fellowship project and had hosted a national symposium on recovering and reinterpreting difficult pasts—but changes had failed to take root. It was not just the history erased from the landscape that impeded these efforts, but also the weight of the visual impression of what had been preserved and constructed. Between the idyllic landscape and a plantation house that looked like the love-child of Gone with the Wind's Tara and George Washington's Mt. Vernon, what could one expect visitors to do but engage in romantic, patriotic fantasies. Any efforts to confront the site's complicated histories of gender, race, land-use, and class in a critical, scholarly dialogue just got swept away in this dream

But as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, theirs is not an uncommon problem. In fact, a hallmark of heritage is the "inadequacy of many actual sites to reveal what they are about" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 375). This inadequacy is the reason that we have museums, to orient visitors and interpret the site. She describes the function of a

museum in Cluny, in eastern France, dedicated to a gigantic "phantom church" that is no longer there, that the village demolished two hundred years ago:

> The museum does for the site what it cannot do for itself. It is not a substitute for the site but an integral part of it, for the interpretive interface shows what cannot otherwise be seen. It offers virtualities in the absence of actualities. It produces hallucinatory effects. On the basis of excavation and historical reconstruction and in collaboration with visitors, the museum openly imagines the site into being—in the very spot where it should still be standing but is no more." (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 377)

At Varner-Hogg too, the "actualities" were absent, and the "hallucinatory effects," though powerful, conveyed a very different message from the one that Kandy wished to communicate. Although Kandy would probably have used different verbiage, based on our discussions it was clear to me that she wished to unveil both the construction of the landscape and the history of the site as a self-conscious production, first of the Hogg family and later of those who administered the site. "Memory requires its prostheses," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett tells us, "and never have they been as numerous and inventive as in our time" (1995, p. 376). At Cluny, the museum was this prosthesis. At Varner-Hogg, the prostheses of the dominant narrative were in plain sight, the plantation house and the grounds. To tell the amputated stories of slavery and subjugation would require a different kind of prosthesis altogether.

From the very first, Kandy knew that she wanted an introductory documentary video to do this, to reconcile the history of the landscape and the site for visitors, to imagine the untold aspects of the site into being where they should be standing but are no

more. Kandy realized that she probably could not get sanction from her local stakeholders, volunteers, docents, and members of the "friends group," nor funds from Parks and Wildlife headquarters in Austin to physically change the site in any way. So her goal was to mediate perception of the site without altering the site. That is where the video came into play: it would function as this "prosthesis" that would reorient and realign it. Kandy envisioned that it would be the very first thing that a visitor would see—if it were possible, even before seeing the site itself. Then after watching the video, once the visitor embarked on a tour of the grounds and buildings, would function as a filter, enabling him or her to view the legacies of other peoples and other activities and multiple eras at the site. The big house would no longer be at the center. Instead it would align alongside and in dialogue with the subterranean remains of the "slave cabins" and sugar mill, with the cane fields and oil derricks and creekside Karankawa encampments, all imagined back into existence through the video.

From Kandy's perspective the opportunity to work on an introductory video with the ITP Scholar-in-Residence in particular was ideally suited for the site's circumstances because not only would the video sidestep the need to make any visible changes to the site, but making any changes to the site was always politically charged, and working with the ITP would mean fewer negotiations back and forth between the site and TPWD headquarters in Austin. Working on the video with ITP and the Scholar-in-Residence was also a very inexpensive option, from the standpoint of personnel, equipment and raw material. The Scholar-in-Residence grants, funded by the Houston Endowment and the Meadows Foundation, were paying my salary, and I could do most of the production and post-production work myself. I had access to all the equipment I needed through the

Project in Interpreting the Texas Past. When I needed help, such as with much of the camerawork, I was able to negotiate barters with colleagues and friends who were as motivated by interest in the project as by the small trades—a weekend in the country cabin, a restaurant meal, or my work on their projects.

Dr. Norkunas had included requests for digital media equipment in the grants she wrote to the Houston Endowment and the Meadows Foundation that funded my salary: a $15,000 digital media studio with a near-professional grade MiniDV camera, 3 computers, a scanner, videotape deck, and professional production software. A few years earlier, a setup with comparable capabilities would have cost well over $100,000. A colleague of Dr. Norkunas also donated an empty apartment to use as a production studio. Access to production equipment and the low cost of digital video tape stock allowed me to shoot and edit lots of footage, and regardless of what I used to make the documentary, all the footage could become research material for the site's archives and for the Brazoria County Historical Museum's archives, with whom the site would share any digital materials generated by the project. Because Kandy did not have to request funds from TPWD Headquarters or from the park's friends group for any of these expenses, they had less investment in influencing on a day-to-day basis the production of the video.

BUILDING CONSENSUS

While Kandy may have been wary of the difficulties of working day in and day out on with stakeholders and Parks and Wildlife Headquarters on a large project to change interpretation at the site, she was determined to make sure that they, as well as the site staff, had crucial roles in the planning process. At the time, TPWD had begun an initiative to develop "Interpretive Master Plans" (IMP) for each of its historic sites. This

(unfortunately named) master planning process would give sites and stakeholders and opportunity to clarify, revise, and document the interpretive priorities at each site. The site and TPWD headquarters would then use the document to develop new interpretive programs or revise existing ones, and to help guide staffing and infrastructure, and development decisions and policies. Just as she did with the ITP Scholar-in-Residence opportunity, Kandy lobbied for Varner-Hogg to be one of the first sites to go through this process. She wanted the document ratified and in hand in time to guide the priorities of the introductory video.

So it was that my first duties as Scholar-in-Residence were to get the word out about my work at the site and about the IMP process, to encourage people to come to the community focus groups and stakeholder meetings that would guide the IMP process, to help recruit a few community members to serve on the IMP Committee in the planning process, and to conduct research to prepare for my role in the planning meetings—to voice what I thought the interpretive priorities at the site should be and why, and to help write the IMP based on the committee's decisions.

I began my Scholar-in-Residence work at Varner-Hogg in July 2003. In the first two weeks of September 2003 we held the public hearings and focus groups. Later in the month the committee—comprised of park staff, brass from the Historic Sites Division of TPWD, staff from the TPWD Regional Office in LaPorte, community representatives, members of the Varner Hogg Volunteer Association and me—began meeting. By the end of a two-day meeting December 2003, the committee had come to an agreement on the major elements of the IMP, beginning with the interpretive mission of the site: to tell the story of race, land and class through the stories of four women who represented different

eras at the site and varying relationships to the site: Elizabeth Varner, Rachel Bartlett-Patton, Sarah Ford, and Ima Hogg. I thought it was a very positive outcome of a genuinely inclusive and transparent process—in particular the stakeholders from the volunteer association surprised me with how open they were to the change in focus. They had known about the "inevitable" changes to the interpretation of the site for years, and many stakeholders in many ways supported it. In November 2000, the site had sponsored Viewing the Past Through Different Lenses, a national symposium on race and historic sites, featuring speakers from the National Parks Service, Monticello, Colonial Williamsburg, the Gullah/Geechee Nation, as well as Randolph Campbell and Alwyn Barr, two of the most prominent scholars of African American history in Texas, and many others. Diverse and large planning committees—with representatives from TPWD and Texas Historical Commission and many of these very community members—worked together to organize the conference in Brazoria County. The conference drew strong local and statewide attendance. Dr. Norkunas and all of her Fall 2000 ITP seminar students, myself among them, attended. According to the conference proceedings, the symposium marked ten years that then site manager Jeff Hutchinson and park staff had worked to build support for "new cultural dimensions to be added to the site" (Hutcheson, 2000).

Varner-Hogg Plantation had also been the site of focus for Dr. Norkunas' Fall 1999 Cultural Interpretations of the Past seminar. Students in the course critiqued ongoing interpretation at the site and proposed new projects addressing African American history and women's history at the site. Cary Cordova, who received that semester's fellowship, funded by TPWD, to carry out her proposal, created a comprehensive database of information on the enslaved people and freedmen of the Patton Plantation

based on her archival research and wrote a new interpretive script for site tours which incorporated the findings from her research.

In fact, the experience of trying to bring in elements from Cary's research and tour script had significant bearing on Kandy's position that the site needed an introductory video. Relying on staff and volunteers to adhere to the revised tour script was a hit-or-miss prospect at best. Some embraced the revisions. Many others did not. A video, Kandy realized, would allow for a great deal more control over the interpretation at the site.

My sense is that even if they did not necessarily agree with the interpretive directions the site was heading, many site volunteers were satisfied with limiting the change. As Kandy had expected, site volunteers were most concerned about visible changes at the site. Part of the resolution written into the Interpretive Master Plan was that the house, the furnishings, and the grounds would remain essentially unchanged. I believe some stakeholders took comfort in this knowledge,

By then the public part of the IMP process was over, and we had the information we needed to produce the introductory video. All that was left for the IMP itself was to finish drafting the narrative sections based on the committee's decisions and to get the approval signatures from TPWD division heads.

In June of 2006, more than two and half years later, Kandy and I were still working on revisions to the IMP. That was a year and a half after I finished the introductory film and two years after my residency officially ended. By that time, in the successive rounds of revisions and compromises between TPWD headquarters and the site, it no longer resembled anything close to the initial drafts or to the IMP Committee's

decisions in 2003. By then the interpretive mission had deteriorated into something bland and vaguely evasive, and like the rest of the plan, completely unrecognizable to me:

> "Our mission is to preserve and manage the natural and cultural resources of Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS. Interpretation of the site's collective aesthetics and cultural landscape will help visitors develop a shared connection to Texas' past" (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2006).

On January 1, 2008, TPWD voluntarily handed over control of Varner-Hogg and 21 other historic sites to the Texas Historical Commission (Hilderbran, 2007). Even with all the revisions, I don't think the Varner-Hogg IMP ever got a single signature.

THE GHOST OF MISS IMA

It's little wonder that the volunteers at Varner-Hogg had difficulty with change. The site staff did too, and for similar reasons: the ghosts. Snakes might have been underfoot at the site, but it was no use looking out for ghosts. They were always vaguely present, though rarely seen. The running joke among site staff, if someone couldn't find their stapler or pen, or if anything was out of place, was that "Miss Ima" had it or moved it. At weekly meetings, the staff would read and do exercises from the self-help series, *Who Moved My Cheese?*. This activity itself was in itself ironic and self-referential, because the real running joke was the site's aversion—or rather the aversion of people on the site—to change. The answer to, "Who moved my cheese?" was always, "It better have been Miss Ima." Otherwise, we knew we would have a problem. The ghost of Miss Ima was a benevolent one, and while the comments were jokes, they referred to the very real reverence many of those connected to the site had for Miss Ima. This reverence, for

Miss Ima and other figures associated with the site, is key to understanding the site, because at Varner-Hogg, while we may occasionally experience ghosts in the room, most often they are present because we have summoned them ourselves.

In his analysis of Mary Queen of Scots House in Jedburgh, in the Scottish borderlands, Michael Bowman and asks whether a performance oriented conception of a site might allow us to move beyond reductive critiques of heritage sites as either authentic and good on the one hand or commodified/historically inaccurate and bad on the other (2010). These binary conceptions, according to Bowman, can lead to condescending and dismissive critiques of sites, interpreters and visitors, and the critiques themselves lead to simplistic readings of the experiences a site generates. Instead Bowman looks at ghosts—and, more specifically, the alliances with ghosts—that mediate the connection between site and participant, between past and present. He invokes Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx, to examine these relationships: A "performance oriented conception" of the site, Bowman proposes, "allows us to focus less on the epistemological issues of what a particular site 'says' or 'knows' or on the ontological question of the site's 'authenticity' and to consider what might be called the 'hauntological' question of how the site recruits and mobilizes bodies to perform acts of remembrance" (2010, p. 208). We too will ask then, "How does Varner-Hogg recruit and mobilize bodies to perform acts of remembrance?" And how do ghosts function in this process?

"A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts," Derrida concedes, "nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality" (1994, p. 11). But in some cases, both Derrida and Bowman say, traditional scholarship will not do, for the object is not to know

but to experience. According to Derrida, with some texts, knowing is insufficient. Instead, Derrida tells us that sometimes, one must look to the virtual space of spectrality, that space "between the thing itself and its simulacrum," to hauntology (1994, p. 10). The ghost resides there, summon it, and one may find experience of the text in the construction, in the performance, of the text.

Anthropologist Edward Bruner has addressed this hauntology, this virtual space "between the thing itself and its simulacrum" in his own vocabulary. Bruner warns of the danger of essentializing notions of authenticity or inauthenticity, of original or copy, of real or Eco's hyperreal, and of the absent original or Baudrillard's simulacrum. All these assessments, if taken at face value, lead to hasty, dismissive assessments (Bruner, 2005, pp. 163-164). Instead, Bruner, like Bowman, prefers to regard all these as fluid, shifting constructions that are enacted through performance. The meanings enacted through these performances are provisional and fleeting, though, as Bowman reminds us, they may leave traces that linger. From this perspective, people, places, and objects are "in process" as opposed to "in a state of being"—and hauntology is the experience of that process. So then at historic sites, visitors enact this hauntological relationship to history by invoking ghosts from the past and experiencing them, however ephemerally, in the present. Hauntology does not produce knowledge or information about the past but rather an "affective and ethical relation to history" which is of value—indeed, according to Derrida, of greater value than knowledge, the purvey of traditional scholarship (Bowman, 2010, p. 209). Certainly, Bowman points out, visitors seem to enjoy it and appreciate these acts of remembrance.

The concept of hauntology, as Bowman uses it, may be particularly helpful to us in understanding the nature of remembrance at Varner-Hogg. Miss Ima's ghost has a long tradition of being invoked at the site, beginning at least with the Carikers, Joe and Koren, who managed the site for 25 years, from 1962 to 1987. The Carikers were interviewed by Miss Ima for their TPWD jobs. He managed the site, and she was the curator. They felt the specter of Miss Ima continually since her death, and that legacy has been carried on to others after them, through institutional memory and lore.

The answer to "Who moved my cheese?" is definitively Miss Ima because in her lifetime, the Carikers often looked over their shoulders, uncertain when Miss Ima would roll into West Columbia with her compact entourage—Jane Zivley, Lucious Broadnax, and Gertrude Vaughn; her secretary, driver, and maid—and move the figurative cheese (Cariker, Cariker, & Cherian, 2004). The Carikers remembered Miss Ima herself constantly experimenting with the objects in the collection, and continually acquiring pieces. They also remembered that Miss Ima liked things exactly the way she liked them, and was quick to remind them in her stern but affectionate manner if things were out of place. Then, especially after her death, the house became a shrine to Miss Ima, and the Carikers and others enacted their respect and fondness for Miss Ima by keeping things "just the way she wanted." Of course, these acts of remembrance also required them to perform acts of imagination also, for, inevitably, "just the way she wanted" became "just the way she would have wanted," especially as her corporeal life became farther and farther removed. And to know what she would have wanted necessitated conjuring Miss Ima, either consciously or implicitly.

It is highly likely that the Carikers learned their psychic craft from Miss Ima herself, since, in her life, she was not above invoking the spirits of the dead. In fact, it was her go-to interpretive strategy. In a house tour—which is more accurately both a tour and an instruction on how to give a tour—that Miss Ima recorded, probably for the Carikers, in 1962, their first year at the site, she confides her art: "With a house like this, where you cannot make a complete restoration, you have to try to make the story of it come alive so that people know who lived in it, the circumstances under which they lived, and feel that it is part of their heritage" (Hogg, 1962).

In enacting this remembrance of heritage, Miss Ima realizes, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett does, that memory requires prostheses. She demonstrates that in the Varner-Hogg Plantation house, the decorative arts collection is the primary prosthesis and that the objects in the collection can be rearranged to alter the remembrances:

> Now, I used some of the Pennsylvania things in here because I remembered that Martin Varner is said perhaps to have come from Pennsylvania. We can think of Penn and Franklin and those men, and the, of course, won our independence and all that declared in Pennsylvania. So I might have people reminded of the fact that we had some affiliation with Pennsylvania, and that's the reason these things are done this way. (Hogg, 1963)

Lifting the veil over her own production of history in this way, Miss Ima arguably leaves the door open for others to do as she does, to produce their own narratives. However, over the years, any trace of this license has eroded away as the site shifted from being a self-conscious production to narrate the shared heritage of two "great empires," the United States and Texas, and shifted toward being a more straightforward shrine to Miss

Ima herself. In doing so, performances of remembrance at the site on the part of volunteers and staff, though still fluid, have become increasingly tired and stale with the passing of time. And the ghost of Miss Ima has become less interesting and less immediate than the tumult of energy that the Carikers originally invoked.

(RE)ENACTING LOVE FOR THE SITE

I have focused on staff and volunteers at the site rather than everyday visitors, because they take on special significance in the negotiation of meaning at Varner-Hogg, and especially in the successive efforts to revise the interpretive narrative at the site. As I noted earlier, one of the first tasks assigned to me as Scholar-in-Residence was to meet and engage community members in West Columbia and across Brazoria county, to explain to them my work at the site, and to talk to them about why I thought interpretation at the should represent more inclusive narratives. In actuality, this outreach consisted of two separate but related endeavors. One was to network in the predominantly African American community immediately surrounding the historic site. Many in these small clusters of homes on the roads leading up to the site had direct connections to the site that stretched back in their family probably farther than they cared to tell. Cora Faye Williams, Miss Cora, whose passing in 2010, at the age of 103, was deeply mourned in the community, recalled her father working as a sharecropper on the property before the Hoggs struck oil. She recalled playing in the plantation house as a small child, and Tom Hogg allowing her to slide down the bannister. Ed Wilkes worked as a cowboy on the site and on the land surrounding it. Mr. Wilkes worked with Hal Fields—who was first the ranch manager for the Hoggs and later, after the Hoggs donated the property to the state, became the caretaker of the site—as well as with several generations of black

cowboys. Traversia Viola and his father shod the horses and fixed the wagon wheels for the Hoggs. Corine Grice worked as a housekeeper for the Hoggs and continued to work on the site for the state until she retired in 1990. It was with great joy that I met and came to know them and many others.

The other facet of my outreach work was with members of the Varner-Hogg Volunteer Association, the volunteer and "friends" group that led tours, raised funds, and were a constant presence on the site. My second trip down to West Columbia was to speak to and meet these volunteers at their annual banquet. They were welcoming and generous. They had collected blankets, plates, and silverware, even a coffeemaker to outfit my cabin in the woods. They invited me out to dinner and into their homes. I enjoyed their company and recognized them as good, caring people, who, above all, had deep, deep emotional connections to the site. Many were at the site weekends and evening, helping in the heat and cold. The site could depend on heavy turnout from the volunteers for any special event. Several had been at the dedication of the site in 1958 and remained active at the site since then. Several of the site's employees had begun as volunteers in the group before going on to multiple decade careers at the site. The volunteer group still formed some of the closest social connections for many of the site staff. And yet I had trouble connecting to the volunteers in a way that I did not with the members of the community surrounding Varner-Hogg.

The most obvious differences were, of course, class and race. The community by the park was, based on my admittedly problematic judgment by sight, overwhelmingly black and working class. The volunteers were, with a few notable exceptions and based on the same problematic judgment, white. Although some were from prominent and

wealthy families in the area, most seemed to be “typically middle class.” But I don’t think that it is these differences that explain my connection to one group and my guardedness with the other. What I found difficult to reconcile about many members of the volunteer group was their performance of and performance on the site, especially on special event days and especially regarding those who led tours or came in period—any period—dress. And my difficulties relating to the performances of some members of the group probably bled into my interactions with other members of the volunteer group. This disconnect likely stemmed from my own assumptions and understandings about race and class in rural Texas both but also from a model of criticism of heritage and public history sites that encourages the distancing and objectification of visitors and site employees.

The scene at Varner-Hogg’s special event days was not the norm at the site, but they occurred regularly, about once in each of the cooler months. At special events or reenactments at Varner-Hogg, often volunteers and the occasional site staff member came in period clothing—from varying times and contexts, since this was not a tightly coordinated effort. They would come mostly as gentry. There were few commoners here. Most women, young or old, conformed to the model of a Gone with the Wind-like plantation elite. In fact, little had changed in that respect over the past 50 years, they resemble quite closely their predecessors in photographs and in the film footage shot at the 1958 dedication of the site, white, seemingly upper-class (though who wouldn’t look high-class in a gown?) women of Brazoria County who enacted leisure imagined from post-reconstruction romantic fantasies of plantation life on the grounds of the Varner-Hogg in its early days as a state park.

Just as the women usually performed the roles of Southern Belles, regardless of their age, the men usually came in some form of military regalia, whether they participated in the war re-enactments or not. Most often it was the Texas Revolution but sometimes it is the Civil War or perhaps the Mexican-American War they fought. While the women walked and comported themselves differently than they would if they weren't in period dress, they were much less likely than the men to be in character. The men, and particularly the men involved in the war re-enactments often had developed a historically based character for themselves, usually either a famous early Texan or one of their own ancestors. They performed their re-enactments on the grounds of the site while the costumed women and other visitors watched from closer to the buildings. Periodically the fighters would take breaks for refreshments and then return to their re-enactments. I couldn't help but think, like Englishmen playing cricket in the colonies.

Even now, I struggle to keep from being dismissive of the performance. Varner-Hogg, like other plantation museums across the South, invites its visitors to identify with the white ruling class at the plantation and even take on their identities and inhabit their consciousness, especially while in costume or performing reenactments (Eichstedt & Small, 2002). African Americans and other peoples of color, of course, cannot engage in this identification so casually, if at all. Few African Americans came to the special events—other than the Juneteenth commemoration or others with a specific African American history program—and almost none came in period clothing, with one notable exception. Loretta Washington, a nurse at the local high school and a longtime Varner-Hogg volunteer, sometimes did come in "black" period dress, a dyed cotton skirt and white cotton shirt, apron, and head covering. Once, that I know of, the site engaged

Talking Back Living Theater, an African American theater troupe from the Houston area, to come to the site and perform mini-plays related to slavery and African American history. Loretta came in period clothing and sang and became an impromptu part of their performance.

This self-consciousness about performing whiteness among black re-enactors is crucial, and that is the key to my general discomfort with the role-playing fantasies. Eichstedt and Small describe a related phenomenon on plantation tours across the south. When leading all-white tours, guides tended to invite visitors to imagine themselves in the role of the plantation owners. In mixed-race groups, guides tended to steer clear of these imaginations and noticeably alter their script in other ways also (2002).

I believed, until recently that enacting these fantasies required a racially homogenous group because they are necessarily implicit fantasies of white supremacy, and the presence of African Americans calls attention to the racist dimensions of the act. In this fantasy, the most likely—if not the only—role for an African American man or woman is to perform slavery. Performing slavery, regardless of the race of the enactors, is a delicate, grueling, and even scarring experience. Carl Weinberg notes the painstaking measures taken to ensure visitor and staff safety in the 2nd person interpretations of slavery at Conner Prairie Interactive History Museum in Indiana, where there they use "safe signals" to alert interpreters that a visitor may have had enough "simulated" abuse (2009). After proceeding with much fanfare and scrutiny, even Colonial Williamsburg's high profile slave auction has never been repeated at the site (J. Horton, 1999).

Bruner, however, has cautioned that dismissing tourists' connections to a site as ahistorical and sentimental is unnecessary, elitist and unproductive (2005, p. 168). And

Tiya Miles in her studies of Vann House, describes a plantation house museum that has many parallels to Varner-Hogg in its founding, its history, and the meaning it inspires (2010, 2011). Miles places the utmost significance on the identification of Vann House as first and foremost a "beloved" site, and one that she loves too:

> The devotion of local volunteers amazed Ranger Autry . . . [who] called some volunteers' passion for the Vann House a form of 'lunacy' . . . People fell for this place—the home, the hills, the mountains on the horizon. The Vann House has a way of casting spells, of creating an aura of eras past. Its massive porticoed entry doors, framed in brightest white, double as a portal to another time. For many visitors and volunteers alike, the effect has been a sense of connection, a feeling of comfort, serenity, pleasure, and release from the cares of our day-to-day world. And I was really no exception. (Miles, 2010, p. xiv)

If Miles, a scholar of African descent, was no exception to this spell of the Vann House, and yet could still ask difficult and disquieting questions of Vann House's past—questions about slavery, about the Georgia land lottery, about White Georgians and Cherokees use of the house and its imagery to prop up their own social ambitions—then perhaps Varner-Hogg's visitors, white and black, could do the same.

Bowman has observed that at Mary Queen of Scots House, visitors are participating in a much more complicated process than appearances suggest:

> As visitors tour the building, they tack back and forth between a state of flow and reflexivity—that doubled consciousness inherent to performance. This is a far more complex kind of engagement with the past and a more complex set of

> pleasures than the cartoonish images of cultural dopes consuming 'history-lite.'(Bowman, 2010, p. 211)

By "doubled consciousness" Bowman means that the visitors may be both present and immersed in the affective experience of the site and reflecting critically on this experience at nearly the same time. When describing the experience of the museum to Bowman, Mary Queen of Scots House visitors articulate both the affective immersion and the switch to the critical reflection: "Walking where she walked, touching the same walls, . . . Well, not the 'same' of course. I don't know really if she ever was here" (Bowman, 2010, p. 211).

This is the experience we see Miles participate in at Vann House also. Miles describes walking through Vann House during the Christmas Candlelight Tour, which is designed to transport the visitor two hundred years into the past, a Vann House ranger tells Miles:

> "During those candle lit nights, one gets the closest glimpse possible of how the home looked during Joseph [Vann's] time. The night hides so much of the modernization inside and surrounding the home. Also, the way that candlelight affects people today is probably the same way that it affected people two hundred years ago. So the feeling people get when they see the candle's flame flicker and the fires' reflections sway on the walls is a feeling much like the visitors of the Vanns' did in the early eighteen hundreds." (Miles, 2010, p. xiii)

Miles participates in this invocation of the past with other guests, but then ventures down alone into the "cold, desolate" basement rooms. There, a lone guide, a young boy, tells her, "This is where the slaves would have worked . . . Shackles were found in the corner"

(Miles, 2010, p. xiv). Instantly the spell is broken. Miles is transported back to the present and from her affective immersion, back to a critical engagement with the site. The only response Miles can muster is to walk out a small side door to be alone with her thoughts in the cold night air.

This is Bowman's version of hauntology at work, the affective intrusion of the past upon the present, but with a doubled-consciousness that recognizes that if both the past and the present offer inadequate ways of knowing perhaps summoning ghosts may propose legitimate ways of feeling. So according to Bowman, the validity of experience does not depend on authenticity. In fact, it depends, at least in part, on departuring from "authentic" experience and engaging in fantasy:

> Visitor performances are partly grounded in the world of the corporeal, physically encountered reality, and partly in the workings of fantasy and imagination, creating an experience that Baerenholdt and Haldrup call "fantastic realism"—a haunting—where objects and space and images and stories in heritage sites lose their aura and become traces, in Benjamin's sense, allowing visitors to be at once possessed by the site and to take possession of it. (Bowman, 2010, p. 210)

Varner-Hogg's reenactment and dress-up opportunities do allow visitors and volunteers both to be possessed by the site and to take possession of the site. And even if this possession is necessarily exclusionary, perhaps performing this exclusion holds some value for the reenactors, perhaps both as wish fulfillment and as a jarring confrontation with the racist past, perhaps in some moment of clarity or in the glimpse of an African American spectator . . . Although, I continue to struggle to see how the experience might be positive for those people of color excluded from this rite of possession. Still, at

Varner-Hogg, hauntology promises at least a more generous way of understanding volunteers' period performance of the site as nostalgia or kitsch at best or white supremacist fantasy at worst. It offers a possible second explanation of the discomfort—not that costumed engagement is breaking the spell of identification with slaveholders but that even this identification could be part of a constant critical engagement volunteers are having with the site. At the very least, as the possibilities for novel engagements with the past have become less welcome in the plantation house as the interpretation enshrines Miss Ima increasingly rigidly, understandably, the performers probably appreciate these playful fantasies on the site grounds as a welcome escape, not only from the present but also from stale imaginations of the past.

"JUST BEING"

There are also other, quieter remembrances of the past performed on site grounds. Bowman notes that some visitors derive the greatest satisfaction from "just being" in a space that may have been occupied by Mary Queen of Scots (2010, p. 210). Tiya Miles enacted the same impulse when she sought out a solitary space in the cold night air at Vann House. In 1989, accepting an award for her novel Beloved, Toni Morrison wrote:

> There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300-foot tower. There's no small bench by the road. (1989)

In the absence of such a space, and feeling the need for such a space, she wrote Beloved, to serve as a virtual "bench by the road." Clearly for some, Varner-Hogg is that place to

summon these ghosts, the presences and absences of slaves. In 2003 and 2004, working with park staff, TPWD administrators and community stakeholders on the "Interpretive Master Plan" for the site, one idea that kept surfacing was to designate for the site a contemplative place, an area where visitors could end their tour of the house and grounds in quiet reflection on the difficult pasts that the site has seen—a small bench like the one Morrison wished for. Kandy even identified an oak grove that could serve as this quiet place to meditate on our shared history—because after these necessary, difficult discussions about race and power, one needed a place to sit and think.

"Just being," and imagining her enslaved "ancestors" was how Toni Hill-Kennedy engaged the site. One narrative thread of the introductory video that I made for the site simply followed Toni from one spot on the site grounds to the next, to the places she would meditate on the presences and absences of the enslaved. Toni's videotaped tour of the grounds, like Miss Ima's audiotaped tour of the house, was a twice-performed act of remembrance. Toni enacted her private ritual of remembrance at the same time she narrated it for her audience. Miss Ima performed her tour of the house at the same time she gave the metanarrative of her tour.

This was how Toni, from South Carolina originally, introduced herself in the film: "My name is Toni Hill-Kennedy, a descendant of enslaved peoples who lived and worked on plantations similar to the one that was here, called the Patton Place" (Cherian, 2005). Here Toni imagines a community that transcends the national, and bonds across time, across life and death, and across space, the distance from the plantations of Clemson, South Carolina to Brazoria County, Texas (B. Anderson, 1983).

As Toni moved from spot to spot, it became clear that she was not choosing general areas but exact locations—so exact that she had to stand feet together, the bottom half of her body almost at attention to occupy the tightly circumscribed area. She would walk to the spot, like an actor hitting her mark, and she would narrate what would have been, on any other day, her silent, interior monologue:

> This is one place where I stand, where most of the powerful feelings come up, because I can see across the creek, the big house, with the widow's walk. And I can imagine. Columbus R. Patton, out there on that widow's walk, looking over here, at this side. It's like the people of privilege and power, over there. In that big house, around that big house, the house slaves, Miss Rachel, over there. And then you cross the creek, over to this side, over to the sugar mill, and those big black kettles, and think about what must have been happening there, from the fields over to the sugar mill, that tedious work (Cherian, 2005).

Toni perceives these "powerful feelings come up" when she hits her mark. In this case, it was an awkward location with unforgiving parameters, a little to the left or right, a little taller or shorter, and the sightline to the big house would be blocked. Keith Basso has noted that among the Western Apache, "oral narratives have the power to establish enduring bonds between individuals and features of the natural landscape" (Basso, 1996, p. 40). In *Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin learns of the Dreaming sites and tracks that Australian Aboriginal people sing. There is also a relationship between names and places and stories in the performance of black heritage at Varner-Hogg. The only vocalized element of Toni's private ritual of remembrance is "calling the names" of those associate with a given spot. This catalogue is reminiscent of the discursive memory practices of

"calling the names of ancestors" prevalent in some West African cultures and which made the diasporic journey to the Americas. Some like the Temne of Sierra Leone locate these pasts in the layers of the landscape (Shaw, 2002, p. 50). With Toni, and with others at Varner-Hogg, it was as if one knows the names and one inhabits the places, then one will know the stories, kinesthetically if not verbally. That is, one will feel the past or its ghosts that we summon, those whose names we call.

THE VIRTUAL

Historian Jerome de Groot sees "something of a virtual turn in historiography" as he "looks at historical presentations in mediums which are generally ignored by professional historians" (2009, p. 2). His survey of media is broad, ranging from popular print forms to television to "amateur history" online to genealogy and museums. There does seem to be a proliferation of the virtual, in the sense that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett uses the term, the virtual either as a representation of the actual or as a representation in the absence of the actual, in which both "actual" and "virtual," as Bruner would point out, are constructed in performance writ broad (Bruner, 2005, pp. 163-164; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, pp. 376-377). However, de Groot instead uses "the virtual" to describe certain digital media:

> The recent virtual revolution is the biggest conceptual change to the museum since [the late eighteenth century], allowing . . . a visit to occur at any point in the world, whenever, wherever. It destroys the Eurocentricity of the museum structure and the authority of the institution, giving power and ownership back to some extent to the citizens of the world. Museums have embraced much faster

> than many other historical media the virtual turn, understanding history as increasingly a technologically mediated experience (de Groot, 2009, p. 247).

This narrative arc, "digital media as counter-hegemonic force in representations of history," might have been the narrative of this dissertation, but that has not been how the cases I have examined unfolded. And de Groot's conception of the virtual—as online media, as video games, and as other visual or multi-sensory digital technologies—I have found to be a less constructive and less interesting, though a far more prevalent, way to look at ideas of virtuality than Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's conception of the virtual as a mediated representation, as the production of a thing, either in the presence or the absence of the actual. In Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's conception, the digital visualization of the phantom church at Cluny, the Ericson and Ziegler's Central Park project, Miss Ima's house tour, the Carikers' invocations of Miss Ima, the Varner-Hogg volunteers' reenactments, Toni's private ritual, and my introductory video are all virtual technologies. The virtual, in this conception, is not a product of the electronic age, but an essential component of heritage production (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 369).

Just as Ericson and Zeigler's project or the computer model at the Cluny museum compelled one to see a site anew, as if with new eyes, so too did *Impressions in Fire & Clay*, the Varner-Hogg introductory video. The introductory video, though shot digitally, did not function differently than these or other media might have. In fact, I had crafted it specifically to minimize the immersive potential that de Groot highlights in his description. Although Bowman has convincingly asserted the value of immersive, affective responses to a site, at the time I was working on the video, I was more interested in generating critical understandings of the past. These critical understandings, I thought,

would foster a genuine respect across differences. By contrast, the value of immersion seemed comparatively suspect. I was, I believe, reacting to the standard formula of interpretation, reliant on deep investment in the narrative and identification with heroes (high-born or humble). I felt these traditional interpretations of the past appealed to little more than primal instinct, that it bypassed reflection and took visitors straight to self-preservation and gut emotion rather than to thought and consideration. In theater, Bertolt Brecht contended that this trance-like identification encouraged the audience to "plunge into illusions" in lieu of "adopting an attitude of inquiry and criticism" (Brecht & Willett, 1964, p. 136). Brecht preferred to distance the audience from the spectacle. He advocated creating an alienation effect that makes spectators aware that they are witnessing a construct, a fabrication—perhaps a fabrication intended to reveal certain truths, but a fabrication nonetheless—and I followed his lead.

One of my objectives in making *Impressions in Fire and Clay* was to challenge the notion of singular, authoritative—and traditionally authoritarian—narratives at historic sites. It was the reason that I chose 1st person narration for the piece and tried to present the construction of history in that documentary as a set of choices, with the understanding that constructing the narrative based on another set of choices could be a viable alternative also.[16]

So I leaned on these Brechtian ideals, trying to distance the audience from the narrative by revealing to them the constructed nature of this story and of history. I decided that the only way I would be able to tell the story of Varner-Hogg was to tell one story of Varner-Hogg, my story of Varner-Hogg and to show how I pieced together both

[16] I did not intend to convey that all of these narratives or choices are equally viable or equally true, but that each set of choices is a function of and a response to power relationships within the story (Trouillot, 1995).

my perspective and the narrative as a whole. I had rarely used voice-over narration in a documentary before, but I knew that I could not pack in all the aspects of the site's history that I wanted to address in the short time allotted for the video without using narration. I considered writing the narration and having someone else read it, but ultimately, narrating with my voice seemed to be most in keeping with my overall objective, that of revealing subjectivities.

I began the audio for the video with an excerpt from Miss Ima's house tour of the Varner-Hogg discussed earlier. In the excerpt, she says,

> "Before you enter the Varner-Hogg Plantation House, it would be well to say a few words concerning its history. The story of Varner Plantation begins even before Texas began, really. The story should start with Austin Colony." (Hogg, 1963)

My narration then begins after this audio clip, as I enter a dialogue with Ima Hogg:

> "She's right, you know. The story of Varner-Hogg starts long before there was a Texas. But I always wonder, why start with Austin Colony? Why not start with the Karankawa Indians? After all, they were here for hundreds of years before Steven F. Austin or any of his settlers even caught site of the Brazos River. Or why not go back millions of years ago, when this plantation, like all of Texas, was underwater, and microscopic plants and animals ruled the seas?" (Cherian, 2005)

My intention here was to communicate to the audience that although the decision to start the plantation house's history at the Austin Colony may not have been arbitrary, it is still at least worthy of examination. I go on to explain that the plantation house was not built by Martin and Elizabeth Varner, the Austin Colonists who settled the land in 1824, but by

slaves owned by Columbus "Kit" Patton who bought the land from Varner ten years later. The rest of the video unfolds as answers to the questions "how has the site and its history been shaped and portrayed over the years?" and "how might we look back on its history from today?"

I had also tried to take care to pull back and give the audience space to breathe and reflect after staring into intense and emotional histories, in the hopes that I could engage the audience's minds over their hearts.

In addition to trying to avoid overly emotional appeals, I also tried to challenge the objective, omniscient tone taken by many history documentaries and history texts. Part of the decision to present Ima Hogg's voice first in the documentary is that she takes on the authoritative tone that audiences expect in this context. When my voice abruptly intervenes, using the first person and discussing the construction of history, I intended it to signal to viewers that along with challenging these formal elements of traditional history documentary videos, I will be challenging other expectations they may have about a an introductory video to a plantation house museum. I also hoped that over the course of the video, by using the "I" and talking specifically about my perspective and how I came to accept certain contentions about the history of the site and to reject others, and by openly discussing my prejudices, that I would gain the trust of the viewer and tacitly suggest that all histories are first person histories, even when the "I" behind the voice is not readily discernible.

AUTHENTIC & AUTHENTICATION

At the core, my intention with the introductory film was to shift power relationships at the site, however slightly, an objective not far from the potential de Groot

saw for virtual technologies. Bruner articulates the essence of the transaction: “The fundamental question to ask here is not whether an object or site is authentic, but rather who has the right to authenticate—or, to put it another way, who has the right to tell the story of the site. This is a matter of power” (Bruner, 2005, p. 150). I had no illusions here; I knew that Miss Ima held a monopoly on both (perceived) authenticity and on the right to authenticate at Varner-Hogg. In fact, no one at the site had any illusions about where power was located. The strongest argument for any change that Kandy made was, “Miss Ima would have wanted it this way.” Kandy would then offer her speech about how Miss Ima changed and evolved her views so much over the course of her life, about how she loved the Beatles in her 90s, about how she did things differently at Winedale, one of the last of “Miss Ima’s public sites.” But the response too, was often still, “But that’s not the way Miss Ima did it.” She was both the justification and the objection, and everything in between. She held sway, continuing to assert her power, apparently, even from the grave.

But of course, this Ima Hogg was herself a construct, a ghost, a virtual technology. The actual Miss Ima was in the ground. Now her ghost was just a virtual agent for those who invoked her. In the introductory film, the “actual” me told my story and wove in Toni’s story. These stories too were virtualities, unabashedly so—as was the film itself. Once we deployed these technologies, all we could do was to wait for power to respond. Power is a nebulous thing. Like a snake, it is difficult to locate.

In his analysis of New Salem, Illinois, a reconstructed historic village, Eric Bruner contends that “Because the state of Illinois owns the site and provides the funding, some (e.g. M. Wallace 1981) might expect the site to reflect the interests of the

dominant classes and the elite, but the administrators at New Salem report that in practice, state officials interfere rarely, and then only when an issue has become openly politicized" (2005, p. 247). This is a curious passage coming from one so attentive as Bruner to power, authority, and the construction of meaning, because what Bruner describes is precisely the hegemonic dominance that the passage ostensibly negates. New Salem administrators' self-report of state officials' control at the site would normally be an unreliable indicator of the location of power. However, here, the administrators give us all the necessary information to make some modest appraisals. New Salem administrators offer that state officials interfere rarely, which is to say that state officials do interfere sometimes. Furthermore, when they interfere is clearly defined: "when an issue has become openly politicized." So state officials have unambiguously delineated the parameters for site administrators' limited autonomy: To avoid reprisal, ensure that you do not engage "political" matters and that no one "politicizes" issues at the site. And "politics" here is code for any challenge to power. This is cultural hegemony in process, dominance in action.

As Dorst has indicated, "if there is a single, overriding quality of postmodern hegemony, it is that dominance becomes almost entirely a matter of texts or images, of the rhetorical deployment of discourse practices" (1989, p. 176). The kind of evidence of coercion or a more forceful assertion of power that Bruner seems to expect is not present at New Salem because it is not necessary for state officials to maintain dominance. However, if we wish to see what happens when hierarchical authority is challenged at a historic site, we need look no further than the experience of incorporating the introductory video at Varner-Hogg.

IMPRESSIONS IN FIRE & CLAY

When *Impressions in Fire and Clay*, the introductory video, premiered at the park on February 26, 2005, it did so to an outpouring of emotion. People cried at the screening, especially in the sections that discussed the most brutal parts of the site's history—slavery and convict labor. I was surprised, but perhaps I should not have been. Although I consciously worked toward a "sober presentation" of the site's history, I should have realized that at Varner-Hogg affect and presence responses trump interpretation and meaning effects. Affect and presence are what Miss Ima appealed to, and she—or her ghost—continues to hold interpretive authority at the site. As for the tears shed at the premiere of the film, it should also be noted that this was a stacked audience. Many of the people in attendance had worked actively to present more inclusive stories at the site. And it is likely, almost certain, that the outpouring of emotion had more to do with the audience seeing their efforts come to fruition than with the pull of the video itself. In fact when Loretta Washington, the volunteer I mentioned earlier as one of the few African Americans to come to Varner-Hogg events in period dress, spoke in the discussion after the film, she explained that she had cried tears of joy, because she never thought that *these* stories would be told in *this* way at *that* site.

Over the next few months, the introductory video worked out much as Kandy envisioned. It was 30-minutes long (probably longer than she would have liked and longer than would be ideal for an introduction to the site). All visitors from 4th graders to adults viewed the film in a screening room improvised in the site's historic barn. It did at least complicate the romantic notions of plantation days that the main house and grounds present. After seeing the video, it became much more difficult for visitors simply to

accept the story of the plantation owners or wealthy collectors as the dominant narrative at the site without at least considering that there were other perspectives. They were forced at least to acknowledge the tension between the idyllic and paternalistic story the landscape told and the more complicated, sometimes brutally violent, histories represented in the video.

As the site began using the film regularly, some visitors continued to be moved to great emotion by the film, but this time, not in a positive way. Over half of the anonymous comment cards in early screenings expressed anger or dissatisfaction, with comments such as: "Too one-sided. Stirs the pot too much;" "The lady Tony [sic] did not do well. It dragged and she was too emotional and not that informative;" "Too long. Civil War is over. Miss Ima was maligned. Bad. Bad. Bad. 'History is written by Elitist'? What garbage;" "Editorial by Toni was unnecessary re: how the past is affecting today. Have we not righted our wrongs?" and "Video was too divisive—will stir up racial unrest—too one sided. It couldn't have been all bad" (Various, 2005).

The audience member at Varner-Hogg could soberly and pragmatically worry about *Impressions in Fire and Clay* inciting "racial unrest" because of the often-latent but ever-present history of race relations in the psyche of Texans. The practice of keeping people, legacies and narratives in their place raised the stakes on the changes at Varner-Hogg, imbuing both the impetus for change and the intractable resistance of the status quo with the acrimony of decades and centuries of oppression, resistance and violence. In Texas too, as in the "Deep South" of the other Gulf Coast states that Goldfield describes, "knowing one's place" and acting accordingly was essential for "getting along" (Goldfield, 2008, p. 226). The penalty for doing otherwise was "racial unrest."

Goldfield's reference to the expectation of "getting along" as a trope in Southern social relations also has relevance to the continued saga of the video at Varner-Hogg. This non-confrontational attitude as coping mechanism—used by all races and classes—against the real or imagined threat of violence is also used by the dominant group as a form of passive resistance. Action by inaction is a basal strategy for social control among those wielding power. This one reason that collaborative planning processes like that of the Interpretive Master Plan at Varner-Hogg can be of dubious benefit. The tendency among many participants is to smile and politely agree, and either to wait for initiatives to fall apart or to work to advance an agenda outside of the process. There is no way to determine for sure that this is what happened with the changes in interpretation at Varner-Hogg. However, it is clear is that some participants who supported the changes in the planning meetings did work actively and visibly to reverse the changes at the site once they were in place.

By the time the video became part of Varner-Hogg's programming, the interested parties knew me, knew what I was doing, and knew what to expect. And yet it was something of a shock to some stakeholders, particularly to some members of the volunteer association, even though some of them had seen multiple cuts-in-progress, had opportunities to influence revisions of the video, and did influence it. I have thought long and hard about why the reaction was so intense and why there was so much resistance, even backlash, among some who sanctioned the changes at the site and were part of the process.

My sense is that although stakeholders were prepared for the changes, they were not prepared for the scale of the changes. Part of the resolution in the Interpretive Master

Plan was that the house, the furnishings, and the grounds would remain essentially unchanged. I believe some stakeholders took comfort in this knowledge, even if they did not necessarily agree with the interpretive directions in which the site was heading. The abrupt appearance of the video probably led to the shock that many felt with the change. Apparently the "one-drop rule" applied to historic sites also (D. R. Harris & Sim, 2002). Seemingly overnight, the site went from being seen as a decorative arts museum to "an African American history site." The dissatisfied parties organized and lobbied for change through the park's volunteer association, to the site's staff and with their legislative representatives. One of the state legislative representatives for Brazoria County began to inquire with TPWD headquarters about the changes at Varner-Hogg. TPWD, in turn, began to inquire with the site and with the site's regional manager in LaPorte about the changes. Within about a year, all the changes at Varner-Hogg unraveled. Kandy Taylor-Hille was forced out as the site manager for the park. Within two years after the video premiered, there was nearly 100% staff turnover—only one person who was an intern during the period I worked with the site is now on staff. The site itself has been handed over from TPWD to another state agency, the Texas Historical Commission. The site reverted to being interpreted strictly as a decorative arts museum. There was little mention of race at the site. And the site had stopped using the introductory video altogether.

THE ETHICAL QUESTION

At Washington-on-the-Brazos and at the LBJ State Park, my videos may have failed to find a place at the sites because they did not achieve their intended goals. At Varner-Hogg, *Impressions in Fire and Clay* may have failed to do so precisely because it

did. Like Varner-Hogg's warning, "Beware of Snakes," the site itself presented a dilemma. The sign makes one aware of potential danger, but it is unclear where that danger may be located or what one might do about the danger. You can put on your boots, but sometimes the snake is sitting in a tree.

At Varner-Hogg, there was good reason to believe that there would be resistance to altering the narrative at the site. But even with all the precautions, planning, outreach, consensus-building, we got bit. For a moment, Kandy's vision for the site came to pass, and I was proud to have a hand in it. However, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's assessment of the raw material of heritage held true. Heritage does not begin with an object or site of value. Rather, it begins with "the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead and the defunct" which gains value through the process of display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995). When I came to Varner-Hogg, volunteers talked about the site as the soul of their community—their history, their heritage. During the IMP process, officials from TPWD headquarters talked about the site as a jewel in its crown. Curators from TPWD and Bayou Bend talked about the decorative arts collection as one of the state's great treasures. Yet once the site began screening the introductory film, once it no longer functioned to produce the heritage narrative of the dominant culture, all these entities were ready to discard the site that they once revered.

A few months after the film became part of the programming at Varner-Hogg, part of the first floor ceiling of the plantation house, in the "George Washington Room," began collapsing. TPWD Headquarters never allocated any funds to repair the ceiling. The Varner-Hogg Volunteer Association, the "friends group" that had been so active so often in private fundraising efforts for the site, did not start a collection of its own for the

repair. For safety reasons, the house was shuttered and the tours stopped. The site transferred from TPWD to the Texas Historical Commission (THC) with little objection. Although the larger transfer of the 18 sites was contentious, I heard no specific discussion of Varner-Hogg. The plantation house did not reopen until it was in the THC's hands. This is what the glossy promotional materials for THC's new acquisitions had to say about the Varner-Hogg: "Founded in 1824 by Martin Varner, one of Texas' first colonizers, the plantation features a majestic antebellum mansion along with Hogg family heirlooms, period furniture and historic documents" (Texas Historical Commission, 2008, p. 3).

How easily snakes shed their skin.

The cliché regarding medical ethics is that physicians should "First, do no harm." Archeologists are taught, all things being equal, to "leave it in the ground." The discipline concedes that excavation, at least traditional excavation, is a destructive process, and contemporary professional ethics requires archeologists to weigh any benefits of excavation against conserving the archeological record in situ, for future generations of archeologists (Wylie, 2003, pp. 10-11).

The last mandate of The Public Historian's Responsibility to the Profession and to Colleagues states that "A public historian should welcome opportunities to represent cultural diversity in his or her work and to enfold members of underrepresented groups into the profession" (National Council on Public History, 2007). Should we, as public historians, also have a parallel discussion about the possible dangers of representing cultural diversity in a racialized, hierarchical society? I, for one, feel some very real responsibility to my colleagues in the profession who were employed at Varner-Hogg and

who are no longer, people who lost their livelihood, people who carried out their professional responsibilities, did their job well, sincerely and conscientiously.

Film historian Vivian Sobchack reminds us that "history—like shit—happens in the present," and only through historiographic reflection does that shit, "that present unshaped material," become "something that deeply matters" (1996, p. 14). Must we then simply accept that sometimes, in making that "something that deeply matters," shit, once again, just happens?

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This dissertation then, represents a journey—a journey that, to borrow the words of Ruth Behar, has been, like life, both "irreversible" and "bountiful" (1996, pp. 2-3). It started twelve years ago, when I began, with Dr. Norkunas and my colleagues in her Fall 2000 Interpreting the Texas Past (ITP) seminar, "Cultural Representations of the Past," to study Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site. At the time, I was just learning how to be a graduate student, in my first semester in the Masters' program at what was then the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and is now the School of Information. Many years earlier still, Umberto Eco took a journey of his own, documented in his essay *Travels in Hyper Reality*, to the very site where I was learning how to be a scholar, to the University of Texas at Austin. Eco was at a very different point in his career, on the steep trajectory to becoming an internationally recognized cultural critic, but there are elements in his description of his visit that I recognize, perhaps because he epitomized the role that I was learning to emulate, that of the authority.

The spot on the campus that Eco describes is in the LBJ Presidential Library, where there is an Oval Office made "using the same materials, the same colors" as the other Oval Office, in the White House 1500 miles away, "but with everything obviously more polished, shinier, protected against deterioration" (Eco, 1986, p. 7). Eco contends that the replica objects in this "authentic reproduction" of the Oval Office are encased in metaphorical resin to satisfy a "constant in the average American imagination and taste,

for which the past must be preserved and celebrated in full-scale authentic copy; a philosophy of immortality as duplication" (Eco, 1986, p. 6).17

Eco arrives at this assessment of the "average American imagination and taste" methodically. Although this methodology is hazy in his fleeting description of the LBJ Library, Eco has articulated it unambiguously in his writings over the years. An astute observer and exceptional semiotician, Eco knows that there is rich cultural material to mine in the exhibits of the LBJ Library, a monumental material manifestation of postmodernity that he describes as a "Fortress of Solitude," like Superman's refuge where, in the comic-strip stories, he retreats to be alone with his memories, a fortress that contains Superman's life reproduced in miniature (Eco, 1986, pp. 4-7). Eco recognizes, in the "polish" and "shine" of the exhibit objects, "the mirror-glass surface . . . one of the most 'complete' signifiers of postmodernity" (Dorst, 1989, p. 107). What is signified immediately, to Eco, is that the glossy objects are, in his own terminology, "iconological entities," whose interpretation is governed by multiple rules. Because multiple rules—that is to say, both "codes" and "subcodes"—govern the objects' interpretation, Eco considers them "overcoded" (1976, pp. 134-135). The key to Eco's reading of the LBJ Library's objects in his essay is that they are a particular kind of overcoded text. They are "ideological" overcoded texts, and as such, they communicate in particular ways (Eco, 1979, p. 22).

Ideological texts, Eco tells us, are read differently by "naïve" readers and "critical" readers: "This means that not only the outline of textual ideological structures is governed by the ideological bias of the reader but also that a given ideological

[17] See Bruner (2005, pp. 149-152) and Huxtable (1997, pp. 17-18) for two different takes on "authentic reproductions."

background can help one to discover or to ignore textual ideological structures" (1979, pp. 22, 26). Eco uses the example of Ian Fleming's salacious and implicitly imperialist James Bond novels to explain his distinction between naïve readers, who are likely to accept the text at face value, and critical readers, who would look much deeper:

> A reader of Fleming's stories who shares the ideological judgments expressed by the text at the level of discoursive [sic] structures is probably not eager to look for an underlying ideological scaffolding at a more abstract level; on the contrary, a reader who challenges many of the author's explicit value judgments is to go further with an ideological analysis so as to 'unmask' the hidden catechization performed at more profound levels. (1979, p. 22)

Here Eco's critical reader draws authority to "unmask hidden catechizations" that his naïve readers ignore by virtue of difference and distance, by being outside a given ideological background and not necessarily through any inherent superiority. This difference—in Eco's case, presumably being Italian and possibly not-so-average—is the authority he calls on to assert his reading of the ideology expressed by the replica objects, the ideology of indiscriminate consumption, the ideology of "the average American" (1986, pp. 6-7). And it is Americans' immersion in this ideology that Eco calls on to assert the ignorance of the "average American" to the ideology and even to the difference between the "completely real" and "completely fake" (1986, pp. 6-7).

It requires no profound analysis to recognize that there is elitism and condescension in Eco's proclamations, even ignoring his references to the "kitsch," "fake," and "plastic" tastes of the "widespread and secondary America" in contrast to the tastes of the American first-class, "the taste of Frank Lloyd Wright, of the Seagram

Building, the skyscrapers of Mies van der Rohe . . . the taste of the New York School or of Jackson Pollock" (Eco, 1986, pp. 7, 57). Eco's elitism becomes apparent in the realization that in the essay, he never once asks the opinion of any of the people he describes, and no wonder, since his semiotic model precludes it.

As a fledgling graduate student, Eco's model seemed like the one to follow. Credibility, and therefore power, seemed to come from debunking and deflating, from piercing critiques, which is to say criticisms, of others and all that others hold dear, and one did not pause to ask opinions or permission. As evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould glibly and insightfully reminds us, these activities determine the scholarly pecking order: "The debunking of canonical legends ranks as a favorite intellectual sport for all the usual (and ever so human) motives of one-upmanship, aggressivity within a community that denies itself the old-fashioned expression of genuine fisticuffs, and the simple pleasure of getting details right" (S. J. Gould, 2000).

In our work in Dr. Norkunas' ITP seminar, our job was to evaluate the existing representation at our case study site, Washington-on-the-Brazos. Dr. Norkunas stressed repeatedly that in doing so, the interpreters and other site staff were our colleagues, and that our evaluations were to help site staff. She cautioned us to use what we learned in the classroom and saw on the site to help them graciously, tactfully, and earnestly. She modeled this philosophy in her interactions with TPWD staff in Austin and at the site. Even in the classroom, she would not let us slip into this easy and abstracted one-upmanship. In a notable departure from many other courses, she also consistently reminded us when we discussed readings to be respectful of the author, that very real person on the other end of the text. And yet, despite her efforts, I had at the time—and

routinely still have—great difficulty expressing anything but adversarial critiques or, less often, absolute approval and solidarity. I would hazard a guess that some others in the class must have struggled with these extremes too, in part because that seemed to be the mode of discourse in graduate studies and in part because this was the approach that many critiques of museums and historic sites took (Handler & Gable, 1997; Vergo, 1989; Wallace, 1996; West, 1999).

So if today I cringe a bit at Eco's dismissiveness, it is only because I recognize myself in it also. Historian Randolph Starn notes that "the Other" was the "ambiguous protagonist of these critiques" of museums and tourist sites (2005, p. 88). Since, as an immigrant and a person of color, I figured myself as an "Other" too, I found I could be the implicit protagonist of my own narrative. However, the "Others" in Eco's narrative are not marginalized peoples of color or women or laborers or the impoverished. Eco's "Others" are the constituents of mass culture, the masses that consume these ubiquitous fakes and, less directly, the institutions that peddle them. So too in the majority of museum studies critiques of the last quarter century, critiques whose model I have repeatedly followed, the unlikely "Others" distanced by scholars are visitors, museum professionals, and museums themselves. It is one thing to say that the "Other" is a fluid construction, in process. It is quite another to be faced with what we usually think of as elements of the dominant culture paradoxically constructed as "Others." Trying to reconcile this paradox made it abundantly clear that the narrative I had been telling myself was untenable: that the "Other" is the protagonist of the story and that I was in solidarity with this "Other" or perhaps even an "Other" myself. It prompted me to search,

quietly and cautiously, for an alternate narrative, as if engaged in a my own private paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970).

I found the catalyst for this personal paradigm shift just one semester later, in the second installment of Dr. Norkunas' ITP seminars, "Oral History as Narrative." In this seminar, Washington-on-the-Brazos was still the practicum site, but we studied oral history methodology, conducted oral history interviews, and proposed ways in which TPWD might use oral history to provide a richer or more nuanced interpretation of the site. Studying, conducting and reading oral histories was transformative for me, as it has been for many others, and as it clearly continues to be for Dr. Norkunas' students, judging from their journal responses to the listening exercises she has designed. Dr. Norkunas stresses the "empathetic bond" that oral history can build between interviewer and interviewee. "In the absence of shared experience," she tells us, "a relational bridge can be enacted between narrator and listener" (Norkunas, 2011, pp. 63, 89).

Deep listening, the core component in the kind of semi-structured qualitative interview methods Dr. Norkunas often teaches, has helped me develop this kind of bond in many of the interviews I have conducted, and her other students have shared this experience also. Sarah Kim "felt that listening to personal sad stories somewhat mystically builds an emotional common ground in a short amount of time between a narrator and an interviewer" (quoted in Norkunas, 2011, p. 71). Karl Jun also noted how quickly oral history can close objective distance and create an emotional connection: "A bond does form and you often feel closer to each other after the experience, even if you've only known the other person for an hour" (quoted in Norkunas, 2011, p. 87). Anne Frugé believed that "dialogues . . . create a bond between speaker and interviewer that is unique

and not replicable."(quoted in Norkunas, 2011, p. 74). Frugé's observation about the "unique" and "un-replicable" bond between speaker and narrator highlights the situated and collaborative nature of the narrative as well as the interaction. This is the mutual authorship of the interview process that Michael Frisch's "shared authority" identifies as a hallmark of oral history (1990, pp. xx-xiii). Kim's comments place the imaginative, creative, and subjective elements of the relationship in relief. These qualities too are present to varying degrees in any oral history narrative.

As Maynes, et al. point out, from a contemporary perspective, "the value of personal narratives is related precisely to their tendency to go beyond the simple facts: They tap into realms of meaning, subjectivity, imagination, and emotion" (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p. 148). As oral history gained popularity alongside the new social history in the 1960s and 70s, spurred on by the desire to do history "from the bottom-up" and to address the documentary absences in archival records, the work of interpreting interview narratives usually meant examining them alongside other documentary sources to determine which aspects of an interview were "credible" or and which could be or could not be corroborated. By the 1980s and early 90s the work of Italian oral historians Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli as well as feminist critiques from North America shifted the focus from authenticating evidence to embracing subjectivity and understanding meaning (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Passerini, 1987; Portelli, 1981, 1990a). From these perspectives, interpretation now focused on understanding meaning and situating narratives rather than corroborating or refuting the "facts" they contained:

> Interpretation should be able to recognize the various levels of expression and eventually find through other sources, as well, the historical contexts wherein they make sense. The guiding principle could be that all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose. (Passerini, 1989, p. 197)

This alternate model of epistemology, based on collaboration rather than on one-upmanship, on seeking meaning rather than debunking, on embracing subjectivities in place of maintaining objective distance, was of course part of a much larger movement in the humanities and social sciences.[18] But at the time, my central concern was its profound appeal for me, personally and culturally. Other implications of oral history moved me deeply also.

There is reciprocity and responsibility inscribed within oral history. Just as speech is a political act, so too is it a political act to listen. One may hear without registering a response. Indeed, we have trained our brains to ignore and filter much of what we hear. But to listen carries with it the pledge, the responsibility, to act. Sometimes that act is no more than to reflect on or to acknowledge what was said in the moments immediately after. In oral history, that act may be to transcribe, to interpret, to archive, to represent . . . sometimes less, sometimes more. The narrator says, "I give you my voice." The listener says, "I give you my mind and my body and sometimes, I will even give you my heart."

These responsibilities also bring concomitant risks. Troubling moments occur, not just in oral history, but in life when the relationship between the act of listening and the

[18] For an introduction to these debates in history, see the *Postmodern History Reader* (Jenkins, 1997) or *The Power in the Story in (Trouillot, 1995)*; in anthropology see Culture & truth : the remaking of social analysis (Rosaldo, 1993); *A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences* in (Marcus & Fischer, 1986); *Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart in (Behar, 1996).*

call to act is somehow compromised. One of Dr. Norkunas' students reflected on an experience at work that may have taken on a different light because of his study of deep listening:

> Roger Gatchet learned to listen to what was not said in the context of his job as a recruiter for a temporary employment agency. "I will never forget the time I interviewed an older Mexican woman who was illiterate and spoke no English. All of her previous work experience had been on family farms in her native Mexico, and she described in such lovely, passionate detail what it was like to work so close to the earth . . . I could hear her silently acknowledging that in some way her future was in my hands . . .. With this woman . . . the most important information was signified in the gaps where nothing was said. That interview has always troubled me, because I knew at the time I could not hire her (my employer, for safety reasons, would not hire candidates who could not read or write)." (Norkunas, 2011, p. 69)

I recognize Gatchet's "trouble." He feels intense empathy for this woman. He has listened to her call for help. As Sarah Kim and Karl Jun noted, in a very short time a bond may have developed. Perhaps he has become in some way part of her life. And he cannot help her. Gatchet has no obligation to help her but in the act of listening, he has become entwined in her struggle. Oral historians codify the rights and duties of interviewers and interviewees through professional guidelines and signed agreements. The Oral History Association's 2009 Principles and Guidelines addresses the expectations directly:

> Interviewers must take care to avoid making promises that cannot be met, such as guarantees of control over interpretation and presentation of the interviews

> beyond the scope of restrictions stated in informed consent/release forms, suggestions of material benefit outside the control of the interviewer, or assurances of an open ended relationship between the narrator and oral historian. (Oral History Association, 2009)

These wise admonitions, thoughtfully crafted, anticipate the difficulties that may arise. They acknowledge both the verbal interactions and the silent expectations of what is often, as we have heard from the student reflections, an intimate encounter. But they give no strategy to address the silent expectations except to avoid inflating these expectations with verbal assurances. Human subject Institutional Review Boards (IRB) require consent forms that present detailed and explicit risk and benefit statements (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). However, the oversight responsibilities of IRB on oral history projects are in continual flux. Currently most oral history projects have been considered exempt on the debatable grounds that oral history is not "generalizable research" (Shopes, 2009b). Furthermore, the language of IRB risk/benefit assessments can themselves seem patronizing or condescending when applied to oral history contexts. Because IRB guidelines have been developed primarily for biomedical and scientific research settings, they present even greater challenges for oral history contexts in the way that they frame issues of anonymity, prescribed, clearly defined, research areas and questions, and the destruction or confidentiality of research records (Shopes, 2009b). The highly situation-specific research contexts of oral history projects and the persistence of these dilemmas of institutional standards and oversights often leaves oral historians at the mercy of their "gut reactions," particularly in cases where this visceral response is to a fracture in the

hazy, undefined, gossamer—but undoubtedly present—connection between the commitment to listen and the responsibility to action.

The paradox of the "irreversible journey" that I have been on for these last dozen years has been that I continually go back, in my head, revisiting scenes and situations, wondering whether my actions and reactions were justified. Visceral responses, gut reactions, led me to return to Venieta Marshall's narrative (Chapter Two) and Alvie "AC" City's narrative (Chapter Three) in this dissertation. I articulated critiques of my own deportment and raised larger questions about the practice of oral history in the context of historic sites, cultural institutions that are—perhaps immutably—entrenched and invested in a profoundly gendered and racialized hierarchy of social dominance. To date the literature on oral history and ethics has clustered mostly around a handful of key topics: the propriety of empathetic connections with narrators (Blee, 1993; Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Feldstein, 2004; Yow, 1995, 1997); the nature of collaboration and sharing interpretive authority (Borland, 1991; R. Jones, 2004; Sitzia, 1999, 2003; Zembrzycki, 2009); legal issues including intellectual property and defamation (H. A. Harris, 2003; Neuenschwander, 1985, 2009; Neuenschwander & Kay, 2002; Neuenschwander & Sharpless, 1993; Shopes, 2007); the umbrella question of ethical standards and guidelines (Fry, 1975; Portelli, 1997b; Shopes, 2009a, 2009b); and the challenges of working with vulnerable populations (Jessee, 2011; Kerr, 2006, 2008; Palmer, 2010; Patai, 1991; Rolph, 1998; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2010).

Although almost all of the articles and chapters noted above deal, at their core, with issues of power and address in some way larger power structures, few, with the notable exceptions of Daphne Patai's work on feminist research with "third world"

women, Portelli's examinations of his own ethical decision-making processes, and Daniel Kerr's work on the Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project explicitly connect the ethical decisions of individual oral historians to the implications of these decisions on power within larger hierarchical structures. But there is reason to hope that things may be changing. Erin Jessee, in her article in the Summer/Fall 2011 issue of the *The Oral History Review* on the ethical implications of her fieldwork in sites of mass atrocities, in Rwanda and in Bosnia-Hercegovina, asks the kind of fundamental questions about the work of oral history that demand our attention and discussion (Jessee, 2011). One of the moments in Jessee's narrative that precipitates her ethical struggles comes in a Rwandan prison, when she interviews Alexandre, a Hutu elder. Alexandre asks for a pen and paper and as he describes the atrocities against Tutsi men, women, and children that he either organized or took part in. Alexandre draws rudimentary but explicit stick figure diagrams of the perpetrators' actions on victims' bodies. Jessee describes her reaction:

> In response to Alexandre's drawings, and the lengthy descriptions he used to explain exactly how each form of violence caused suffering and death, I was mute. My ability to respond with more than a nod of the head vanished, and while I continued to take notes—a practice I had to engage in when conducting interviews in the prisons because I was not permitted to record them—the quality of my notes deteriorated . . . I quickly realized that due to the horrific nature of the events Alexandre was describing, I had failed to listen deeply during the interview, which then hindered my ability to revisit his narrative with a critical eye. (2011, p. 292)

The nature of the crimes Alexandre described are unimaginable to most, and, in contrast, Jessee's inability to listen deeply is not only understandable, it is hard to imagine anyone responding otherwise. As I described in Chapter Three, in my interview with Mr. City, I had been thrown into a similar state in the face of a far, far less disturbing narrative. Still, immersed in this brutal situation, Jessee nonetheless feels the qualms of not fulfilling her commitment to Alexandre as an oral historian. In the moment she could not listen deeply. After the fact, she realized that she had recorded the interview inadequately in her notes. Reflecting after completing the interviews, she decides she will not use Alexandre's narrative. In fact, Jessee decides that in her project, her dissertation/book, she will hardly use her narrators' interviews at all. She will not use Alexandre's because she cannot take responsibility for giving voice to his world-view, and she will not use others' because she fears the repercussions that revealing their identity, even inadvertently, might bring.

There remains, however, an issue larger even than the harrowing ethical decisions specific to Jesse's project, and she confronts them head-on:

> In response to the idea that oral history can promote the democratization of history, the lingering question that remains when working amid highly politicized research settings is: To what end? By uncritically disseminating the narratives of complex political actors who seek to delegitimize their governments or justify their involvement in mass atrocities, for example, oral historians risk inadvertently becoming part of the machinery of propaganda . . . To contextualize these narratives by locating them within the larger historical or political landscape within which they are produced, or by drawing upon secondary sources that critique the informants' perspectives, detracts from the oral historians' ability to

> give voice to those who are typically absent from history. The voice of the individual becomes subsumed by other sources of authority—including that of the researcher—to an extent that many oral historians would seek to avoid precisely because it undermines efforts to share authority and democratize history (Jessee, 2011).

Although the ethical implications of Jessee's work are thrown in great relief by the extremely high stakes of her fieldwork sites—There is no question that life and death hang in the balance—I would offer that Jessee's conclusions have even deeper significance than she seems to propose. In doing so, I reiterate my response in Chapter Four to Eric Bruner's observation that centralized power only responded locally at New Salem when an issue was "openly politicized." I have never been in any situation remotely so charged as Jessee's sites. And yet, in my experience, drawing from the three case studies presented in this dissertation as well as from my work other projects, every site and situation can be a "highly politicized research setting" because any situation becomes "highly politicized" the moment one presents a challenge to power, however slight the challenge and however insignificant the stakes may seem.

If we shift Jessee's initial question slightly, we come to a fundamental question that oral history must face and that oral historians are only beginning to address in print. Rather than asking ourselves "To what end?", perhaps it may be fruitful to examine the premise itself: Can oral history promote the democratization of history within any hierarchical structure, whether the immediate locus of power in that structure is a handful of individuals in a small, historically segregated rural Texas community, an administrator

at a historic site overseen by a central state agency, the nation-state itself, or even a coalition of forces operating in global economies across diplomatic lines?

Despite these unsettling questions, my confidence in oral history as a methodology and in making meaning through deep listening as an epistemology remains unshaken. If anything, it is stronger still. After all, I arrived at these questions I believe are so central by applying the methods of my trade—and what a reassuring and formidable feature, for a "research tool" to hold within it the potential to challenge its own legitimacy. I came to these questions because my training—Dr. Norkunas' training—had taught me to pay close attention to the deep bonds and unexpected connections that can develop in the interview process. When I noticed a fracture in these bonds, I felt in my gut the need to ask why.

I also felt the need to return to these three projects and ask questions of them because I had spent so much of the years from 2000 to 2006, my first six years as a public historian, working on them. And as so often happens with work that we love, I came to see the major products of that work, the three films—*Truth I Ever Told*, *Hill Country*, and *Impressions in Fire and Clay*—as manifestations of the relationships that shaped them. I see in the films all the wonderful people in the communities where we worked—those we interviewed and those who helped in so many other ways. I see in them all the dedicated and struggling workers at Texas Parks and Wildlife, in Austin and at the sites. I see my mentors, my professors, and my colleagues in the courses that greatly influenced this work. I see in them my friends and partners on the projects, Brian Rawlins and Mark Westmoreland. And of course, I see myself. So when it came to pass that successively, each of these films failed to play at their respective sites—*Truth* played at Washington-

on-the-Brazos and *Hill Country* played at the LBJ State Park only once each, and after screening for about a year at Varner-Hogg Plantation, *Impressions* has not screened there since—after the films failed to do what they were made to do, I took it as a grave disappointment. I have had neither the opportunity nor the ability to do anything remotely as gratifying professionally in the six years since. And in much of the time I have been ruminating on, avoiding, and writing this dissertation, the working title I had in my head for the dissertation, rarely spoken out loud, has been *Tony Cherian: a Chronicle of Early Failure*. But I no longer call it that anymore.[19]

And so I ask, "Why it is that these films failed to do what we intended them to do?" The smart-ass response, and a valid one too, would be, "Maybe they stink." It would be foolish not to consider the possibility, and I entreat any and all to watch and assess them.[20] I, however, regard them as beautiful documents of the times in which we made them and of the times that they refer to. They remain so in spite of any shortcomings I have described in the preceding chapters. Although I contributed a lot of myself to them, they seem somehow outside of me also. They always have. They tell me things that I could never have learned on my own—they even tell me what they lacked. Each time I watch them, I learn something new. I see manifested in these films quiet, subtle, and compelling challenges to power. And so, when I ask why these films no longer or never did screen at the sites intended to be their homes, one answer comes in the form of John Dorst's succinct insight. "The more polished the mirror-surface of post-

[19] This is not just because at 37, I can no longer be considered a "young professional" or "early in my career."

[20] All three of the films are available online as a stream or download, free at http://www.vimeo.com/tonycherian

modernity becomes," Dorst says, "the more visible and disturbing even minor disruptions of that surface appear to be" (1989, p. 177). Dorst is speaking here about Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania, as a mirror-surface of post-modernity and of one site there, the Sanderson Museum, as "one such minor disruption." However, I hope that I have shown in the preceding chapters, that each of my three case study sites are themselves also mirror-surfaces of post-modernity—not like the mirror-surfaces Eco sees at the LBJ Library, surfaces that reflect out the "ignorance" of the spectator, but mirror-surfaces that reflect the impenetrability of the heritage narratives represented on these sites, mirror-surfaces that conceal behind them the workings of power desperate to maintain control, mirror-surfaces that deflect external critical practices, mirror-surfaces that reject all retrospective analysis of the past, mirror-surfaces that naturalize the rhetorical images that they project out.

Each of the films then appear as minor disruptions on the highly polished mirror-surfaces of the sites. At Washington-on-the-Brazos and the LBJ State Park, as soon as these specks landed on the mirror-surface, the sites wiped their surface clean again and proceeded to function as they always had. At Varner-Hogg Plantation, the speck landed, along with other specks, on the mirror surface, and the site allowed them to remain on the surface long enough at least that it became uncertain whether the blemishes would wipe clean, and in that moment of uncertainty, power showed itself to be more than willing to shatter the mirror to rid itself of those tiny blemishes. This is one explanation for why the films did not become or remain part of the interpretation at the sites. But there are other reasons too.

“Oral history entails risk,” Southern historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall tells us, “the risk is of seeing yourself and others in a different light” (Hall, 2005, p. 192). In listening deeply to others, and trying to build a “relational bridge between listener and narrator” and across differences, things change. In the preceding pages, I have alluded to the fact that things changed when I became involved with oral history, that I changed. The words in Dr. Norkunas’ students’ journals intimate that they changed also. One such change takes place when one commits to seeing another on his or her own terms, in his or her own words. This is yet another part of the process of deep, engaged listening. One may strive to empathize with the narrator or at least see things from his or her point of view. This is what I did when I revisited the three case study sites and tried to understand what happened. As I watched and rewatched, the interviews that have troubled me the most over the intervening years, as I transcribed them, examined my editing choices, as I heard my dialogue with the narrators and not just their narrative, I shrunk, as one would expect, the objective distance between myself and the narrators. But then something else happened, I also increased the distance between myself in the present and myself as present in the recorded footage. No longer immersed in the task of making a film, I began to view myself reflexively, to ponder the motivations behind my actions, my words, my questions. I began, perhaps, to see myself as an observer might, to see myself, in some slight manner, as my narrators might have. I began to see myself in a different light. I began to fall into my own gaze.

It was in this process that I began to discover my own complicity in maintaining the dominant narrative at these sites. Once I assumed this posture, this complicity was not difficult to see. Quite the opposite, it was hard to ignore. I could see the evidence

everywhere. I began to see how I could not hear Ms. Marshall's narrative, the words she said over and over again, "It's hard being a single parent, raising five kids." I began to see how doggedly I was pursuing the words I needed to edit the film I envisioned and how callously I ignored so much else Ms. Marshall chose to share about herself and her life. My memory of our interview had been much kinder to me, even as it nagged at me to revisit it.

So too with Mr. City's narrative, I began to see my role, not only in silencing it, but also in eliciting it. I could see now how earnestly Mr. City searched, early on, to give me the stories I wanted, and how I, equally earnestly, insisted he tell me what he found significant. I saw him fumbling and anxious. I saw myself reassuring but stubborn, refusing to give him direction. And I saw him light on his well-worn narrative of racist history, and I saw him come to ease and decide for himself that this was the story I wanted from him. And I saw myself freeze, in shock, detach and travel elsewhere in my mind, leaving him nothing but dead air to fill and white supremacist dogma to fill it with. Even at Varner-Hogg where we succeeded in displacing the dominant narrative at the site at least for a time, viewing myself reflexively, I began to see how I replaced the dominant narrative so completely with my vision of the site that visitors could no longer perform their own hauntologies of the site. Through the introductory video, I had so crowded the landscape with ghosts of my choosing that if others tried to invoke their own apparitions, theirs had no space to materialize. When, in turn, I began to pay attention to the possible meanings of the volunteers' performances of the site, I began to see how the film might have taken away something deeply meaningful—and not necessarily racist—from them.

And I began to see why they might have had such an intense reaction to the film and to the other changes at the site.

The first part of Hall's warning had come to pass, I had seen myself differently. I saw some of my interviews and interviewees differently also, but that did not entail so much risk—Perhaps it's not so hard to give some one the benefit of the doubt when you have already tried to empathize with them. The risk came when I revisited my own narratives of the projects at the sites, the narratives in my mind, the narratives that I told in my Chronicle of Early Failure. The narratives, in brief, went something like this: At Washington-on-the-Brazos, we created a beautiful film together with the Post Oak and Bluff communities that celebrated those communities' contribution to Texas history and that those communities celebrated at the state park for a brief moment. That brief moment was destroyed by a racist and conspiratorial middle manager who never had any intention of using the film and who buried the project the moment we walked off the site. At the LBJ State Park, an open-minded and egalitarian site manager commissioned a beautiful and inclusive film which his successor, bent on self-preservation, summarily buried on the basis of any available excuse, to avoid even the slightest appearance of controversy. At Varner-Hogg, a talented, charismatic, and honorable site manager commissioned and supported a film that reinterpreted the site to better reflect the experiences of the majority of the people who lived and worked on the site. Despite agreeing on this reinterpretation through a public, transparent and democratic process, racist and reactionary site volunteers, corrupt politicians, and small-minded, territorial, and cowardly bureaucrats at Parks headquarters buried the film, gutted the site of its staff and funding, and left the site to rot in the swampy climes of Brazoria County.

Just writing these words feels like such a violent act. It makes me wonder how I lived with such anger for so long. I still feel the pain of loss, what might have been at these sites, but I can no longer locate any blame or muster any anger towards the people and entities that these narratives rail against. Instead, I mourn quietly for all of us, as comrades struggling within a corrupt and unjust hierarchy. This, I believe, was the risk that Hall referred to, the most profound risk that oral history entails, the risk of revealing that we cannot choose who we identify with and who we distance ourselves from. "Oral history," Hall says, "takes us to the core of our insecurities and fears . . . it makes us question where we are, who we are and where, as individuals and socially, we are willing to go" (2005, p. 192). I do not know how Hall meant these words. When I first read them, I read them as metaphor. In time, I have come to feel them literally. Hall wrote these words in the context of a project on school desegregation that she and Della Pollock undertook with their students at UNC-Chapel Hill. Reflecting on the project, she called it a "fantastic failure":

> A failure in the impossibilities it revealed. The impossibility of erasing the boundaries sedimented by slavery, segregation, and the whole ordeal of integration . . . the impossibility of doing justice to the story . . . the impossibility of representing . . . the full meaning of the stories we heard . . . And yet 'fantastic' precisely because of what the project dared and what limits daring will always reveal. (Hall, 2005, p. 196)

I wish I shared Hall's optimism in the face of the impossibilities she describes. I do not dare. Nor do I feel daring. I only know that I must . . .

I do not know whether the work we did at these three sites changed them in any meaningful way. Nor do I know whether it changed anyone, outside of myself. I do know that this journey changed me in ways that make me deeply grateful. And so in answer to the question, “What next?”, I know only that out of this gratitude, I must continue to listen, to act, to think, to write, to care, to love.

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