

"THE OTHER HALF":
MAKING AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY AT
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

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For Blair, Towles, and Tom

Abstract

Museums are institutions that have long had a prominent role in creating and maintaining ideologies central to 20th-century culture. Nowhere has this been more clearly demonstrated among history museums than at Colonial Williamsburg, the museum/town in Tidewater Virginia reconstructed by industrialist John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Now in its seventh decade, Colonial Williamsburg is seen by the public and by professionals in the museum field as a leader among traditional history museums, as the place which sets the standard in the preservation and interpretation of colonial America's physical buildings and its philosophical beliefs.

This dissertation describes and analyzes black history at Colonial Williamsburg, looking at the programs, at the people involved in developing and presenting them, and at the responses to them by both visitors and museum staff. For fifty years, the history of the white founding fathers was not just the dominant story in the museum's presentations, it was the only story. By museum standards it was a rich story, one bolstered with stacks of historical documents and original artifacts. In 1979 that changed when six African-American actors were hired to present black history. This was an area about which most of the museum's historians had done little research, and for which its

curators and archaeologists had collected few museum objects. In a museum context, the black past struggled to compete with the past of those for whom documentation and collections met traditional museum standards.

My project focuses on this scenario of primary and secondary--or dominant and subordinate--histories in the museum, and on the accompanying paradoxes and tensions. It is the study of a hegemonic situation involving people and departments, narratives about the past, and extending to the objects in the museum's collections. I show that this museum was a place where the values of America's dominant white culture were reinforced at nearly every turn, and I argue that, despite its best intentions and indeed imbedded in those intentions, Colonial Williamsburg not only reflected the hegemonic relationship which exists between blacks and whites in American culture, it often reproduced, unconsciously, the racism inherent in that hegemonic relationship.

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Preface

I was midway through writing this dissertation when the Holocaust Museum opened in Washington, in April 1993. Reading article after article on that project, I was struck by how Colonial Williamsburg's efforts to present African-American history, and specifically slavery, seemed to fall short of a complete picture. After all, over a period of three centuries Western Europeans and Americans killed 12, 25, or 60 million Africans, depending on whose estimates you accept of the numbers who were captured, shipped, or worked to death. Enough of those Africans had suffered and died by 1770, the date on which Williamsburg focused its attention, to require this museum committed to authenticity to show the pain, dehumanization, and hopelessness of slave life. Yet compared with the Holocaust Museum's presentation of life in Auschwitz or Buchenwald, slave life as depicted at Williamsburg was safe, clean, and unthreatening.

And there was more to the problem. Colonial Williamsburg was a museum with an avowed intention to create an "authentic reproduction" of the 18th century. The museum's number one message about itself was its commitment to authenticity, a goal it saw itself achieving through researching and presenting to the visiting public the most "accurate" information possible about the past. Precisely because it appeared to succeed at this in many other areas,

its sanitized version of slavery was the more unsettling. If a visitor was told that the Wythe House was the actual house, the very building, lived in by Mr. Wythe, and was told that the costume displayed as Mrs. Randolph's was made to the last button and ribbon exactly like the 18th-century version, then that visitor was likely to assume that a comparable level of accuracy pertained in a slave presentation.

Where were the shackles and chains? In a museum committed to the story of the 18th-century town's enslaved population, a visitor encountered physical restraint at only two places, and at neither, ironically, was slavery the subject. One was the reconstructed mental hospital where chains and leg irons were shown in connection with lunatics, not slaves. The other was the courthouse with its replicas of 18th-century wooden stocks, a museum landmark where thousands of laughing visitors have had themselves photographed, and a trademark in Colonial Williamsburg advertising.

There were, of course, presentations about slave life at Colonial Williamsburg that suggested some of the horror of slavery and were powerfully moving. Visitors had been known to leave slavery programs in tears, deeply pained by what they had experienced. More generally, however, the visitors reacted to the museum's information about slavery with surprise, followed by relief. The surprise seemed to

stem from the numbers; they were amazed to find that fully half the population of the 2800 residents in 18th-century Williamsburg was black. A museum is a setting in which, theoretically, objects drive the narrative, yet visitors at Colonial Williamsburg did not see that population among the costumed guides in the town. And what they did see was more comforting than disconcerting. Peering into the doorway of a neat and cozy kitchen, glimpsing a tidily made bed in the corner of the adjoining laundry room, visitors could comment that slaves in Williamsburg lived pretty well. To them it was a surprise that there were so many slaves, but a relief that they were relatively comfortable.

Colonial Williamsburg had introduced the topic of slavery, but it had backed away from an in-depth exploration of what it meant to be a slave, and of what slavery meant for the society as a whole. More than a decade after introducing black history into its historical narratives, there were still only a dozen full-time African-American guides or interpreters responsible for presenting black history, these out of a total corps of nearly four hundred guides. The museum management wanted to present black history, and particularly slavery, and it wanted African Americans to do it, but not too conspicuously. It was as if the black guides and their narratives were to serve as "icons of authenticity" (Gable and Handler 1993).

An icon, the physical but symbolic embodiment of idea, was acceptable. The few "slaves" were icons, like the museum's few neatly penned sheep and cattle, or the "road apples" in the streets (as some guides quaintly referred to the manure left by the carriage horses). But recreating the town with roaming chickens and rooting pigs, or mire in the streets, was to move from the symbolic to the real, from icons to pollution. To present a more realistic picture of slavery, in terms either of numbers or of the story, would be to pollute the pristine fantasy world which Colonial Williamsburg and its American public believed to be their "true" history. The members of the African-American staff were potential polluters, and not just of the 18th-century storybook community recreated by the museum. By tainting America's past, they threatened her present.

What happens when a history museum endeavors to present versions of history which turn out to be uncomfortable for its constituents, both internal and public? What happens to the history, or histories, and what happens to the people involved in carrying out the project? These became the questions which guided this dissertation.

My focus was the social historians and the African-American interpreters, both groups with a sense of mission. The social historians--including historians, architectural historians, curators, and archaeologists, and allied with the museum "management"--were the researchers behind the

scenes who tried to broaden the museum's message to include the poor and exploited along with the rich and powerful, while preserving the attractiveness of the museum to its public. However, I was most concerned with the African Americans, caught in the interpretive dilemma of trying to convey the evils of a system while struggling to present the people in the system as something more than victims. Many of these employees were engaged in personal struggles to keep from identifying too closely with the historical victims, and to keep from being identified by others--both the white middle-class public and the museum's overwhelmingly white middle-class staff--with the victims. They could not provide a complex depiction of slavery; at best, they could only round out the museum's traditionally all-white history.

Derrick Bell argues that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (1992:iii). He believes that there is no way for blacks to be fully equal to whites in America, and he sets out the proposition that even apparent successes in black-white equality are "short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance" (Ibid.:12). If what historian Reginald Butler pointed out to me is true, that the efforts to present slavery at Colonial Williamsburg in fact reproduced the racism the museum sought to denounce, then credence is

given to Bell's proposition. This dissertation may be useful if it can throw light on, as Bell puts it, "racial patterns. . .that maintain white dominance." How did it come about that an institution motivated by good will could recreate the problem it hoped to confront?

This project may also be useful if it adds to the growing and complex body of ethnographic work in American culture. Along this line, I wrestled with a two-part problem. First, as a person born in Virginia and acculturated from birth (some would say indoctrinated) in the lore of a Virginia where the past is utterly revered, I know I carried to Colonial Williamsburg the baggage of a public heritage, and of a private one--baggage I am sure I was not always aware of and certainly never shed.

Second, I am a person who falls into the ethnic category of "white." At Colonial Williamsburg, I was a "white" woman from the "white" establishment trying to understand how this museum which was a product of that establishment presented a past built on the exploitation of black people. It was possible that I grasped what the museum "management," its white establishment members, were thinking and doing. Less certain was whether I had any understanding about what the African-American staff members were thinking and doing. The danger was dual: that I, as ethnographer, would be unable to shift my own personal baggage enough to see that the museum was reproducing

racism, and worse, that I would reproduce that racism in this dissertation. You, reader, will have to judge.

Introduction

[M]ost museums remain bound by traditional collection and exhibition practices. As one respondent [in a survey of museum curators] put it, "we remain the captives of generations of institutional policies derived from the habit of viewing museums as private preserves of a wealthy white society. . .any other tradition is considered suspect."
(Horton and Crew 1989)

Museums are institutions which have a prominent role in creating and maintaining ideologies central to 20th-century culture (Carson 1981, 1991; Chappell 1989a, 1989b; Clifford 1985; Duncan and Wallach 1978; Ruffins 1986; Stocking 1985; Wallace 1985). Nowhere has this been better demonstrated among history museums than at Colonial Williamsburg. Now in its seventh decade, Williamsburg is seen by the public and by professionals in the museum field as a leader among traditional history museums, as the place responsible for setting the standard in the preservation and interpretation of colonial America's physical buildings and its philosophical beliefs. Indeed, many consider it the paradigm of the "modern" history museums, the model among those self-conscious, self-appointed institutions in which a history or histories--some version or versions of the past--are presented (Ettema 1987; Handler 1987, 1993; Harris 1980, 1987; Horton and Crew 1989; Leon and Piatt 1989; Wallace 1986a, 1986b). This dissertation analyzes how Colonial Williamsburg, in its self-conscious, self-appointed

role, undertook the addition to its programs of black history, often described in-house as "the other half." My analysis focuses on the hegemonic relations among people and departments, and, in a symbolic sense, among the museum's historical narratives and among the museum objects associated with those narratives. I am concerned with the tensions inherent in situations where some objects, narratives, and individuals were deemed more or less valuable than others--more or less valuable either as "history" or as items in the collection of the present-day museum. I am concerned also with an issue imbedded in these tensions, that of racism. Because these objects and narratives were associated with African Americans and whites, both past and present, it was perhaps inevitable that racist attitudes in American culture would surface in the museum's presentations of them.

By studying this museum from the perspectives of its hegemonic relations, and the racist issues associated with those relations, I think we can learn something about how Williamsburg, and museums generally, create and maintain ideologies in the area of cultural hegemony, specifically in terms of black culture within a dominant white society. It should also be possible to find out something about how these relations reflect situations in American society at large.

It was Williamsburg which pioneered many of the "traditional collection and exhibition practices," referred to by the curator cited in the quotation at the head of this chapter. And while presenting itself as an historical mecca for all Americans, the fact that Williamsburg was founded, and for many years largely funded, by one of America's preeminent industrialists, puts it in the ranks those "private preserves of a wealthy white society"--a preserve into which the museum's visiting public buys, literally and figuratively, with its admissions tickets.

The buildings and the beliefs, and the acts of preserving and interpreting, all reflect cultural attitudes about what is important in American life, and at the same time they also help to shape those attitudes. That Colonial Williamsburg exists reflects, for instance, the belief that memorializing certain people and events is part of the cultural fabric; and, even as it stands as evidence of this belief, the museum also specifies which people and events those are, and how they are to be valued. Its collections, which are at the foundation of the museum's existence, are evidence that certain objects have a role in the memorialization endeavor, but also that some objects have value in and of themselves. The museum has a similar stance toward the preservation and interpretation of 18th-century crafts, believing that the skills "reveal" an era, and that

the practice of the skills "preserves" the era, but also that the skill or craft has value in itself.

Beginning in the late 1970s, museum scholars and staff began to analyze and debate the role of their institutions in modern society, and they felt increasingly that their hands were tied by the procedures and policies for which traditional history museums such as Colonial Williamsburg has long been respected (Horton and Crew). Many of the accepted approaches to collections of objects--whether the objects were buildings, books, or boot buckles--became problematic, particularly as history museums started adding to their presentations narratives for which they had few objects, and even started acquiring objects that curators thought of as less "valuable." Such additions were not extensive--they rarely affected the object-focused nature of the institutions--but they did inject the possibility that a collection could follow the narrative rather than serve as its source.

Colonial Williamsburg was part of this phenomenon. Led by a few scholars in its top level of management, but including staff in the middle echelons and on the front line, the museum set out to shift its approach, or to broaden it, from presenting an essentially monolithic version of history, one focused on the lives of the textbook Revolutionary War heroes and on crafts of the 18th century (though not on the lives of the craftspeople), to a version

incorporating several perspectives. People in the museum described this as a move to presenting a "more accurate" picture of the past.

The step after acknowledging that there were other people and events that could and should be presented, was choosing which people and events to add. As Colonial Williamsburg's literature and guides now explain, African Americans made up half of the population of the town in the 18th century, a statistic for which there is apparently ample data from tax and court records. A museum with a self- and oft-proclaimed commitment to "accuracy" as the basis for recreating an "authentic" past could not ignore such information. Colonial Williamsburg moved to include black history, explaining that these two requirements--the need for more than one perspective for presenting the past "accurately," and the necessity that those perspectives be documented--would be satisfied by black history.

The decision to add the narratives of African Americans, and even the notion that other perspectives were necessary, might not have arisen, however, without a third factor. (It is relevant to point out here that the chronology which brought about these changes is murky. It was suggested to me in three separate interviews--two with administrators, and one with an historian whose chief charge was the black programs--that the proposal to include African-American history came first, and that the perceived

need for additional perspectives for "accuracy" was secondary.) In any case, this "factor" came in the form of a group of scholars and educators, many of them historians, who had joined the museum in the mid- and late 1970s. Their role will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but it is important to note them here.

They were the "social historians" educated in (mostly Ivy League) universities at a time when academia was responding to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and to the Vietnam War, and was experiencing a trend which urged that "history" be "rewritten" to acknowledge the existence of many versions of the past, and particularly the "validity" of the African-American past. These scholars and educators, describing the narratives of the mid-1970s as overly upbeat, saw themselves as agents of change and the museum as the vehicle (Ellis 1989, 1990; Leon and Piatt 1989). Openly acknowledging the ideological role of museums (Carson and Chappell, cited in the first paragraph of this chapter, are both at Colonial Williamsburg), they held that adding black history would change not just the visitor's view of the past, it was also intended to change his view of the present.

"The Other Half"

Colonial Williamsburg owes its existence to a philanthropist from New York, but it is a museum located in

the south, and in the early 1980s when black history was introduced, it had a fifty-odd-year tradition of a history whose protagonists were white, presented by an all-white staff of employees, to an overwhelmingly white audience. Adding black history to the museum's story of white patriots meant adding black protagonists to the picture. In the "new" narratives presented in the museum, the relationship between the white and black protagonists was lodged in slavery, making hegemonic relationship within historical narratives inevitable.

In addition, there were people associated with the museum who saw the relationship between the narratives in hegemonic terms. These included visitors as well as staff members to whom the story of the colonial patriots was, without question, more important than the story of black life in colonial times. Just as white people dominated black people in the 18th century, so the histories of those whites should take precedence over the histories of the blacks of that era.

Some version of an African-American past might have come into the narrative at Colonial Williamsburg with relatively little disruption of the narrative status quo (as has been attempted at Monticello), if the inclusion had been left to the white corps of guides then in charge of the presentations. But Colonial Williamsburg chose not just to tell about black life, it undertook to show it. In keeping

with its literal approach to "authenticity," this meant bringing African Americans onto a museum staff which was nearly all white. It was a hiring decision which created another arena for hegemonic imbalance. To the two inherently hegemonic relationships referred to above--that associated with slavery, situated in an historical context; and the one between the narratives associated with the founding fathers and the narratives pertaining to their servants, situated in the context of the present-day museum--were added the hegemonic issues inherent in bringing African-American employees into a previously white institution. The cultural hegemony implicit in a museum traditionally devoted to narratives about a group of white landowners, the "founding fathers," became more explicit with the addition of narratives about their African slaves. Issues associated with racism also became more apparent. Before going farther I want to clarify my use of terms associated with, or meaning, "black history." Currently, researchers and scholars in the museum world and in academia seem to use "black history" synonymously with "African-American history." It seems also to be acceptable, even preferable, to substitute the word "past" for "history." Apparently this is a choice made to avoid certain implications associated with the word "history." Traditionally, "history" has meant the definitive description of an era, and so was, by implication, the only

reliable account, or the only account. As I understand it, "past" is considered by some to be a more egalitarian term, and is used to avoid or to counter a presumption associated with "history"--the notion that a single report of events can possibly provide an "accurate" picture of the past.

Colonial Williamsburg personnel used both words, history and past, in conjunction with the adjectives "black" and "African-American." They also used "slave life," "slavery," and "the other half." This meant that there were a number of more or less interchangeable phrases for referring to black history in the museum: black past, black history, African-American past, African-American history, slave life, slave history, slavery, and "the other half." In reality, however, nearly all of the "black history" presented at Colonial Williamsburg was "slave history," despite the fact that there was ample evidence that free black people lived in 18th-century Williamsburg. "Free black" was the marked category, and although there were occasional references to a few free black members of the 18th-century African-American community, the museum's programs and tours focused overwhelmingly on slavery. That free blacks received so little attention was seen by some members of Williamsburg's present-day black community as evidence that the museum was not interested in black history per se, but only in the most sensational form of black history, slavery--for marketing purposes. (See Chapter

Four, especially the endnote to the chapter, for more discussion of museum presentation of free blacks.)

In this dissertation I have used all of the museum terms above as the museum used them, that is, more or less interchangeably. When one word seemed more accurate than another, however, I made choices. An example is the title, "The Other Half: Making African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg." To begin with the second part, I chose "African-American History" to suggest two ideas of making history: that of composing or creating an 18th-century African-American past for museum purposes, and that of making history, in the sense that the act of adding black history to the museum's narrative was making history in the 1980s and 1990s. The decision to use "African-American" instead of "black" stems from my perception of how the museum viewed the history of 18th-century free black people. "Black" suggests to me an inclusive past, and I thought that in using it I would imply that Colonial Williamsburg gives attention to free blacks, which was not the case. This left a choice between "African-American" and "slave" as the modifiers for "history," and since I wanted to suggest with "making history" the double meaning of making history in the 18th century and in the 20th century, "African-American" worked better.

More interesting issues are associated with the first part of the title, "The Other Half." To have encountered

cultural hegemony and racism in a museum with Colonial Williamsburg's origins and traditions was not surprising. What was ironic, however, was that this institution which saw itself as having the best intentions of providing a "corrected" or "inclusive" picture of American history, one designed to give African Americans "equality"--equal time, equal respect, an "equal" past--often reproduced the inequalities. To me it was an irony starkly evident in the phrase, "the other half," the highly visible term commonly used by both the African-American and white guides and educators in the museum to refer to the 18th-century black population. "The other half" was embraced by museum personnel as a benign, even a positive way to describe the 18th-century situation; no one I talked to ever seemed aware of its potentially negative connotations.

The phrase was adopted in the early 1980s as the title for Colonial Williamsburg's first regular program focused on black history, "The Other Half Tour." (This program receives detailed analysis in Chapter Three of this dissertation.) Rex Ellis, then head of African-American projects and creator of the tour, took credit for coming up with the name, seeing it as a catchy way to inform visitors "up front" that half the population of the period being presented in the museum was black, and also to keep that fact in the front of his colleagues' the visitors' minds (Rex Ellis, interview, 2/90). I was never sure, however, of

Ellis's position on this--of whether he intended or was even aware of the irony in the fact that the 18th-century white residents of the town would not have thought of the black contingent as its "half," in the sense of "equal." In any case, during the 1980s, as efforts expanded to include black history in programs throughout the museum, "the other half" came to be an in-house substitute for "blacks" or "slaves."

Perhaps it is the anthropological perspective that makes the word "other" seem additionally problematic. For nearly a century after Tylor established anthropology as an academic discipline in the 1870s, ethnographers routinely associated the concept of the "other" with people they thought of as less civilized than Westerners, and thus, usually, less valuable. Almost always these people were "other" than "white"--"brown" or "black" or "red," but rarely "white." Even when they were "white" they were still aberrations from Western conceptions of the norm; they were peasants, for instance, or an ethnic social group in some way outside the society. I think that the adoption of "other" in regard to the African-American past at Colonial Williamsburg reflects an unconscious acceptance of a culturally hegemonic attitude in which narratives associated with those who were not "patriots" and were not "white," were assigned a subordinate place in the museum's scheme of the past.

"Half" compounds the irony implicit in "other." A half is, of course, an equal segment of a whole which has been divided into two parts. It is equal by definition. To add the adjective "other" changes the definition. The half described as "other" is demoted; coupling "other" with "half" implies (at the very least) that it is a lesser half. Put another way, there is the "real" half, the white half, and then there is the less real, the non-white, the other half. Rex Ellis may have been aware of the ironic implications in the use of "half" vis-a-vis the historical white population of Williamsburg, but there is the related irony in a museum whose 1990s population of guides, a decade after black history was introduced, still numbered close to 400 white people and fewer than 20 African Americans.

I think one reason for the term's wide acceptance in the museum was its euphemistic element. With "the other half" in their descriptive vocabularies, museum staff members (and visitors) were given an alternative to saying "slave" or "black;" it helped both white and black staff to navigate difficult narrative territory. The phrase may also have come easier to guides who were familiar with usage in suburban society of "other half" as a reference to one's spouse--as in "How's your other half?"--especially since an alternate term in this usage is "better half." I can imagine a guide's unconscious train of thought in which "other half"

equates to "better half," and so helps mask any negative reactions to the taboo subject of slavery.

In his discussion of subversion in public transcripts, Scott reminds us that a euphemism in a society is usually evidence that the topic is a delicate one, and he suggests that such a presence may play a role in "masking the many nasty facts of domination and giving them a harmless or sanitized aspect" (1990:53). His focus is on the acquiescence of a subordinate group to the use by the dominant groups of a euphemism. At Colonial Williamsburg, however, the AAIP staff took credit for conceiving "the other half," and appeared to "own" it wholeheartedly. Ten years ago the guides at Monticello were told to stop using a common euphemism, "servant," to describe Thomas Jefferson's slaves. Although "slave," "slavery," and "black" were certainly used at Colonial Williamsburg, their absorption into the notion of "the other half," a term which obscures the reality of black life in 18th-century Virginia, reflects the museum's conflict about the issues of hegemony and racism. I think "the other half" was readily accepted by both black and white at Williamsburg to obscure their, and the museum's, conflicts about presenting issues associated with racism. At the same time, it may also have been evidence of Gramsci's theory (discussed below) of the subordinate group acting with autonomy, but in a way that was in fact submissive.

In summary, the phrase "the other half" is emblematic of the issues which surrounded the addition of black history to the programs at Colonial Williamsburg. Despite appearances--the notion that "half" means equal--its subtext is one of inequality. While "the other half" mocked the reality of the 18th-century situation, it reflected the reality of the 20th-century museum, where the embracing of the term reproduced unconscious, or unspoken cultural views associated with white and black. To my mind, the use of the term was a reflection of a conflict in American culture, one of those core ideologies that the museum was attempting to present and understand, but which it reproduced despite its best intentions.

Theoretical Framework of the Project

My analysis of the issues surrounding the addition of black history at Colonial Williamsburg centers on the hegemonic aspects of the situation--how groups and individuals within the museum, and their associated narratives and objects, emerged as dominant or subordinate to each other, and how these hegemonic relationships were negotiated. Given the circumstances of black history in a traditionally white museum, it is not surprising that the subject of racism entered this discussion, but it was interesting how often racist attitudes found in American society were reproduced (if unconsciously) in a museum which

had publicly committed itself to an even-handed presentation of African-American history.

The focus is in examining these issues is on two perspectives among Colonial Williamsburg staff members, perspectives held by two "groups" of "natives." One was a group which I call "management;" the other was the department of African-American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP), a staff numbering approximately twelve full-time museum professionals. The "management" group included researchers, educators, and historic interpreters (the museum's term for "guides"), and most of its members were white. People in this group agreed with the generally held view that the "traditional" history presented at Colonial Williamsburg--the story of the patriots--was the central message of the museum. At the same time, most of them also believed (or did not object to the notion) that the message was incomplete without an accompanying narrative about slavery. This group could accept that whatever was "lost" to the narrative of heroic national origins (by presenting founding fathers who were sullied by the messiness and contradictions associated with their being slave holders), was compensated for by the "more accurate" version of the past achieved through the addition of presentations of slavery.

The AAIP "group" was composed of the staff interpreters and researchers of the AAIP department, all of whom were

black. Members of this group did not question the importance of the patriot history, but they believed that adding a black version of the past to the patriots' past did more than enhance the traditional story: for the patriots' story to be credible, the slave story was indispensable. This was different from the "management" view which saw including the black story as providing the ballast of "accuracy" which made the museum's traditional story more "authentic." But beyond either credibility or authenticity, the AAIP group saw black history as intrinsically valuable. For the management group the patriots' story was the main story, encompassing any others in the museum--craftsmen, women, slaves. For the AAIP group, the African-American story was not just "any other" story; it was (the irony of being the "other half" aside) a legitimate "half" of the story.

"Management" people, then, gave every indication of being committed to the importance of black history per se, but they also subscribed to the museum's core ethos that "accuracy" was the means to "authenticity." There was not necessarily a contradiction in this, since black history in the museum could be important in itself and important to producing the museum's more "authentic" picture of the 18th century. The problem came with conflicting interpretations of what qualified as "authentic." The "authentic" discussion was not a new one at Colonial Williamsburg.

Museum craftsmen had long felt that the locus of "authenticity" in the museum was lodged in the activities in their shops, where the only true "18th-century reality" was in the "doing"--making guns, chairs, hats, or harnesses using period tools, methods, and materials. As pointed out earlier, because the skills were seen as "real," or "authentic," the museum ethos could accommodate the fact that the "people" were not "real," were not "documented" figures from traditional history, such as George Wythe and Peyton Randolph.

The "management" group thought black history was important, at least in the abstract, but when it came to accommodating presentations of 18th-century black life, there was hesitation. For many, black history was seen as inadequately documented, and as lacking the objects which gave museum narratives credibility. In the context of the museum, this put black history in a position where it received less respect than that given traditional history. Within this framework, narratives about colonial black life could be seen as having the same "value" in the museum as narratives about colonial crafts. But there was a difference. The black person or history presented did not have that authenticating element of the craftsman, that skill which linked him to the 18th century.

Having neither the "documentation" required by the museum to present historical, documented, black individual

in the "traditional" 18th-century story, nor the museum-approved "reality" which was derived from doing an 18th-century craft, the African-American story would seem doomed. I think that what enabled it to occupy a competitive place in the minds of "management" was another kind of "authenticity:" black history could be authentic because it would be done by black people. In a sense, the situation of the AAIP staff member with an ethnic identity paralleled that of the craftsman identified by his craft; the former was categorized by his skin, the latter ;by his skill. In a difference sense of course it was not the same at all. In the 18th century, the silversmith could, at least ostensibly, choose to be a cabinetmaker or to abandon life as a craftsman altogether and become a farmer or a sailor; and in the 20th-century museum, he had similar options. For the African American in the either century, being black was one identity that could not be abandoned.

Questions surrounding the differences and the similarities in the perspectives of the two groups, "management" and AAIP, and the versions of the past they presented, speak to classic notions of cultural hegemony. We owe to Gramsci the idea that in Western capitalist nations a hegemonic culture "serves the ruling groups at the expense of the subordinate ones" (Lears 1985:571). What seems to be specifically related to Gramsci's thinking vis-a-vis Colonial Williamsburg are how the views of the

"subordinate" group (AAIP) digressed from the views constructed by the hegemonic or dominant culture ("management"), and how there existed for AAIP a "contrast between thought and action, i.e., the coexistence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in effective action." A third aspect of Gramsci's thinking also applied the museum situation, that of how a subordinate group decided, or even knew, when it was acting "for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination," and when it was "independent and autonomous" (Gramsci 1971:326-7).

Two instances of the "digression" of the subordinate group from the dominant view which I examine in this dissertation are the inverted interpretations of "masters'" objects to serve the story of slavery, and the deviations from traditional museum practices during black history presentations to allow visitors to handle and use museum objects. These were digressions from the dominant view that could also be interpreted as subversion of it. Similarly, there were tours, which I will discuss in detail, on which AAIP guides followed the museum's standard format, yet said and did things were in contrast to the "management" view of what the museum's position should be.

My suggestions are more tentative about the third scenario mentioned above, that of a subordinate group's knowing when it was acting from a "submissive" stance and

when it was "autonomous." There are critics of the black history program at Colonial Williamsburg who maintain that the African-American staff members presenting slavery were not conscious either of their submission or of their autonomy, rather that they had been completely coopted by the "management" group, and were reproducing the racism of the dominant culture with no awareness of their contribution to the enterprise. More persuasive for me is the notion that although AAIP members saw themselves as autonomous, they acted in submissive ways, or in ways stereotypical of African Americans in subordinate roles, often without realizing that it reproduced the racism.

I think that two kinds of "acting" were happening: that in which an AAIP person overtly played a role, for instance the obvious one of 18th-century slave; and that in which she was the 20th-century, cooperative black museum employee. Among the pitfalls of the first was what I saw as an all-too-frequent collapse into a kind of "minstrel" performance. Here the AAIP interpreter became a parody of herself, complete with the kinds of behavior--exaggerated dialect, rolling eyes--which Roediger describes as the classic behavior of the white in minstrel blackface. Roediger's theory is that the white actor projected onto his black character, in parody, the behavior which whites scorned in blacks (and themselves) (1993). The irony at Williamsburg was that the minstrel behavior was being

presented by a black person. I encountered the second sort of acting in the ways some members of the AAIP group saw their jobs. As museum employees they were charged with telling the African-American story, a story framed by the museum as one largely about slavery. Slavery is about labor, and specifically about forced labor--work under coercion with no recourse to a contract. During my second winter in the museum, I became aware of a situation which suggested the existence of a dominant-subordinate relationship between "management" and AAIP. Tense contract negotiations were underway between Colonial Williamsburg's hotels and the members of the hotel and restaurant workers union, and the workers, blue collar and predominantly black, were picketing the Colonial Williamsburg hotels and restaurants.

I asked several AAIP staff members their opinion of the controversy, and whether they had considered supporting the union. All of them replied in ways that distanced themselves from the negotiations and from the people involved, ways that suggested to me that they did not see (or were not willing to see) any parallels between the history of slavery that they were talking about as museum interpreters, and what was happening across the street from their presentations. It is possible that the AAIP people felt they had to take the "management" position to safeguard their jobs, but they did not say that to me. One, for

instance, told me she avoided associating with the picketers because the letter she had received from the union asking for her support was ungrammatical, and another said he "really did not know much about" the contract negotiations, this despite prominent coverage by local and regional media throughout the four-month period of the negotiations.

Lears uses Gramsci's ideas of cultural hegemony to "rethink some fundamental issues in recent interpretations of American history" (1986:568). Putting aside the Marxist controversies surrounding Gramsci's work, Lears focuses on Gramsci's concepts of the functions of cultural symbols in dominant-subordinate relationships, and specifically on Gramsci's notion of a "spontaneous philosophy," which he sees as a combination of language, "conventional wisdom," and popular religion or folklore. According to Lears, the dominant group in a society "selectively refashions" the spontaneous philosophy of the whole society into a world view that benefits the dominant group, but which the society as a whole accepts, although there may be some form of coercion.

Looking at Colonial Williamsburg as a "society," I think that the "management" group attempted such "refashioning" on several fronts. One instance that stands out was the museum's adoption of a new "theme." I would argue that when the museum changed its thematic approach from "The Story of a Patriot" to "Becoming Americans," it

was selectively refashioning. An often stated intention in the reconception was inclusiveness: an African-American past had greater legitimacy in a museum that was talking about "Americans" (everybody) instead of "Patriots" (a few white men). But I believe that this refashioning also made it possible for visitors, "management" people, and even members of the AAIP group to overlook the vast differences between the whites who in 1770 were "becoming Americans," and the blacks of that period who were also, supposedly, part of the process. The inclusive term was intended to benefit both groups, but in obliterating the gap between free and slave it worked to the detriment of the AAIP story. A cynic might even argue that obliterating the gap served to enhance the position of the white story--it was possible to ignore the narrative problems raised by having freedom fighters who were slave holders.

"Management and 'Mainstream'"

Colonial Williamsburg's founder created an institution that reinforced the structure of the dominant group in American society. It was an institution which reflected the hegemonic situation of early 20th-century America: there were dominant and subordinate groups in the society and there were whites and blacks, but in the conception of Colonial Williamsburg and for the first fifty years of the museum's existence, only the white patriots were presented

as real three-dimensional people. (As I have noted, some of their fellow townsmen were on display in crafts shops, but they were not exhibited as "real" in the same way. They were referred to not by name but according to their skills--the shoemaker, the silversmith--and not as thinking about such abstract issues as independence or self-governance.) It was not that one group was presented as better than another, much less dominating another. It was that only one group was presented, period. Blacks, laborers, Native Americans--all people who did live in 18th-century Williamsburg--were not presented at all; they were invisible.

At its inception then, and for most of its history as a museum, Colonial Williamsburg had "history" that was characterized by a world view which had a white, male, Anglo-American, Protestant perspective. This was the "dominant" perspective, but it was also the "universal" perspective, and its power lay in the fact that it was the unchallenged given. It was seen as neither "universal" nor "dominant." Like the air, it was simply there, not noted at all unless some "outside" element or change brought it to our attention, and even then it was the foreign "other" which was defined by the unchallenged given.

With the addition of black history there were the two perspectives that I have described as "management" and AAIP. However, "management" in 1990 vis-a-vis black history was

not so different from the days when the museum had its unilateral account of history. Even as it professed to recognize other versions of the past, it never questioned its own role as the definer, defender, and purveyor of the "mainstream" and of the "other," which became the "other half." In their shaping and nurturing of their notions of "mainstream" and "other," we can see a powerful example of how a dominant group--the people I have described as "management"--maintained the status quo in the culture of the museum.

Most of the Colonial Williamsburg staff subscribed to the management view that there was a traditional story that was central in the museum. They called this story the "mainstream" story and they thought of themselves as being "in the mainstream," or as simply the "mainstream." The AAIP group also referred to the "mainstream," and while more likely to think of itself as separate--the "mainstream" was generally synonymous with "white"--the boundary could be fuzzy. If AAIP staff members were not in the "mainstream" of the museum, they could count themselves in the "mainstream" of the culture at large by virtue of working in a "mainstream" institution.

Talking about slavery was a radical departure from the museum's traditional narrative, versions of which had been presented almost from the day Rockefeller's restored buildings opened. Unchanged, and unchallenged, for nearly

fifty years, this traditional story focused on Williamsburg's illustrious role in the creation of America, concentrating mainly on the founding fathers. The addition of crafts, besides satisfying what "management" saw as the visitor's need for "activity" and a museum goal of preservation, expanded the museum's imaginary populace, providing a class of the "middlin' sort" to supplement the gentry class, the "silk pants patriots." But the traditional story stayed the same. If anything, adding craftspeople served to strengthen that story, since the coopers and their cohorts were depicted as admiring and aspiring to the same values as the gentry.

African-American history had not figured in any of this. Not that there was not, all along, a black presence at Williamsburg. Since the 1930s, a black body in livery had been an essential image of the museum's pleasantly gentrified version of the 18th-century. It was a version in which blacks functioned silently as living "lawn ornaments" in a site which, by design or accident, had become a kind of fantasy community for a white middle-class audience. After 1979, the African-American presence changed.

In that year, the museum brought African-American actors and guides to talk about the lives of the black "other half" of the town's 18th-century population. Into its 175 pristine acres of white picket fences, immaculate gardens and storybook colonial cottages came people who

presented the stories of the cooks and coachmen, the gardeners and grooms, the laundresses and scullery maids of the colonial capital, of whom all but a few were slaves. These new actors and guides were black, they dressed in the costumes of slaves, and they presented life (with rare exceptions) from the perspectives of slaves.

In the museum world, decisions to include narratives about groups outside those covered in traditional history textbooks in museum presentations had been made at the top level of the museum's administration (Davis 1986, Scott and Lebsock 1988, Tate 1965), and at the outset Colonial Williamsburg was no exception. The institution's agenda shifted to include the pasts of two groups which had been peripheral, at best, in museum presentations: African Americans and women.¹

The first black professional staff members, six people during the summer of 1979, became involved in this history as actors portraying slave and free black residents of the colonial town. Although initially conceived and directed by the white mainstream, increasingly through the 1980s it was the African-American staff and interpreters who developed presentation of black history (Ellis 1990). That

¹A word about women's history. My original proposal for this dissertation included analyzing the presentations of both women and African Americans at Colonial Williamsburg. Once into the project, I realized that to do both groups--as interesting as the comparisons between them were--was too much for a work of this scope.

development was one of the interesting revelations of this research, for I found that where the program met the public, black history bore the mark of the "marginalization" of the African-American presenters.

When I arrived at Colonial Williamsburg in 1990, the museum employed nearly four hundred guides, of whom all but a handful were whites assigned to telling the traditional founding fathers story. The black handful was the recently created Department of African American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP), a group of about a dozen full-time staff members whose territory was interpreting 18th-century black history. Generally the arrangement worked in a sort of "upstairs-downstairs" fashion, in which many of the same events and topics were presented from the vastly different perspectives of master and slave. For instance, freedom from England, a topic in most interpretations of the "traditional" history, was presented as making little difference to slave life. Another example was the subject of childrearing, in which gentry children were depicted as learning manners while slave children were shown developing the subordinate behavior necessary for survival.

Through much of the decade of the 1980s, however, decisions involving the presentation of the "other half" were not the exclusive territory of African Americans at Colonial Williamsburg. There were museum staff members in all departments, the "management" group, who were concerned

with the issue. These white employees who dealt with the subject were primarily those in research/administrative positions--historians, architects, archaeologists, curators, and educators. Conflict occurred among these groups and within them. One debate frequently mentioned to me was that between the curators, who seemed to favor a more benign presentation of slavery, and the architectural historians, who pushed for an account which emphasized the grimmest aspects of slave life. Although not directly part of the dilemma of the African-American interpreters, these conflicts affected approaches to presenting slavery in the museum because their proponents--mainly the architects and curators--determined the kinds of objects--from buildings to beds--used in the African-American interpretations.

In the end, however--when it came to the interpretation of concepts or of objects--it was the members of the all-black AAIP department who were intimately involved with the conflicts and paradoxes of the dual goal of presenting the "other half": the balancing of presenting slave life in terms of a system and of presenting it in terms of the individual. They were the historic interpreters charged with making the lives of 18th-century Williamsburg's black population as real to museum visitors as the 18th-century white population. Their job meant that they dealt daily with the conflicts between what museum staff called the "mainstream" story and the "other half" story, and with the

compromises between the two. It also meant that they grappled with their own dual roles as employees in the "mainstream" museum presenting a past often considered an adjunct, when it was considered at all.

Objects: "Mainstream" and "Other Half"

Museums exist because of their objects. Traditionally, a history museum has presented stories of the past through its collections of objects, operating on the principle that the more "real" or "authentic" the items were, the truer the story and the better the museum, and further, that the more important the objects--by virtue of some intrinsic merit (when, where, or by whom they were made, for instance) or through contact with particular people--the more powerful the stories and the grander the museum. Thus a history museum's collection created and certified historical messages, and at the same time the collection indicated the worth of the present-day institution (Stocking 1985).

This attitude toward objects in history museums has altered somewhat since the 1970s (Schlereth 1989). As the historical archaeologists, led by Deetz (1977), began to look for and at the material culture of the "non-elite" members of society, museums which carried the traditional history of America edited or extended their narratives to include the pasts of people associated with those objects. More often it worked the other way around: museums decided

to tell the stories of everyday people and set out to find objects with which to do it. Colonial Williamsburg began with the former, broadening the narrative via the 1979 actors portraying African-American life. The museum later moved to the latter position, finding or creating those objects which were associated explicitly with slave life (Chappell 1981, 1982; Kelso 1984; Singleton 1985).²

By 1990, despite efforts to develop its collection in the area of African-American and slave-related objects, Colonial Williamsburg's collection of objects that could be used to tell the story of the African Americans, most of whom were slaves in the museum's interpretation, was neither large nor grand. Yet with its commitment to "authenticity," the museum saw itself as responsible for as true a representation of 18th-century life as possible. This meant (1) including slavery in the museum's narrative, and (2) having objects to illustrate the narrative, objects that were as "real" as possible, either actual 18th-century items or close facsimiles. The precise nature of Williamsburg's African-American objects, juxtaposed with the museum's concern for authenticity, created two problems.

²Even before this period, one group of "everyday people," African Americans, had realized the need for locales where the objects and narratives of their culture would be central, and had begun focusing on the creation and development of black history museums and sites (McRae and Latham 1975; Ebony 1981; Austin 1982, Craig 1983).

First, because the museum had in its collection relatively few "real" slave objects, it was often necessary to present slave life without the very artifacts which, in the museum setting, confirm "authenticity." Second, when the museum did find or reproduce such objects, the items were seldom of the rare and expensive sort found in the rest of Williamsburg's collection. African-American history, then, had to be told with fewer objects than other history in the museum, or with no objects at all. Furthermore, when there were objects, they were likely to be less valued in traditional museum terms than those which drove most of the other stories, stories attached to "better" items.³ In consequence, African-American history could be seen as both separate from the Anglo-American history in the museum, and as less important than that history. Put another way, a museum visitor could see black history as being neither as "true" nor as "worthy" as the other stories being told at Colonial Williamsburg.

Objects, then, seemed to determine worth, certainly in terms of the African-American story. Moreover, an absence of objects suggested the lack of a story. It was a curious irony: until a story was deemed important, the objects

³ This is not to say that curators did not "value" articles that could be linked to 18th-century slave life. I once heard the head of Williamsburg's textiles department announce in a program on costumes that she "would crawl on my knees for a real colonial slave garment." At that time she had yet to find one.

related to it--the ones which "illustrated" it--were not valued. Since they were of little value, they were not sought. This was not, of course, an attitude, or paradox, limited to the museum. For historians and archaeologists, as well as cultural anthropologists, this interplay between the worth of individuals in the past and the value of the objects associated with them had surfaced often. Those objects could be the possessions of African Americans or the sites where they had lived or been buried; and the individuals themselves could be slave or free (Fraser and Butler 1986; Ferguson, L. 1992; Gable, Handler and Lawson 1992; Schlereth 1989).

The connections between the narratives about 18th-century black life and the objects associated with that life--the "concrete evidence" of the group's cultural property--were an integral part of the "management" group's concept of itself and its notion of "mainstream." I was interested in the ways the museum's African-American employees, as a group and as individuals, struggled to resist the power of museum objects to diminish them, whether through marginalization or assimilation. These employees appropriated objects and redefined their meaning, or their uses, to influence and even determine the importance of stories about their past. Through this process they attempted to balance the position of the African-American story between the "mainstream" and the "other half,"

following on the one hand the traditional museum approach--have an object, have a story--while on the other subverting that approach--have an object but change its meaning to tell a the story of the "other half," or use it in a non-traditional way.⁴

"Mainstream:" the "Native" View

As I have suggested, "mainstream" was a "native" term. American anthropology's interest in American society in the last decade, and general cultural use, have served to define and refine the meaning of "mainstream," and of "not-mainstream" (the "marginal" or the "other"), but it is important to put them into the context of this particular ethnographic field. Two occasions which I experienced helped to do this.

The first occasion was a February 1990 forum on interpreting black history, presented in celebration of Black History Month. The forum (or "charrette," as they called it), was organized by Colonial Williamsburg's scholars and administrators--the "management" group--for museum employees, and featured staff historians, archaeologists, and educators discussing their specific

⁴Handler has proposed that the presentation of slavery at Colonial Williamsburg was "based on the presuppositions of possessive individualism," an approach which undermined the museum's more important task of analyzing the system of racism. He suggests that "the social unit to be made salient by museum interpretation might be the racist social system, rather than ethnic cultures within it" (1989:24).

research on 18th-century African-American life. At the conclusion of two hours of presentations, the museum's then chief education officer, Dennis O'Toole, appealed to the audience to "make the story of black inhabitants part of the mainstream of our interpretation." He emphasized his conviction that black history should be part of every story in every building, and he explained, "We call that mainstreaming."

In effect, the museum leadership had issued a mandate, or, more accurately, it had reissued one. Two years earlier O'Toole had presented as a challenge to the staff at all levels that it make the past of the "black majority one of the central threads of our interpretation," noting the need at "every site [for]. . .at least some mention of black men and women" in Williamsburg's history (1988:1, O'Toole's emphasis). In 1990 he said it again: the history of the African-American half of Williamsburg's 18th-century population was to be included in presentations throughout the museum, not just in such slave-related sites as kitchens. The mandate was called "mainstreaming," and people in the museum coopted the term and used it much as other 20th-century Americans used it--that is, the "mainstream" story at Colonial Williamsburg was the story of the "Anglo" roots of American culture. In the ideal "mainstreaming" situation, all museum guides would give black history equal time with traditional "Anglo"

history--better yet, the African-American and Anglo-American narratives would become one integrated story. "To mainstream" black history would mean to bring what had been excluded and forgotten into the present narrative, and--because the museum was seen as part of the American "mainstream"--"mainstreaming" in the museum was also expected to bring black people today--as museum employees and visitors--into this "mainstream" which was the museum.

A second occasion on which I encountered "mainstreaming" in this form of official policy was in June 1991, toward the end of my fieldwork. I was invited by AAIP Director Rex Ellis to attend a meeting of the Mainstreaming Committee. When I arrived I was handed an agenda:

1. Topic: Anna Lawson's Research
Desired Outcome: to solicit advice on mainstreaming process based on her findings during her research
2. "Mainstreaming Definition and Charter Document."

Consider the events first from purely a linguistic perspective. Here is the word mainstream used as a noun, as a gerund, as a verb, and as an adjective. When Dennis O'Toole talked about "the mainstream of our interpretation," mainstream, the noun, meant that the museum had a central story, one which, as he emphasized, did not sufficiently include blacks. There was this "mainstream" and there was the group outside it, the "other half." Put another way,

there was the "mainstream" and there was the "marginal," the African-American "other."⁵

O'Toole then named the act of including black history: "We call this mainstreaming." Mainstreaming is the gerund formed from the verb, to mainstream, which in turn comes from the noun, mainstream. Here were two nouns meaning the main current, the main part. Just as important as his role in setting a narrative agenda was O'Toole's authority to create and define a certain word and action. Speaking as Vice President O'Toole of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, parent organization of the museum, his "we" referred to the museum "management" group which was mandating "mainstreaming."

In the second instance, the June meeting, mainstreaming was used as an adjective. I was part of a meeting of the Mainstreaming Committee, a group assembled to consider the mainstreaming process and a mainstreaming definition. By then, sixteen months after the forum, mainstreaming was a key word and a key concept in the title of this recognized group in the museum, and in the title of a formal document outlining museum interpretation. And further, mainstreaming

⁵While this seems straightforward enough, and I think it was his intended meaning, it raised an interesting question. I do not know why O'Toole did not use mainstream as an adjective--"our mainstream interpretation." Did he mean to suggest that the museum did not believe that its narrative of American history was the only narrative? Or was he trying to maintain a politically correct stance with regard to history generally? It is a question which recurred in this research.

described the process, the action of incorporating black history into the museum's central story. A word describing a new concept at Colonial Williamsburg in February 1990--O'Toole's pronouncement was "We call this mainstreaming"--was part of the institutional lexicon eighteen months later.

The language of the forum and of the committee indicated that "mainstreaming" was the name for an activity promoted by the dominant group to make black history part of the American history presented in the museum. A sketch of the settings, casts, organization, and goals of the two occasions will more clearly define what this activity meant for different museum constituents. The 1990 forum was billed as an official Colonial Williamsburg event for Black History Month. Open to the "museum public" (that is, museum employees but also members of the Williamsburg community at large), it was held in a formal lecture hall located inside an art museum situated within the boundaries of the designated "historic area." The event featured a special printed program, and included high-ranking personnel, both at the podium and in the audience.

In the course of the evening, two essential ideas on which the museum operated--documentation/accuracy and authenticity--emerged over and over. One was that there did exist (after all) ample, reliable information about 18th-century African-American life with which to tell the story

of blacks in Williamsburg (the documentation necessary to "accuracy"), and the other was that without the black story, American history was incomplete (authenticity). Even as they mandated "mainstreaming" black history, the forum speakers reiterated what the museum considered necessary to qualify for inclusion in its "mainstream"--documentation (the tangible proof provided by original papers and objects) and authenticity (the most accurate reconstruction of the 18th century possible).

The forum's message was that black history was important because without it white history was "inauthentic." Eleven months after this event, in January 1991, O'Toole's office issued a chart and memo describing a new organizational structure for Colonial Williamsburg. In the interest of expanding and "mainstreaming" the interpretation of African-American history in the museum, the reorganization proposed abolishing AAIP as a separate department and moving all interpretation into one division. This organizational shift would literally "mainstream" the AAIP staff of the museum.

I attended the Mainstreaming Committee six months after the memo decreeing the abolition of AAIP. AAIP was anything but abolished. We met in the conference room of the AAIP department, housed on a street of two-story brick office buildings just outside the boundary of the museum's historic area. Among the seven people present were AAIP Director

Ellis, and, arriving twenty minutes late, the senior staff member from the general interpretive division, a white man who had been instrumental in creating O'Toole's January memo.

The atmosphere was tense. The AAIP staff had opposed the memo, flatly refusing to "mainstream" itself because it meant dissolving its separate department and joining general interpretive corps of the museum. According to Ellis, African Americans interpreting black history, particularly when that history was about slavery, needed the psychological support that being a special, discrete department provided. He said his staff felt it could not join the museum "mainstream" and still deal with the stresses inherent in discussing slavery. The AAIP department, a tiny enclave within the museum, sent the message that if it were abolished, its staff would resign.⁶

These incidents give a sense of what "mainstreaming" meant to the museum "natives," both black and white, but the concept was broader. When O'Toole talked about "the mainstream of our interpretation," he meant the perspectives and beliefs of that segment of the 18th-century British colonial population which owned most of the property and controlled the colony's governmental, economic, religious, educational, and social institutions. The beliefs of this

⁶When I left the museum in August 1991, AAIP was firmly in place, and as recently as November 1994 the department still appeared to be intact.

class--termed by museum personnel as the "gentry," and represented in the museum by such historical personae as George Wythe and Peyton Randolph--were "mainstream." But "mainstream" also included what museum personnel referred to as the "middlin' sort." These were the craftsmen and others who worked with their hands (as opposed to their heads), who did not wield the power of the "mainstream" but who nevertheless were portrayed as subscribing to gentry views.

What "mainstream" referred to in terms of the culture within which the museum resided--20th-century America--was less clearly defined, but there were some clues. For purposes of this study, I limited the concept to the museum's visitors, from the buses of school children to the buses of retirees, and including that great bulge in between of predominantly white middle-class families who could afford the minimum \$17 admission ticket. This was as disparate a combination as the gentry and the "middlin' sort," that 18th-century population which interpreters focused on to tell the museum story. But the similarity among these visitors, their "mainstreamness," lay in a common concept about culture--that the museum was an essential institution. To these people, the museum was essential for what it taught--particular kinds of stories about the past--and for what it held as the standards and methodology for determining the validity of those

stories--documentation and research: that is, a certain kind of proof.

Not Mainstream: The "Native" View

The discussion above of the "other half" covers to some extent the "native" idea of what was "mainstream" and what was not mainstream at Colonial Williamsburg. For both black and white staff members, the "other half" was the linguistic and conceptual alternative to patriot history. Whereas "mainstream" was a concept in the foreground, the term for affirming the territory of the dominant group in the museum, "marginal" was unspoken; it was not a museum term. The same museum staff which used "mainstream" with abandon avoided the term "marginal." Perhaps this was a result of the museum's image of itself as a democratic institution which reflected the ideals of a democracy, for unlike "other half," "marginal" carries connotations of being less valuable, less powerful, or less capable than "mainstream;" it advertises the possibility of exclusion, and even subordination, by the dominant group. In an institution which wanted to see itself as functioning according to the American ideal of openness and fairness, "other half" helped create the illusion of equality.

But the notion, "marginal," if not the term, was present at Colonial Williamsburg in both the history presented and the ranks of the modern-day staff. In the

realm of the historical, the people, groups, and even objects which were was not of or owned by the patriot or "gentry" class, were "marginal" (including the women of this class). The exception was the crafts and merchant class. Members of this group were referred to in museum presentations as part of the "mainstream," reflecting a general perspective in American society about the "mainstream."⁷ Specifically, "marginal" meant the history of African Americans, both free blacks and slaves; the history of women, even "gentry" women; and the histories of children, of the working or yeoman class, and of non-Anglicans. (Native Americans would probably have fallen into the "marginal" category. However, with the exception of references to the 1622 "massacre" at Wolstenholme Towne, the archaeological site at Carter's Grove, they were not referred to at Colonial Williamsburg.) Possibly there were others, but in the museum the category designated "mainstream" meant gentry--male, Anglo, educated, property owner, taxpayer, office holder.⁸ And whereas those in the

⁷Deborah Battaglia's ideas on "intentionality" in class situations applies here. She found that in a census situation people were likely to describe themselves as part of the social or economic "class" to which they aspired, even though the facts of their lives indicated otherwise. (Paper given at the 1989 American Anthropological Association meetings, Washington, D.C.)

⁸Russell Ferguson describes the mainstream as "the invisible center which claims universality without ever defining itself" (1990:13). He quotes Audre Lorde's definition of this center as "'white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure'" (1990:9).

ambiguous category of craftsman could aspire to become gentry, others--blacks and women--were in a marked category, biologically consigned to positions outside the "mainstream."

Whatever the terminology, it was recognized at Colonial Williamsburg that African Americans were "marginalized" in the 18th century, but ostensibly it was the pasts of blacks, and other groups, which were relegated to "marginal" positions. In fact, while 20th-century blacks in the museum had the freedom or leeway to negotiate their positions, they were caught in a dilemma. Either they must try to enter the "mainstream," or they must choose, or accept, a "marginal"--that is, less powerful or subordinate--place in the society. But their "marginality" paralleled what Steinberg, citing the "Chicago school" on second generation immigrants, calls "the experience of living in two worlds and not fully belonging either." On the positive side, such "marginality" often expressed itself as a creative release from traditional authority," while on the negative side was the experience of "a painful split, involving feelings of insecurity, alienation, and ambivalence toward both the ethnic subculture and the dominant society" (Steinberg

Staff members of the Colonial Williamsburg mainstream might challenge the "financially secure" aspect of the description, and the observer looking at the 18th-century mainstream as presented in the museum could call "thin" and "young" into question; otherwise, Lorde's definition aptly fits both the past and the present at Colonial Williamsburg.

1981:52). Ways in which AAIP members dealt with this dilemma are described in the chapters which follow.

It is worth a brief detour here to describe a tangential instance of this "marginality" which was unfolding while I was at Williamsburg. This was the struggle undertaken by a group of Colonial Williamsburg women employees to become "mainstream." Ironically, it was shortly before the reorganization proposal which would have eliminated AAIP as a separate department and made telling the black story part an integral, "equal" part of the traditional patriot story (or of "Becoming Americans"), that some two dozen women in various museum departments, including two African Americans (one from AAIP and a woman employed in a "historic" shop), began organizing themselves into a group. Their goal was two-pronged: to give the women in the museum's 18th-century history a more prominent role in that history and to give the women in the 20th-century institution a more prominent in its operations.

Beginning in the summer of 1990, these female employees worked for several months composing a mission statement. Throughout the drafting period, they talked of the absolute necessity of presenting their project to top management without seeming "threatening," of being "inclusive" (both in the history the group presented and in its membership), and of avoiding what group members saw as the pitfalls experienced by the museum's only recognized "non-mainstream"

group, the AAIP department. As they organized, these women came to realize the potential strength of being "equal" partners in the "mainstream," and to understand risks of becoming separate, a entity.⁹

What I did not see the Women's History Forum realizing the strength of the reverse situation: the ways in which being part of the "mainstream" could weaken their story, and the ways in which being separate might strengthen it. Again, Steinberg's analyses of marginality and ethnic immigrant groups focuses on this paradox--on the creativity

⁹In November 1990, four months after the group's first meeting, the Forum of Women in History adopted a mission statement that had as its goal "to celebrate the lives and times of women of the past, with emphasis on those of eighteenth-century Williamsburg; and to acknowledge the connections among women--then and now." The Forum also approved six objectives, including, on the one hand, developing programs about women with special events year 'round as well as annually during Women's History Month in March, and integrating the history of women into existing story lines throughout the museum.

In their juxtaposition of special events about women with the routine integration of women's history into the museum presentations one can see parallels to a dilemma of African Americans: are women, like slaves, to be considered part of "regular" history or not? Forum members were concerned with diversity as central to its base of support throughout the museum, with being open to all women in the organization, and with avoiding among themselves the kind of hierarchy found in "management"--all concerns which suggest to me efforts to shake traditional approaches. On the other hand, the members had an understanding of the need for not being, or being seen as, too separate from the "management" group, the center of "power" of the museum. This was apparent during a May 1991 meeting in which a member cited the African-American department as a good model for some things, but said "we want to learn from the past. . .we don't want to go through being separate the way they did." While the group was aware of the power of being outside that "mainstream" controlled by "management," it was also conscious of the negative aspects of being the "other half."

that comes from being "marginal" and thus released from "from traditional authority" (Steinberg 1981:52). Of course one could argue that the forming of the women's group was a formal statement of "marginalization," but also evidence of the creativity engendered by being "marginal."

One premise of this dissertation is that museums create and maintain core ideologies in American culture. "American culture" came into Colonial Williamsburg in the form of its visitors--the nearly one million people who came to Williamsburg annually in 1990 and 1991. From the profile of this visiting group, one must conclude that "marginal" meant non-Caucasian--that is, individuals of any descent other than European. Sparsely represented were people without the means to travel, and people without a belief in the inherent value of a history museum. Predominating were middle-class families, senior citizens, and couples unaccompanied by family, almost all of whom were white. The black family, the black couple, and especially the black senior citizen, were exceptions. In fact, except for groups of elementary and junior high students, among which were high percentages of African Americans, black visitors of any description were few and far between.

It is interesting that questions about how many black visitors actually came to the museum arose during the February 1990 forum celebrating Black History Month that I attended in my first weeks at Colonial Williamsburg. A

staff member in the audience wanted to know whether the addition of more black programs had increased the number of African-American visitors to the museum. The administrators said they did not know, that no data had been kept on this. I could not decide from the exchange whether the museum administration was surprised by the idea that black programs would attract black visitors, or embarrassed that someone might think black history was being added for commercial purposes. The latter seemed unlikely, since a representative from the marketing department stated that no attempt had been made to correlate any rise in the numbers of black visitors with the growing emphasis on black history. On reflection, I think that the administrators saw the purpose of black history as educating the museum's traditional white audience, and that little thought had been given to black history as a sales ploy to attract African-American visitors to the museum.

Field Research and Data

The field data for this study came primarily from five sources,

- material, largely printed, generated by the museum;
- museum presentations open to the public, mainly tours, plays and musical events;
- in-house meetings and sessions;

- interviews conducted with members of the museum staff and with museum visitors; and
- informal conversations and activities with people associated with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (both those with the museum and those in the hotels and restaurants), and with people in the Williamsburg community.

The material generated by the museum included publications for Colonial Williamsburg's external audiences, such items as visitors' guides and pamphlets, a quarterly magazine, and both scholarly works and coffee table books; and internal publications, the most useful being The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter, a monthly compendium of short articles aimed chiefly at the corps of interpreters. Other items were post cards, slides, cassettes, and videos, all sold in the museum gift shops. Particularly useful in grasping the museum's approach to black history were the AAIP training manual and an extensive--six-page--annotated bibliography of the secondary sources relied on by AAIP interpreters. The manual was a four-inch thick loose-leaf notebook of primary and secondary sources about 18th-century slave life--housing, clothing, food, folk tales, customs, laws. From the bibliography, the works most often cited by the interpreters were Kulikoff (1986) and Genovese (1976) for details of slave life in a tobacco economy; Levine (1977) for African and African-American folk tales, a number

of which reappear frequently in the various AAIP presentations; Morgan (1975) and Wood (1974) for the contradictions inherent and experienced in a slave-holding society seeking independence from a colonial power; Sobel (1987) for the similarities between Anglo and African world views in the 18th century; and Kelso (1984) for the archaeological foundations of the Carter's Grove Slave Quarter. Part of my task was to know enough about these sources to understand their importance to the AAIP interpretation.

I also had access to the Colonial Williamsburg archives. The most useful items there for this project were the following: correspondence beginning with the museum's founding; memos and committee minutes discussing issues from street paving to paint colors; research papers; and materials for training interpreters. For my study of Carter's Grove and the slave quarter, I had unrestricted freedom to roam through more than five years of files in the architectural history department--from the conception of the slave quarter through its first interpretive season. Also in this category, information produced by the museum, were non-print materials, the museum-produced videos and cassettes. Finally, there was a pool of useful information about the museum but not generated by it, mainly in the form of books and articles, and, again, including some video material.

Tape Recording

No events--programs, meetings, interviews--were recorded without the permission of the staff and visitors involved. There were evening plays which the museum did not want recorded, fearing, I was told, that a visitor might pirate the script. Although at the outset I taped and transcribed nearly every program and meeting that I attended, after the first few months I generally limited myself to recording events which related to black history.

I recorded all interviews, except for the most informal conversations. Museum staff and visitors were told about our anthropology team and its research and were nearly always enthusiastic about talking with a tape recorder running. No more than a few staff members refused to be taped and no visitor I approached ever declined. (Indeed, I have concluded that Americans, at least that self-screened group working with or observing black programs at Williamsburg, like to be asked their opinions, and to deliver them into a microphone.)

No transcribed material in the following text has been attributed by name without the permission of the individual quoted. The exceptions were museum employees whose interviews I may have taped, but whose statements were also made in public forums and/or in generally available publications. Thus staff members who had spoken and written publicly about their ideas and experiences--for instance,

AAIP Director Rex Ellis, Vice President Dennis O'Toole, or the architectural historian Edward Chappell--were quoted by name.

There was also a group of individuals for whom I used pseudonyms in the text; these were the African-American interpreters. Because the fact of their differing perspectives bears directly on issues of hegemony and racism, I provided more information about their lives in order to individualize them, and I have given them fictitious names so that their particular approaches in the museum, to its historical narratives and to its modern operations, could be identified, compared, and contrasted without jeopardizing their situations in the institution. I taped "biographical" interviews with ten of the twelve full-time members of the AAIP department. These interviews ran for one to two hours and were useful in providing not only the facts of their lives and their perspectives on museums and black history, but in giving me--a white middle-class, middle-aged woman--a better understanding of how these black Americans thought about their lives and their jobs, and how they related to the museum and to the culture in general. All other interpreters, and all visitors were cited anonymously.¹⁰

¹⁰I also conducted a few interviews with people who were not employed by the museum. Among them were AFL-CIO members picketing two Williamsburg hotels in 1990-91; the historian--a former museum employee--who had been instrumental in beginning the black history programs; and an historian, never employed by the museum, who had served as a consultant on black history in the late 1970s.

I recorded black history presentations with as many different interpreters as possible, in order to have a range of individual presentations. This meant, for instance, that in the case of the Other Half Tour I taped six different interpreters, creating from each a transcribed document of from thirty-five to fifty single-spaced pages. (Two AAIP interpreters did not want to be taped on their tours, but had no objection to my making written notes.) Most interpreters I toured with more than once. I wanted to see to what extent an individual might alter an approach, especially in response to changes in the audience. As it happens, for a two-to-three-hour program without a script in hand, the presentations varied very little, and even between interpreters the content and the form were surprisingly similar.¹¹

There was one important aspect of taping and transcribing which I did not resolve. This was the issue of dialect. In African-American programs, in first-person slave portrayals, and often in third-person presentations, AAIP interpreters would use dialect when taking the roles of slaves, or in telling a story from the perspective of a slave. In all but a few instances I did not try to

¹¹In the section on the Other Half Tour (Chapter Three) I point out that there were interpreters who dwelt more heavily on certain subjects--for instance, miscegenation or slave punishments. However, every tour had a checklist of focal topics, these among them, that the interpreter never failed to emphasize.

reproduce that speech in this paper, for two reasons. First, it seemed to me that to be at all faithful to the speaker, I would need to develop a system of correlates for each interpreter: that is, for "the," I might need "de" for one interpreter and "da" for another, and it would be the case for almost every word, an undertaking that would have taken the analytical skills of a linguistics expert.

Second, I think that the "slave" talk that was used in the museum, like the "18th-centuryspeak" derived from 18th-century documents for the white actors, was a 20th-century version of what might have been. Not that this would not be interesting--looking at the language used by these interpreters and how they arrived at it--but, again, I think such a study required sophisticated linguistic training.

A few staff members were taped several times, and there were a number whom I saw on a regular basis throughout the fieldwork period without taping every encounter. Some of these encounters were at the anthropologists' apartment and a few were at the employees' houses, but most were at local restaurants. For instance, during my first summer in the museum, a group of employees--interpreters, members of the landscaping staff, craftsmen--met on Wednesday evenings, in costume, to play cricket on Market Square near the Courthouse. I watched them play and joined them afterward

at a local eatery for dinner and pitchers of Samuel Adams.¹² With rare exceptions, these people were white, and were engaged in some aspect of presenting what the museum called its "mainstream" story. My social encounters with AAIP staff were almost all at breakfast meetings or lunches, usually at places frequented by a predominantly white middle-class clientele, composed of both museum employees and visitors. or both. Only once did I go to the house of an African-American interpreter, for a potluck dinner celebration when she received her B.A. degree.

Such situations were symptomatic of this fieldwork, but also of the distance between white and black groups in American society in general. The ease with which I slipped into social events with "mainstream" members of the museum staff and the distance which I often felt from the AAIP interpreters, are situations which must affected this project.

¹²These "mainstream" interpreters seemed perfectly comfortable in their 18th-century costumes after hours at a restaurant outside the museum boundaries. By contrast, African-American interpreters told me that they were reluctant even to stop by the grocery store after work in their slave outfits, and my guess is that staying in such clothes for beers in public would have been out of the question. The issue of slave costumes is explored in Chapter Seven.

Summary of the Dissertation

In this dissertation I start with the premise that museums have a role in creating and maintaining central ideologies in our culture, and use this premise as a basis for exploring Colonial Williamsburg's presentations of black history. My concern is with the museum staff's (the "native") concepts of "mainstream" and "other half," and specifically with how the ideas and activities associated with these terms reflect (maintain) or alter (create) views about hegemonic relations between black and white in our society. As part of its effort to deal with these hegemonic relations, Colonial Williamsburg's "management" group saw historical interpretations of slave life as a vehicle for righting some of the racist wrongs in modern society, wrongs which the museum was not alone in seeing as being caused by slavery. The irony is that the museum often ended up unconsciously reproducing the racism it sought to deal with. In its presentations of relationships, stereotypes, and images involving African Americans, Colonial Williamsburg, despite its best intentions, reproduced racist situations which helped to maintain one of the hegemonic attitudes it sought to change.

In analyzing the "other half" version of the past at Colonial Williamsburg, one of my main concerns was how black employees responded to being responsible for dealing with a past in which slavery was an inescapable fact. These

employees felt it important to present slavery as a system--its victimization, subordination, and dehumanization--but they were also committed to a portrayal of slavery in terms of the individuals whose lives survived and even triumphed over the system. The dual goal created a quandary. Should the main focus be the institution of slavery, which seemed to require depicting slave life in the grimmest light possible? Or should it be slavery in terms of individuals, an approach which called for emphasis on strong, resourceful survivors? Both perceptions were seen as "true" in the museum, but the two interpretations could be conflicting. It was almost impossible to describe the dehumanization of an individual and at the same time to present convincingly the initiative and courage it took to be a survivor.

Inextricably linked to the presentation of 18th-century African-American life was the issue of how museum objects, or the absence of them, affected the kind of history the interpreters presented and how they presented it. This entails looking at how the African-American presentations were different from other museum presentations, and how objects--either those associated with the patriots or with the "other half"--were used in these presentations. It also involves studying how presenting black history affected not only the museum AAIP staff responsible for it, but also those in other departments (whose members were nearly all

white) who became associated with what were viewed in the museum as African-American projects.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two I lay out the details of the ethnographic site in terms of the geography and physical structures (One) and the organization and programs (Two), as they relate to presenting black history. The next three chapters deal with interpretations of the black past inside the historic area, where there were limited objects for illustrating the narratives. Chapter Three discusses the Other Half Tour, in which both objects associated with the museum's traditional story and objects associated solely with the marginal story are used in non-traditional ways. Chapters Four and Five describe presentations of African-American history in which the interpreters play the roles of slaves, thereby "becoming" themselves objects in their narratives.

The focus of Chapters Six and Seven is the slave quarter at Carter's Grove. In Six, I outline some of the history behind the acquisition of these objects, the first collection of items obtained by the museum solely for telling about the slave past. Chapter Seven is a description and analysis of tours at the site, with attention to how having these specifically slave-related objects affected interpretation and AAIP interpreters. Chapter Eight summarizes some of the ways in which the presentations reflected hegemonic relationships in American

culture, with attention to the role of museum objects in the presentations.

A visitor, then, to Colonial Williamsburg would most likely encounter the museum's approach to black history in three packages: on the Other Half Tour (Chapter Three); in kitchens where interpreters were in the roles of slaves (Chapters Four and Five); and at the Slave Quarter at Carter's Grove (Chapter Seven). In spite of what seemed to be sincere efforts by staff members in most museum departments, each package in its own way bore evidence of the hegemonic relationship between whites and blacks in our society. On the Other Half Tour, the museum's collection of "traditional" objects served as a foil for the presentation of the lives of slaves, the "other half," while objects that were associated with slavery (musical instruments) were not "original" and, indeed, seemed to have so little status that they were put at the disposal of the visitors. Furthermore, some Other Half Tour guides openly subverted Colonial Williamsburg's official narrative, accentuating the gap between the story told by white interpreters in the museum about the white patriots, and the story told by AAIP interpreters about the "other half."

The African-American interpreters who presented black history in the roles of slaves put themselves at the greatest distance from the museum's "mainstream." In doing the thing that told the story the most

forcefully--"becoming" slaves--they themselves became museum objects. Although other interpreters took on the personae of 18th-century people in the colonial town, none became objects which, in the 18th-century were, by law and practice, objects, chattel to be bought and sold.

At the Slave Quarter, where the museum had created objects expressly for the presentation of the slave story, the traditional narrative was turned on its head. Here, the African-American interpreters presented the slave objects--the cabins--as the cultural property of both whites and blacks, explaining that the overwhelming majority of 18th-century whites would have lived in structures like these, not in the clapboard cottages of the storybook town of Colonial Williamsburg. The property of the "other half" was made to be the property of the middle-class visitor--"you would have lived here"--a new kind of "mainstream," while the story of the "traditional" patriots was converted, by implication, into what it may more accurately be described as the "elite," a concept as "undemocratic" as slavery.

Chapter One

The Ethnographic Field: the Site¹³

Come walk the same streets, admire the same gardens, and visit the same shops that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and Peyton Randolph knew so well.

(Colonial Williamsburg Vacation Planner, 1989)

Like most museums, Colonial Williamsburg began with a collection of objects. Here, the objects were eighty-eight 18th-century buildings--some very few whole ones and parts of many others--collected in the eastern Virginia town of Williamsburg by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in the 1920s and 30s. Rockefeller had the buildings restored, had many relocated, and, over the next fifty years, his Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had several hundred more reconstructed, or constructed, according to carefully researched designs. He and the Foundation also supported the furnishing of the buildings, which up until the 1970s

¹³This research was carried out between January 1990 and August 1991 at Colonial Williamsburg where I spent several days a week for two summers, and about two days every other week during the academic years. My project was part of an investigation being carried out by Richard Handler and Eric Gable under their grant funded by the Spencer Foundation. Working with the approval and support of the museum's management, we attempted an ethnographic study of Colonial Williamsburg as a whole. The scope of the project was an enormous one which included the museum staff (from senior administrators to junior guides), the museum's messages and its audiences, its educational goals, and its corporate structure. My focus was on one small part of this, the creation and presentation of African-American history.

were filled primarily with elegant British and American antiques of the period. The result was Colonial Williamsburg, the museum town of some 500 buildings intended to represent the capital of the colony of Virginia between 1699 and 1780 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989, Kopper 1986, Leon and Piatt 1989, Yetter 1993).¹⁴

In 1990 and 1991 the officially designated museum space, termed the "historic area," consisted of 175 acres. Within the area were nine paved streets (most of them closed to public vehicular traffic between 8 am and 9 pm); at least twenty-five "exhibition gardens;" and a dozen or so fenced pastures for animals which would have been common in the 18th century (horses, oxen, sheep, geese, chickens, guinea fowl, etc.), some used for work and some maintained as part of Colonial Williamsburg's rare breeds program. The focus of the historic area was the approximately 45 "exhibition buildings" and other sites (the brickyard, the windmill) which were open to the public, by admission.¹⁵ Officially, the African-American past was presented throughout the historic area, wherever any history was presented; in fact,

¹⁴These 500 buildings included everything from the most insignificant outbuilding to the Governor's Palace. Of them 88 were said to be original, and of those 88 about 45 were actually open to the public.

¹⁵The number of open buildings varied during the period of this fieldwork. For instance, the wigmaker's shop which was open in the summer of 1990, was closed the following summer, while the 1770 Courthouse, and the shoemaker and tailor shops, not open in 1990, were available in 1991.

serious focus on the black past was limited almost entirely to a few specified spaces.

At all of the exhibition buildings and sites were costumed guides, known at Colonial Williamsburg as historic interpreters, part of a corps of close to four hundred full-time and part-time employees responsible for talking about the past as represented by the museum's objects. Most of these historic interpreters (they were known as HIs in the museum) told visitors about the history of the sites from a 20th-century perspective; that is, even though they wore 18th-century style clothing, they did not pretend to be in the 18th century themselves. There was also a small cadre of character interpreters (these were known as CIs in the museum) who did present history in the roles of 18th-century personae, i.e., from a first-person viewpoint. The character interpreters who portrayed white citizens of the colonial capital were members of the Company of Colonial Performers (CCP); those portraying black denizens of the town came from the Department of African-American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP).¹⁶ One main

¹⁶There was one exception. The African-American woman whose chief character role was the Powell House slave, Cate, was a CCP member. The portrayal was an anomaly among the character interpretations of slaves in the museum, for Cate was depressed, surly, angry, and even disrespectful to her "owners" and to visitors. Her interpretation, its impact on visitors and other museum staff, and the insights it offers about differing philosophical approaches in dealing with slave history in the museum are more fully explored in Chapter Five.

difference between the two groups was that CCP members rarely "came out of" the 18th century, or "broke frame" as they referred to it in the museum, while AAIP character interpreters were generally expected to spend five or ten minutes acting as "slaves," and then to address visitors as 20th-century museum employees. (More detailed discussion of historic interpreters and character interpreters occurs in Chapter Five.)

Also in the historic area were more than 400 buildings not open for exhibition. Some served as private residences for museum personnel and several others housed museum offices. Two were "museums within the museum" (DeWitt Wallace Gallery in the Public Hospital and the archaeological exhibit in the James Anderson House), and there was a myriad of smaller structures considered necessary for the realism of an 18th-century town. These last included "dependencies" of all sorts, ranging from privies to stables to kitchens, some open and some not. They were reconstructed but rarely functioning; for instance, associated with a number of houses were buildings representing kitchens, but to my knowledge only four of them ever had fires on their hearths.¹⁷ Although not open to

¹⁷Eighteenth-century cooking demonstrations were presented regularly in the kitchens of the Wythe House and the Governor's Palace by costumed historic interpreters who explained their activities from a 20th-century perspective--not as a CI or 18th-century cook. The kitchens of the Powell House and Wetherburn Tavern, black history sites, had fires burning when staffed by AAIP employees, but

the public, these buildings served a purpose, one akin to the two-dimensional store fronts in a western movie set. Because all were three-dimensional and many were in use (especially those lived in by "real," albeit 20th-century, people), they reinforced the visitors' sense of being in what they thought was a "real" place and a "real" time--the "real" 18th century.

Further reinforcing this "reality" were two institutional buildings not owned by the museum but located in the historic area, Bruton Parish Church and the Wren Building of the College of William and Mary. Museum personnel spoke of these buildings as having been in "continuous use" since the 18th century, a condition which apparently endowed them with a certain rare "reality" only possible for buildings with an unbroken history of functioning as they were originally intended. The museum sought to bolster this reality further through historic presentations by museum actors--a "professor" or "students" at the Wren Building, a "minister" at Bruton Parish Church. In addition, there were historic area buildings where museum visitors themselves participated, as 20th-century consumers, recreating what could be termed a diluted version of the Wren or Bruton Parish experiences. They could dine in four restaurants serving meals to the public--reconstructed "colonial taverns" offering "a sampler of 1700s foods" or

I never saw cooking taking place in either building.

"traditional southern dishes." They could shop in nine different stores selling "items typical of" or "goods representative of" the 18th century, ranging from The Golden Ball with objects created "by hand in the eighteenth-century manner" to the McKenzie Apothecary with its "medicinal herbs," candied ginger, and pomander balls. (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989, 1990a, 1991a).

Except for a handful of brick structures--most of them public buildings such as the Capitol and Governor's Palace, and some very few residences--Colonial Williamsburg was composed of one- and two-story clapboard, whitewashed houses, with dormer windows, cedar-shingled roofs, and brick chimneys. The tree-lined streets were asphalt surfaced, some overlaid with brown pebbles rather than the standard gray gravel to create the effect of dirt or sand. Brick sidewalks bordered the one-mile length of Duke of Gloucester Street, the main thoroughfare of the town which ran from the Capitol to the Wren Building. Sidewalks made of brick, oyster shells, or pebbles could be found on some of the more heavily trafficked cross streets. White picket fences defined property boundaries and surrounded acres of showplace gardens containing the ubiquitous boxwood among a variety of shrubs, perennial and annual flowers, and, less often, herbs and vegetables.

Maintenance and gardening staffs of several hundred employees, depending on the season, were responsible for

keeping the buildings and grounds in order--"order" meaning clean, repaired, painted or whitewashed, mown, weeded, and pruned. Much of the grounds activity was carried on during the 9 am to 5 pm visiting hours by workers--predominantly African-American--with hand tools, performing such chores as weeding, edging, and mulching the town's many gardens. Motorized jobs, cutting the grass being the primary one, were scheduled before and after museum hours. The intent was to have as few 20th-century intrusions into the town-museum as possible, and despite their uncostumed presence, the gardeners in their green, 20th-century uniforms and the maintenance men in their khaki outfits became, for most visitors, part of the landscape.

Although these efforts to maintain this certain order were endorsed by most people, there were intimations from some staff members and occasional rumbles from purist visitors that the town was far too clean--that a recreated colonial village with muddy streets, animals at almost every residence or even running loose, and wood fires burning constantly throughout the town for cooking and heating would look and smell quite different from the current model and be far closer to the original. Museum management, however, saw the departure from authenticity, created by cleanliness and order, as more than justified by the need for a pleasant and easily navigated environment. The problem was solved to some extent by "icons of authenticity," that is, manure (a

little) in the streets from the daily horse traffic, or the barnyard smells (a light waft) from the pens of chicken, sheep, and oxen--a suggestion of the animal life without the inconveniences. The fact that most interpreters who lead tours through the town focused the visitors' attention on these "icons," especially the manure, suggests the power of their function (cf. Gable and Handler, 1994).

Like muck in the streets and animal odors, slavery was also a part of 18th-century Williamsburg which many 20th-century people--museum employees and visitors alike--preferred avoiding (Leon and Piatt 1989). But just as it would have been difficult to cross any street without getting dust and mud on one's shoes in the 18th century, so it would have been impossible to cross that street without seeing at least as many black slaves as white owners. In keeping with its commitment to authenticity--despite some tension on the part of both guides and visitors--the museum showed slave life, but as the focus of only two of its restored sites.

All of the historic area was the setting for presenting history in terms of the institutional theme, "Becoming Americans." According to the museum publication Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg, "Becoming Americans" was adopted in 1985 in response to visitors' requests for more focus on what was "distinctly American" about the 18th-century residents of the colony (Colonial Williamsburg

Foundation 1985). As outlined in Teaching History, museum sites were assigned to one of four subtopic categories. For instance, the Capitol and Palace were under "government," craft shops and a tavern were in "enterprise and work," "family and community" encompassed the Powell House and the Public Gaol, and "cultural life" was discussed at the Wythe House and the Lawyer's Office.¹⁸ This interest in the evolution of American culture affected the decision to present many historic area sites in the year 1770, seen as the "moment" when the British colony was grappling with the social, philosophical, economic, and political conflicts between exploitative rule by a distant monarchy and a rejection of subordination, born of 150 years of increasing autonomy.¹⁹

¹⁸In addition, there was a fifth topic, or subtopic: the history of Colonial Williamsburg itself, cited by Teaching History as important because of "Williamsburg's role as a powerful tastemaker in modern American life" through the Colonial Revival movement, and because it showed "that history writing has its own history." This meant that two perspectives, potentially conflicting, were possible at every site. There was, first, the 18th-century experience, the "journey into the past," a very certain time and place of which the visitor was supposed to become a part. But there was as well the 20th-century discussion of the decisions relating to the museum's historiographical choices, of why a particular version of the past was selected.

¹⁹Museum staff cited other factors in the choice of 1770 as the "focal" year for interpretations. Not surprising for a museum, objects played a key role, and the one most frequently mentioned was the Governor's Palace, totally refurbished in the early 1980s according to the detailed inventory of possessions made after the 1770 death of Lord Botetourt, governor of the colony from 1768-70. In the redone Palace, the museum had a building, considered by

In theory, as explained in Teaching History and reiterated by Vice President O'Toole in his 1990 "mainstreaming mandate" (described in the introductory chapter to this dissertation), the story of African-American life was to be interwoven in presentations at all the buildings. In fact, most presentations of African-American history were confined to two sites, the Powell House and its grounds and the grounds and laundry of Wetherburn's Tavern. At the Powell property presentations about slavery occurred primarily in the kitchen and laundry building, with occasional programs including actors portraying slaves in the main Powell House. The kitchen-laundry was clapboard and paved with brick, with adjoining rooms, one for preparing food and one for washing clothes. Each room had a large fireplace, a separate door to the outside, and visitors were told that upstairs were living quarters for slaves, although that area was not open to the public. Central to the property was the Powell House, of which three downstairs rooms were used for historic interpretation, the

many its most important structure--albeit reconstructed, not original--in which practically everything from furniture, to wallpaper colors and designs, to the specifics of the governor's clothing (not exhibited), was documented.

Another sort of "objects" were also a factor in the choice of a year, although which year was less a issue. These objects were the character interpreters, or "people of the past," the costumed employees who could be found throughout the town presenting history from the perspective of specific 1770 inhabitants. In this case, 1770 was important because it enabled all interpreters to converse from the same time frame, both with the visitors and with each other.

upstairs for offices and meetings, and an additional downstairs room and "break" area for AAIP staff at the site. A barn, a chicken yard, a dairy building, and a large vegetable and herb garden were also part of the interpretive space of the site, and there was in addition a "classroom" building, seating thirty people, where programs were introduced. And, finally, situated on the property was a small brick building which served as the headquarters for CCP character interpreters working throughout the museum.

At Wetherburn's Tavern were a stable and combination laundry-kitchen-living quarters, similar to that at the Powell House. The buildings were whitewashed clapboard, with enormous cooking or boiling fireplaces, and had brick chimneys, roofs of cedar shakes, but no upstairs dormer windows. AAIP staff members interpreted at the kitchen-laundry site, generally in a combination of first- and third-person presentations. They also made occasional appearances in the tavern itself, confronting a tour group and its costumed third-person historic interpreter in brief first-person vignettes. During the summer of 1990, visitors toured the tavern first with a costumed guide and then proceeded to the outbuildings, where they encountered a costumed guide from AAIP who told them about slave life at the tavern. The following summer the route was changed so that visitors entered the yard of the tavern and went first to the laundry-kitchen to hear about slavery and then toured

the tavern. Whether this shift was part of the effort to mainstream black history was unclear.

A third locale at which African-American life was a topic, although not in the sense of a regularly staffed site, was the Wythe House--the outside of the Wythe House, its gardens, kitchen, laundry, and stable. This area was not staffed with African-American interpreters, but it was a regular stopping point on the Other Half Tour, a two-hour walk through the streets and gardens of the town during which African history and 17th- and 18th-century black life in Virginia were discussed. Visitors to the Wythe property who were not on the tour (offered March-November) were left to draw their own conclusions about the lives of Wythe's slaves. Even on the days when the kitchen was the site of an 18th-century cooking demonstration, the focus was on the cooking, not the cook. Costumed members of the museum's "foodways" team, sweltering in front of the huge cooking fire, would explain the principle of the roasting spit to the twenty or so eager visitors crammed into the tiny kitchen, mentioning the 18th-century cook, as a rule, only in passing. The concern was with the methods of 18th-century food preparation, not with the context and the people connected with that activity--the slaves who did the cooking and lived in the building. (To my knowledge, the lives of Wythe's slaves were presented in Wythe's kitchen only once during the period of this fieldwork, in a formal

play given as a special evening program during the Christmas season in 1990.)

No one ever gave me an explanation for why the Powell House and Wetherburn's Tavern were chosen to serve regularly as black history sites while the Wythe House, a residence with several buildings which, according to interpreters in the house, were known to have been occupied by fourteen slaves including the named cook, Lydia Broadnax, was not. One possibility is what I refer to as the "conjecture-documentation principle."

Under the conjecture-documentation principle the museum seemed to feel more comfortable approaching slave history from a conjectural stance and white history in terms of facts. Thus slavery was talked about at the Powell House and Wetherburn's Tavern primarily in terms of particular individuals, but they were individuals who were mostly "conjectural." That is, there were records showing that Benjamin Powell and Henry Wetherburn owned a certain number of slaves of a certain description, including their gender, age, job, and even some of their first names, but information about them as individuals, about their personal existences, was not available. George Wythe's cook, on the other hand, was a specifically documented individual. Lydia Broadnax, interpreters explained as they pointed to the book

on the bed in the tiny room adjoining the kitchen, was able to read.²⁰

This split approach to presenting the past may have stemmed from a mindset among white Americans generally, but especially among those involved in "history" as an endeavor focused on "great" white men and their activities, which held that documented African-American history did not exist, or, where it did exist, could not "compete" with the events featuring the founding fathers as the chief [f]actors. Another reason may have been that museum administrators saw including an interpretation of a particular slave's life based on strong documentation as undermining the presentations based on conjecture, which much of the African-American presentations were (cf Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1992).

There may be still another explanation, or at least another dimension to the explanation. Wythe's own records

²⁰Gates (1986) explains that during the Enlightenment, literacy was seen as the evidence of reason: to be able to read and write was the proof that a being could think. Gates argues that her literacy itself was not the most important aspect of Phillis Wheatley's accomplishment as a poet. Of greater consequence was that she was an African who could write; this meant that an African could reason, and in turn meant that Africans were capable of being fully human (i.e., able to think like Europeans). Whether the Other Half Tour guides were aware of this connection I do not know. It is hard to imagine that their emphasis on the literacy of Lydia Broadnax and Michael Brown, slaves of the museum's symbol of the Enlightenment, was accidental. In a reverse sense, the connection between literacy and humanity was also suggested in a first-person interpretation at the Powell House, where the "slave" Judith never missed a chance to tell visitors that her mistress could not read or write.

show that he tutored a young "mulatto" named Michael Brown in Greek and Latin, and there was speculation, at least among African-American interpreters, that Brown may have been Lydia Broadnax's son. When I asked one informant, a member of the AAIP staff, why she thought Colonial Williamsburg, with its commitment to accuracy, would choose to focus on Powell's and Wetherburn's "conjectural" slaves and not Wythe's "documented" cook, she suggested that the museum was worried about introducing the topic of miscegenation. Visitors might conclude that George Wythe was the father of Lydia Broadnax's son, she explained. "And there is no proof of that so we don't even want to suggest it," she said. Miscegenation was often cited by both black and white interpreters as an off-limits subject in the museum--off-limits because it dealt with two prime taboos in American culture: sex and race. However, as we will see in Chapter Three, members of the AAIP staff who led the Other Half Tour rarely failed to introduce the subject of Lydia Broadnax and Michael Brown when their tour stopped on the Wythe property. They did so noting that "you won't hear about this 'inside' the house," and explained that the museum cannot talk about miscegenation because there is no proof. They meant documented proof of the actual sexual event (cf Lawson and Gable 1993). And yet proof that interracial sexual activity occurred was all around; sources most often cited in the museum were the laws made against

miscegenation, the writings of William Byrd and Landon Carter, and the runaway slave descriptions in the Virginia Gazette.

A second museum location, or ethnographic site, where 18th-century African-American life was presented was the slave quarter at Carter's Grove plantation, situated eight miles southeast of the Colonial Williamsburg historic area. (The slave quarter site is discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation: this is to complete the overview of the sites in the museum where black history was a focus in interpretation.) Visitors could drive to the site on the "country road," a route winding through woods and marshes with only fleeting glimpses of 20th-century buildings or vehicles. Traffic on the road was limited to one way with buses and recreational vehicles prohibited altogether. Return to the historic area was via Route 60, the main road to Newport News and Norfolk before construction of Interstate 64. There was no transportation provided by the museum to the site. All of this is to suggest that for many visitors to the historic area of Colonial Williamsburg, Carter's Grove was somewhat off the beaten path.

The 175-page Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg devoted six pages to Carter's Grove, describing the then recently opened slave quarter in one paragraph, as follows:

Archaeological excavations in the 1970s also discovered the location of the quarter that served as home in the eighteenth century for the slaves who worked the land around the

great house. After extensive research the buildings in the quarter have been rebuilt on their original sites using the construction methods of the eighteenth century. The story of these African-Americans is told at the quarter (1989a:145).

A brochure published in 1991, "400 Years of History at Carter's Grove," provided a more detailed description of the slave quarter, giving it equal billing with three other sites: the reception center, the mansion, and, as a combined site, the settlement Wolstenholme Towne (outlined or suggested by paths and four-by-four wooden beams, but not reconstructed) and, new in 1991, the Winthrop Rockefeller Archaeological Museum (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1991b).

Unlike its approach within the historic area of presenting as much of the story as possible in the year 1770, the museum at Carter's Grove attempted to show several time periods in a single setting. The notion of history as "process," presented in the "Becoming Americans" theme, was shifted from process in terms of a single year, 1770, to process in terms of four centuries. The introduction to the site was a film, "A Thing Called Time," in which the geographical spot itself became a character through which or against which four hundred years of events and people were enacted. Within each separate space--the slave quarter, the mansion, Wolstenholme Towne--there were glimpses of individuals in specific contexts, with the whole linked together through a common place. Even where connections

between events or themes might have been made--for instance, between the 18th-century African-Virginian slaves owned by the Burwell family and the 20th-century African-American servants employed by the McCrae family--they generally were not.

Visitors en route from the Carter's Grove reception center to the mansion were "welcomed" by AAIP interpreters, who seemed frequently to be waylaying the tourists and cajoling them into the quarter area. Once a group was assembled, seated on backless, split log benches in partial shade, an HI began the introduction; a group of twelve or more people was preferred but if fewer were gathered and more than a few minutes had passed, the presentation started. There was the sense that visitors might feel they were being detained, sidetracked from those more desirable destinations, the mansion and the archaeological sites and museum.

The quarter consisted of four buildings, including two log cabins, one with a wooden floor and one with dirt, in which visitors were told as many as twenty-four field hands lived, some with families. Between these cabins was an open area where the slaves were said to have cooked and had most of their social life, and adjacent to them were a fenced garden and a chicken yard, both circular, a shape which the guides pointed out as being reminiscent of the slaves' African heritage. There was also a log corncrib and, up a

slight hill, another fenced yard (this one square) with another log dwelling, this one presented as a single-family dwelling, the house of the "driver," the slave charged with the immediate supervision of the field workers. The ground around the buildings was packed clay and crushed oyster shells and had little shade. The path leading from the Visitor's Center and parking area to the mansion bounded the area on one side, a wooded ravine was along another, and woods and a field bordered the remainder.

While the primary ethnographic sites of this study were the parts of Colonial Williamsburg where black history was presented to the public--in the historic area and at Carter's Grove--the settings in which decisions about black history were made, the museum's administrative and operational buildings, were inescapably part of the "field." Most of these were located outside the historic area. Chief executives of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the parent organization of Colonial Williamsburg, the non-profit museum--its president, several vice presidents, and top public relations and finance personnel--had offices in the three-story, Federal style, brick Goodwin Building situated in Merchant's Square, an up-scale shopping area at the end of Duke of Gloucester Street near the William and Mary College campus. The building had a panelled board room on the corporate model, complete with portraits of its founders and presidents. Housed in its basement under lock and key

were the Foundation archives, tended by the archival staff who, with an approved request, provided selected files to approved researchers. Several blocks from the Goodwin Building, in a direction away from the historic area, was the two-story Boundary Street Office which housed the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, and the departments of the research historians and the architectural historians.

The Department of African-American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP) was located in the Franklin Street Offices (or FSO, as it was referred to by employees), a complex of two-story brick and cinder block buildings on Franklin Street abutting the historic area near the Public Gaol. AAIP and the offices of the Colonial Williamsburg Journal, a quarterly, four-color magazine of illustrated articles about Colonial Williamsburg and its history, as well as 18th-century Virginia history, shared a building situated between the offices of personnel and accounting and the headquarters of the Fife and Drum Corps. Nearby was a large quonset-type structure which served as the daily hitching area for the horses who pulled the various carriages and wagons for tours of the town. Behind these buildings were the archaeological offices and labs, and not far away were curators' offices and some curatorial storage space. Across the street beyond these buildings, further removed from the historic area, was the Costume Department,

a factory-like structure where the colonial outfits for historic interpreters and character interpreters were produced, cleaned, and repaired under the supervision of a director who maintained close contact with the research departments, particularly the textile curators, of the museum.

As mentioned above, a number of the buildings within the historic area served as museum offices. For instance, the Company of Colonial Performers, the Department of Interpretive Education, the Department of Historic Trades (crafts), Historic Interpreters, and Visitor's Aides all carried on their day-to-day administrative operations in parts or all of various "historic" structures. AAIP was also assigned a space in the historic area, the Public Records Office located next to the Capitol. According to the museum guide book, the three-room brick building was constructed as a fireproof repository for the colony's official documents, after the Capitol burned in 1747 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989a:58). In 1990 and 1991, the AAIP staff member responsible for outreach programs had her office in the building, and other AAIP staff used it as headquarters, mainly between tours or kitchen assignments at the Powell House or Wetherburn's Tavern.

There was also another area at Colonial Williamsburg relevant to both historical interpretation and to museum

administration, although anomalous in some ways to both. This was the Visitor Center. Described as "the gateway to Colonial Williamsburg and the first step of a journey in space and time," the center was a large brick building of "modern" design located within walking distance of the historic area (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989a:147). It was part of a sprawling complex which included several parking lots, two motels, two bookstore-gift shops (one in the Center itself), a restaurant, a cafeteria, play areas, a building for group orientation programs, and even a gasoline service station. Most visitors parked (free) at the center, purchased tickets to the museum, received information about various programs and activities, and were invited to visit the bookstore and gift shop and encouraged to see Williamsburg--The Story of a Patriot, a film portraying Williamsburg on the eve of the Revolutionary War through the eyes of a fictional family of the period. Buses into the historic area (free with the purchase of any class of museum ticket) left from the center every few minutes, and stopped at ten points along a route around the area, dropping and picking up visitors.²¹

²¹For an anthropologist, the ideas of a "gateway" and of "the first step of a journey in space and time" suggest some kind of liminal place and event. In a sense this was true at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center. Visitors entered at one end of the rather dimly lit building, through one of two doors opening on opposite sides of the building. Once inside they usually had to wait in line before one of eight teller-like windows to purchase tickets. They then moved through the ticket purchasing area to the waiting

In terms of this project--the interpretation of black history in the museum--the Visitor Center was relevant for what was presented there about 18th-century African Americans, but also for what was not presented: the film, The Story of a Patriot, said a great deal about black life; the bookstore-gift shop and newspaper-style guide given out with each ticket offered very little. Made by Paramount Pictures for Colonial Williamsburg in the mid-1950s, the film concerned the difficult political and economic choices facing a young plantation owner in the Virginia House of Burgesses in the early 1770s. Set mostly in the streets and buildings of the museum, the movie created a "reality" which lingered with visitors, so that when they found themselves in the same buildings and streets a few minutes later, they

section for the two theaters where The Story of a Patriot ran continuously. If they saw the movie, and most did, they were immersed for thirty-five minutes in a professionally produced cinematic adventure. From the film they were funnelled down a flight of steps and onto a museum bus into the historic area, or, for a few, onto a walking path.

As in rituals of transition, the visitors were guided along certain "routes" and participated in activities which seemed to move them progressively farther away from their family vacations in their 20th-century cars or vans and into the "Williamsburg experience." One could even argue that waiting in line for tickets paralleled the early period in many rituals where the participants--initiates?--are given a levelling experience, are made to feel their similarities instead of their differences. The film served to remove them entirely from their world and to make the "world"--the museum--into which they were entering seem "real." And the movement directly into the buses enabled them to retain the reality and at the same time to distance themselves still farther from their personal lives and their own individuality, here especially evident in their vehicles with their possessions, the symbols of their identity.

could be heard commenting on the places as "being real"--because they were in the movie.

All the black characters in the film were slaves. They were "happy" slaves, from the cheerful child in the opening frame, proudly bringing his master a baby duck, to the wise and trusted manservant attending his youthful owner on his legislative trips into the capital. Museum employees remarked on several occasions that there were "mistakes" in the movie, citing the facts that slaves were shown seated in the north, rather than the south, balcony of Bruton Parish Church, and that an elderly plantation owner was filmed at work on his property in a wig, something unlikely, they explained, since wigs were generally worn in colonial Virginia only on formal occasions. These were the sorts of mistakes that Colonial Williamsburg prided itself in pointing out, seeing them as evidence of its research efforts toward an ever more accurate version of the past.

Employees made few comments about the film regarding what many in the museum saw as a key issue in portraying slavery: the problem of how grim to make the situation. The slaves it depicted were upbeat, well fed, and clearly respected by their white owners. It was easy to see them as having a good life, that same good life espoused by many 19th- and even 20th-century advocates of the "Old South." It was problematic, however, that this image of African Americans was the first image of black life encountered by

most visitors to the museum, and for many who never found their way to the Wetherburn or Powell kitchens, to the Other Half Tour, Carter's Grove, or the special black programs, it was the only image of blacks they saw in the museum. Museum employees--black and white--whom I asked about the movie were generally not concerned. It was not so much that a simplistic and traditional portrayal of slavery was presented, as that they--the insiders--saw the film itself as somehow "outside" the museum proper, so that whatever messages it sent were not cause for concern.

The bookstore-gift shop displayed for sale books dealing with topics related to African-American life. Indeed, over the two years of this study the two shops at the Visitor Center complex, and the shop at the Carter's Grove Reception Center, offered a respectable range of solid scholarly work on black history as well as more popular publications. But among the souvenir-type items there was little. Absent were the those objects from black life comparable to the reproduction items from "white" life--mob caps, tricorns and straw hats, tin whistles, clay pipes, bird houses, colonial teas, and fragrant soaps; the list was long and growing. There were not objects directly associated with black life for visitors to buy, those things which might affirm not only the visitor's trip but the existence of the historical individual.

No museum employee I questioned seemed to have an answer for this. There were "black" objects, items used in the kitchens and on the Other Half Tour, which could have been marketed as African-American--for instance the "African" instruments which visitors were coached in playing on the Other Half Tour, and the baskets, wooden bowls and other cooking implements from the kitchens. And there was one traveler's item which could have been easily available, the inevitable postcard. The museum could have "created" any number of scenes showing African Americans in colonial costumes in settings throughout the town. In fact, of dozens of cards depicting scenes in the museum, I counted fewer than six cards showing a black person in any kind of job or outfit: a shoemaker, a coachman, and a cook in the historic area; and at Carter's Grove, a singing and dancing group at the slave quarter, and some workers in slave costume hoeing the mansion garden. On evidence from the shops, it was hard to avoid the message that blacks owned no objects, and without a "black" object or a "black" image, the African-American past itself became for the visitor peripheral at best.

As late as August 1991, eighteen months after O'Toole's call for "mainstreaming" and nearly a year after the formation of the Mainstreaming Committee, the weekly guide to museum events, Visitor's Companion, gave little indication of an African-American presence. A summer issue

of eight pages included day-by-day listings of special programs and tours, a two-page map of the museum, and as many as twenty boxed "advertisements," highlighting the listed programs. In the July 29-August 4, 1991 publication, a typical issue, two of those boxes promoted African-American programs, no African-American interpretation sites were specifically designated on the map, and in lists of "Exhibition Sites and Museums" and "Historic Trade Sites," a total of thirty-three places to visit, three included mention of African-Americans in any form, slave or free.

The film, Williamsburg--The Story of a Patriot, created the visitors' first image of 18th-century life in the colonial town, and the Visitor's Companion served as their chief source of information while in the museum and became their subsequent record of the visit. The movie and the publication's map emphasized the "reality" of Colonial Williamsburg as a town, rather than as a museum.²² As far as African-American history goes, however, it

²²It is interesting that people refer to their visits to Williamsburg and to houses such as Monticello or Mount Vernon as "going to Williamsburg" or maybe Colonial Williamsburg, and "seeing Monticello" or "visiting Mount Vernon." These sites are no less museums than the National Gallery or the Metropolitan Museum, yet because they are not named "Monticello Museum" or "Mount Vernon Museum" and because they were residences, albeit residences in which a collection of objects has been gathered and arranged, they tend not to be thought of as museums, at least by the general public. I wonder if the fact that they are not presented as museums causes visitors to forget that they are enabling them to suspend disbelief and to accept the messages of the places less critically.

would have been difficult to conclude from either of these media that the museum intended to present a community in which the population was fifty percent black. It would also be hard to conclude from what was presented in either the film or the publication much about the institution of slavery. In the film one saw 18th-century African-American life in a single dimension, and in the publication that life was limited to a few stereotypical places--kitchen, laundry, at the backs and sides of focal buildings. These were spaces outside the sites where the colonial Virginians were "becoming Americans."

Chapter Two

The Ethnographic Field: People and Programs

Colonial Williamsburg is one of the largest and most diversified organizations of its kind, employing more than 3800 men and women. The educational and museum programs of the foundation require an annual expenditure of more than \$45 million. Included in these costs are the work of research, preservation, and maintenance. . . , interpretation. . . , publication. . . , and conservation. . . .
(Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1991a:2)

The Organization

Along with the geographical layout and physical design of the museum's exhibits and its offices, my ethnographic field focused particularly on two groups within the museum, the AAIP staff and the members of the general museum staff concerned with African-American history.²³ The economic and organizational relationships of these groups and between them, within the overarching structure of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, directly affected presentation of African-American history in the museum.

Organizationally, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation included the non-profit museum (craft shops, exhibitions,

²³Initially, I had planned to look at the museum from the visitor's perspective as well as the employee's, aware that there were bound to be differences between what a researcher or an interpreter thought and presented and what the listener heard. Although I did some visitor interviews, I decided that presenting any sort of consistent sample from nearly a million annual visitors was too much for this project.

the historic buildings themselves, research and educational programs, and all staff responsible for these activities, especially the interpreters) and the for-profit Colonial Williamsburg Hotel Properties, Inc. (CWHPI), "a wholly owned, taxable subsidiary" (Gardiner 1989:42). The museum, in turn, encompassed the Department of African-American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP). The parent organization was routinely referred to by its employees, by residents of Williamsburg and the surrounding area, and in its own literature as simply "the Foundation." In the minds of many museum employees and much of the general populace, the Foundation and the museum were thought of as one, while other Foundation activities--the hotels and restaurants, for instance--were referred to by their specific names--the Williamsburg Inn or the Williamsburg Lodge or the Cascades. (This was a shift from earlier references to the museum as "the restoration." AAIP Director Rex Ellis told of his grandmother wondering, aghast, why a black man with a college education would go work for "the restoration," especially in the role of a "slave." The only blacks she had ever heard of having worked there were bellmen, waiters, and gardeners. I did not specifically ask Ellis if he thought there was a correlation in his grandmother's mind between these service jobs and his "slave" role.)

African Americans were employed by the Foundation in 1990 and 1991 in four general areas. In educational-

research positions in the museum, there were twelve to fourteen full-time African-American staff members in AAIP and eight to ten part-time or "seasonals," as they were referred to in the museum. The full-time people included Ellis, his assistant, a staff secretary, and a dozen employees who served as historic interpreters and character interpreters, performed in special African-American programs (music, storytelling, scripted plays), and occasionally also took roles in general museum productions calling for slave or free black characters. Also doing historic interpretation within the museum, but outside the AAIP department, was one African American in the Company of Colonial Performers, and a handful of black historic interpreters who interpreted buildings and exhibits alongside their white colleagues, from the "mainstream" perspective in which a "white universe" is assumed. These African-American "mainstream" interpreters were trained as "generalists"--that is, they were telling the 18th-century story not from an African-American slant but from the museum's (and middle-class America's) more traditional "Story of a Patriot" position.

Unlike AAIP interpreters, who nearly always appeared in "slave" costumes in the historic area, the generalists wore the standard 18th-century costume associated with the "middlin' sort" assigned to the general interpretive corps. The people employed full time were paid salaries, as opposed

to hourly wages. Most of the full-time AAIP interpreters and the adult part-time interpreters had attended college; nearly all of them had bachelor's degrees, and several had done graduate work. The part-time employees were generally paid by the hour, but most were summer employees, either children and teenagers hired for youth roles or college students. Beyond Ellis, his assistant and the AAIP secretary, there was a mere handful of African Americans working in administrative positions in the Foundation, and no archaeologists, curators, historians, or architectural historians.

Since the focus of this study is the conception and presentation of black history within the museum setting, I have not dwelt here on African-American staff outside the education-research division of the Foundation, i.e., the museum. These people were relevant, however, for what they revealed about the way those inside the museum viewed them. By far the most African Americans employed at the Foundation were in two divisions: Facilities and Property Management (landscaping and maintenance), and Hotel Properties (hotel and restaurant service workers). A main organizational difference between these two non-museum groups of employees was unionization. Those in the Hotel Properties division were represented by Food and Beverage Workers Union Local 32, AFL-CIO, and during the second year of this fieldwork they were engaged in a bitter struggle with the Foundation

for a new contract. But aside from this fact, union members or not, the employees in both groups received hourly wages, and most were not educated beyond high school.

Where they became important for this study was in the ways in which members of the museum staff who were connected with presenting 18th-century black history viewed the Foundation's black employees who were not part of its educational and research division. Here the union-management controversy offered an opportunity to observe staff attitudes. From my perspective, the plight of the union employees (such as bellhops, housekeepers, cooks, bartenders, seamstresses), most of whom were African Americans, seemed in many ways like a 20th-century version of the 18th-century exploitation of African-Americans which AAIP interpreters were attempting to present. The union, which had only been accepted by Colonial Williamsburg Foundation hotel and restaurant workers in 1976 and had never been strong, presented itself as negotiating for better pay based on a higher hourly wage as opposed to the Foundation's compensation through merit bonuses; for a better package in the areas of health care, overtime, educational assistance, retirement and disability; and for recognition as a legitimate representative of Foundation employees (Food and Beverage Workers Union, Local 32, AFL-CIO 1990).

At the administrative level, the Foundation saw itself as having historically "taken care of" its workers. A corporation in an "open shop" state, it presented the contract dispute as inspired by outsiders who were intent on destroying a longstanding relationship between management and labor, one in which labor had always been well provided for. Dennis O'Toole, the Foundation vice president with overall responsibility for the museum and a strong advocate for black history in every facet of the interpretive effort, saw the union activities as destructive to the positive relationship that the Foundation's management had always had with its hourly employees. But while saying that "unions make adversaries of management and employees," he also acknowledged that in the Colonial Williamsburg case the union controversy "made us more conscious of how we relate and deal with our employees--to the employees' advantage" (Interview 2/22/91).

I expected to find that the Foundation's museum employees who were interpreting black history supported the Foundation's minimum-wage workers in its hotels and restaurants. This was not the case. When I asked them about it, however, these museum employees either evaded the subject or outrightly condemned the union tactics. An AAIP interpreter who spent much of her time as a character interpreter in the first-person role of a slave cook, said the union had contacted her for support but that the letter

she had received was so poorly written she could not consider being involved--there were misspelled words and the grammar was bad. Another interpreter, one who also portrayed a slave much of the time, criticized the union indirectly by denouncing the pastor of her mother's church because he had given union leaders permission to hold a meeting there without consulting the congregation. In each of these cases, the response served to distance the museum employee from the plight of the union workers.

Asked point blank about his view of the contract dispute, AAIP Director Ellis told me he could not comment because he had not followed the negotiations. This was in February 1991, a time when I was in town two days a week at most. For me, Ellis's lack of awareness seemed incredible. The weekly Williamsburg Gazette carried articles on the dispute in every issue, and the Richmond and Newport News dailies, as well as the electronic media in Tidewater, Richmond, and even Washington, were regularly covering it. Picket lines were out almost continuously at the Williamsburg Lodge, the chief site for visiting conferences and the location of a popular dining spot for visitors, employees, and even area residents.

When pressed, Ellis acknowledged a vague awareness of the union situation, but said he had no opinion about it. His was a common response, one I encountered among other museum employees I questioned. It suggested to me the view

that labor contracts in the Foundation's for-profit realm were irrelevant to the museum and its staff, and reflected a distance between the Foundation's two operations that I encountered more than once. But I also think that Ellis and the other African Americans may have been distancing themselves in a different sense. As African-American college graduates they could have seen associating with blue-collar black people as too close--in anthropological terminology, polluting. In some cases their own relatives had been bellhops and waiters, and the distance, and status, created by education was too tenuous to jeopardize by an alliance with what is generally seen by members of the American middle class as a lower class.

In terms of organizational structure, both the museum and the hotel properties were ultimately under the purview of a single individual, the president of the Foundation. Something of the interaction between the non-profit and for-profit sides of the organization can be understood from a look at its finances. According to its annual report, the Foundation had operating expenses in 1990 of \$132.8 million. "Earned" income amounted to \$123.4 million, broken down as follows: (in millions) \$22.3, admissions; 64.4, hotels and restaurants; 22.8, products; 9.9, gifts and grants; and 4.0, real estate, with additional income of \$10.2 available from investments. The 1990 operating surplus was \$.8 million (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1991a). (Since most

conservative institutions allocate no more than 5% of their endowment income for operating expenses, the \$10.2 million figure suggests that the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had an endowment of approximately \$200 million. The annual report showed endowed funds of \$184 million, leading one to wonder if some other formula was being applied.)

The figures for 1991 were proportionally the same (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1992). What was not published in these reports were the separate amounts spent on the museum and on hotel properties, or the actual number of employees in each division. In other words, one could not tell how much of the \$132.8 million spent in 1990 went to the museum and, of that amount, how much went to African-American history.

According to its publications, the mission of the Foundation was threefold: preservation, education, and hospitality. As described in more detail, preservation involved restoration, recreation, and interpretation; education meant teaching about Virginia, the colony, and its relationship to England, the colonial power; and hospitality included courteous behavior on the part of Foundation employees as well as quality products--in hotels and restaurants and in the museum's "reproduction" items for sale (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989b, 1991a, 1992). From the way in which these goals were presented--two pertaining to museum activities and the third, hospitality,

more oriented toward the for-profit side of the operation--there was the impression that the museum dominated the Foundation. From this information it appears that although the museum did not pay for itself, the operating deficit was more than covered by the Foundation's for-profit component, and more important, that the museum was the raison d'etre for the whole foundation.

At the same time, employees in the museum often talked of the pressure they personally felt from the Foundation to increase revenues. The one obvious means to greater income was more ticket sales, both admission to the museum generally, and to its special programs. Ticket sales would grow, according to the corporation, if those employees dealing with the public--everyone from waiters to guides--adhered to the hospitality code. Yet, as the figures above show, even a doubling of ticket sales would not have covered museum costs. As for special programs--for instance, evening plays presented in the Capitol and Governor's Palace--many museum employees, and not a few visitors, felt the seven- or eight-dollar ticket price over and above that of admission to the museum was an unfair charge--unfair to the visitors and to the performers who were told that the fee was necessary for the program to pay for itself.

This phrase, "pay for itself," turned up repeatedly in reference to just about everything in the museum. It was a

curious phenomenon, given that Rockefeller founded the museum as a philanthropic venture and funded a foundation for its support. At some point in its history, however, there was either an unconscious shift in what should or should not be supported, or a calculated change in philosophy: although certain elements of the museum could operate "at a loss," others could not--that the principles of the for-profit component of the Foundation would apply, sometimes, to its non-profit side.

The for-profit thinking affected black history in the museum in at least two ways. First, the black history evening program, along with the other evening programs, was put under the "pay for itself" rule. But the rule was a paradoxical one. On the one hand, because evening programs were supposed to pay for themselves (even though many did not), they had a certain status within the museum. They were "good" because, in theory, they did not drain off museum resources. They were also seen as more "valuable" or "better" than many daytime programs, the proof of this being the visitors' willingness to pay extra to see them. At the same time, because most did not in fact break even they were always under threat of being eliminated. Thus while presenting an evening program was one way to be considered important (because visitors paid to see them), such programs were also considered dispensable (because they were a financial drain).

AAIP administrators and staff felt the need for the status attached to having an evening event and so, despite the pressure to "pay for itself," a black history nighttime program had been presented weekly during the summer since the mid-1980s. To my knowledge, these AAIP evening programs never paid for themselves. Even the 1991 presentation lost money. Titled "Nightwalking," it was a series of vignettes presented on the grounds of the Governor's Palace, a format and site which accommodated far more visitors--and thereby earned more money--than the programs of earlier years which had been staged in the limited space of the Powell House buildings and grounds. In the end, I think that being part of the evening program coterie enabled the AAIP staff and its historical narrative to identify itself with a segment, of the "mainstream," the Company of Colonial Performers (CCP). while "marginalized" to some extent itself, CCP was more closely tied to the "mainstream" because its topics and characters were the stuff of the standard pre-1970 American history books. (CCP's "marginalization" is discussed in detail in Chapter Five). The irony was that the site had no direct correlation with the topic. Unlike, for instance, the Capitol where a witch trial or a Thomas Jefferson program (both based on "real" documents) were set, or the Palace ballroom where costumed gentry staged a musical evening, the Palace garden was a site antithetical to

presenting the harshness of slave life. So the best spot for revenue was the least appropriate for the event.

The second instance in which finance and philosophy had a curious impact on black history in the museum was the \$400,000 AT&T grant received in 1986 specifically for presenting the African-American past. Money went to hiring a black history scholar for two years, to excavating a kitchen site within the historic area, to researching and producing slave costumes, and to furnishing sites in the historic area associated with slave life, such as kitchens and laundries. These projects were made possible with funds over and above those available through the Foundation's regular sources of income. Staff members of AAIP along with top management and the museum development office felt that the grant was an affirmation by the museum of its commitment to black history (Birney 1988:4,6). And of course it was. The question, however, was whether the museum would have embarked on the projects without "outside" funding--if Colonial Williamsburg would have devoted \$400,000 of its existing endowment or annual fund resources to black history projects. My point here is that it seems to have taken outside money to get for the African-American program what were considered necessities--research, costumes, furnishings--in the museum's mainstream program. But having the money come from an outside source was seen as more

affirming of the effort to present black history than a commitment of museum funds.

The organization chart of the Foundation provided additional information about the museum-business relationship. On my arrival in Williamsburg in January 1990, Dennis O'Toole, vice president-chief education officer, provided me with a set of material about the museum which included an organizational chart headed The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, with a second line, Colonial Williamsburg Hotel Properties, Inc.²⁴ The chart showed a president-CEO, under whom were the senior vice president and the Foundation secretary-legal officer, and six divisional vice presidents. Only one of those six division heads, O'Toole, had responsibilities related solely to the operation of the museum, with a second, whose area covered public relations and development, appearing to be primarily museum oriented. Of the remaining four vice presidents, one was involved specifically with sales--both "historical" products and hotels--and the other three had responsibilities in both areas. For instance, the vice president for facilities and property management had under him a Director of Landscape and Facilities Services whose responsibilities covered all grounds and buildings, both

²⁴See Appendix for a copy of the organizational chart of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, which was included in my 1990 information packet.

inside the historic district and at the hotels and restaurants. Similarly, the personnel director dealt with both hotel and museum employees.

In the course of discussions with Foundation personnel over the next eighteen months, I never pinned down the exact nature of the relationship between the two parts of the Foundation--museum and business. In fact, some of the staff I talked to hinted at a similar confusion, even suggesting that an exact picture might not exist. Most employees, from salaried executives to hourly wage earners, reiterated the corporate position: that the businesses existed for the support and operation of the museum. When pressed, however, about funding for various museum programs and projects, they implied that the museum's educational-preservation mission was actually secondary to the Foundation's commercial activities.

An example frequently cited by museum employees was the construction of a nine-million-dollar, eighteen-hole, championship golf course at the Williamsburg Inn, its second such facility, and the third to which hotel visitors had access. Writing in Colonial Williamsburg, the Foundation's quarterly magazine, the vice president for facilities and property management described the golf course as necessary to compete with similar resorts for conference business (Gardiner 1989:42). On the other hand, the museum's director of archaeological research lamented the

destruction, resulting from building the course, of a number of unexcavated 18th-century sites, as well as some from prehistoric, 17th-century, and 19th-century periods. His department was given money and time to survey the area before construction of the golf course was begun. But, as he pointed out, the allocation preceded the bulldozers, not the decision of whether there would be a course there at all (Interview, Marley Brown, 5/22/91).

In terms of black history in the museum, these situations and figures were significant. Here was an organization whose avowed mission was to educate, but which saw itself as competing not only with other educational (non-profit) institutions but also with the (for profit) resort market. To have a history museum on the cutting edge, Colonial Williamsburg's administrators were aware as early as 1980 that black history was a necessity. Black history meant prestige. For AT&T, black history--stated more generally, support of minorities--also meant prestige, or an image of social responsibility. At the same time, the museum, or the Foundation, was apparently not prepared to take existing funds to strengthen its black history programs.

The Program

Like most museums Colonial Williamsburg began with a collection of objects, but unlike most museums--at least the

traditional museums of the 19th century and even 20th century--the collection of objects became a means to an end, the 18th-century experience. In a letter at the beginning of the Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg, Charles Longworth, Foundation president 1976-1992, called a visit to the museum a "rendezvous" with the past. He talked of "encounters" with great deeds and daily activities, and expressed his hope for the visitors' "new awareness of a kinship with the men, women, and children of early America" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989a:1). This notion of an event, of an experience, was reiterated throughout the guidebook and most of the museum's other statements and publications. Williamsburg was described as a "journey. . .[where] you will enter the day-to-day world of men and women long since passed from the scene" (1989a:7).

The sense of a journey or an encounter--some active participatory experience on the part of the visitor--recurred throughout the weekly Visitor's Companion. This newspaper-style publication listed which buildings were open on what days, and listed museum programs, special events, places and hours for dining and shopping. It included as well a centerfold map of the historic area. Visitors were most often asked to "explore" some aspect of 18th-century life, as if they would be undertaking both a journey and an encounter. The Visitor's Companion description of the Lanthorn Tour, for instance, read,

"Explore the social and economic worlds of eighteenth century tradespeople and look at their products," and for The Other Half, "This two-hour tour explores African-American life." On the Religion Tour, one would "explore the role of religion in the lives of eighteenth-century Virginians." The idea of exploring was not limited to the 18th century; visitors were also invited to "explore the history and maintenance of Historic Area gardens," on the Garden Tour (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1991c:3).

When not inviting them to explore, the programs were giving the visitors chances to "experience." At the military encampment, one could "Experience the daily life of an eighteenth-century soldier." And through conversations with character interpreters, visitors "not only will experience living history activities. . .but they will also encounter citizens of the eighteenth-century Williamsburg. . . . It is a way for the visitor to talk with the past" (Ibid.:8). For African-American history at Williamsburg, character interpreters were part of this "experience" as well. To understand their roles in the museum, some background on the whole interpreting program is useful.

Less than a decade after opening its several doors to the public in the late 1920s, the museum began hiring local townspeople to talk about the history of the buildings in terms of their colonial past. Genteel white women in the

community sought the job and were sought for it. Dressed in elegant costumes which reflected a Colonial Revival concept of the clothing of the 18th century, they provided a gracious "native" tone while supplying historical details of the buildings and their furnishings. These women considered it socially acceptable to work as "hostesses," and for many it supplied a small second income, particularly welcome in the less-than-prosperous depression era. Indeed, following some initial suspicion in the community about the Rockefellers--after all, they were "Northerners" and Williamsburg in 1928 was the stereotype of a sleepy southern town--it was looked on as prestigious to be associated with the "restoration," as natives referred to the project.

On their part, the museum's founder-administrators saw the hostesses as providing ambiance as well as information, both of which enhanced the museum collection, and thus added to the tourists' understanding and appreciation of Virginia's colonial past. Too, the administration was enthusiastic because having townspeople involved with the museum helped bridge a gap between the northern newcomers and the local community.

These women made up the bulk of the hostess corps at Colonial Williamsburg until well into the 1960s, and even in 1990-91 there were still a few longtime residents, still mostly women, working as historic interpreters, the museum's latter-day term for hostess. When asked, they could point

out some of the disadvantages of the job--low pay, weekend shifts, summer heat--but they were usually quick to note the advantages, citing most often the attractions their predecessors found in the 1930s: the job carried prestige, it was educational, and wearing a costume was transforming in positive ways. But these women (and subsequently all costumed employees) had another role of which they and the institution may have had only a glimmer. In addition to serving as hostesses, historians, and local links, they became, in effect, part of the museum: they became objects themselves. Here were real Southern "gentlewomen" discussing the artifacts of the 18th-century gentry, some few of whom were literally their genealogical antecedents. In costumes purchased in the 1930s from New York and since the 1960s supplied by Colonial Williamsburg's own costume department, the people who talked about the museum's collection of buildings and antiques were also seen as part of the collection--particularly by the visitor, but also among museum personnel.

The historical and ideological orientation presented at Colonial Williamsburg varied little between the museum's founding and the 1960s. But as the museum's research departments discovered new information, the story of the town's past was altered in its details.²⁵ Rather than a

²⁵The notion of researchers "discovering" new information raises a major historiographical issue, one as relevant to history museums as to history texts, but with an

cause for concern, such changes were embraced by the museum as it shifted from a position of telling the only story about 18th-century Virginia life, to telling the most

added dimension in the case of the museum. Among the relatively sophisticated staff at Colonial Williamsburg, no one today would dispute that much of the information that the museum historians or archaeologists found over the years depended on what questions they asked. This has become the prevailing view in most fields, including the "hard" sciences. And as with these other fields, in the peculiar case of the museum one also needs both to ask who made the decisions to ask what questions and why, and to try to determine how, when, and to what effect the "new information" showed up in the museum's presentations for the public.

In terms of African-American history at Colonial Williamsburg, research preceded presentation by more than two decades. In 1957, historian Thad W. Tate, then a member of the museum's research staff, completed a report on black life in colonial Williamsburg. Tate's work was the first serious study on the subject, and an important event at the time in American history. It was almost a decade before the report appeared as a book, The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg, published by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1965, and nearly fifteen years after that before the first African-American actors were hired to portray 18th-century black people in the museum. There were a few exceptions in which costumed African Americans had been part of museum interpretation over the years. One such were the drivers of the coaches and carriages, those liveried "lawn ornaments" referred to in the introductory chapter of this paper. There were also two instances at the Wythe House. In the very early years of the museum, Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, the Episcopal minister who led Rockefeller into founding Colonial Williamsburg, used the Wythe House as his office, and two black women--his housekeepers--interpreted there. As Rex Ellis recounted it, this stopped when one of the women was "told by a local white woman, who had begun interpreting the building, that the job of hosting visitors was no longer hers." Later, for two years in the early 1940s, the African-American Payne family lived on the second floor of the Wythe Kitchen and "dressed in 18th-century costumes and conversed with visitors" (Ellis 1990:14). Ellis told about the Payne family to show that blacks had been part of museum interpretation for a long time; my point is that in none of these cases was the focus on slavery.)

accurate story, broadened to mean several interrelated stories, based on the research of the moment. The pervading institutional goal became one of accuracy, which in turn was seen as the key to authenticity.

Parallelling its meticulous attention to accuracy in its buildings and furnishings, the museum increasingly put emphasis on the accuracy of the costumes and on the historical information imparted by the employees who were responsible for explaining the museum collection. Historical accuracy was seen by the museum as essential to creating authenticity in both the appearance of the costumed employees and the history they presented. A result of this was an interpretive corps which, while it could never successfully compete with the "real" 18th-century objects it was charged with presenting, became "authentic Colonial Williamsburg reproductions."

For these employees, being in costume was generally viewed as a positive aspect of the job. Aside from solving the practical problem of what to wear to work, the colonial outfits seemed to enhance most of these people's (20th-century) sense of themselves. For example, describing the experience of being dressed for the role of Betty Randolph in 18th-century style clothing, complete with undergarments which included whalebone stays, a female interpreter told me that standing on the second floor of the Peyton Randolph House she felt she "became" Mrs. Randolph, wife of a

prominent legislator, mistress of twenty-seven slaves, and a leading resident of the town and colony. She seemed to be saying that she may not have been the 18th-century dining room table, the authentic object, but she was the next best thing, an authentic reproduction, the human equivalent of the reconstructed 18th-century building or antique reproduction. Two things were happening here. As suggested above, these costumed employees, in simulating people of the 18th century, became, in a sense, 18th-century objects. In a museum, where objects were the raison d'etre, it was not hard for employees and visitors alike to accept the transformation, and thus to see the person who "became" an object--any object--as achieving a more desirable status. In addition, when the 20th-century employee "became" an 18th-century person who is a member of the elite class--i.e., Betty Randolph--the employee, at least as long as she is in costume, tended to be viewed and to view herself as an elite person. So there was not only a context--the museum--in which the object was preferred to the individual, there was also a context where, because the objects were rare and expensive, identification with them conferred even greater status.

This seemed to hold true as long as the object with which an employee was associated was deemed valuable by the museum: if not an antique table, then the "colonial reproduction" owner of that table. For African-Americans,

however, the relations between objects and people could be quite different, with very different consequences. According to AAIP director Rex Ellis, the negative side of "becoming" an object for an African American was the sense of being "less." Unlike the middle-class white interpreter who was transformed by her costume into Betty Randolph, member of the 18th-century elite, the African American in his slave outfit found himself feeling denigrated and inferior. Where portraying a slave was concerned, the idea of being an object in the museum took on a different meaning. The hostess who became an 18th-century item, a member of the gentry population, was portraying an item which was seen as human in its historical context. The African American who became an 18th-century item, a member of the slave class, was portraying an item which was seen as sub- or even non-human--as truly an object, a slave which was bought and sold--in its historical context.

Beginning in the 1960s, Colonial Williamsburg broadened its program to include various guided tours through the streets of the town. The town tours evolved over the next two decades in several directions, and during this period the term "hostess" was dropped in favor of "guide," a designation that was subsequently superseded, in the mid-1980s, by "historic interpreter." The changes in program and terminology reflected, along with other changes during this period at Colonial Williamsburg, a shift towards

professionalism in the museum world generally, and especially in the world of the outdoor museum. To have guides was more professional than to have hostesses, and to have historic interpreters was more professional still. The titles enabled the employees to think of themselves as serious museum personnel, and this in turn affected the public's sense of getting more educational value for the admission ticket.

The expanded offering of tours provided visitors a range of options for understanding the 18th century, from the Patriot's Tour, a one-hour walk oriented toward first-time visitors, to more specialized tours like colonial dining and 18th-century gardens, walks which might last from two to three hours. The focused tours, like the new job titles, reflected the museum's shift in approach: specialization was evidence of a more professional sort of history, and specialization also gave tourists the sense of getting more for their money, both in education and entertainment.

Historic interpreters generally wore 18th-century costumes and spoke from a 20th-century perspective, from the viewpoint of the "third" person, analogous to the omniscient voice in a novel. This group of employees, the people in costumes on the streets and in the buildings of the museum, made up ninety percent of the corps responsible for telling the history to the visiting public. In addition to its

third-person interpreters, the museum began experimenting on a broad scale in the 1980s with costumed actor-guides who presented life from the perspective of particular 18th-century individuals. These "first-person" historic interpreters were known in the museum as character interpreters, and they represented either historical figures documented to have been in 18th-century Williamsburg, or "conjectural" individuals which research indicated could reasonably have been there. For instance, one first-person tour in 1990 was that of Captain Stewart, documented by historical sources as master of a Scottish trading vessel, whose tour focused on 18th-century shipping, trade, and nautical practices. Another was that of the "reasonably likely" African-American slave Judith, who allowed visitors to accompany her on a round of errands through town for her mistress.

Most character interpreters both led tours and interpreted at specific buildings. For example, the character interpreter known as Grandma Geddy could be found one day a week at the Powell House, another day or two at the Geddy House, and yet another day leading the tour, "Grandma Geddy Pays a Visit," on which visitors were told they would "learn about the world of this widow, mother, and grandmother." In each situation the character interpreter spoke from the perspective of the 18th-century mother of silversmith James Geddy. Her intention was not to recreate

the specific personality of the colonial era Mrs. Geddy (the records did not contain enough to do that), but to present 18th-century views on old age, widowhood, and being a grandparent.

Research documented the existence of Mrs. Geddy, wife and mother of the silversmith, but the museum's purpose in presenting her was to present her circumstances, fashioned to represent the circumstances of the generic craftsman-class woman in her late sixties. Further, although "the world" of Mrs. Geddy was the ostensible subject matter, it was a world which was tied constantly to the interests of 20th-century Americans--the character interpreter focused, for instance, on inter-generational misunderstandings and the status and wealth which her son had achieved from the struggling beginnings made by her and her husband. Visitors could identify with the American themes, reiterated frequently in the presentations, of youth not respecting age or of giving one's children a better life.²⁶

The Grandma Geddy character was in contrast to that of George Wythe, for whom specific facts of the individual's life were paramount. Of special importance were Mr. Wythe's role as a teacher (and especially as the law professor of

²⁶One speculates on the extent to which Colonial Williamsburg management chose this character to appeal to its growing number of older visitors. According to the museum's own market surveys, people aged sixty-five and over accounted for fifteen percent of its visitors in 1991 (Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1992:803).

Thomas Jefferson) and a scholar, the Williamsburg representative of 18th-century rationalism. Although nothing inside the Wythe House seen by 20th-century visitors was "original" to the house, the building itself was the original 18th-century one, and the people with whom Mr. Wythe dealt in the colonial capital were the "real" people--Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Lord Botetourt. Grandma Geddy was a documented reproduction of what probably was; Mr. Wythe was a documented reproduction of what certainly was. She was representative of the generic, of the "plausibly possible" historic personage based more on statistical information than on personal documents. He, on the other hand, illustrated the specific, the "authentic" historical personage based on his own particular documents, both public and private, including his own personal accounts and those of people who knew him, and such official sources as the colonial government or the College of William and Mary.²⁷

²⁷A reader of an earlier draft of this dissertation questioned whether the "probability" of Grandma Geddy, versus the "certainty" of Mr. Wythe was a function of their genders--were female personages generally presented by the museum with less "reality" than male personages. I do not think so. There were, for example, presentations of female personages which were very specific and individual--among them, the character of Betty Randolph, daughter of the elite Harrison household and wife of legislator Peyton Randolph, and that of Anne Blair, daughter of William and Mary President John Blair.

I believe that the difference between characterizations of Mrs. Geddy and Mr. Wythe was not so much a function of gender as of class. Members of the "middlin' sort," represented by Mrs. Geddy, generally did not leave for

In contrast with Mrs. Geddy and Mr. Wythe, the character interpreter roles of most of the slave personages represented people who were "reasonably likely." For instance, the character Judith, mentioned above, was created from the ledgers of an 18th-century builder named Benjamin Powell and the master of Carter's Grove, Nathaniel Burwell. Powell's account books showed he had hired out a slave named Judith. Mr. Burwell's books showed he had a slave named Judith (and I am not sure if AAIP interpreters said Burwell's records showed her hired out or not--it was vague). Beyond a name and an approximate age nothing certain was known. In the arena of character interpretation, the realm of realism provided by objects in the museum was mimicked through first-person portrayal. Wythe, because of his documentation, and like the physical structure of his house, was the most "authentic." Grandma

posterity the kinds of documents--diaries and letters, for instance--left by the upper class. The museum "reconstructed" Grandma Geddy from a few specifics, among them her silversmith son's ledgers, but most of the material used to create her came from general statistics. The question is a good one because it raises the issue of class, an issue which I have dealt with only peripherally in this project. I see its omission as one of the failings of the work, since the issues of racism and class cannot realistically be separated in American culture. In fact, in separating them, or in trying to, I am doing something similar to what I describe Colonial Williamsburg as doing in its interpretation of the past. In its interpretive efforts, the museum often reproduced the racism it said it sought to understand and alleviate; in not talking about class, this paper reproduces a cultural attitude in which the existence of class in American society is denied (or avoided), a situation all the more problematic given the complicated intersection of racist and class issues.

Geddy was less so. Historians knew little more than her name, but she was connected with a craftsman-tradesman whose account books proved his commercial existence, and there was a "real" 18th-century house standing where he had lived. Judith had no last name, no spouse's accounts, no house. She may have been "reasonably likely" in one sense, but she was also the least likely.

In the 1960s, Colonial Williamsburg had acknowledged the need for some mention of a black story. Its solution for a short time was a tape-recorded message in the kitchen of the Wythe House, describing the life of a slave cook. This was abandoned when the museum management discovered that black members of the maintenance staff were hanging their coats over the box containing the recording to keep visitors from hearing about slavery. It was said that the black maintenance corps, like most blacks at that time, were embarrassed by slavery. They did not want to be reminded, or have anyone else reminded of possible slave origins (Ellis 1989:155). It was only in the late 1970s, in the wake of the social history trend in academia, that the museum made a serious commitment to interpreting the lives of what it termed "the other half," the African-American half of the colonial capital's population. By that time, black pride had emerged and the black power movement focused on slavery as both the emblem of white oppression and the evidence of black strength (Ellis 1989).

During the time of this fieldwork, regular African-American presentations in the museum included the Other Half Tour, first-person and third-person presentations in the kitchens of the Powell House and Wetherburn's Tavern, and the tour of the Carter's Grove slave quarter eight miles from the historic town. There was also a weekly evening performance during each of the summers: in 1990, "The Runaway" at the Powell House, and in 1991, "Nightwalking" on the Palace grounds. Black music programs, skits aimed at children featuring African-American student employees, and a one-man show, "The Storyteller," were also presented in the summers.

For the two summers of this study there were seventeen regularly offered outdoor walking tours (I include here Patriot's and Lanthorn tours, but not horse-drawn carriage and wagon rides, or the stage wagon), ten by third-person interpreters and seven by first-person interpreters.²⁸ All

²⁸The summer 120 historic interpreter tours included "Building the Constitution," "Dinner and Garden," "Historic Area Garden," "Lanthorn," "Once Upon a Town," "Other Half," "Patriot's," "Stepping into the Past: Families at Work and Play in Colonial Virginia," "Sunset at Carter's Grove," and "Young Apprentice." There were also special tours inside some buildings: two at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery, and a morning family tour at the Capitol. The 1990 character interpreter tours were "Captain Stewart Visits Williamsburg," "Grandma Geddy Pays a Visit," "Tendin' Our Own Business" with the slave character Judith, and "Young Misses and Their Pastimes."

In summer 1991, historic interpreter tours included all of the above, except for "Building the Constitution" and "Dinner and Garden," and a new one, "Religion in Colonial Virginia." The 1991 character interpreter tours included all of the above but "Young Misses and Their Pastimes" and

but one of these tours required the purchase of special tickets in addition to the basic admission to the museum. The exception was the Patriot's Tour which could not be purchased at all; it was available only to those who bought the Patriot's Pass, the most expensive of the museum's three admission tickets. Prices for the other tours ranged from \$3 to \$8, with one, the Dinner and Gardens Tour, at \$25 (because of the meal). With the exception of the last tour, which included a meal, I was never able to determine the logic for price variations among the seventeen tours. "Captain Stewart," for instance, cost \$6, the Other Half Tour and "Judith's" tour were \$5, and the three children's tours were \$3. The length of time a tour lasted could have been a factor in its price, but there was no obvious consistency. The Other Half Tour was advertised as being two hours long, and the Judith and Hattie tours were billed as taking an hour and a half. Captain Stewart's tour was listed as being from 2 - 4 pm, and no time duration was given for the children's tours.²⁹

The foregoing is a general sketch of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and its interpretive program. It is

"Tendin' Our Own Business" with Judith, and featured, in addition, "Jane Vobe, Woman of Business" and "Tendin' Our Own Business" with the slave character Hattie.

²⁹The details of tour and ticket information cited here come from summer 1990 and 1991 editions of the Visitor's Companion, the museum's weekly guide to its exhibits and activities.

intended to serve as a context for the specifics of the museum's interpretation of the African-American past, the focus of this work.

Chapter Three

Talking about Slavery: The Other Half Tour

Williamsburg officials report that visitors are increasingly curious about slavery.

"How are we going to deal with where we came from," Ellis said, "if we continue to pretend it didn't exist?"

(Brown, Chicago Tribune, 1988)

In a 1988 BBC documentary on the archaeology of American slavery, Rex Ellis, then director of African American Interpretation and Presentations (AAIP) at Colonial Williamsburg, was filmed leading a group of visitors on the Other Half Tour. In his broad-brimmed black felt hat, rough textured brown knee pants, simple white shirt, and heavy black shoes, Ellis was hardly dressed to represent the traditional founding father. He wore clothes of a laborer, and as Ellis, an African American, quickly explained, he was concerned with a particular kind of laborer--the Williamsburg slave.

The narrator of the documentary described Colonial Williamsburg's commitment made in 1979 to telling the story of the town's 18th-century African-American population. Evidence of that commitment was seen a decade later in this film, "Digging for Slaves in the South," which focused on archaeological evidence of 18th-century black life. Along with Ellis, the museum's chief archaeologist was shown explaining the excavation of a kitchen site where slaves had

lived, and Williamsburg's head architectural historian was filmed leading the viewer through the reconstruction of the slave cabins at Carter's Grove.³⁰

During the period of this research, however, work at the kitchen site had terminated. Funding for the project had ended and there was no sign of the past dig, only a passing reference made to it on an occasional Other Half Tour. The slave cabins which had been under construction during the film were completed. But Carter's Grove, where they were located, was several miles outside town, so that even though the cabins were often mentioned by the historic interpreters leading the tours, they were too far away to be part of a walking tour.³¹ Instead, visitors on the Other Half Tour in 1990 and 1991 walked down the public streets, across Palace Green, through the gardens of the Governor's Palace, and around the grounds of Mr. Wythe's and Mr.

³⁰The kitchen excavation site was officially known as "Mammy's Kitchen," a project funded by the 1986 AT&T grant for African-American programs. It was explained in the film that this was because the excavated foundation matched the description of a 19th-century building known to Williamsburg residents as Mammy's House, the residence of a black slave or servant of a white Williamsburg family. I never detected from the archaeologist, or from AAIP interpreters to whom I mentioned it, any awareness of the possible irony present in giving an excavation site focused on black life a name so stereotypically suggestive.

³¹The terms historic interpreter, interpreter, and guide are used interchangeably in this chapter to refer to the Colonial Williamsburg employees who talked about history to museum visitors. Elaborations on distinctions between and within the terms (i.e., first-person interpretation, third-person interpretation, character interpreter) appear in the following chapter.

Everard's houses--streets and gardens associated less with the lives of 18th-century African Americans than with the white masters of those lives.

This chapter looks at the ways in which AAIP interpreters, using the objects associated with the founding fathers--the museum's traditional or "mainstream" history--and following a traditional museum format--the tour--talked about the black residents of 18th-century Williamsburg. I describe how these interpreters, presenting their tours at the geographical core of the museum and referring primarily to objects routinely associated with the "mainstream" message, distanced themselves and their narrative from that mainstream. The AAIP interpreters devised bold and creative approaches to achieve this "distance," but with it came emphasis on "otherness" and the concomitant message of separateness and inequality between black and white in the 18th century. In the context of a museum founded on and focused on individuals' relationships with certain objects, "unorthodox" interpretation of those objects in a narrative could put interpreters--in this case, African-American interpreters--outside the pale, branding them with an "otherness" vis-a-vis the main corps of interpreters in the museum. Each situation, the historic and the modern, played a role in reproducing that racism which the museum's administration was seeking to confront through its programs.

At first glance the Other Half Tour was startling in its paucity of items specifically related to 18th-century black life. One visitor commenting to me on this, noted that the dearth of "things" contributed to her less-than-positive impression of the tour. "It was really just a walking lecture," she said. "What were we seeing on this tour that had any particular relevance to the story we were being told about slavery, and especially about slavery in Williamsburg?"

In one sense this visitor was right. There were only two instances where the narrative presented on the Other Half Tour focused on objects directly related to African-American life. These objects were a building--the Wythe House laundry where slaves lived and worked--and a collection of musical instruments styled after traditional African and African-American pieces, which visitors were invited to play. The objects supported the narrative, but there was also a danger. Both the building and the bongos could readily reinforce 20th-century stereotypes of black culture, especially in the case of the instruments. Indeed, when presenting the various drums, bells, and other percussion pieces in the collection, the historic interpreters emphasized the importance of rhythm in African and in 18th-century African-American music, contrasting that music with European music which, they said, focused on melody and harmony. The problem was not whether this was

true--that there existed a difference between African and European music--but that this particular emphasis pointed up a cultural aspect of African and African-American life often thought of in 20th-century America as "natural," one of those "racial" traits that has become stereotypical.

In another sense, the visitor was not right. She did not notice two groups of objects which were fundamental to the tour. In one group were the "mainstream" buildings and grounds which were not overtly connected with the tour narrative. In the other group were the tour guides themselves, African Americans often dressed, like Ellis in the BBC film, in 18th-century "slave" costumes. The sites (Palace, Wythe House), while not traditionally connected with slavery (that is, places which were not specifically living or working spaces for slaves), were made to serve the African-American story. For example, in a garden at the Governor's Palace guides described the Middle Passage, one of slavery's grimmest horrors; and in the shadow of George Wythe's house, where the legal scholar Wythe tutored Thomas Jefferson, they outlined the development of Virginia's Black Codes and talked of miscegenation. Instead of being presented as the "picture" of the narrative as, for instance, in this typical quote from a Wythe House interpreter--"George Wythe's finely proportioned house and elegant garden illustrate George Wythe the rational scholar and born gentleman"--the site was used to point up the

discrepancy between the values of the 18th-century white mainstream and the existence of the 18th-century "other half," and to suggest the possibility of sexual relationships between blacks and whites. On the Other Half Tour, master class objects were presented from a different perspective, one which changed the meanings of the objects to enhance the message of the tour.

Present throughout these tours was the subject of resistance. Whatever the topic (education, religion, music, law), African Americans were depicted as sturdy and stoic victims resisting an unjust system created for economic gain. Stories illustrating the ways slaves resisted their owners cropped up repeatedly--how sickness and singing were used to slow the work pace; who ran away and why; what triggered outright rebellion--and almost always the slave was described as resisting successfully.

These narratives of historic resistance seemed to me to have a parallel in the ways the AAIP interpreters distanced themselves from some of the "mainstream" positions of Colonial Williamsburg. An example of this was the Other Half Tour's focus on miscegenation. Built into every tour's narrative was the information that from the early 1600s, black-white sexual relations were commonplace and common knowledge in the colony of Virginia. This contradicted the accepted approach of the "mainstream" narrative. That approach avoided any mention of miscegenation--ostensibly on

grounds that it could not be documented. But not only did AAIP guides freely discuss the intermarriage of 17th-century blacks and whites, and outline the details of the 18th-century Black Codes prohibiting such intermarriages and ultimately all social relations, many of these guides extended the message to include a specific miscegenous relationship; they strongly implied that George Wythe and his slave cook Lydia Broadnax were the parents of a mulatto child.³²

I see here another link between, on the one hand, the 20th-century African-American citizens working as museum guides interpreting slave history and, on the other, the guides' subject, slavery. As African Americans in an institution and a culture where "white" was the universal category, the guides were in a "marked" category--they were "other," and thus (I would argue) "marginal," marginal" to the American "mainstream." At the same time, the past they were presenting was considered "marginal" (outside, other) to the museum's "mainstream" (main, central) history. Their subject, the African-American

³²An irony here is that in his book on Thomas Jefferson and slavery, The Wolf by the Ears, Stanford historian John Chester Miller wrote, "while he [Wythe] resisted the temptation to which slaveowners were exposed, he succumbed to the sexual attractions of a slave woman" (1991:42-43). There was no indication in the book as to the source of this statement, and when I wrote to Professor Miller in 1993 to ask him, I found that he had died. His son, who responded to my letter, had no knowledge of where his father had found this information.

slave, was outside the culture of the 18th-century British colony. As guides they talked of slave resistance and survival and, as if to mimic or emulate their subjects, they defied a museum rule.

Context of the Tour

Of the seventeen walking tours offered at Colonial Williamsburg during the period of this fieldwork, three focused on the black experience in 18th-century Virginia: the Other Half Tour, led by a third-person historic interpreter; and two tours led by first-person or character interpreters, which will be discussed in later chapters. The Other Half Tour was the centerpiece of African-American presentations at Colonial Williamsburg. It was the longest running black program, both as a daily presentation (two-and-a-half to three hours) and historically (ten years). It provided significant contact between black staff and the public, in both time and intensity. And the material it covered was vast, a compendium of slave history from 1450 into the 19th century. Because of these factors--its length, its structure (a walking lecture with some free exchange between guide and visitor), and its subject matter--AAIP interpreters found a number of opportunities to challenge and expand the mainstream story of the 18th century.

The tour was developed by Rex Ellis in 1981. A Williamsburg native, Ellis had worked in the museum as a character interpreter while still in college, one of the three African Americans hired in the summer of 1979 to portray black residents of the 18th-century town. Ellis and two colleagues had roamed the streets in costume playing a variety of African-American characters--not all of them slaves--that they documented historically and created theatrically. Among them were the black preacher Gowan Pamphlet; Nioto, a young slave recently arrived from Africa; and Belinda, a scullery maid at Wetherburn's Tavern. Following his graduation from Hampton University in 1980, Ellis joined the museum staff full time and, soon after, he began working on a tour about the other--the black--half of 18th-century Williamsburg's population.³³

In 1991, the Other Half Tour was the only African-American program which had run continuously since its initiation. The AAIP department had offered a play about slavery one night a week during the summer since 1982 (among them, "On Myne Own Time," "Williamsburg in Black and White," "The Runaway"), but scripts, plots, and characters changed every two or three years. During the 1980s, several programs had also been developed about slave life, generally

³³Ellis received a doctorate in education from the College of William and Mary in 1989, writing his thesis on black history at Colonial Williamsburg. In the fall of 1991 he left the museum to join the Smithsonian Institution where he is director of the Office of Museums and Programs.

some combination of vignettes, stories, and music. Some of these, still presented three or four times a summer, were "The Storyteller," "Black Music," and "African-American Children in the 18th Century." Again, these, like the plays, shifted and changed depending on the season and the staff available. Finally, AAIP interpreters had been doing first- and third-person presentations on slavery in the kitchens of the Powell House and Wetherburn's Tavern, but only since 1985. Alone among these programs, the Other Half Tour had been offered since the museum undertook the incorporation of black history into its agenda (Butler 1981; Ellis 1986, 1990).

In terms of staff-visitor contact, the Other Half Tour reached more visitors for a sustained period of time with the story of 18th-century black life than any other museum program. During the period of this research and for several previous years, the Other Half Tour was offered twice a day, five days a week, in June, July, and August, and no fewer than three times a week in the spring and fall (from a survey of the Visitors Companion during 1990 and 1991). Although visitors were required to purchase \$5 tickets on a first-come-first-served basis in advance (but not before the day of their tour), in the summer the number of people who signed up often exceeded the advertised limit of twenty-five

people.³⁴ And, despite its billing as lasting for two hours, no Other Half Tour I took ever ended in less than two-and-a-half hours and many went on for as long as three hours. The rare visitor who left before the tour was over did so with profuse apologies.³⁵

During the first summer of this study, seven of the twelve full-time AAIP staff members were responsible for giving Other Half Tours; during the second summer, six members gave the tours.³⁶ This meant that at least fifty percent of the AAIP staff was involved in the project; that is, at least half the AAIP staff had to train for and give the tour. With ten tours weekly, each of these staff

³⁴According to the Summer 1992 issue of the CW Journal/Annual Report, The Other Half Tour is now included in the Patriot's Tour package.

³⁵This apologetic departure raised an interesting question, one which I am not sure how to deal with. On Other Half tours I took over the two-year period, white visitors averaged between 75% and 100% of the group, and were never less than half of it. It seems likely that there was an etiquette of political correctness at work here which demanded sticking with a tour whose subject was slavery and whose leader was a black person. But there are other possibilities. Visitors may have stayed to the end because, as earnest middle-class Americans, they believed in a code of manners that says it's rude to walk out on a speaker. Or they may have subscribed to a system in which the leader, the teacher, is an authority figure whom they must respect. They also may have stayed to the end because they paid extra. But as I mentioned above, it was the rare visitor who left; most stayed eagerly, many appearing captivated by the experience.

³⁶Five staff members gave the tours in both 1990 and 1991. Two gave tours in 1990 but left the museum before the summer of 1991, and one began giving tours in the summer of 1991.

members gave at least one tour a week, and two weeks out of three they usually gave two tours each.

From the visitor's side, the availability of a program of this length offered with this frequency, meant that the tourist spending an eight-hour day in the museum who took an Other Half Tour devoted a minimum of twenty-five percent of that day learning about 18th-century black history, and learning it from an African-American interpreter. But the relatively limited availability of the tour also meant that even when the group number was stretched to thirty or thirty-five people, never more than seventy Colonial Williamsburg visitors a day could have taken the tour. By contrast, during the same two summers, Patriot's tours, which came free with purchase of the Patriot's Pass admission ticket to the museum, were offered hourly between 10 am and 3 pm seven days a week, with a group maximum of twenty-five, and the Lanthorn tour was available nightly for a \$7 ticket to twenty people per tour. In winter, Lanthorn tours, which focused on 18th-century economics and crafts, were given at 7 pm and at 8:30 pm. Despite the fact that there were more visitors during the summer, only the later time was scheduled because in summer it was not dark enough to have a lit lantern earlier. To accommodate all the interested visitors, several Lanthorn tours could be run almost simultaneously, with as many as five, depending on demand.

Although there were vast differences between the more general Patriot's Tour and the specialized Other Half Tour, it could be argued that in a museum where the administration's stated commitment was to telling the story of the African-American "half" of the 18th-century population, there was an imbalance between seventy people a day, five days a week, on Other Half tours and three hundred people a day, seven days a week, on Patriot's tours--350 versus 2100. Or, in the case of the Lanthorn Tour, given a conservative estimate of three tours a night with twenty people each, the difference is 350 versus 420. Whether or not all of the tours were fully subscribed all of the time becomes less an issue than the apparent commitment of the museum to making some stories more available than others. Access to the African-American story was restricted by both availability and cost.

Comparisons are possible between the Patriot's Tour and the Other Half Tour on grounds that each dealt with "half" of Williamsburg's 18th-century population. The tours were not strictly parallel, since the former purported to be an overview of the whole museum, while the latter focused only on the black half of the 18th-century population and on some of the issues related to black history at Williamsburg. In practice, the Patriot's Tour dealt mainly with the white half, of which the gentry class was the primary focus. Comparisons can also be made between the Other Half Tour and

the Lanthorn Tour, this on grounds of specialization. Other Half Tours were concerned with the black experience; Lanthorn Tours, the title notwithstanding, focused on crafts and economics. So named because each group of visitors was guided by the light of two "lanthorns" carried by group members, the hour-long Lanthorn Tour consisted of an after-dark walking tour to four candlelit craft shops, with an historic interpreter who described the craft activity of each shop, and talked generally about "the economy." The craft was not being carried on at night, but the historic interpreter explained what would be happening during the day and encouraged the visitors to return the following morning.

These facts of staff size, programming, and scheduling raise key issues with regard to black history at Colonial Williamsburg, and to choices of history generally. The museum's stated priority was its commitment to authenticity. By its own logic, then, 18th-century Williamsburg should have been presented as a town and a story in which the population was unequivocally one-half black. But the institution's commitment in terms of resources appeared to diverge from its commitment to its stated philosophy. Various staff members offered different explanations for this seeming gap between the museum's intentions and its actions. Among them were the following.

1. Insufficient funds: Colonial Williamsburg's total interpretive corps of approximately 400 people was

overwhelmingly white. To make the black-white ratio of historic interpreters and character interpreters more even, the museum would have had to hire almost that number again of African Americans.

2. Insufficient employee applications (three aspects): African Americans with the general education to be hired as historic interpreters (a) could get better jobs in industry, (b) were not oriented toward museum careers, and (c) did not want a job in which they must deal with slavery.

3. Insufficient visitor interest: tourists to Colonial Williamsburg came to experience a past free of 20th-century tensions, not to see the dark side of the past or be reminded of the racial problems of the present.

Translated into a short version, these objections became no money, no people, and no market, none of which could be dismissed. However, as is often the case in situations where one problem seems insurmountable, each covered the others; i.e., even if there were funds, there would be no people, and even if there were people there would be no visitors.³⁷

From the perspective of the museum management, the literal solution posed a tangle of questions, questions

³⁷As noted in Chapter Three, the museum found funding, beginning in 1986, to expand the AAIP programs. There was money from the AT&T grant for costumes, kitchen furnishings, and a black history scholar; funds for the construction of the slave quarter at Carter's Grove came from the Foundation's endowment.

basic to its philosophy. What exactly constituted authenticity, and to what extent can it be presented in a museum? Did the existence of a certain numerical population figure for African Americans in 1770 require an equal percentage African-American interpreters in 1990? Say half the interpreters were black, and presenting blacks, would this not present a very different image of Colonial America, one of the museum's goals, even while giving accurately the precise ratio of Williamsburg? If half the population being portrayed by the museum was black, should half the museum's resources go to black history? History museums with limited resources can only include a portion of the "whole" history of a region, an era, or a people, so that every inclusion or omission involves choices in which the commitment to authenticity is only a part. One solution was the icon of authenticity. At Williamsburg, the animals in the pens and the manure in the streets functioned as icons. The danger was that Rex Ellis in his slave costume became an icon, a symbol of something just one removed from the "black body in livery" which had been in the museum for decades.

Content and Form

As both the longest running and most frequently presented black program at Colonial Williamsburg, the Other Half Tour had a certain status among AAIP programs and in the museum generally. But it was probably most remarkable

among the museum's tours for the sheer range and amount of historical data presented by its interpreters. Their agenda covered the history of slavery from 15th-century West Africa through the social, economic, political, and religious aspects of slave life in 18th-century colonial Virginia, and concluded with audience participation in playing and singing "African" and "slave" instruments and music.

The tour was led exclusively by members of the AAIP staff, all of whom followed closely a model in which topics were presented in a particular order at designated places along a specified route through certain streets, gardens, and buildings of the museum. The historic interpreters also employed several pedagogical models designed to involve the visitors: asking them questions, asking them to participate as characters in skits to illustrate certain historical situations, and asking them for assistance and participation in the musical portion of the tour. Of the AAIP guides who led this tour, Dalton Parsons and Susan Josephson stand out as the ones who exemplified the range of interpretive approaches to the material. A Williamsburg native, Parsons was AAIP director of interpretation and the producer-director of nearly all other African-American programs presented in the museum. He had a national reputation among professional storytellers and was the creator and sole performer in the museum's production, "The Storyteller," a

program of African and African-American stories, skits, and music.

Parsons was an enormous man in his early thirties, well over six feet tall, broad-shouldered and solidly built. He could be intimidating for visitors, both because of his size and because of an interpretive style in which he might pounce on a visitor who did not know the answers to his questions. At the same time, he had a magnetic personality which he used with his storytelling skills to draw his listeners into his interpretations of slave life and his views of 20th-century racism, a topic he did not hesitate to discuss. I never saw Parsons at work in anything other than a slave costume. He wore either an outfit like the one in which Ellis was described, or one with long wide pants in tan or brown and a long-tailed shirt to his knees made from a striped material to simulate Osnaberg. Osnaberg, as Parsons would explain as he invited visitors to feel the texture (thick and rough--not ideal in Virginia's humid summers), was made in a German town of that name and imported in great quantities by masters in the colonies and the West Indies for their slaves. Parsons left the museum during my second summer, and I heard that he intended either to join a Smithsonian storytelling project or to become a free-lance storyteller.

Josephson, who is more fully described in the next chapter, was also from the Williamsburg area. A former

third-grade teacher married to a Newport News fireman, she had joined the museum in 1987 and begun interpreting almost immediately, both first- and third-person presentations. In addition to the Other Half Tour, she regularly led a first-person tour as the slave Judith, and was the character interpreter Judith at the Powell House. She was also director of African-American outreach, a museum program for taking AAIP presentations into schools and colleges, and during my first summer she was the site director at Carter's Grove. Like Parsons and all of the AAIP staff, she was a regular performer in skits, plays, and musical presentations in the museum.

Josephson laughed and joked throughout her tours, not in a step-and-fetch-it or minstrel fashion, and not at her visitors' expense, but with a kind of warm intimacy. Occasionally the authoritarian tone of the third-grade teacher would surface, but her style of interpreting was to put visitors at ease, drawing them into her narrative through comradery rather than intimidation. She generally wore the slave costume assigned to women, an ankle-length brown or tan skirt of rough material, muslin apron and "peasant style" blouse, white stockings and black "slave" shoes.³⁸

³⁸As mentioned in the Introduction, AAIP interpreters avoided wearing their slave costumes anywhere but in the museum. If their schedules required being out of the museum before a tour and they did not need to be in costume for a first-person interpretation, they would wear their own

A "generic" Other Half Tour adhered to a route and a curriculum similar to the following description. The tour began in the center of town in front of the Greenhow Lumber House on Duke of Gloucester Street, across from Palace Green and a stone's throw from Bruton Parish Church. Visitors purchased their tickets at the Lumber House and received, as with all special tours, self-sticking badges which they affixed to their shirts or blouses. Distinguished by their "OH" tags, the approximately twenty-five visitors--more in mid-summer, fewer in late fall--who had paid five dollars for their special tour tickets were met by an AAIP guide. The ethnic make-up of the tour group ranged from all white (probably a third of the time) to at most, half white and half African-American.

The guide wore either the museum's 18th-century "slave" costume described above (having been scheduled either before or after the tour to interpret slave life at one of the kitchen sites) or some version of 20th-century guide dress. In town on the Other Half Tour, the guides seemed not to mind the slave outfit, but I heard that at the Carter's

clothes for the Other Half Tour. My impression was that they not only found it awkward to be in public dressed as "slaves," but that there was still some resistance in Williamsburg's African-American community about working as a "slave," similar to what Ellis described about his own grandmother when he joined the Restoration, as she called it. I remember some AAIP interpreters whom I never saw in costume except in a performance, but I do not know if this was because they objected to the clothing's associations with slavery.

Grove slave quarter interpreters had resisted (successfully) pressure from some factions in the museum to wear the costume. Among 20th-century clothes there was a range of individual styles. I once took the tour with a guide who wore a bright yellow blazer and skirt, complemented with a navy AAIP T-shirt which had a picture of Africa on the front and the words "We tell the story."

The interpreter welcomed the group and counted heads, making sure the number who paid for tickets tallied with the number present, and politely evicting from the tour those who had not paid. (Evictions might recur throughout the tour as visitors along the route heard the guide talking and attached themselves to the group.) The guide first led the visitors away from the main thoroughfare, crossing Duke of Gloucester Street to a more secluded spot on Palace Green where she (or he) laid out the contents and general format of the tour. "We will focus on" the 17th-century and 18th-century history of African Americans in Virginia and particularly Williamsburg, including information about Africa and the slave trade, slavery in terms of plantation life and of urban life, and in terms of education, the law, religion, and music. "You will be led through" these topics in "an order," the guide would continue and "if you are good and you respond" you will be rewarded by having the chance to sit down occasionally, and by the "fun" of playing the musical instruments at the end of the tour.

Before setting out, the interpreter (on this and on almost every walking tour I took in the museum) explained that she would be walking backwards in order to talk to the group and so needed to appoint someone to watch out for "what the horses might have left." She appointed someone, often a child, to let her know so she would not step in it. The manure monitor took the job seriously; even when an adult had the assignment, there was dedication. She then began slowly walking the roughly two blocks along the street bordering Palace Green to a side gate into the Palace grounds, talking most of the way.

This was the first of several instances in which the interpreter assumed the persona of an elementary school teacher. The monitor was her helper, with a responsibility like dusting the erasers, and to some degree--depending on its make up--the group as a whole became subordinate pupils. Handler and Gable (1992) reported that one historic interpreter had speculated in public, during a tour, that the manure assignment was given to children because they are at the bottom of the hierarchy in our culture, an appropriate match for the "job," which was also low in rank. While this may be true in the case of manure, there were other times on the Other Half Tour when children were asked to participate. In these instances I think they were called on because they were the least likely to be embarrassed or inhibited, or maybe even because they were the least likely

to refuse the request of the adult guide. At those times the teacher-student model seemed particularly apparent.

As they walked, the guide reeled off facts about Africans in the colony of Virginia between 1619 and 1770, using (some with more success than others) a question-answer format. A theme of the spiel was that black slavery was a socially constructed system in America--that the first Africans who came to the colony were free, that they intermarried with whites, and that some eventually owned black slaves themselves. Also on the walk, the teacher role became apparent. Visitors could usually come up with the right year for the arrival of Africans in Virginia (1619), but they often did not know the details of that arrival--the key detail being that they were not slaves. All Other Half Tour guides explained that in early 17th- and 18th-century Virginia, blacks were free, and all emphasized that slavery was a socially constructed system which came about gradually. This first section of the tour lasted from ten to twenty minutes, took the story about blacks in Virginia through the 17th century, and moved the group the two blocks to the Palace.

Once in the Palace grounds, the visitors were led around behind the Palace itself to a bench and low wall where the guide invited them to sit. They were positioned with their backs to the Palace, facing a large and immaculately cultivated garden--red and yellow tulips in

spring, a variety of colorful perennials and annuals in summer, and chrysanthemums in fall. With the garden behind her the interpreter stood before the group on a sandy path and talked about "Africa and the slave trade business." She began by sketching a map in the sand to represent Africa, particularly its west coast and inhabitants, and proceeded to the Portuguese role in starting the New World slave trade in 1450, orchestrating an "enactment" of the Middle Passage voyage by visitor volunteers in the group.

The Middle Passage demonstration was a feature of all Other Half tours and tours of the slave quarter, and AAIP interpreters also used it in other settings where audiences participated. This section of the tour included details--usually very explicit--of the physical horrors and indignities suffered by the Africans on the slave ship. The map in the sand and the visitors became objects to illustrate the story. The map was not unlike a rough outline which a teacher might make on the blackboard--again, overtones of the classroom. Indeed, when making it, the guides, like many teachers, laughed at their own ineptness.

The role of the visitors as "objects" was more complex. The guide invited the children in the group to come to the front and make a line, adding if needed enough adults to have five or six people, standing side by side--i.e., shoulder to shoulder. She then asked the rest of the tour members to imagine the line with the people lying on their

backs and every other person upside down, or side by side head to foot. This, the guide explained, was called "loose pack," one way of arranging slaves in the hold of a slave ship. She next had the volunteers turn so that they formed a line facing one direction. She pushed them together, so that each was touching the back of the person in front and explained that this arrangement was called "tight pack." Then she asked, "Which ship would you rather be on?" Finally, she elaborated on the conditions on the slave ship, mentioning sickness, filth, and the fact that women would be put in one of the higher levels below the deck, "for the sailors' pleasure."

Because the volunteers--sometimes coerced, just as in school--had "become" slaves, and the other members of the group were asked to imagine themselves as slaves, the loose-pack-tight-pack routine never failed to involve visitors. They were taking the roles of slaves, themselves often "coerced" by the guide into participating. The activity also captured their interest for the explicitly gruesome details about slavery which the interpreter provided.

I asked Rex Ellis and several of the AAIP interpreters why they had chosen the Palace garden for this part of the tour. One interpreter responded with a strictly utilitarian answer--the Palace grounds had plenty of room and was a good place to sit for a long period, and it was pretty. Ellis, on the other hand, said that the whole tour was calculated

to emphasize the fact that with the slave story one was always "at the back door or the side door. We never go in through the front on that tour." This would seem to support Ellis' point in the document, Teaching Black History at Colonial Williamsburg, that

any discussion of slave life be seen from the vantage point of the slave and not the master or mistress. . . . In order to provide the best possible experience, visitors must be encouraged to begin their imaginative journey looking through the eyes of those blacks that are being referred to (1989b:8).

In the same document Ellis noted that the "black presence" can be interpreted "by using the whole town as an exhibition site" (Ibid.:5). Still, in our conversations he never confirmed that he had selected the Palace for the stark contrast created by its being the setting for that particular part of the slavery story, or acknowledged that the irony of the setting--the rows of pretend slaves positioned among rows of tulips in the fantasy Palace garden--was consciously planned.

Having got the African slaves to Virginia, the interpreter led the group in retracing its steps back out to the front of the Palace and onto Palace Green. At this point the tour had been in progress an hour or more and so far there had been no African-American objects specifically designated by the museum to illustrate the past presented on the tour. There was also, in the periphery of the group's focus, a member (or members) of the museum's grounds

staff--an African American in a green uniform, weeding the garden or pruning the topiary. As the guide talked about packing the captured Africans, making people into sardines in the hold of a ship, these generic gardeners, all dressed alike, carried on the same kind of labor for the 20th-century museum that slaves would have performed for the 18th-century royal governor. (I never heard a guide or a visitor make any reference to this juxtaposition, and, alas, did not think to elicit comments from either while I was still at the museum.)

Either at this point on the tour, moving across the green towards the Wythe House, or just before taking the visitors into the Palace grounds, guides discussed the role of the African-American department in the 20th-century museum, mentioning various other AAIP programs and sometimes asking for "support." Some made a pitch for the museum--"to support our programs" eat at Colonial Williamsburg restaurants and stay at its lodgings-- and a few referred directly to AAIP programs--"keep using the phone since our department is funded by AT&T." One or two went a step further. Parsons, for instance, would roll his eyes at the prices in the museum taverns and recommend cheaper restaurants in the area, making himself an ally with the visitors against the expensive museum. I heard guides on other tours--Patriot's Tour, Garden Tour--talk about the history of the museum in the 20th century, but rarely were

they as overt in asking for support (eat in our taverns), especially for a specific department (give AT&T your business). They also did not openly criticize the museum. And even separating AAIP presentations and pushing them at the expense of the rest of the museum's programs was not considered appropriate.

Also during this part of the tour, visitors were "allowed" to stop at a nearby water fountain, go to the restrooms, or purchase soft drinks. For interpreters and visitors alike, this "business" served as a kind of reprieve from the business of the history lecture. The mixture of events--release from the lecture, taking a break, looking at the 20th-century museum instead of 18th-century slavery--usually led to relaxed exchanges between the guide and interested visitors. Often there were visitors who were bent on giving their own lectures; some out of a true passion for black history, others from a need to compete with the guide. There were also those who were full of questions. Generally the interpreter nodded and smiled and then reassumed the role of elementary school teacher. Visitors with knowledge were patted on the head and visitors with questions were told to "wait until we get to that." Or, if the guide was more dominating, the lectures and questions were challenged, although this might mean stretching the museum's rules on hospitality--an idea akin to the notion of "the customer's always right." Even here,

in this more casual moment on the tour, my sense was that the guide felt it important to keep control of the information and of the group.

Reassuming her role of Other Half Tour guide, the interpreter next turned to the specifics of the Black Codes, 17th- and 18th-century laws creating and governing slavery in Virginia, especially those dealing with miscegenation. Here the interpreter would include a few gruesome examples of slave punishments, sometimes with graphic descriptions. How gory the examples became varied from guide to guide, and, to some extent, the particular group. The focus on miscegenation emphasized the growing number of laws against it, a fact which guides made clear was proof that it was a problem.

By the time the group reached the Wythe House property, the guide had laid out some of the details of the legal system supporting the creation and maintenance of slavery in 18th-century Virginia, and begun a presentation comparing urban and rural slave life. The presentation always began with a description of George Wythe, with visitors being asked "to guess" how many slaves he had, given the grounds and buildings of the property. While the discussion resulted in establishing Mr. Wythe's affluence, it did little to present the slaves as individuals, except in the case of Mr. Wythe's cook, Lydia Broadnax.

It was here that interpreters explained that Lydia (the only slave I ever heard referred to with a last name at the museum) was the mother of a boy whom Mr. Wythe taught Greek and Latin. Interpreters suggested that Mr. Wythe could have been his father: not only did he teach this boy, Michael Brown, but he left him part of his estate. Although the guides had referred to various 17th- and 18th-century Black Codes regulating sexual activity between blacks and whites, this discussion was the only one I encountered in the Williamsburg fieldwork in which miscegenation was connected to any specific individual, much less a founding father. At this point in the tour, stories of slave resistance merged overtly with employee resistance. There was the reported defiance of Mr. Wythe himself, and of Lydia Broadnax, to the laws governing relationships with slaves.

As interesting was the behavior of the 20th-century interpreters who not only talked about miscegenation, a topic considered off-limits for public discussion in the museum, but also told the visitors that they would not hear about Lydia Broadnax inside the Wythe House. When a visitor asked why the guides in the house would not mention Lydia, or at least her son, the Other Half Tour interpreter explained that the museum refused to discuss the relationship because there was no documentation. In effect, the interpreters were defying both museum policy regarding

undocumented history, and its policy of discussing an off-limits topic.³⁹

The tour group remained in the laundry for about twenty minutes, with most of the visitors standing while the interpreter compared the lots of urban and rural slaves. There were guides who would set their groups up to perceive the life of a city slave as preferable to that of a plantation slave--better food, better clothes, the excitement and occasional freedom provided by the town--and then, when the visitors had literally raised their hands (like children in a classroom) to show their preference for the city, the guides would stack up evidence to the contrary. It was a tactic which diminished the visitors and gave interpreters control.

In fairness, this was not a ploy used only by AAIP guides. One particularly notorious interpreter, a white male, had a fondness for the trick question, "How many bricks did it take to finish the Wythe House?" Visitors would guess in the thousands or hundreds of thousands. The interpreter would let them go on and then give the answer, "One. It just took one brick to finish the building." Still, in my experience in the museum, visitors were more

³⁹Miscegenation was off-limits because it was about sex and about race, and about the intersection of the two, three taboo subjects which simply could never have been mentioned by the hostesses of the 1930s or the 1950s, and which still were not talked about in 1990, except by AAIP interpreters--a "marginal" topic, presented by the "marginal" people (Lawson and Gable 1993).

often thrown off-balance on the Other Half Tour, and in AAIP programs generally. The interpreters were partly responsible, but being a predominantly white group listening to an African-American guide tell about slave history created tension, or at the least, awkwardness. Visitors were usually bending over backward to deny to themselves or conceal from others their prejudices, while the guides often felt compelled to assert the importance of the black story in the museum and of their role as the African-Americans telling it.

Leaving the Wythe property, the guide led the visitors back out across Palace Green for the last lecture segment of the tour, on education and religion, ending in the side yard of the Brush-Everard House opposite the Wythe House.⁴⁰ Here the interpreter invited the group to sit on the grass while she unlocked an outbuilding and brought out several kinds of drums, bells, and shakers. There were eight or ten

⁴⁰The Other Half Tour was designed to conclude with instrument playing in the yard of the Brush-Everard House. Occasionally this conflicted with the performances of the Play Booth Theatre, presented outdoors on the site of an 18th-century theatre adjacent to the Brush-Everard yard. When this happened, the musical segment was dropped and the guide substituted an explanation of African and African-American music for actually playing it. She used the same terms as the guides who were able to conduct the instrumental part of the tour, with one odd exception: talking about slaves who played the fiddle, she said, "But if you put what it sounds like [the melody of European music] with someone who's rhythmic you got a great fiddle player....It's not a derogatory statement by [sic] alluding to the fact that blacks have rhythm....it's natural." [underlines mine]

in all, made in the 20th century and modelled, according to the guide, on African and African-American rhythm instruments. This was the "fun" referred to from the beginning of the tour.

If there were children in the group, the guide singled them out to play, and after distributing the instruments, she talked about their use, describing how they were made and noting that one, the shakaree, was simply a gourd covered with a net of dried okra. She explained the importance of music in general among African cultures (which usually became a generic single culture) and among 18th-century Virginia Africans--communication, celebration, control. Visitors were told that slaves, like their African ancestors, would play drums to convey messages; that they would use music to mourn or rejoice; that they would sing work songs to keep all hands at the same pace--not too slow, but just as important, not too fast. The shakaree with its okra was an object which elicited from some interpreters two interesting responses. These guides focused on the okra--a food associated with the south and with African Americans--to distance themselves from slavery. "This is the best place I've ever seen okra," they would say. But they also proved to be skillful at playing the shakaree, and to be authorities on the production of the instruments. So, oddly, while distancing themselves they also seemed to imply that their expertise derived from a "natural" association.

Each visitor with an instrument was given brief instruction individually by the guide in a specific rhythm for that instrument. She then started one player and brought the rest in, one by one, until all were playing a cacophony of rhythms. She let them play for several minutes, and then stopped the "concert" as it deteriorated into chaos. This was the formal conclusion of the tour. Visitors stood and applauded and as the guide gathered up the instruments, there were groups of twos and threes who clustered around to thank her. Often the gratitude was tearful, occasionally on both sides. I once saw an African-American visitor and a guide in an emotional hug, each thanking the other for being there.

By the time it was over, the tour had run anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour beyond its allotted two hours. Throughout the museum, guides who led specialized tours spoke of having too little time to tell the "complete" story. But while these tours rarely kept visitors past the period contracted for, Other Half Tours invariably ran longer than advertised. For guides leading the Other Half Tour the problem was acute. They saw their tour as the only comprehensive forum for black history in the museum, and felt that a visitor who did not get the African-American story on the Other Half Tour had little chance of getting it at all. It is difficult to know whether appropriating the additional time went beyond a need to give visitors

information to a defiance of museum order, but I think a case might be made for its being a means by which the AAIP staff distanced itself from the museum's "mainstream".⁴¹

Interpreters and Objects

Over two summers I went on a number of Other Half Tours led by at least nine different AAIP guides. No tour was exactly like another, but their similarities were far more apparent than their differences, with the most obvious being the format and subject matter--the predetermined path through the museum outlined above with its designated spots for presenting specific information. As outlined at the

⁴¹An African-American professor at a large state university once told me that among the black students in her predominantly white classes, there were always a few who thought they could operate on CPT. "They turn up late for class, they assume they can get their papers in after the deadline--they just think they can operate on Colored People's Time," she said. She said she sits them down and explains that "white folks don't operate on CPT, the world doesn't operate on CPT, and you can't operate on CPT in my class."

I asked her if she thought her students' use of CPT could be a form of resistance to the system, even though the person they were most affecting was their African-American teacher. "They do it to me because they think they can get away with it because I'm black. They'd never do it to a white male." But she went on to say that CPT was something she encountered with her black friends and family. "I think it's their only way to rebel, to have a little power. But CPT is something that's also cultural. A lot of black people in this country, or in the south anyway, really don't take time as seriously as white people." She also said that what might be seen as running overtime by some (of some whites) was a given in her childhood. "But maybe it wasn't 'overtime,'" she said. When they went to church in southern Alabama they stayed all day. Whites used to an 11 o'clock service ending at noon might call that overtime, but for her church all day was the length of the service.

beginning of this chapter, what objects there were for presenting this information fell into two categories: those items directly connected to the tour narrative--the laundry and the instruments; and those associated with the mainstream history--Mr. Wythe's House, the Governor's Palace.

I have talked some here about the use of the Palace Garden as a backdrop for the Middle Passage description, and the use of the Wythe House as a focus for discussing miscegenation. I never heard guides mention slave ships and mulattoes in association with these sites (or practically any other sites) on the Patriot's Tour, or other "mainstream" tours, but they were central to the Other Half Tour. There one found the curious inversion in which "mainstream" objects--possessions owned by or commonly associated with members of the white master class--were subtly appropriated and turned upside down. The Palace garden was not presented as a fairyland of the elite into which the visitor was allowed brief entrance. It was used as a backdrop against which to set--and have the visitors reenact--the antithesis of the fairy tale, the nightmare of the Middle Passage.

Likewise, there was discussion earlier in the chapter about Wythe's house being co-opted for talking about black-white sexual relations. While the use made of the Palace grounds was effective because of its irony, the appropriation of the Wythe House was effective because Wythe

himself was appropriated and made an accomplice--to an act which was off limits in his 18th-century community and to a topic which was off limits in the 20th-century museum.

As for the objects associated directly with the slave narrative, the laundry served in the standard way on the Other Half Tour. It was an instance of the traditional museum correlation between object and interpretation: a narrative about slaves living and working in colonial Virginia was presented in a building where at least some of those activities would have occurred. On one level, such a correlation was also the case with the musical instruments, where interpreters presented African and African-American slave culture using objects which would have been used by individuals in those societies. On another level, however, the participatory aspect of this event ran counter to what happened almost everywhere else at Colonial Williamsburg.⁴²

In a museum where most objects in the collection were seen but never touched, the instruments on the Other Half Tour were freely handled. The objects, of course, were not "real" in the sense that they were original from the 18th century. Nor were all of them even copied from 18th-century pieces, or illustrations of those pieces. Interpreters

⁴²An exception was the brickyard, where visitors were encouraged to jump into the wet clay to help knead it for brickmaking. There were other participatory events, such as the evening plays in which visitors became part of the performance ("Cry Witch"), but in these they did not use museum objects, beyond sitting in a building.

described some of the instruments simply as African; that is, they were not supposed to be African-American, or "slave" objects. So not only were they modern artifacts, many were not even presented as reproductions, copies of what might have existed in 18th-century Virginia. Still, there were many sites in the museum where objects were not "real." For instance, the Capitol and the Palace were not real, having been constructed in the 1930s; houses often had reproductions among their furnishings; and the meals in the dining rooms of the Palace and the Peyton Randolph House were sometimes "imaginary," as with the plastic meats, and sometimes prepared food, such as the desserts and breads. All of these were exhibited to visitors; the difference with the instruments was that they were handled by visitors.

But visitors not only handled the musical instruments, they used them. Unlike most other items in the museum collection which were focal to telling about 18th-century history, the Other Half Tour objects were the means for doing 18th-century history. With few exceptions--the brickmaking yard, an occasional craft shop, and some children's programs--the Other Half Tour was the only program in the museum where visitors were encouraged to understand 18th-century life through doing. In most cases--whether a tour or an exhibition site such as the Wythe House or the Powder Magazine--the standard format was for the historic interpreter (the authority) to speak to the

visitor (the novice/guest) about an object, which the visitor never touched, and the guide handled, if at all, only with greatest care. Objects were fragile, prone to destruction, almost sacred in some way. On the Other Half Tour, objects were put into visitors' hands, especially the hands of children.

Clearly "black" objects, unlike other objects in the museum, were not considered "sacred." Because they were not sacred and could be touched--or because they could be touched, they were not sacred--the instruments were seen as less valuable than other, untouchable, objects in the museum. Handling them meant a deviation from the museum norm, and I am inclined to think that it was a deviation that followed a shift in perspective (black history permitted a different approach to objects) rather than one that created a shift in perspective (the objects permitted a different approach to black history). Either way, in the context of a museum, and especially a museum such as Colonial Williamsburg with its vast collection of expensive untouchable objects, a story grounded in touchable objects risked being seen as less valuable than the story for which there were objects too valuable to be touched, much less handled.⁴³ For the black story, an exception had been made

⁴³In saying, "Either way. . .," I do not mean to suggest that it made no difference whether touchable objects devalued the story, or the devalued story resulted in touchable objects. In fact, I think arguments can be made both ways, and none may hold up. In a museum which prized

to the museum rules--to the museum's rules of how objects were used, the standard museum way of doing things--with the consequence that the story was different from the story told through the untouchable objects. This difference distanced the two narratives, and I think it also helped to distance the interpreters who were allowed to operate outside the "mainstream" rules from their counterparts within it.

For visitors, this activity required many to confront some of their own racist views. In most cases, simply to be on the Other Half Tour meant that visitors were interested in black history. But judging from the embraces and tears between guides and their groups which frequently followed the tours, many of them were more than interested in black history--they were advocates of it and champions of the oppressed people who were its subject. As a result, these visitors were compelled in their own minds to participate in

rare items, a replaceable shakaree could not compete with the Wythe House's air pump, dating from the 18th century (even if it was not Mr. Wythe's own). But then there was textile curator Linda Baumgarten's remark that she "would crawl on her knees for an original 18th-century slave garment." That slave article would be under far tighter security than the air pump; presumably it would never be touched. The problem is whether the narrative associated with the garment would be as valued as the narrative associated with the pump. In other words, the slave story could seem to be devalued because there were no valued objects for it, but the story--white oppression, black victimization, or even black survival and triumph--may be less valuable to most people regardless of the garment than the story of the Age of Reason drawn from the air pump. I come back to the obvious place: the people writing the story, the mainstream descendants of Wythe, must value the successes of their past over the failures.

the musical event, for to refuse might be interpreted by the guide, others, and even themselves as prejudice--prejudice in the sense that to see the activity as childish, or not important, could demean the story that the activity was designed to help illustrate.

Also, for visitors the participation offered the possibility of "becoming" the oppressed black. The opportunity to play the drums and bells let visitors glimpse slave life, and allowed them to think of themselves as understanding, if briefly, what it was like to be "marginal," on the fringe of white, middle-class America. In doing what slaves were supposed to have done, they "became" slaves, the "marginal" group in the "mainstream" account of colonial history.

But look more closely at what it was that the visitors and, for that matter, the interpreters, were "doing." I see in the use of music two stark examples of the museum's unconscious reproduction of racism. First, music was probably the activity associated with slavery that was the most removed from the dehumanization and drudgery of slave life. Using it to help 20th-century white visitors identify with slaves allowed those visitors to ignore, repress, or forget the slavery's grimmer side. Furthermore, having African-American interpreters, often in "slave" clothes, doing music with skill and pleasure--indeed, this was the "reward" they had talked about from the beginning of the

tour--served to create an upbeat mood, a warm and fuzzy tone at tour's end. By presenting slavery in this light and having visitors "experience" it (consciously or unconsciously), the museum ran the risk of letting its middle-class audience escape the glimpse they had of the horror of slavery during the tight pack-loose pack demonstration in the Palace Garden. An aspect of racism hardest to deal with is the inclination to deny its existence. I see in this emphasis on entertainment, the slaves' and the visitors', a denial of a key reality of slavery, and with it, a denial of the racism associated with it. In this denial, the museum reproduced the racism it sought to confront.

A second way in which this use of music on the Other Half Tour contributed to reproducing racism lay in the problem of black stereotypes. I touched on this briefly in Footnote 37 earlier in this chapter, noting that a guide had described blacks as "naturally" having rhythm. Everything about the music segment confirmed this stereotype: the black guides had no trouble demonstrating the instruments to be played--the drums, bells, sticks, and gourds--while the visitors (almost all whites) were usually hopelessly awkward in trying to play them. Never mind that the guides did it day in and day out as part of their job and the visitors, even the children, were first timers.

I found that the use of music in this and other AAIP programs, often summoned up not just the stereotype of the rhythmic black person, but that of the "shuckin' and jivin'" African American. Roediger, in The Wages of Whiteness, talks about the 19th-century minstrel show as a setting in which whites in a capitalist society acted out in "blackface." According to Roediger, the white actor projected onto his "black" character what the white disciples of "progress" missed about preindustrial life (nostalgia for a "better" time), but also what they scorned about it (disdain at a "lower" life) (1991:95-97). In AAIP music activities, I saw black interpreters take on those same "minstrel" characteristics; they became, ironically, blacks in blackface, all too often confirming the "shuckin' and jivin'" stereotype of blacks which had been created and maintained by white minstrel players.

Interpreters as "Marginal"

I have argued that while the AAIP guides' use of objects on the Other Half Tour could strengthen their interpretations, that use, paradoxically, could also weaken the narrative vis-a-vis the traditional story and distance the guide from the "mainstream." A different sort of distancing occurred when AAIP guides directly criticized the museum. On some of these tours interpreters would suggest

that the museum's research was inadequate, or that museum prices were out of line.

One returns, for instance, to Parsons, the interpreter who advised visitors to avoid the Colonial Williamsburg taverns because they were too expensive. He went on to recommend that they go instead to Sam's Steak House for a "ten-ounce steak for \$3.95." And he added, with a tone of sarcasm, that "at the [Williamsburg] Lodge that's an appetizer price--\$3.95 for a wedge of watermelon." He saw the museum eateries, and by implication the museum itself, as geared to the wealthy--a different class from that of an AAIP guide. AAIP interpreters were paid by the museum at least as much as most of the main interpretive corps, so the distinction was not between black and white interpreters. I think, instead, that the museum bashing, albeit mild, was in part a gesture at creating an alliance between the interpreter and the visitor against the elite museum, an attempt to draw the visitor who had become the slave in the tight-pack-loose-pack event into the peripheralized situation of the 20th-century African American.

Perhaps in order to emphasize the class difference suggested by the economic contrast between steak and watermelon, this interpreter also recommended that the visitors go to dinner at the Cracker Barrel, "the only place in town where you can get fried okra." Okra is a vegetable long associated with the south, an essential ingredient in

gumbo, and fried okra is a dish connected many people's minds with black culture. The dictionary gives the etymology of okra as the West African native name nkrama. At Colonial Williamsburg, okra emerged as a general motif in AAIP interpretations, recurring in discussions of 18th-century African-American food, gardening, and even music, as we saw in the instruments section of the Other Half Tour. Almost always, when AAIP HIs mentioned okra they added their own 20th-century opinions of it. To dislike it was to distance oneself from slave life, and, by extension, to disassociate from 20th-century stereotypes of black life. To like it, as in the case of the Other Half Tour guide above, was to put a distance between oneself and the mainstream, represented here by the museum's expensive restaurants.

Criticizing the museum by talking about the prices of Colonial Williamsburg hotels and restaurants seems to me one way in which the AAIP interpreters resisted the museum's white "mainstream." Another was criticizing by undermining or even directly challenging the museum's facts. The ethos of Colonial Williamsburg was rooted in the notion that every statement, every "fact," which an interpreter told to visitors, could be documented. One fact which researchers felt could not be documented was whether George Wythe had a mulatto son because nowhere was it actually written down. Other Half Tour interpreters, however, regularly brought up

the story of the mulatto son of Lydia Broadnax, but said that the guides inside the house would never mention it because they did not believe it was documented. AAIP guides clearly believed it was true, whether documented or not. The "evidence" consisted of three pieces of information: Wythe educated the boy; he bequeathed him a portion of his estate; and he took only him and his mother Lydia to Richmond when he moved, and for AAIP interpreters, this was evidence enough. This attack was two-pronged. Interpreters were presenting "undocumented" history, undermining the museum, and they were calling into question the mainstream interpretation of George Wythe, challenging its facts.

The attack was softened when interpreters expanded the point to discuss miscegenation in general terms. They would explain that there were mulattoes throughout 18th-century Virginia--that whether or not it could be proven that George Wythe was the father of Lydia Broadnax's child, it was a fact that black people and white people were having children together. Nevertheless, it is hard not to see the incident as a violation of the museum's rules about documentation. Whether referring to Wythe and Broadnax specifically or to miscegenation in general, discussing the topic was not something the main corps of historians and interpreters were comfortable with. In doing it, AAIP interpreters focused on the distance between the African-American past and the "mainstream" past, and between the museum's black guides and

its white "mainstream" in the present. In short, the AAIP drew attention to the distance between black and white in the museum.

To suggest that the museum might not be telling the whole truth also created distance. Whether or not the AAIP comment, "you won't hear this inside the house," prompted visitors to question Wythe House guides about Wythe and Broadnax, a seed of doubt had been planted. The rest of the history they were eagerly consuming throughout the museum might be less than the whole story.

Conclusion

Because of the ways in which some seemingly non-relevant objects were used on the Other Half Tour, having few "slave" objects did not mean that the tour was two hours of "tell" with no relevant "show." In fact, the Other Half Tour was anything but devoid of objects, but the objects were used to tell a story different from the "mainstream" story, or used in unexpected ways. Sometimes the objects were used to tell stories that contradicted the traditional story, or even undermined it; and in the case of the instruments, objects were used in ways that contradicted traditional museum practices. In each instance, "mainstream" narrative (the story of the patriots) and practice (the documented facts and sacred collection) were called into question. Wythe's case was obvious in creating

doubts about both the narrative and the practice, while the route of the tour behind buildings and through the Palace Garden was more subtle. The use of the instruments deviated from museum practice, raising questions about exactly what is valuable in a museum and why.

This inverted use of objects separated the narrative of 18th-century African-American life (slaves) from the story of life in the "mainstream" (owners). The result was not just to distance the two accounts and thus to strengthen, rather than diminish, boundaries between black and white. In serving up the separateness and the distinctions between the two, the black half emerged, at least in the context of the museum, as the lesser. In this, I see not the reduction of racist images, but their reproduction. The irony, of course, is that on the Other Half Tour it was the victims of racism, the African Americans, who unwittingly reproduced the racist scenario.

Chapter Four

Becoming Slaves: Judith's Tour

You're going to meet a woman named Judith, right here. Judith from Carter's Grove. . . Personality-wise Judith's a pistol. She's very matter of fact because she's seen it all.

(Introduction to Judith's Tour 7/18/90)

The Other Half Tour followed a format standard in many museums--that of a guide leading visitors through a series of exhibits that illustrate her narrative--but with the twists explored in the last chapter. Objects belonging to the mainstream (white) population became props in telling the story of the marginal (black) population, and objects associated with the black group's past were used--literally handled, put into the hands of the visitors--to present their marginalized story. Thus the neat rows of the Palace gardens were in sharp contrast to the "tight-packed" rows of Africans on a slave ship, and the visitors beating rhythms on museum objects were anomalies in a place where objects were generally seen in roped-off areas or behind glass. Still, the tour adhered to the traditional "show and tell" model, with a guide cloaked in authority delivering the details of black history to the visitor.

Among presentations of African-American history at Colonial Williamsburg, however, the Other Half Tour was the exception in that the guides always spoke in the third

person. That is, although they may have worn 18th-century costumes they interpreted history as the 20th-century museum employees they were. The only other place or part of Colonial Williamsburg where a third-person interpretation was the norm in presenting the African-American past was the Carter's Grove slave quarter, a site physically removed--eight miles away--from the historic area. Elsewhere within the historic area, when black history was the main focus of an interpretation, that history was presented in the first person. Interpreters "spoke from" the 18th century as 18th-century people, and then either "broke frame" to explain their presentation from a third-person perspective, or were introduced by a third-person interpreter. This chapter explores first-person interpretation of the black past at Colonial Williamsburg, looking at the issues of distance and marginalization from the museum's mainstream story.

To say "elsewhere within the historic area" suggests that there were locations throughout the museum/town where African Americans presented black history. This was not the case. In addition to the Other Half Tour, black history was presented by black interpreters at two exhibition sites only, and on a tour led by an interpreter portraying an 18th-century black slave. Further, all of these presentations were from the perspective of slavery; there was no regular interpretation of 18th-century free black

life.⁴⁴ Since the vast majority of black people in 1770 Williamsburg were slaves, the museum rationale seemed to be that the most coherent way to present 18th-century black life was through this monolithic approach. The concept of black history as synonymous with slave history also dovetailed with the thinking of the museum's social historians, who looked to the generalities for information about a group of people for whom the documents offered little about specific individuals. This approach resonated as well with the agenda of the AAIP staff members; they felt that to include messages about free blacks diluted the most critical aspect of black history--that white people owned black people. And since AAIP staff resources were extremely limited (a full-time interpretive staff of twelve people), to use up even one interpreter in a free black role could diminish the effort to present slavery.⁴⁵

⁴⁴During this fieldwork, instances in which 18th-century black residents were depicted as free blacks and not slaves were found only in special programs. This changed, however, in the last few weeks of my time in the museum, when an African American began regularly portraying a free black. In an unprecedented arrangement between the museum's historic interpretation division and its crafts department, an AAIP interpreter entered the apprenticeship program at the cooper's shop. My understanding was that he became a member of the museum's crafts department and was no longer considered part of AAIP.

⁴⁵Whether to portray free blacks, or to spend much time even talking about them in the historic area, was an issue which caused tension and confusion in some places at Colonial Williamsburg. The dearth of free black first-person interpretation was initially pointed out to me by Edith Hurd, an employee on the for-profit side of the Foundation. An African American and lifelong resident of

As mentioned above, the first-person interpretations of slaves were in association with a third-person interpreter who was responsible for introducing the slave character and, depending on the program, for dealing with visitors' questions after the encounter. Although this dual mode of

the Williamsburg area who was on familiar terms with her own pre-Civil War free black genealogy, Hurd was also a single mother of several children, and had returned to college in her thirties. When I met her she was a waitress in the Williamsburg Lodge dining room and vice-president of Local 32, AFL-CIO, Colonial Williamsburg Hotel and Restaurant Workers. Between December 1990 and April 1991, Local 32 aggressively picketed various Foundation establishments in an effort to obtain a contract it deemed fair from Foundation management.

Hurd said that in researching a history project on the black population of 18th-century Williamsburg she had discovered the existence of many more free blacks in the town than AAIP Director Rex Ellis suggested were there. She felt that Ellis's decision to emphasize only slavery served his own agenda, and she disapproved both of the historical inaccuracy suggested by the AAIP approach and of an agenda which, to her mind, promoted the oppression story over the "truth" about African-American initiative.

There were also occasional tensions within the museum over the portrayal of free blacks. From time to time, several AAIP interpreters--Dalton Parsons, Allen Jarrett, and Frederick Saunders--had done first-person presentations of an Adam Waterford, a "documented" 18th-century free black cooper. These portrayals had tended to put the craftspeople on edge because they felt that having an "actor" cooper undermined their own "authenticity" as true practitioners of crafts in the museum. Craftspeople wore 18th-century costumes, but they never pretended to be 18th-century people, believing that to pretend in one aspect of their activities might suggest to visitors that the activity itself was not "authentic." In response to this criticism, Saunders set out to present a more "authentic" portrayal of Waterford by arranging an apprenticeship with the museum's "master cooper." Although these efforts at an authentic Waterford met mixed reactions in the museum, when I last saw him Saunders seemed to have prevailed. Displaying a leather bag with the initials AW hammered into it, he was giving barrel-making demonstrations in the cooper's shop, alternating between his 18th-century persona and a 20th-century one.

interpretation was not limited exclusively to African-American presentations, it was considered especially important for them because of how the topic of slavery was generally seen at Colonial Williamsburg. More than a decade after putting slavery interpretations into the museum, AAIP Director Ellis regularly spoke of the subject as "controversial and difficult," a view held by both black and white staff in the museum.

Background: First-person, Third-person, and Character Interpretation

Situating the first-person interpretations of slavery in the general context of the interpretive programs at Colonial Williamsburg provides a better understanding of this notion of slavery as "controversial," and of the function of the third-person introduction. So far in this paper I have discussed only third-person and first-person interpretations. In fact, there were actually three categories of museum interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg during this research: third-person, character, and first-person. As outlined earlier, third-person interpreters were referred to as historic interpreters and comprised most of the approximately four-hundred-member interpretive corps. They generally wore 18th-century costumes and talked about history with a heavy focus on the museum's objects, working both inside the exhibition buildings and outdoors in the

streets of the town. Character interpreters were a special group of twelve individuals who portrayed specific 18th-century people day in and day out in the museum, and who rarely, if ever, came out of character in public (i.e., acknowledged any other time frame or activity outside the 18th century). A first-person interpreter was an interpreter who would play an 18th-century person, but who came out of the role in public and even assumed different roles on different days or at different sites.

Historically at Colonial Williamsburg, there had been important distinctions between character interpreters and first-person interpreters. The character interpreter program--including those first summer experiments when Ellis and his colleagues roamed the streets--was launched in the early 1980s under the direction of Harvey Credle, director of the Company of Colonial Performers (CCP).⁴⁶ Writing in 1985, Arthur (Barney) Barnes, then manager of character interpretation, outlined the difference between the two. He described first-person interpretation as "a mode to convey

⁴⁶In one of my first interviews in the museum, Credle was described by Mary Wiseman, director of character interpretation, as a "genius" at what he did. I was also told that he had left Colonial Williamsburg under a cloud, but I was never able to find out exactly what the problem had been. What I sensed was that people in the museum saw Credle as a sort of gypsy, perhaps because his non-traditional approaches to history (a chief one being character interpretation). What is relevant here is that the "founder" of the program was presented to me as something of a bounder, and that nearly a decade later there were people in the museum who saw his program as slightly tainted, somehow off-base.

information in context about a specific situation," and character interpretation as moving beyond a particular situation "to re-create the life experience, in all of its infinite complexity, of an eighteenth-century individual" (1985a:2). First-person interpreters conveyed information; character interpreters re-created a person and his experience. Barnes elaborated:

In a real sense, he [the character interpreter] is attempting to do in a historical context what was always described to me as the ideal in the study of foreign languages--you succeed only when you begin to think as well as speak in the language you are studying. And once a character interpreter has attained this level of expertise, he becomes what I call a "living artifact" (Ibid.).

Barnes's primary audience for this article was the corps of third-person interpreters in the museum. His goal was not so much to explain to character interpreters themselves their own role, as to give those third-person interpreters who came into contact with the characters a sense of the potential of character interpreters as useful interpretive "objects." Thus he likened the character interpreters to the "physical components [which]. . .are the springboards you use to describe aspects of eighteenth-century life: they speak most directly, although not solely, to the material culture of the period" (1985b:2-3).

At the time of this fieldwork, a decade after character interpreters were introduced, the distinctions between character interpretation and first-person interpretation had

blurred a bit. For instance, during the summer the museum employed interpreters on the order of "street actors," people resembling character interpreters in that they did not have scripts and were trying to present the past from some core understanding. Unlike character interpreters, they did not always stick to the portrayal of one person; they might be required to shift among first-person personae during a season. But they did not come out of the 18th century. At the same time, there was still a separate corps of character interpreters. In 1990 the museum published a one-paragraph description for visitors of the character interpreter program with short biographies of the twelve current "official" character interpreters. None of them were African Americans, and none were portraying slaves.⁴⁷

⁴⁷A published list for 1990 included the following: Elizabeth Dawson of Albemarle County, niece of Benjamin Powell; Anne "Grandma" Geddy; Robert Greenhow, successor to his storekeeper father John Greenhow; Thomas Gwatkin, professor at William and Mary; James Hubbard, local lawyer; Owen Murdock, itinerant day laborer "transported against his will" from Ireland; Benjamin Powell, "prominent builder;" Annabelle Powell, his wife; Elizabeth Randolph, wife of Peyton Randolph; Duncan Stewart, sea captain; Jane Vobe, tavern keeper; and George Wythe, legal scholar and teacher of Thomas Jefferson.

It is not necessarily redundant to note that "none were slaves" after the statement that "none were African Americans." Several observers of Colonial Williamsburg's attempts to present slavery, among them Duke historian Peter Wood, have challenged the administration's assumption that only African-American interpreters can present the African-American past. Indeed, Wood's view is that only when white interpreters can lead the Other Half Tour or give a first-person interpretation as a cook in the Powell Kitchen, will black history be truly integrated into the fabric of the institution (Personal communication, June 1, 1990).

I was aware of one exception to this rule of staying consistently with portrayal of only one character. There were occasions when a character interpreter would be called on, but usually not in costume, to give an introduction in the third person for a first-person situation. For instance, Linda Couch who portrayed the character "Mrs. Vobe" introduced the slave character "Hattie," but as an introducer she was Linda Couch, i.e., in the third person.

In discussing AAIP first-person interpretation I will use Barnes's character interpretation concept of the "living artifact," but I will refer here to African-American interpreters who portrayed slaves as first-person interpreters, not as character interpreters. The reasons for this lie in a combination of museum terminology and institutional organization. First, interpreters in the AAIP department never called themselves character interpreters, nor were they referred to as character interpreters by others in the museum. The terminology appeared to reflect departmental divisions more than job descriptions: you were a character interpreter if you worked in the character interpreter department; otherwise you were a first-person interpreter. This was so even though an AAIP first-person interpreter did exactly what Barnes described in terms of taking on the persona of an 18th-century slave--learning her life like a foreign language. But, unlike a character interpreter, she might "break frame," switching from first-

to third-person, and she might portray more than one character, even in the same day.

Second, the AAIP and CCP departments made a great show of presenting themselves as separate--in location, administration, and budget. The separation was described to me as being a functional necessity: the two departments operated differently because they had different expectations of first-person interpretation, and thus had different needs. An individual AAIP interpreter might well do a third-person interpretation, a first-person interpretation, and what would be considered a character interpretation all in the same day, or at least a two- or three-day period, while an "official" character interpreter played only his or her one character for a season or even many seasons. Thus Other Half Tour guide Esther Foster might become the laundress at Wetherburn's Tavern in a first-person interpretation, and then Nan the cook, her on-going character at the Powell House kitchen, indistinguishable from a character interpreter. By contrast, I never saw a character interpreter, such as Don Kline who worked full time as Mr. Wythe at the Wythe House, portray anyone else or offer an interpretation from a third-person perspective. AAIP people did what CCP character interpreters did, but they did other interpretations as well.

By way of emphasizing the separation, Rusty Wilson, assistant to Mary Wiseman, the director of character

interpretation while I was in the museum, once gave me a detailed explanation of the "tortuous" budgetary process involved when AAIP interpreter Susan Josephson portrayed the slave Judith, on the first-person slave tour. Because the tour was a project of the character interpretation department, Josephson's salary for that four hours of her work week came from character interpreter funds. I hear Wilson's statement as evidence that the separation between character interpreters and AAIP interpreters was founded more in issues of museum organization, specifically departmental turf, than in differences between character interpreters and AAIP interpreters.

From the AAIP perspective, however, the separation was viewed as essential. According to AAIP staff members, and especially Director Ellis, AAIP interpreters needed their own department for psychological reasons. African Americans playing slaves required a kind of support that was possible only from an all African-American department. In the eyes of Ellis and his staff, slavery and the attendant issue of racism in the 20th-century museum setting were such emotionally difficult topics for black interpreters, and so potentially controversial for interpreter and visitor alike, that those interpreters could only function day after day in the context of an all-black department. Still another reason for the separation, one more hinted at than stated outright, was that the 18th-century people who were

portrayed by character interpreters were thought of as "more real"--because they could be better documented--than the people portrayed by AAIP interpreters. In other words, details of the lives of character interpreters--Mr. Wythe, certainly, and even less "famous" people such as Mr. Powell and Grandma Geddy--could be found in the museum's historical documents, while details of the lives of 18th-century Williamsburg's black population were "conjectural," derived primarily from the social historians' statistics. This was a departmental distinction created by the sense that a certain amount of traditional documentation--specific information about an individual--was necessary to a character's "reality." One character interpreter remarked to me that AAIP interpreters "just made it up over there as they went along," and there were character interpreters who carefully separated themselves from AAIP interpretation, seeing it, as understood them, as something akin to anthropologist Mary Douglas' notion of "polluting" in its deviation from the standards of accuracy that they as character interpreters felt they were following.

Of course, the character interpreters also "made it up," documented or not, in the sense described by Barnes of becoming the "living artifact." This was particularly true in the cases of character interpreters responsible for historical personages who left no "documents" of their own--not even a diary--or figured only marginally in other

people's writings--little beyond their names, dates, and children in parish records or account ledgers. Like most of the AAIP first-person interpretations, these interpreters developed characters who were more generic than specific--Mrs. Powell, the 18th-century housewife, or Mrs. Geddy, the 18th-century grandmother.

It was interesting that in creating the characters, AAIP and CCP interpreters would develop different uses for the same information. Consider, for example, the emphasis put on the fact that Mrs. Powell could not "read, write, or cypher," a point made in nearly every Powell House presentation I saw. Both character interpreters and AAIP interpreters focused on the high rate of illiteracy in the 18th century, but the presentations led to different conclusions. Character interpreters pointed to Mrs. Powell's inability to read or do simple math to illustrate that even well-off women did not have what is today considered a minimal education. They saw this information as evidence of how different the 18th century was from the present, a difference which not only distinguished the present from the past but, in this case, illustrated the "progress" of the last two centuries. However, an unintended consequence was to make Mrs. Powell's character seem less real. Documentation was connected to proof of existence, and the 18th-century Mrs. Powell, like most slaves, was excluded from the sphere of creating (writing)

or even understanding (reading) documents. (There were instances, such as Philip Fithian's diary, or Nathaniel Burwell's farm accounts, in which as much was known about various slaves as about most women: a name [but only a first name], dates, names and ages of their children, and even their economic value.)

AAIP interpreters also focused on the fact that Mrs. Powell was illiterate, but with different intentions. One purpose was to show that blacks were not the only uneducated people in the colonial capital, and thus to suggest that blacks and (many) whites were in fact "equal." Henry Louis Gates' theory, presented in Chapter Four (regarding Wythe's literate slaves), that Enlightenment belief held that one must be literate to be rational, pertains here as well. Just as the literacy of Wythe's slaves "proved" that African Americans had "reason," the illiteracy of Mrs. Powell was evidence that all "reasoning" people could not necessarily read and write. A staple in AAIP interpretations were the signs with pictures above the shops on Duke of Gloucester Street. These were proof of the illiteracy of the general population--the only way most people had of knowing where the silversmith or the apothecary was. I asked a museum historian about this--whether 18th-century shoppers would really not know where to go without pictures to tell them--and was told that it was one of those myths which cropped up periodically in the ranks of front line

interpreters. The historian did not confirm or deny the idea that for AAIP interpreters the signs were the artifacts for a narrative which minimized the distance between blacks and whites.

AAIP interpreters also used Mrs. Powell's situation to illustrate one way in which slaves outsmarted their owners. When asked by a visitor what foods slaves ate, the AAIP interpreter portraying the slave Judith who worked at the Powell House replied, "We might takes two chickens when the mistress says kill a chicken for dinner an' since she can't read, write, or cypher, she don't know whether she gots one more or less in the chicken yard. But we knows one and one." The slave tricked the mistress, who, it was implied, might not even know one plus one.

Although the AAIP and the CCP departments had their differences, the distance between the two was less acute than between these departments and the rest of the museum. This was partly because of the regular involvement of AAIP people with character interpreters at the Powell House, a site which was devoted to character interpretation. But I think their connection went deeper, that they were allies partly by virtue of their being marginalized vis-a-vis the traditional "mainstream" in the museum. In his articles on character interpretation and living history, Barnes (1985a, 1985b) was writing ostensibly to show the third-person interpretive corps how to use character interpreters in

their own third-person interpretations. At the same time, he was also persuading them of its efficacy and, indeed, he concluded one explanation with an undisguised plea to interpreters to use the characters.

My sense is that there was resistance to the characters among the conventional third-person interpreters on the "front line," but that Barnes was also addressing the museum community at large. In the framework of the traditional history museum, both AAIP first-person interpreters and character interpreters had the potential of being agents of Douglas' sort of "pollution." This was because all of them were "acting," which kept them from being honest purveyors of "true" history. It is a view that Wiseman, writing two years earlier, also appeared to be combatting when she described character interpretation as "a vital teaching tool," emphasized its connection with the research department, and described the "intensive training program" (1983:4,6).

There were, in fact, staff in other departments who saw both first-person and character interpreters as not only permanently removed from the "truth" or "accuracy" standard of the museum, but as potentially damaging to those interpreters who did meet the standard. For example, there were members of the historic trades department, the craftspeople, who believed that having a "pretend" builder such as Mr. Powell diluted the "truth" of the "real"

builders in the cabinet shop or the brickyard, or that having an African-American interpreter in the role of Adam Waterford, the free black cooper, undermined the presentations of the "real" makers of buckets and barrels in the cooper's shop (see Footnote 41). In their roles as preservers of the "authentic" 18th-century methods of producing furniture, guns, wheels, or boots, these craftspeople saw themselves as the only groups in the museum with a valid claim to embodying the kind of reality to which character interpreters aspired.

Among still another group, the main corps of nearly four hundred historical interpreters who presented the past from a 20th-century third-person perspective, there were some who saw the character interpreters as misinterpreting history, this because of the fact that they must inject so much of their personal sense of the 18th century into their roles. There were also historic interpreters who had difficulty with first-person interpretation because the characters, with the exception of George Wythe, were predominantly from the ranks of the "not famous." The problem, these people felt, was that Williamsburg's importance as the site of crucial events in American history tended to be obscured when the 18th-century people featured on the streets were shopkeepers and country lawyers, not Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson.

Somewhat paradoxically, all sides seemed to agree that having character interpreters roaming the streets playing Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson would be inappropriate. Possibly a Wythe character was acceptable because there was a house to put him in, a legitimate museum artifact, and interestingly this character did not roam the streets. Except for a rare encounter in the arbor of his garden, visitors came in contact with Mr. Wythe only across the barriers to the rooms inside the Wythe House. In the case of Henry or Jefferson there was no comparable "museum artifact," the house which was so important to making Wythe "legitimate." But I also think that there was something close to a taboo in the museum about portraying these legendary figures as mere mortals, people pursuing their quotidian activities with members of the hoi polloi--be they the museum's middle class interpreters or its middle class visitors.

AAIP First-person Interpretation

In their first-person roles on the slave tours and in the kitchens, AAIP interpreters functioned, as Barnes suggested, as "living artifacts." To use another Barnes phrase, they were the "concrete examples" who served as the chief objects for telling about the past. These first-person presentations took one of two approaches. The majority of them were brief encounters (five to fifteen

minutes) between groups of as many as twenty or twenty-five visitors and AAIP interpreters who were stationed in the kitchens and grounds of the Powell House and Wetherburn Tavern. In these settings the interpreters presented history from the perspective of slave roles appropriate to the site--cook, laundress, scullery maid.

The second, less frequent, form of first-person interpretation were tours of an hour and a half or more led by interpreters in the roles of slaves. Generally they were either introduced to the museum visitors by a third-person interpreter, or they "broke frame" after a few minutes, shedding the 18th-century persona and "coming into" the present. Over the eighteen months I was in the museum, the kitchen or stationary interpretations were presented as often as four or five days a week in summer at both the Powell and Wetherburn sites, and a day or two a week at the sites in fall, winter, and spring. One first-person tour was offered once a week for about two months during the two summers.

In both first-person situations--on the tours or in the kitchens--the interpreters attempted to present at least two perspectives: that of the slave-as-person with a distinct personality and/or a specific history, and that of the slave-as-worker with an identity rooted in a particular job. On her tour, for instance, the interpreter in the role of the slave Judith referred throughout to details which helped

to reinforce the sense that she was a particular individual--a mother, a wife, and the daughter of slaves in Middlesex County--but she also emphasized her "professional" identity as cook's helper "hired out by Mr. Powell from Mr. Burwell at Carter's Grove."

For the stationary interpreters, the possibility for developing a distinct personality was more limited because of the shorter time period with each group of visitors--twenty minutes versus as much as ninety minutes on the tour. On the other hand, among themselves (at least at the Powell site) they seemed over a period of weeks and months to keep building their 18th-century personae and relationships. This was not surprising since they worked in character together several days a week from mid-morning until late afternoon in the Powell kitchen and garden.⁴⁸ But the main focus of these interpreters was their jobs as cook or laundress, a focus determined by the buildings (objects) they were in, with their parallel presentation on the condition of slavery rather than a detailed sketch of their personal lives as specific individuals. For instance, the interpreter who played Nan the cook would tell visitors

⁴⁸Character interpreters also did this, both formally and informally. The Visitor's Companion advertised daily sites and times where the public might find two or more characters interacting--the lawyer Mr. Hubbard spending time in the lumber store of Mr. Greenhow, or Grandma Geddy visiting Mrs. Powell. And nothing seemed to delight visitors more than witnessing an (apparently) ad hoc encounter on the street between character interpreters, who would of course carry on as if in the 18th century.

that she had a husband and children still in Jamaica, but the point was less to create an individualized history of Nan and her family than to illustrate the slave's lack of control over her life. The emphasis was on the inhumanity of systems of slavery, not on the reality of a particular individual.

Both approaches--the person and the job--were intended to convey a double message: what the system of slavery was like, and that slaves were distinct, individual people. But talking about slavery as a system could be incompatible with talking about individuals within that system. That the goals were not always compatible created a tension for many in the museum. On one hand there was a fear among some staff members--many of them in the AAIP department--that it was better to focus on slavery in terms of individuals as survivors than on slavery as grimly oppressive. But there were others who felt that the spunky survivor belied the reality of slavery, and thus presented an inaccurate version of 18th-century history.

When pressed, AAIP staff members who favored the spunky survivor said that the image was important because it dispelled the 20th-century stereotype of the black who does not try. Those who favored emphasis on the oppressive system countered with the argument that the happy slave who was "part of the family" was an equally dangerous stereotype because it allowed visitors to dismiss the evils of slavery

and, in the process, some of the modern problems of racism. Both sides of the issue emerge in the discussion of stationary character interpretation, contrasting Judith and Nan--and indeed most of the African-American interpreters--who appeared upbeat and gregarious, with the character Cate, so morose that one visitor walked out on her presentation, complaining that she was a "black with an attitude."

I will deal first here with one of the tours, and then discuss two museum sites where stationary interpretations were presented, Wetherburn's Tavern and the Powell House. The broad issue is how African-American interpreters in first-person roles were fashioned or fashioned themselves into museum objects, what effect that had on the history presented, and, finally, how this reproduced racism in the museum.

The Slave Tour: Interpreters

The two first-person slave tours offered during the period of this fieldwork were under the title "Tendin' Our Own Business." They were part of the museum's "According to the Ladies" series, in which three first-person tours were presented weekly from the different perspectives of three 18th-century women--women in various classes, phases of life, and economic situations. The apostrophe replacing the "g" in "tending" (not replicated in the series title word,

"according") was a nod to the notion that the 18th-century slave would have spoken in dialect. The use of the word "ladies" in the series title was in spite of the inclusion of a slave tour--no slave would ever have been designated a lady, a term reserved for females of the upper class. But then, interestingly, none of the "According to the Ladies" tours offered during 1990 and 1991 were led by what were technically considered "ladies" in the 18th century--Mrs. Vobe was a tavern keeper; Grandma Geddy's son was a silversmith; and Mrs. Powell and her daughters were the family of a builder, an upwardly mobile craftsman who "only late in life could put Esq. after his name."

The "Tendin' Our Own Business" tours were led by separate interpreters playing characters with different personalities who came from different contexts within slavery. In the summer of 1990, visitors were invited to join Judith, "a slave in the Benjamin Powell household," on errands around town for Mrs. Powell. Judith's tour was replaced the following year with one led by Hattie, a plantation slave in town on market day to sell her poultry. The tours took approximately an hour and a half, cost five dollars, and were limited to twenty-five visitors. I was able to record and study several Judith tours. The Hattie tour was offered for only a few weeks in 1991 (it had been done for a whole summer in 1985) and I was able to record

only one of them, so the focus here will be on the tour led by the character Judith.

"Tendin' Our Own Business" was among a dozen or so first-person tours offered by the museum during the fieldwork period, guided walks through the town led by character interpreters in the roles of 18th-century Williamsburg residents of various social classes. All had the common goal of adding a dimension to the show and tell model of the museum's tours: with first-person tours the interpretation became (to some extent--how great depended on the individual interpreter) a matter of "be" and tell. In the case of black history, this meant that an African-American guide-as-slave led a group of visitors through Williamsburg, looking at the town, and life, as a slave might have seen them. She was presenting a particular kind of slave job or enterprise, she was creating a thinking, feeling individual, and she was trying to give visitors a palpable understanding of the system of slavery. She wanted to be seen by the visitor both as a person and as the embodiment of an oppressed class. It was a difficult undertaking: the character interpreter leading a tour in the guise of a slave must struggle to balance her presentation between the individual and the institutional.

Judith's "Tendin' Our Own Business" tour was led by Susan Josephson, an AAIP interpreter, who played the same character Judith in conversations with visitors about slave

life in the kitchen and on the grounds of the Powell House. These encounters, in which the character interpreter did not "break frame"--she remained an 18th-century person no matter what questions the visitors raised--lasted twenty minutes or so and ran continuously between 10 am and 4 pm, three or four days a week at the Powell site. Josephson also had roles in some of the "fourth wall" vignettes inside the Powell House (discussed in the second section of this chapter), and appeared in various AAIP evening plays and programs--among them the African-American musical presentations given as part of a dinner package at one of the museum's colonial taverns, and the Sunday evening plays, "The Runaway" (1990) and "Night Walking" (1991). Her chief character was Judith, but she might portray other slave characters, depending on the needs of various programs.

In addition, Josephson led Other Half Tours and did rotating stints as a guide at the slave quarter at Carter's Grove. Like most of the AAIP staff, she had administrative duties, being responsible during the time of our fieldwork for African-American outreach programs for schools (including organizing Black History Month presentations outside the museum); for organizing and updating the AAIP training manual; and, at one point, for directing interpretation at the slave quarter.

Unlike AAIP Director Rex Ellis and his colleagues in the early years of African-American programs in the museum,

most of the 1990-91 AAIP interpretive corps had not come to their jobs from theatrical backgrounds. The majority had been in education at the primary or secondary level, and Josephson was no exception. In her mid-thirties in 1990 and a member of AAIP since 1987, she had left an elementary school position as a science and health/physical education teacher to join the museum staff. As she explained her decision, it was prompted by a combination of historical connection and career. "I'm Virginia born and I'd always heard about Colonial Williamsburg--good place to work. They have good benefits and I just got tired of teaching and I said OK where do I go, you know, from here."

Josephson said that eleven days after she started work she was "at Wetherburn's Tavern doing Phyllis [a first-person slave cook]. Eleven days." Several weeks later she added the Other Half Tour to her interpretive repertoire and in the spring of 1989, along with other AAIP interpreters, she began giving tours of the newly opened Carter's Grove slave quarter. Josephson emphasized that she was not a history major in college; she had liked history "but they never made it interesting in high school and it just turned me off." But when she started working at Colonial Williamsburg, she said, she began to discover her "heritage, something I just did not know anything about. I found it very interesting and that's what keeps me going." In my personal contact with her, Josephson was consistently open

and cheerful, and in my observation of her interpretations, both first- and third-person, her approach to her audience was upbeat and friendly.

Although Josephson led the Judith tour, the interpretation could be considered a team presentation. It was introduced by Christy Coleman, an attractive African American in her twenties who had worked in the museum off and on since the mid-1980s. In a chic 1990 outfit--short skirt, bright cotton sweater, high heels and often, her nod to the topic, a colorful, African-style head wrap--Coleman greeted the visitors before they "met" Judith. She gave a ten- to twenty-minute explanation of the tour, focussing on its evolution as a program within the museum, and on the "development" and "reality" of Judith's history as an 18th-century person. (The development of Judith and the reality of Judith were in a sense a paradox, one I will examine more thoroughly below.) Coleman also appeared during the tour in costume in the role of a slave friend of Judith's, and then returned at the end of the tour for a five-to-fifteen minute conclusion, once again wearing her 20th-century clothing.

Coleman was a longtime resident of Williamsburg, graduating from high school there and starting college at William and Mary. (She once told me that the apartment where I lived during my second summer of fieldwork had been the house of the black sorority she had belonged to while at W&M.) Her mother had grown up in Eatonville, Florida, the

black community where Zora Neale Hurston was raised, and her stepfather had worked for a number of years as a chef at the Williamsburg Inn. Her parents still lived in the area, her stepfather working as a chef at Busch Gardens and running a catering business in which he and Coleman's mother were partners.

Coleman had begun working at Colonial Williamsburg part time the summer she was seventeen, and began full time when she dropped out of college in 1985. During this period she helped develop and began presenting the Hattie tour, as a member of CCP under Barnes (the tour she resurrected in 1991, six years later). Leaving Williamsburg after a year and a half, Coleman spent three years helping to develop and present African-American programs at the Museum of the City of Baltimore. When we met her, she was back in Williamsburg living with her parents, enrolled at Hampton University and working part time as an interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg. In August 1991 she received her BA, and was notified of her acceptance into a graduate program in museum studies at Norfolk State University, with a substantial grant.

Unlike Josephson, and in fact all the other African-American interpreters responsible for presenting black history in the museum, Coleman was not a member of the AAIP department. She worked under Mary Wiseman, director of character interpretation, and was the only African American

in Wiseman's department. Among Wiseman's responsibilities were the dozen or so character interpreters who interacted with visitors as specific 18th-century people in the buildings and streets of the museum, and performed vignettes, or as they were termed in the museum, "Fourth Wall" programs (so named for the "invisible wall" between the visitor audience and the actors) in some of the houses. Some of these "people of the past" have been mentioned previously here--Wythe, the lawyer Hubbard, "Grandma" Geddy, and the Powell family--Benjamin, his wife Annabelle, and daughters Hannah and Elizabeth. Not listed among these people of the past were either Hattie or Cate, Coleman's slave characters during the time of this fieldwork. (Perhaps this was due to a lack of documentation--that nothing was known about the individuals as 18th-century people.)

Coleman interpreted slave history on the Hattie tour in summer 1991, but the bulk of her time (which was part time, twenty hours a week, during 1990-91) was spent in the first-person role of Cate, a kitchen slave at the Powell House. She also had regular responsibilities in a third-person capacity at the Powell site, including introducing such first-person events as Judith's tour and the Fourth Wall vignettes, as well as other tours at the site (when she was not interpreting in the first person). Because she was not part of the AAIP corps, Coleman did not give the Other Half

Tour or tours of the slave quarter, nor did she do first-person interpretations in the kitchen at Wetherburn's Tavern.

The Slave Tour: Setting

Judith's "Tendin' Our Own Business" tour was given on Wednesday afternoons during July and August of 1990. Visitors purchased tickets in advance at Greenhow Lumber House, the same central site near Bruton Parish Church where the Other Half Tour originated. The Judith tour began at the Powell site, a collection of buildings located on the street which ran behind the Capitol. Several blocks away from the center of town, it was on the physical periphery of the museum.

At the time of this fieldwork, the Powell House was the primary setting at Colonial Williamsburg where visitors could interact with a number of the museum's character interpreters, including members of the Powell family and the AAIP first-person interpreters who portrayed the slaves on the Powell property. The encounters and vignettes took place in main floor rooms of the house, in the garden, and in the kitchen and laundry building. Like most of the buildings in the museum, the Powell House was of white clapboard, two stories with a shingle roof and dormer windows. Unlike most other buildings in the museum, the house and its outbuildings were actively used. Windows and

shutters were opened and shut during programs; there were fires in the fireplaces; and, in the vignettes presented there about birth, illness, and death, characters portraying members of the Powell family tossed and turned under the covers in the curtained colonial-style bed. The furnishings were sparse and all were reproductions. For the programs, there were chairs in the rooms for as many as a dozen visitors to sit; others sat on the floor.

The kitchen and laundry where visitors encountered slave characters was a two-room building constructed of white clapboard with a cedar shingled roof, brick floors and a loft. Although the loft was not part of the tour, interpreters often included a call up the steps to an imaginary child during a first-person presentation.⁴⁹ As with the main house, the building was used: a fire was generally burning in the kitchen, food preparation occurred on the kitchen table, herbs hung from the beams. A well, a spring house/dairy, and a barn were occasionally part of the

⁴⁹Visitors could see the steps and some would ask about going up into the loft. Interpreters said it was off-limits because the steps were too narrow and steep and the room too small to be safe, the same reasons given visitors who wanted to see the second floor of Monticello. In truth, some visitors were allowed up the steps at Monticello. According to Gable and Handler (1988), tours of Jefferson's upstairs were reserved for certain elite people, VIPs selected by the museum director for special attention. There is an aura about off-limits places in museum houses that could have been capitalized on at Williamsburg in the slave lofts. Instead, elite visitors were taken to the cupola of the Palace, and no visitors ever got to see the recreated low-ceilinged, dark living spaces of the town slaves.

interpretive landscape, and a large vegetable, herb, and flower garden, tended by the museum's landscape crew, was the setting for slave interpretations during the growing seasons.

The Powell House complex also served as the headquarters for the character interpretation program. The off-limits second floor of the main house contained the offices of Wiseman and her assistant Wilson, a retired Air Force pilot who was the character interpreter Captain Stewart, as well as a meeting room which Wiseman referred to as the "Dome of Creativity." On the main floor was a break room for AAIP interpreters. Across the yard from the main house was a small, one story outbuilding which served as a break area, office, and costume closet for the character interpreters. Behind this was a building of similar size, also brick, where visitors were introduced to special Powell House programs, including the Judith tour.

This last structure was designated as an education building, and was closed to the public except for special events conducted by a museum employee. Its one room was about fifteen by thirty feet and outfitted with seating for thirty or so people along one wall. Covering the opposite wall was a genealogical chart showing the key dates, names, places of origin, and relationships (kinship and ownership) for the members of the Powell family and the various slaves on the property during the twenty or thirty years of the

Powells' residence. This genealogical outline was superimposed on, or integrated with, a chronological chart of the chief historical events which had taken place during the same time period in colonial Virginia and England. Thus, for instance, a visitor could trace much of the life of the mistress of the house, Annabelle Powell--when and where she was born, when she was married, her children, and their ages--and see the information in the context of simultaneous events of Williamsburg. Also on the chart was information about the slaves working on the Powell property--their first names and ages (or estimates), the names and ages of their children (if on the property), and when they came and left the Powell family.

The Slave Tour: Third-person Introduction

The Judith tour--which one might argue was half stationary program and half tour, since walking took no more than half the allotted time--followed a three-part format in which the audience had a third-person introduction, first-person interaction including the walk, and third-person conclusion and discussion. It lasted about ninety minutes, with the introduction and conclusion taking fifteen to twenty minutes each, and the first-person contact about an hour.

The tour began in the education building with an introduction by Christy Coleman, dressed in 20th-century

attire. Individuals with tour tickets assembled in front of the Powell House and, given the weather in Williamsburg in July and August at two o'clock in the afternoon--often temperatures of ninety to a hundred degrees with similar humidity readings--most were feeling the heat by the time things got started. Coleman greeted them in front of the main house and led them through two gates, both with "Do not enter" signs, across an area behind the main house and into the education building. Thus, before the program formally began the visitors had taken a special, even "illegal," route, and had entered a special building. With its air conditioning, thick walls, and small windows, it was welcomingly cool and dim.

Standing in front of the genealogy-chronology wall, Coleman outlined in ten to fifteen minutes the tour to follow, focusing mainly on two topics: the 18th-century life of Judith and the 20th-century development of the Judith tour. Coleman's physical location, standing in front of the room, and the visitors' seated position in rows facing her replicated a classroom--she was the teacher with the facts; we were her subordinate students. Her emphasis was on Judith's reality--that she was a "real" 18th-century person--and in her description Coleman worked to "prove" that reality. She used the chart as evidence of absolute, "documented" historical fact. For instance, as she stated that "Judith is a very real person" (8/8/90) or that "Judith

is a real person, by the way. She wasn't made up" (8/1/90), Coleman turned and tapped the name Judith on the wall chart.

A few minutes later, explaining that Benjamin Powell's account books showed that a female slave named Judith was "hired out" by Mr. Powell from Mr. Burwell at Carter's Grove plantation near Williamsburg, and that it happened for five years, Coleman tapped the chart again, five times, to account for the years. The chart, solid as the wall, became an artifact. It was an object whose physical reality--the important dates of Judith's residency in Williamsburg were professionally printed in the same form as the important dates of the British stamp acts--conferred factual reality on its contents. Because Judith was on the chart, Judith existed.

Having introduced an "historically real" Judith based on the documents (Powell's 18th-century ledger books and Colonial Williamsburg's 20th-century wall had merged to form a sort of billboard of facts), Coleman set about presenting the Judith portrayed by the historical interpreter Susan Josephson. Priming the visitors for their dealings with "Judith," Coleman described her personality: "She's a pistol. Judith is something else to spend some time with" (8/1/90); or, "She's the feisty one, not quite as sharp-tongued as Cate, but Judith has her ways, let me tell you" (8/8/90); or, "Personality-wise Judith's a pistol. She's very matter of fact because she's seen it all" (7/18/90).

This was another kind of "real." The historically "real" person on the chronological-genealogical chart had a psychologically "real" persona.

At the same time as she was developing for the visitors this paradoxical authenticity--historical and theatrical--of the person-interpreter Judith, Coleman was recounting the tour's development by Colonial Williamsburg. She described Mary Wiseman looking at the character interpreter program "six or seven years ago," and saying, "'What about the women? What about the poor folk?'" (7/18/90). Coleman then switched back and forth between the story of the museum's creation of Judith and Judith's reality, frequently merging the two.

We were interpreting more black life, we were interpreting more women's roles and women's history in the 18th century, and it just seemed like a natural progression to start dealing with the slave woman and her environment and that's what we do here with "Tendin' Our Own Business." You're going to meet a woman named Judith, right here [Coleman tapped the genealogical chart on the "right here"]--Judith from Carter's Grove.
(7/18/90)

Coleman concluded her introduction with some tips about Judith's route and about the visitors' role in the tour. She told them that "Judith has her own agenda," some business to attend to unknown to her mistress Mrs. Powell, for whom she is going on an errand. She also explained that Judith, the historic interpreter, "is not an actress. . .but yes, she does have an objective. As a professional she has

objectives that she has to achieve during this tour" (7/18/90). The 18th-century reality of the slave's surreptitious agenda and the 20th-century reality of an employee's interpretive agenda were connected, further merging the museum's creation of Judith, the reality of Judith, and the reality of the Judith interpreter.

In her concluding remarks, Coleman explained to the visitors their place or role in the event: "For the nature of this tour, you, the audience, are considered equals with her. You are equal to her. She will not recognize your racial person, OK? If she did, she wouldn't talk to most of you" (8/8/90). Both the slave agenda and idea of the visitor as the slave's equal served to create an alliance between the tour group and Judith--visitors knew that she had a secret from her mistress and that they would be party to it, and they knew that they would be the "equals" of a slave. At the same time they were told about the existence of a 20th-century agenda. They were reminded that--despite what many museum-goers may want to believe--Colonial Williamsburg's displays and objects were constructed with the idea of presenting stories of the past according to some administrative agenda.

Coleman intertwined the reality of Judith (historical--"right here" on the chart, and modern--"She's a pistol") with the creation of Judith, and she mixed the notion of the museum as a place where authentic documents

and artifacts were used to present history with the actions of the museum as a place where documents and artifacts were created to present history. The messages of her presentation appear impossibly contradictory, but the result seemed to strengthen, not weaken, tour. The psychological sensation of being "on the inside"--having the special knowledge of how the program developed--and the physical sense of being on the inside from having passed through the "do not enter" gate into the room with the genealogical chart, coupled with Coleman's tips about how to deal with Judith, and Judith's "secret agenda" and professional objectives--all of this worked to bring the visitors in on a secret of their own. After they heard the introduction they were privy to a truth about the museum, that it encompassed these different kinds of reality. Encompassing these "realities" reinforced the value and authenticity of each of the separate aspects.

On the Tour

Coleman then led the visitors out of the educational building along a brick walk through the yard covered with crushed oyster shells, to the kitchen. As they came up to the open door the group heard Judith singing a lullaby as she worked. Coleman disappeared and after several minutes Judith looked up and said hello. The next fifteen to twenty minutes were spent in the kitchen and the adjacent garden.

Primed with Coleman's information about Judith's life, the visitors chatted with her about her work and her life as a slave until they were interrupted by "Mrs. Powell," instructing Judith to go "into town" to fetch Mr. Powell's newspaper and deliver some things from the garden (mint, figs, tansy--varying from tour to tour) to Mrs. Everard. The characters' exchange enhanced Judith's "reality," and it illustrated the dominant-subservient relationship between mistress and slave. Throughout, Judith responded to Mrs. Powell's directions with a subdued "all right" or "certainly," keeping her eyes on the floor. The exchange also provided material with which Judith could demonstrate slave resistance, in this instance by scoffing at the owners' mistakes and weaknesses. Once Mrs. Powell had left, Judith poked fun at her ("She got her a husband all right," sarcastically) and at Mr. Powell ("Leftovers? You ever see Mr. Powell, you know there ain't no leftovers.")

While serving to develop Judith's character and her relationship with the mistress, this opening scene also had the equally important function of helping the visitors to situate themselves in the perspective they were to have for the tour--that of the slave. They had remained invisible to Mrs. Powell; they simply did not exist. The white mistress entered the room and carried on business with her black slave and the people with whom the slave had been conversing an instant earlier ceased to be. Being invisible and being

Judith's secret encouraged a sense of equality and alliance between the visitors and the slave character, giving them a double entre into the experience of slavery.

Up to this point what was normally thought of as a tour--walking from place to place looking at certain sites--had not yet begun. Depending on the group and its responses, a half hour or more could pass before Judith would finally lead the visitors from the Powell property.⁵⁰ During that time the visitors had heard about Judith, seen and talked to Judith in "her" kitchen, and some had helped her with her work of picking herbs or figs. They had moved from the traditional academic setting in the education building, with its blackboard and chart, to the experiential learning of the kitchen garden. Judith had taken them into her confidence, and in doing so, become increasingly "real." While she (and Coleman) worked to develop her reality as a

⁵⁰My first thought about this was that spending so much of the time allotted for an event billed as a tour in one spot had to do with introducing the tricky topic of slavery, and to some extent it probably did. African-American interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg felt that interpreting slavery was in a category of its own, one which required that the audience be prepared for the sake of the interpreter, as much as for the visitor's understanding or the legitimization of the history being interpreted. But there were other first-person tours in the museum which followed a similar pattern. On "Captain Stewart Visits Williamsburg," visitors spent their first thirty minutes in a classroom setting with the guide who became Captain Stewart lecturing (in his third-person persona) on 18th-century navigation and sea trade. The lectures may have functioned to legitimize the presentations; they lent a serious aura of academe to a mode of interpretation which many in the museum--both interpreters and researchers--saw as play-acting, not "real" history.

person, I see her reality as that of a museum object. The interpreter in a museum who "becomes" an 18th-century character, can never be achieving the reality of being human; to create a "real" historic personage is to create an authentic object, not a person. The character Judith was a museum artifact, albeit a living artifact.

Once Judith had filled her basket, the actual walking part of the tour began. Lasting from forty to fifty minutes, it followed a six-block route which began at the stable of the Powell House, moved along Nicholson Street by the Public Gaol and the Raleigh Tavern stable, went one block on Botetourt Street to Duke of Gloucester to the Post Office, then returned via a side street to Nicholson and continued two more blocks to an unobtrusive gate and a long boxwood bordered path which opened into the back garden of the Brush-Everard House. Although Judith briefly entered the Post Office for Mr. Powell's newspaper, no buildings were entered by the group on the tour except those on the Powell property.

During one introduction to the tour, a visitor asked if they would be entering houses. Coleman responded, "No, you're going to see the mainstream and you're going to see back road with Judith, and from a different perspective" (7/18/90). This exterior view was the approach commonly taken on walking tours throughout the museum, essentially for practical reasons. It was logistically difficult to

coordinate taking a special group of twenty-five people into a building during regular visiting hours.⁵¹

The "mainstream" promised by Coleman was a brief walk on a block of Duke of Gloucester Street. It was the "back road," literally behind the "mainstream" houses on the Duke of Gloucester Street but also figuratively peripheral, which dominated the tour. Nicholson Street was a back street. It had no sidewalks and although it had one exhibition residence, Peyton Randolph's House, its one public building was the "gaol," a structure associated with the lower classes, a group with marginal power in the 18th century and one marginalized in the 20th-century museum's representation of the 18th century. While (or because) it paralleled the main street, Duke of Gloucester, Nicholson served the back entrances to some of the important business establishments of the town. Only two craft shops were located on it, the brickyard (for which there was no actual building) and the cabinetmaker, while long stretches of the street had no buildings at all. On Nicholson Street, even where it

⁵¹One solution was to take the group into a closed building. For instance, Captain Stewart's tour concluded during off-hours in a dining room of the King's Arms Tavern, one of the museum's commercial restaurants. Visitors were even served a glass of cider. Another way to handle the problem was to enter buildings where there were no formal presentations, and low traffic. The tavernkeeper Mistress Vobe, on her "Woman of Business" tour, took her group into the apothecary shop on the pretense of buying medicine for a sick slave. On Judith's tour, however, the post office shared its small space with the Printer and Bookbinder, a designated "shopping place" in the historic area, which was generally crowded with visitors.

bordered market square, one was removed from the bustling core of 18th-century life as it was presented in the museum.

This existence on the margin--ethnic, economic, and social--was central to Judith's interpretive agenda, recurring in her presentation-as-guide and in the conversations between her and the group. The physical route was important because it was removed from the main artifacts and activities of the museum and of the colonial town as presented by the museum, but obviously it was symbolic, paralleling Judith's own existence on the margins of those artifacts and, in terms of legal status, the margins of the activities. The tour could have wound through any back paths and side streets and had the same information presented. This was because the route was also mostly irrelevant in terms of museum objects. Reference to the gaol was useful in explaining the relationship between slaves and the law, but most of Judith's narrative did not depend on specific objects en route. The law could have been discussed the way most of the other topics on the tour were discussed--slave religion without reference to a church building, slave marriage with no broom to show "jumping the broom," slave children who appeared only on the genealogical chart, slave punishment absent whips or welts, and miscegenation minus mulattoes. Unlike the Patriot's Tour with its direct references to the Capitol, the Palace, and other specific buildings and spaces, or even the Other Half

tour, with its "inverted" use of the Palace and the Wythe House, once Judith's tour left the objects (buildings, kitchen tools, garden) on the Powell property, the one artifact directly related to her narrative was Judith herself, with her basket of herbs.

Or almost the one related artifact. Another emerged part way up Nicholson Street in the form of "Nancy," Christy Coleman dressed as a slave. She motioned Judith into the stable area behind the Raleigh Tavern, and in a short and dramatic vignette, explained her child's grave illness and begged Judith to help her with a remedy. (The source of the remedy varied on the tours--either it would come from a slave at the Everard House or from Judith's husband Daniel at Carter's Grove.) Both Nancy and Judith were fearful, because, as Judith explained, masters opposed slaves' herbal treatments as well as their "networking" (Judith's term--one of her few 20th-century nods, or lapses).

Without minimizing the surrounding environment of artifacts--the museum town--I think it is legitimate to see Judith as the chief object on this tour, the one to which the narration was directly related. The brief appearance of Nancy, another object in the category of living artifact, reinforced this. The distinction between Judith and any of the interpreters leading the Other Half Tour was precisely in the Tildenesque connection between object and story. The Other Half Tour guides never "became" the slaves whose lives

they described (at least not intentionally--at times I felt they fell into slave personae in presenting an idea or situation), but they did take objects along the route and incorporate them into the story--for instance, Mr. Wythe's House as the focus for discussion of miscegenation.

But there appears to be a problem here. What was the difference between African-American interpreters who presented history in the first person and those other interpreters, like Captain Stewart and Mrs. Powell--the character interpreters whom Barnes called "living artifacts?" If Susan Josephson could become the object Judith, and Rusty Wilson could become the object Duncan Stewart, it is difficult to argue that only African Americans in the museum did something different with themselves as objects.

Much of the answer lies in two different ideas about the concept of object. One is a concept of the relationship between objects and the 18th-century people being recreated by these interpreters; the other is in the understanding of the meanings of objects in the 20th-century museum. Judith, as a first-person interpreter, was for the time of her tour a museum object. Judith, the 18th-century slave, was in her real life an object. In the eyes of the law, the white community, and certainly her owner Nathaniel Burwell and her Williamsburg master Benjamin Powell, Judith's status was that of chattel: she could be rented, sold or bought; she

could be used, discarded or cared for. Like a chair or a mule, her existence was, ostensibly, in the hands of her owner. This conjunction between the history presented (the story of people with object status) and the method of presentation (by an interpreter becoming an object, "living artifact")--between the narrative and the object about which that narrative refers--was different when dealing with museum objects and historical objects. Rusty Wilson as a museum object was not presenting Captain Stewart, an 18th-century object; he was presenting Captain Stewart, an 18th-century free white citizen of the British Empire. The first difference, then, between African-American interpreters and those of the mainstream, was that only the African-American interpreters were "becoming" objects in order to present objects--that is, slaves.

The second difference between the two was that as objects in the context of the museum, one had more value than the other. This value was conferred, above all, by the authenticating documentation relied on for the "object's" creation. For the character of Captain Stewart (or George Wythe or even Grandma Geddy) there were artifacts confirming the details of his particular existence--ledgers and account books showing transactions with Williamsburg merchants. There were also artifacts reinforcing the existence of the generic 18th-century sea captain--navigational instruments, charts, and log books. For the character Judith, the

authenticating documentation was a bare sketch, Burwell's and Powell's ledgers showing the ownership of "a" Judith, a female slave of a certain age. As with Captain Stewart's existence, hers was constructed through artifacts connected with the generic group (in his case sea captain; in hers, slave), but unlike the sextant and telescope which Wilson as Stewart used in introducing his tour, Judith's artifacts--the basket, the herbs--had no museum value. There were no authentic slave items, articles from the 18th-century owned by or associated directly with slaves, with which to define Judith. As first-person AAIP interpreters often remarked in their presentations, "possessions can't own possessions, objects can't make contracts." If you look for a consequence of this in the logic of the museum Stewart as a museum object had value as part of the Colonial Williamsburg collection, while Judith as a museum object in the collection had less, or none.

Third-person Interpreters and Visitors' Questions

The tour wound up with the group moving single file down an obscure path into the grounds behind the Brush-Everard House. Once the visitors were assembled in this almost secret garden, Judith excused herself, saying she had to take the herbs (or figs) to Mrs. Everard. The visitors waited silently for a moment before Christy Coleman stepped from behind one of the surrounding twelve-foot tall

boxwoods, dressed as she had been for the introduction in her modern clothes and head wrap. She took charge, offering to clarify misunderstandings which might have arisen when Judith could not respond to a visitor's question because it was outside the 1770 time frame in which the tour was set. After several minutes of conversation, Judith reappeared to be introduced as Susan Josephson and then both women fielded questions from the visitors.

The questions alternated between inquiries about facts of slave life in the 18th century and about "doing" slavery in the 20th-century museum, with the focus varying among the tours, depending on the interests of the visitors. In one concluding session, for instance, questions about the operation of the 20th-century museum dominated, and only one direct question about 18th-century history was raised; on others it could be just the opposite. The former situation is most relevant here for what it reveals about the problems and challenges of presenting African-American history, and particularly slavery, in the museum. Scattered through the transcribed pages of this particular tour's conclusion (approximately eight pages of the total twenty-seven-page transcription, or about fifteen minutes on tape) were the following questions, asked by several different people (not the same inquisitive person, who sometimes took over such situations):

How do your people feel about playing slaves here?

Do you get any other opposition from any other members of the black race [sic] for doing this sort of thing?

How many African-American interpreters are there?

Are they [the museum administration] trying to have it so that you get more of a sense when you come to Williamsburg of the fact that half the people are black?

The staff [AAIP] that's here, do they also go into Carter's Grove?

What about the research that you do, like finding out about Judith?

(Judith Tour, 8/1/90)

Coleman and Josephson worked together to answer the questions, their responses shifting among three areas: the general position(s) regarding black history of the institution, Colonial Williamsburg; the position(s) of African-American interpreters, as a group; and their own personal views as individual African Americans. These questions and their answers touched on many of the issues involved in presenting black history at Colonial Williamsburg, and suggested some of the differences in perspective among black interpreters.

To the question of how "your people" feel about playing slaves, Josephson said she was "very proud," and that it educated the public. It got rid of "myths and misconceptions concerning the institution of slavery," she said, and added that through education "it [slavery] will never happen again." Her personal view, "very proud," was combined with the museum's official position regarding its educational purpose, not just education for its own sake but

for a better future--"That the future may learn from the past" was a long-standing motto in the museum. When a visitor asked if other African Americans opposed their "doing this sort of thing," Josephson talked about the mission--a personal mission, a departmental mission, and a museum-wide mission, all rolled into one. She saw Colonial Williamsburg as a pioneer in the field of black history which other museums were trying to copy, but not too successfully: "A lot of them, we have talked to them, we have shown them what we do, but none of them have gotten up off the ground like Colonial Williamsburg."

Coleman and Josephson went on to address the question of how other blacks felt about their jobs as interpreters portraying slaves. Coleman, who prefaced her answer with the opinion there were not more blacks working in the museum because of concern about racism, told about phone calls to her house from angry blacks in the area following a newspaper article about racism toward black interpreters in the museum. The callers were incensed that a black would willingly take a job where she would set herself up for racist attacks. Her point, however, was that the attacks were few and far between. She was concerned that because they had been blown out of proportion by "a lot of stuff in the press," blacks coming out of local colleges who might have been thinking of working in the museum would be turned off. But in doing so she revealed an apparently strong

attitude on the part of some African Americans about presenting slavery.

Whereas Coleman stuck to what blacks outside the museum might have thought, Josephson described the fear that black people inside the museum sometimes felt. She told about an AAIP outreach program at a college "at the western end of Virginia, close to Kentucky."

. . .at that college there were only about twenty. . .black students. And you know, we go into some areas where we're looked upon in a different way and you can sometimes think to yourself, what's going to happen? You know, are we going to make it out of here? . . .these types of things are still going on in certain areas. So what we're doing--I say this and not because I'm part of the staff, but we're a very unique and special group of people because you're not going to find any and everyone who can come here and, you know, do what we do. (8/1/90)

Along with her sense of pride, and her sense of her mission to correct misunderstandings and misinterpretations, Josephson acknowledged that slavery interpreters experience both fear and uniqueness.

Coleman also picked up on the notion of mistaken information--Josephson's misunderstandings and misconceptions--but in a way which combined cynicism, urgency, and reconciliation. She was asked a question about the promises made by the British to slaves who ran away to fight for England during the American Revolution. Coleman responded with an account of what happened to promises made to freed blacks after the Civil War:

that was one promise that was reneged on just like the Indians got pushed further and further and further. So, you know, even though I love the museum field and interpreting I was telling a friend over there, there's a singer that I happen to love a great deal and one of the lines of his songs says. . . 'The written history is a catalogue of crime,/ The sordid and the powerful are the architects of time.' And if you really think about it, you think about what your history book said.

You probably never saw women or blacks or Jews or anybody mentioned in your history books. Especially around the war, they started taking Germans out of history books like crazy. What we're doing here is we're trying to set the picture right. We're trying to look at our past, not so much our history because the history might fool you. So you look at the past and you start trying to pull all of those pieces together because one [the white population] was just as dependent on the other [the black population]. It really was. We were very, very co-dependent on one another. (8/1/90)

Embedded in this quotation are most of the ideas, listed below, about history which I heard repeatedly from African-American interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg.

1) "They," which was synonymous with the government or the people in power, reneged on promises to people not in power (ex-slaves and Indians).

2) History, in its "written" or official form, was written by the people in power ("they," the "government" of number 1).

3) Those writers reported only some of the story--they did not include subordinate groups such as women, blacks, and Jews.

4) "They," the writers, also rewrote history--i.e., they took out the Germans "around the war" [WWII].

5) Now "we," the African-American interpreters, are changing the story to get it right, "to set the picture straight."

6) At the same time, "we're trying to look at our past:" the "past" and "history" are different--the past tells the truth, while history may not, "history might fool you."

7) "You" can look at the past and "pull all of those pieces together;" "you" can discover the interdependence of blacks and whites, a co-dependence.

In Coleman's view, the people in power had taken physical action historically against blacks and Indians, and had also taken written action against them in creating a history to their own advantage. But now there were representatives of the oppressed people in the museum, right there where history was delivered to the world, to retell the story and get it right. The new story, at least as told here by Coleman, was not to present blacks as better than whites, but to get them into the story as equals. "One was just as dependent on the other. It really was. We were very, very co-dependent on one another." Coleman's choices of pronouns, however conscious or unconscious they were, are important here. Remember, she was talking to a group of

mostly white visitors. She first described the "they" who broke promises and who wrote and rewrote history--the group not to be trusted--and then brought in the "we" who were telling the truth, using something she termed the "past" in place of the suspect history. Finally she shifted to "you," who can discover the interdependence. This "you" may have been used the way a person gives directions--"You go one block and then you turn right," i.e., "one" goes a block and turns right. But the effect was to create an impartial observer, "you," who would put the pieces together for the accurate picture, an 18th-century world where blacks and whites were interdependent.

I think this notion of interdependence was very important to the African-American interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg because it helped counter that assumption of inequality which accompanied the image of slavery. Interpreters often referred visitors to a recent (1988) history, The World They Made Together, whose text, like its title, looked at the ways in which African and English cultures both contributed to the world view of the 18th-century colony. Josephson, for instance, asked the group, "When I say light bulb, what do you think?" "Thomas Edison," replied several visitors. "If I say filament, what comes to mind?" Again, "Thomas Edison." "No," said Josephson, "a black. And you take the filament out of your light bulb and see what happens." She was talking about the

neglect of blacks but also about the interdependence between blacks and whites. As we will see, in the interpretation at Carter's Grove this theme of interdependence becomes coupled with a notion of a common heritage, a sort of metaphorical miscegenation.

There were also on some tours questions about the museum's organization and its purpose vis-a-vis black history. In responding to how many African-American interpreters there were in the museum, Coleman and Josephson began computing, aloud, the number of the blacks in AAIP, in mainstream interpretation, and in the craft shops (about thirty-five in all). Coleman then added, "If you want to see the most black people, just go over to the hotels. It's sad but it's true." Her explanation for why "it's true" went the core issues of black history in the mainstream museum.

First of all, because museums and the whole concept of museums is something that, if you think about it, museums are something for the elite or it has always been something that, well, you don't belong there and there's nothing there that we should--so you had very few blacks get into history and government and museum studies and things like that (8/1/90).

She did not dwell on the point that museums were for the elite; that was a given. Her notion was that their being thought of as elite kept eligible blacks away, and that the few blacks who did have the appropriate education went to black museums and institutions.

To the visitor's related question of the museum's intentions--"Are they [the museum administrators] trying to have it so that you get more of a sense when you come to Williamsburg of the fact that half the people are black?"--Coleman referred to the hotels where most of the waiters, maids, bellmen, and groundskeepers were black. She did not seem to hold the museum responsible for this. The problem was in supply: blacks who were good enough for a "mainstream museum like Colonial Williamsburg. . .are out doing other things."

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I said that the norm in presenting black history at Colonial Williamsburg was through the medium of the first person, noting that except for the third-person guides on the Other Half Tour, presentations about 18th-century African-American life in the museum used interpreters playing the roles of slaves to tell about the past. The evidence of the Judith tour seems to contradict this, with the combined introduction and conclusion, both in the third person, taking at least half of the ninety-minute program. My experience was similar on the Hattie tour, the other tour led by an interpreter impersonating a slave. Before the visitors ever met Christy Coleman in her role as Hattie, they heard a twenty-minute introduction (in the same Powell education building) by

Linda Couch, a (white) character interpreter who portrayed the 18th-century tavern keeper Mrs. Vobe. At the end of the Hattie tour, as with the Judith tour, there was a fifteen-to twenty-minute conclusion, this time with Coleman stepping out of her role as Hattie to discuss the tour as a third-person interpreter.

These were, then, museum programs which were a combination of the two modes of interpretation. My point is not to quibble with the way the museum advertised its black history programs or to diminish the impact of first-person interpretation. What interests me is the role of the tour in the reproduction of racism which seemed to be occurring in the museum's interpretation of black life. Two aspects of the Judith Tour stand out: the third-person "framing" of the first-person which underscored the sense of the "living artifact," in this case, the "real slave;" and the frank exchanges about racist issues during the tours (in both first-person and third-person segments), particularly in the concluding third-person segment, such as that cited above.

In the case of the "framing," I think that the more explanation and preparation a museum visitor received about a person as an object, the more that person was perceived as being an object. In instances in the museum not dealing with slavery (Captain Stewart or Grandma Geddy) this creation of person into artifact, may have had its drawbacks--chief among them, leading the visitors into

believing they were "in" the 18th century, that they were seeing the "real" past--but it did not reproduce a status relationship between blacks and whites which had existed for more than two centuries in America. Reproducing slave-master relationship, juxtaposing a black interpreter and a white interpreters, with the African American providing both the overt "yessums" and the covert ridicule, reproduced the situations and behavior in which racism developed and from which it was sustained. The better the "framing," the more "real" the "object," and to me the more powerful the reproduction of the very racism the museum said it was committed to avoiding.

On the other hand, I think that the second aspect of the tour, the exchanges between the visitors and the museum interpreters (in third-person 20th-century personae), may have served to counter the reproduction of racism. Most importantly, racism was often an overt topic. Coleman talked about oppression by whites of blacks and Indians, and she discussed those oppressors' control of "history"--how "they" could tell only part of the story, leave out some groups entirely, or rewrite the past at will. She seemed intent on giving visitors a glimpse, at least, of the possibility that "history" in American society, even at colonial Williamsburg, could be written from a skewed perspective.

However, she also seemed to go to up to the edge of the racist reality at Colonial Williamsburg only to back away. In her emphasis on interdependence, when she said "we were very, very co-dependent," she returned to what I see as the museum's "mainstream" party line. But to focus on being "co-dependent" dilutes the principle fact of slavery: that one group was dominant and the other subordinate. Ironically, then, this co-dependent theme which was meant by both the white "mainstream" and the AAIP staff to enhance the image of African Americans and help dispel 20th-century racism, probably minimized the oppressive element of slavery and thus undermined the goal of showing that oppression.

Chapter Five

Interpreters as Slaves--The Kitchens

Visitor: What do you think of Mr. Powell?
 Cate: What do you mean?
 Visitor: Is he fair?
 Cate: What do you mean fair?
 Visitor: Does he treat you well?
 Cate: Depends on what you mean by well.
 Visitor: Does he beat you?
 Cate: Sometimes.
 Visitor: Did you deserve it?
 Cate: Nobody deserves to be beaten.
 (Exchange between a museum visitor and
 interpreter Christy Coleman as the slave
 Cate, Powell House Kitchen, Summer 1990,
 1991)

In contrast with the first-person slave tours,
 encounters with first-person interpreters as slaves in the
 kitchens at Wetherburn's Tavern and the Powell House were
 brief and less structured.⁵² At these sites visitors in
 groups of fifteen or twenty met African-American
 interpreters portraying slaves as part of a tour focused on
 the main building, but including the kitchen and general
 property area. In this chapter I will look at some of the
 programs and objects at these two sites as they relate to

⁵²Kitchen is used in this section to refer to all of
 the outbuildings--kitchen, laundry, stable, barn, dairy--of
 the work areas at the Powell and Wetherburn sites. I have
 not used the word, outbuildings, to include all of these
 buildings because most of the interpretive activities were
 in the kitchens, and because museum personnel emphasized
 that "outbuilding" was not an 18th-century term. In fact,
 most of the slave portrayals were given inside and around
 the kitchen and laundry buildings at both places. In summer
 1990, the Powell stable was included as part of the setting
 for the AAIP evening play, The Runaway.

slave life, with an eye to how traditional museum objects--buildings and their contents--and, more especially, non-traditional museum objects--people who "became" items to represent the past--affected the narratives presented, particularly in relation to the museum's unconscious reproduction of racism.

Beyond their connection as the only permanent places for African-American interpretation in the historic area, Wetherburn's Tavern and the Powell House had in common having been "reinterpreted" at about the same time by what the museum called a reinterpretation team, a committee of researchers, curators, and educators that examined and redefined the interpretive goals at a site. The general impetus behind the reinterpretations was the same: to present a more accurate picture of the past (including the African-American past). This picture would take shape as narratives at the museum's sites were brought in line with the theme, "Becoming Americans," as outlined in Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg.⁵³

⁵³"Reinterpretation" of buildings was a phenomenon at Colonial Williamsburg linked to the work of the social historians who joined the museum beginning in the mid-1970s. Reinterpretations also sprang from utilitarian considerations--the need for new climate control systems, for instance--and, as in the case of the 1980 refurbishing of the Governor's Palace, from shifts in curatorial discoveries and tastes. In 1990, the rationale given to me for recent and current reinterpretations was the need to bring the narratives at the exhibition sites into sync with the organization of ideas in Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg, that is, with the "Becoming Americans" themes.

The Tavern and the Powell House had opened with their revised interpretations in the mid-1980s. The Wetherburn reinterpretation reflected the 1760 estate inventory of Henry Wetherburn--that is, a definitive list of objects--and was geared toward showing 18th-century economic and political life through the site. In the Powell House the change was from a place where visitors participated in crafts to one where they encountered 18th-century everyday life through interaction with first-person interpreters, both "master" and "slave" characters.⁵⁴ The interaction

The Wythe House and Raleigh Tavern were both undergoing reinterpretation while I was at Colonial Williamsburg. I was told that the purpose of the reinterpretation at the former was to conform better with "Becoming Americans," and that at the latter the reasons were mechanical. At the Wythe House, an interdisciplinary team composed of fourteen representatives from various museum departments--CCP, AAIP, general interpreters as well as interpreters from the kitchen and textile departments, along with an historian and a curator--was meeting throughout the eighteen months I was visiting the museum, but had not yet come up with a final plan when I left.

In the case of Raleigh Tavern, a museum staff member told me that the initial impetus for the changes was the replacement of obsolete heating and cooling systems. My informant went on to say, however, that once the building was emptied the museum's curators decided to "rethink the furnishings plan," and that this led to extensive changes in which objects were to be put in the building and, ultimately, to what history was to be presented there. (Gary Brumfield, Master Gunsmith and coordinator of the Wythe House reinterpretation team, 3/3/90)

⁵⁴An interpreter explained to me that candlemaking had been an important activity at the Powell House for decades, but that research in the early 1980s had indicated that candles "would not have been made in town at the time, much less at home." She said this with both pride and disbelief, appearing proud that the museum had discovered the "truth," but surprised at the possibility of a medieval era in which such unsophisticated interpretation occur. The Western

was envisioned as presenting the home life and family relations of an 18th-century family of the "middlin' sort," as opposed to the lives of gentry, the museum's traditional focus (Barnes 1988).

There were differences, obviously, in interpretation at the sites--in the main buildings, in the kitchens, and in the interactions between black interpreters and white interpreters and between visitors and interpreters. At Wetherburn's the traditional third-person guides interpreted inside the Tavern, while AAIP interpreters did both first- and third-person presentations, mostly in the kitchen. At the Powell House all the interpreters--black and white, inside the main house and outside in the kitchen--were in the first person.

There were also differences in how the main buildings were furnished and used. Although both structures were considered "original," the Tavern was outfitted with primarily 18th-century antiques (objects which the museum can document as being made at least two hundred years ago) to which the third-person interpreters pointed to present the history of 18th-century tavern life. The Powell House was allotted reproduction items (objects made in the 20th-century which looked like antiques) which were used by first-person interpreters to "recreate" history by acting.

notion of linear history moving continuously on a path of progress was alive and well among museum staff even, or maybe especially, vis-a-vis their own institution.

Put simply, the Tavern was treated as an object in the museum collection and the Powell House was used as a stage.

Although reinterpretation led to the inclusion of African-American interpreters and narratives at both sites, additional changes were made between 1990 and 1991, apparently in response to pressure to carry out the "mainstreaming mandate" issued by Vice President O'Toole in February 1990 (see Introduction for the details of O'Toole's proposal). At the Tavern the touring order of the buildings was shifted so that visitors entered the slave area and encountered AAIP interpreter(s) at the beginning of the tour instead of at the end. The thinking, apparently, was that having visitors start in the kitchen insured higher visibility for the African-American interpretation. (There is an interesting parallel here with the slave quarter, where visitors start their tour of Carter's Grove; see Chapters Six and Seven). As for the Powell House, it had been offering visitors interpretations by blacks and whites in first-person roles since dropping the candlemaking, but now there were more black and white interactions, and not every all-slave presentation was set in the kitchen.

Although there was first-person presentation in the kitchens at both sites, at Wetherburn's visitors encountered AAIP interpreters who might pretend briefly to be slaves before "breaking frame" to talk in the third person--or who might do it all in the third person. At the Powell House

the interpreters presenting slavery generally stayed in the first person. At the former, the mode was one of interpreters telling visitors about slavery, while at the latter the goal was for visitors to learn by interacting with slavery.

Wetherburn's Inventory

Wetherburn's Tavern was located on Duke of Gloucester Street about halfway between the Capitol and Bruton Parish Church. Like most of the museum's other buildings, it was a two-story white clapboard structure with brick chimneys (three), dormer windows (eight facing the street), and a roof of cedar shingles. Tours covered five downstairs rooms, four rooms upstairs, and a two-room laundry-kitchen behind the main building. At the Wetherburn site the interpretation inside the tavern building was by one or more costumed third-person interpreters, all of whom, in my experience, were white. In the kitchen the interpretation was done by one or two AAIP staff members who began with a first-person presentation and then shifted, after five or ten minutes, to the third person.

Wetherburn's Tavern was the first building I visited for this research. At the time--the winter of 1990--it was the only site at which African Americans were giving interpretations solely devoted to slavery. (In those early months, there were first-person interpretations--the "fourth

wall" vignettes developed under Mary Wiseman--which included African Americans in the roles of slaves in the Powell House, but the slave interpretations in the Powell kitchen did not begin until spring.) On a Thursday afternoon in late January, Richard Handler and I were among about fifteen visitors conducted through the building by a gracious middle-aged woman with a southern accent in an 18th-century style costume, a guide reminiscent of the museum's hostess era. She introduced our group to the building in the Bull Head Room, where we were allowed to sit on non-historic chairs while she explained the tavern and its context, focusing on Henry Wetherburn's life between 1743 and 1760, the year of his death. The use of these dates made the building one of the few places in the museum where interpretation was not confined to the year 1770. This variation, it was explained by the Tavern guides and in Foundation publications, was because the building had been furnished with the aid of a room-by-room inventory of the 1760 estate of Henry Wetherburn (1989a:40).

The importance of Wetherburn's estate inventory to the interpretation of the Tavern cannot be underestimated. Its significance was evident in the Tavern reinterpretation plan's chronological deviation (1743-60) from the plans followed in most other museum buildings (1770). It was a topic on every tour and it was emphasized in museum publications. To understand the impact on the

interpretation, it is useful to look at the regard with which Colonial Williamsburg researchers held this particular kind of document--a detailed list of objects in a man's possession at the time of his death--starting with the 1980 refurbishing of the Governor's Palace. Beginning in the late 1970s, relying on the 1770 inventory of Lord Botetourt's estate, curators had "redone" the Palace. In what many people both inside and outside the museum considered a revolutionary change, much of the 18th-century collection of furniture, china, tapestries, rugs, and other items which had furnished the building since its reconstruction in the 1930s--items purchased in England by curators (and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. himself) from the 1930s to the 1950s which had seemed "appropriate" in the Colonial Revival era--were replaced with objects listed in the inventory.

In his 1992 book, The Governor's Palace in Williamsburg: A Cultural Study, Graham Hood, chief curator at the museum, described the refurbishing of the Palace step by step, linking each decision to objects in the inventory, and to a philosophy about what those objects revealed about the "cultural life" of the governor and of the era.

According to Hood,

Careful analysis of the inventory and its related documents. . .discloses patterns of living within the established spaces, articulates the cultural life of the governor as it was evidenced in the building, and reveals the nature of his cultural

interaction with those around him. . . . As the inventory was 'exact and perfect,' this study [Hood's book] is not subject to the vagaries or recklessness of survival of actual artifacts for its interpretation of the governor's cultural life. Indeed, as a study it is considerably reinforced with actual objects, many of them identical to those listed in the inventory and in some cases the same ones (1992:36-37).⁵⁵

At first glance this statement appears to contradict the raison d'etre of Colonial Williamsburg and of history museums generally, where the operating principle is that the "truth" of the past can be found through the actual objects of a time and place. Working from an inventory is better, Hood says, than relying on the "actual artifacts," the real 18th-century objects (although he does give those artifacts their due in reinforcing the information found in the inventory).

I read this, however, as Hood's affirmation that the inventory--the document and its contents--was the premier object, the object among objects. Not only did it list everything used by the governor, because it was made out room by room, it provided a context for the objects. That is, it was organized according to the space each object occupied at the time of the governor's death. (Guides on

⁵⁵"An exact and perfect Inventory" was the term used by the 1770 trustees of Botetourt's estate, "a most distinguished group of men," who compiled the inventory. As a curator, Hood apparently adopted their appraisal of their work--made in correspondence about the estate with Botetourt's relative, the fifth duke of Beaufort--to justify his own reliance on the inventory.

tours of the Palace were always eager to point this out). In addition, some objects were described in the inventory, so that along with knowing what items the governor owned and used, and where he used them, curators, researchers, and guides had information about what some of them looked like. For instance, there was the heading in the inventory, reprinted in its entirety in a six-page appendix in Hood's book, which read, "In the Hall & Passage below," and under it four entries including, "2 Mahogany red damask Elbow chairs covered with checks" (Ibid.:287).

Small wonder that in 1985, when a team of museum researchers and educators set about developing a "reinterpretation" of Wetherburn's Tavern, the estate inventory was considered important as an interpretive guide. Just as Botetourt's had been essential to a more "truthful" rendition of the Palace, Wetherburn's inventory was key to a new, more accurate presentation of the Tavern.⁵⁶ The accuracy superseded the interpretive framework of the museum as a whole, making Wetherburn's, because of the 1760 inventory date, a chronological anomaly.

⁵⁶My sense is that the application of an approach used at an elite site, the Palace, to a non-gentry site, such as a tavern, would have delighted the social historians who were by the mid-1980s in firm control of the museum's research efforts. They had privileged an estate inventory as an object among objects. Once the estate inventory of a tavern keeper turned up, the objects of a tavern keeper must have the same value to historical interpretation as the objects of a governor, a member of the British nobility.

Repeated statements about Wetherburn's inventory also attest to its importance within the museum. Visitors were made aware of its role at the site in the two-page description of Wetherburn's Tavern in the Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg. Here four references were made to the inventory, including the information that it was "long and detailed" and that it had served as the "principal guide in refurnishing the restored tavern." In an internal publication of the museum, the 1985 reinterpretation of the tavern's various rooms was explained as based on the value of the furnishings according to the inventory. For instance, the Middle Room went from being a private dining room to a "public dining space," because "appraisements [in the inventory] for the room's furniture were low, indicating modest pieces" (Lundeen and Jamerson 1986:2). Like Hood in the Palace, the Tavern interpretive team was using these items to "articulate the cultural life" of the tavern.

Most important for this project were the ways the inventory affected African-American interpretation at Wetherburn's Tavern. Evidence of its impact was suggested by a brief, seemingly innocuous mention in the Official Guide. Scattered throughout the 160-page guidebook were twenty-two biographical sketches of 18th-century Williamsburg residents, ranging from members of the Randolph family to Peter Pelham the gaoler, and including five African Americans, four of them slaves. (Although committed

to interpreting the lives of the "other half" of its population, the museum had not gotten around to revising the collection of biographies in its guidebook to increase the number of African Americans beyond a quarter of the total.)

On part of one of the two pages devoted to describing Wetherburn's Tavern was a short biography titled "Meet. . . Caesar and Sarah." It told about two slaves who had lived on the tavern site: "Wetherburn's most valuable slave, Caesar had been appraised at seventy pounds in the inventory taken after his master's death in 1760. . . . Sarah, Caesar's wife, managed the dairy. . . . She was valued at forty-five pounds" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1989a:41). The sketch described Caesar's duties, Caesar's and Sarah's children, the fact that they "worshipped" at Bruton Parish Church, and the importance of slaves at "a busy tavern like Wetherburn's." In addition to the inventory, the sketch referred to one document, the church record showing that Caesar and Sarah's two sons had been baptized at Bruton Parish. (The assumption that, because they were forced to go to church, the Wetherburn slaves actually "worshipped" there illustrated a different kind of use of documents at Colonial Williamsburg--that because slaves were reported as being in a place with their white masters, they were doing what their white masters purportedly did there.)

The sketch appeared to convey factual information (activities in the lives of slaves at an 18th-century tavern) in terms of living, breathing people, yet the key source cited was the estate inventory which substantiated the existence of the people by documenting their worth as possessions: Caesar was "appraised," and Sarah was "valued." While the biography recounted their various responsibilities and jobs at the Tavern, the evidence cited was a list of objects. As part of an inventory, Caesar and Sarah may have become "more real" in a certain kind of history--they were documented--but in being valued like objects, they were made less real as people. More interesting, the museum management apparently did not see this--that the use of the inventory in connection with describing Caesar and Sarah was contradictory. Incorporating the inventory--the list of objects with their monetary worth--into the space set aside in the Guide for bringing 18th-century residents to life might have worked had the reference been to an inventory of things which had "belonged" to the individual in the biography. But citing it as a way of describing Caesar and Sarah served to emphasize their status as possessions instead of as people.

In the cases of the Palace and the Tavern, the inventory was seen by historians and curators as definitive in achieving an authentic recreation of the 18th-century building. But using the document to authenticate the

existence of the slaves by showing their value put Caesar and Sarah in the category of objects. The document credited with conferring "reality" on the hard-to-document enslaved persons diminished their reality as people. Ironically, AAIP interpreters did not portray Caesar and Sarah at the Wetherburn site; the characters were created from the names of other slaves in the inventory. At Carter's Grove, however, we shall see how an inventory served as the chief means of AAIP interpretation, serving as a source of names--some with ages, familial relationships, and job assignments--with which to "people" the slave quarter.

Wetherburn's Tour

On that first trip through the Tavern in January 1990, the guide led us up to the second floor, presenting the past in terms of life in such an 18th-century establishment--who came (men), why (business, government), how they slept (five or six to a bed, if they were lucky), what it cost (more to eat than sleep), who did work (the Wetherburn family and slaves). Slaves were mentioned briefly in passing, in terms of the work they did. As the interpreter led the group along the upstairs hall, she pointed to a row of chamber pots "which the slave children would have emptied," and when she described the Tavern's responsibilities for travellers' horses, she noted that their slaves would have slept over the stable, with the Tavern stablehands.

On this tour and others I took--they ran twenty to thirty-five minutes--this was generally all that the third-person interpreter said about slavery. But back on the first floor, the guide took the group into the building's last exhibit space, the Great Room, closing the door firmly behind her. There, in the midst of her description of the elite events--balls and lectures--which would have been held in the room, just after her awed explanation of the marble fireplace, a costumed African-American woman came unannounced through the door we had just entered. Seemingly surprised at finding the group, she addressed the guide with the deference a slave would address a mistress, talking about chores and saying that "Mastah Wetherbu'n bed' not fin' me here." She then turned to the visitors, introducing herself as "Clarissa," a Wetherburn slave. She asked our guide where we were from and whether we intended to stay at the tavern for the night. Making a noncommittal reply (which I think was also tinged with embarrassment), the guide remained in the third person, backing away from the group and ceding the floor (literally) to the "slave."

"Clarissa" directed questions at specific individuals, insisting that they interact with her in discussing such topics as where they had come from, why they were in Williamsburg, and if they intended to buy slaves. It was not clear whether she was suggesting herself as a possible purchase; it did seem that she was playing on the likelihood

that a direct conversation about buying slaves between a white person visiting the museum and a black person acting the part of a slave could be awkward. Discovering that Richard and I were from Charlottesville (as opposed to those from Ohio--"oooh, that's a wild territory"--or California--"a Spanish colony"), she decided that we were likely candidates to stay at the tavern and to be slave owners. She went on to others in the group, exploring the same topics. While some visitors found the exchange awkward, others entered into the event, discussing with the interpreter her qualifications and cost.

After about five minutes the African-American interpreter excused herself, never coming out of her 18th-century character. She left, asking the guide not to tell Mr. Wetherburn she had been talking to his guests, and saying she would see us later in the kitchen. Our guide, who had retreated from the group during the encounter, reasserted herself and finished the explanation of the fireplace. She then led us out onto the back porch, and directed us toward the laundry and kitchen. The same African-American interpreter hailed us into the kitchen where she continued interpreting in the first person. In a monologue (as opposed to the dialogue she had attempted to carry on with visitors in the Great Room), "Clarissa" told of her fears that Wetherburn would soon be selling her daughter. Gone was the upbeat assertive approach she had

taken toward visitors inside the Tavern, replaced by a subdued tone which bordered on hopelessness.

She continued in this manner for several minutes before breaking frame, dropping her 18th-century persona and introducing herself as Beverley Jones, a member of AAIP. At this point she became outgoing and amusing, and worked to put her audience at ease. She invited questions (What did slaves eat? Where did they sleep?) and gave answers which were geared to providing practical detail in a matter-of-fact manner. She did not try to sensationalize the grimness of slavery, nor did she treat the visitors as though their questions were anything but legitimate and thoughtful.

Jones was the first AAIP interpreter we met at the museum and she became, as I am told often happens with those one meets early on in the field, an eager ally. She worked regularly at Wetherburn's as Clarissa during the time of this research, and, like all of the AAIP interpretative staff, she also led Other Half tours, interpreted at the slave quarter, and performed in various AAIP events, including evening plays and programs of music and storytelling. Jones had been with the museum for eight years, and in 1990 was returning to full-time status following the birth of her second child. Lively and attractive, she was born in nearby Middlesex County in 1962, where she had been raised and attended the public schools. Before joining AAIP she had studied accounting for a year

and a half at Christopher Newport College, and at one point she told me her goal was to finish her undergraduate work, earn a master's degree, and have a Ph.D. by the time she was forty.

Unlike most of the other AAIP interpreters I interviewed, Jones did not talk about her work in the museum in terms of a mission. Indeed, the entire time I knew her she seemed to be following leads for other jobs, hoping to find one which would pay more than Colonial Williamsburg. The first summer she told me she had applied for a management position in the golf shop at the Williamsburg Inn, and the last time we talked, in August 1991, she had an application in for a postal service job in Richmond. Perhaps it was the sense that Jones had one foot out of the camp--that for her presenting slavery was more a job than a cause--which led some of her AAIP colleagues to make negative comments about her. The comments usually had to do with shirking responsibilities in some way--arriving at a site late or leaving early.

She was proud of her mother who worked in the products division of Colonial Williamsburg, one of the few African Americans in 18th-century costume who was not part of AAIP. Her mother managed the Greenhow Lumber Store, described by the Official Guide as "the most completely reconstructed eighteenth-century commercial space in Williamsburg" (1989a:86) where "a wide variety of items similar to those

sold here two hundred years ago is again available" (Ibid.:98). This was a black person in a managerial position, a costumed employee but in the costume worn by those representing the 18th-century shopkeeper, a member of the white middle class. Although Jones never expressed it to me in these terms, I felt that she saw her mother as having transcended the level of most blacks in the museum, even though she was considered a commercial employee, a position which some historic interpreters would have considered as having less status than being in the educational department of the museum.

Jones alternated with other members of the AAIP corps at Wetherburn's kitchen, and different interpreters handled their presentations in different ways. At the point on the tour when visitors concluded their time in the main building, they would move hesitantly across the brick "service area" to the laundry door. Some AAIP staff hailed them in from afar; others might wait, letting them feel tentative about the encounter. The two characters were generally "Clarissa," if the AAIP interpreter was a female, and "Caesar" if the interpreter was male. (There were portrayals of other slaves owned by Wetherburn, but these two were the ones presented most often.) "Clarissa" would entice the group into the room and give what generally proved to be a heart-wrenching account of an incident in her life. She then broke frame and explained the event--a child

being sold, the death of a runaway husband--in an upbeat and friendly manner. Visitors were encouraged to ask questions and were made to feel welcome.

Male interpreters were generally less somber in their first-person interpretation, but were sometimes more unsettling for visitors. Two in particular, Dalton Parsons (described in Chapter Four) and Frederick Saunders, took more aggressive approaches. For instance, one of the first times I encountered Parsons, he was standing on the brick pavement near the well, talking as "Caesar," described in the guidebook as Wetherburn's most valuable slave. He chatted with the visitors as a group for a minute and then singled out one whom he asked to explain why it was that "Caesar" was so special. The visitor, an earnest white woman in her forties, struggled to find the answer.

"You have some special skills?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, but he pressed her, "What skills? Tell me what they were?" (At this point I had difficulty knowing whether he was in the first- or third-person.)

She struggled until she stumbled on "maybe he could read and write," to which Parsons raised his hands in (mock) despair, rolled his eyes, and said, "No, no, no."

The visitor gave up and backed off, looking embarrassed and eager to get away, while Parsons-Caesar explained that "Caesar" could read; he could read his master's instructions about where to drive the wagon and what to pick up from

whom. "But he couldn't write," Parsons would say, as if anyone who would have assumed that reading and writing went together was an utter fool.⁵⁷

Saunders, another of the men at AAIP who worked at Wetherburn's kitchen, was more approachable than Parsons in his manner--at least for most white visitors--but had his own unsettling interpretive techniques. Parsons could be intimidating, with his imposing six-feet-four, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound frame, and I think he knew it. Saunders, by contrast, was of medium height and weight, easy-going and very friendly. He focused on the importance of the slaves' work in the smooth running of the Tavern, and he did not try to show up visitors in the way Parsons did, at least not in terms of their knowledge of slavery. Saunders dwelt on the commonalities between blacks and whites in the 18th century, emphasizing the roles of both the slave and the master to making the Tavern a productive enterprise. As he saw it, the two sides had equally important responsibilities. (This was a perspective which guided his interpretation to a much greater degree at the slave quarter. See Chapter Eight).

⁵⁷Among women members of AAIP, many seemed willing to make visitors uncomfortable during first-person interpretation, but bent over backwards when speaking from the 20th century to put visitors at ease. I thought the men at AAIP did the opposite. Visitors were often thrown by their third-person presentations--as in the cases of Parsons and Saunders described above--while their first-person roles were generally not particularly intimidating or provocative. I do not know what to make of this.

Saunders' approach adhered closely to the ideas developed by the Wetherburn Tavern Implementation Committee (WTIC), which had worked from 1982 to 1985 on reinterpreting the site. As described by the committee planners, one goal of the new interpretation was to emphasize "the fact that both family and members and slaves had to work together to make the business successful" (Lundeen and Jamerson 1986:4). This concept of presenting slavery as part of an entrepreneurial enterprise was laid out in some detail:

The enormous task of day-to-day support in a tavern that was an active business establishment was provided by Wetherburn's cook Sylvia and his hostler and carter Caesar. While Mrs. Wetherburn and maid Clarissa coordinated many activities relating to the care of family and clientele, other slaves tended to the gardening, errands, and cleaning and found time for their own private lives as well. . . . Visitors saw where black families lived and began to understand the relationships between black and white members of the household and how they supported and depended upon each other (Ibid.:2).

These statements, written by the member of the museum staff who had served as chairman of the WTIC and was at that time responsible for supervising the tavern, revealed the approach that museum employees, at least those at the management level, were taking in presenting slavery at the site. The tone implied that slaves worked together with their owners for the success of the tavern because they had an equal stake in it. Also implied was that Sylvia and Caesar "provided" their services voluntarily, and that

Clarissa was her mistress's equal in coordinating those many activities. Too, there was the notion that blacks and whites, described as "members of the household" as though they had equal standing, "supported and depended on each other."

The problem with all of this was not that it may not have been true, in a literal sense, at the 18th-century tavern. The problem was the absence of information about coercion and a lack of emphasis on the fact that slaves were property. There was no hint of one group owning the other, of the reality of slavery--that Caesar, Sylvia, and Clarissa had no choice in the matter. The most revealing element in the article was its lead sentence: "How unfortunate it would be to move from one decade to the next and not have a progression of insight and new ideas." Like the perceived evolution in the museum that dropping candle making from interpretation at the Powell House, interpretation at Wetherburn's Tavern had evolved to include talk of slavery. Yet the article illustrated what I saw as a failure in the museum to grasp the reality of slavery, at least at the Wetherburn site. Look again at Saunders, in the first person, presenting in 1990 and 1991 the museum's notion of slave life at the tavern. There is the very real danger that, hearing about the site in terms of a joint venture, the visitors (remember, they are predominantly members of

the white middle class) would be lulled into a sense of well-being.

The revised 1991 tour, in which visitors began with the kitchen and slaves, changed the format inside the tavern and made the sudden appearance of the "slave" in the Great Room problematic. One interpreter confirmed my guess that the Department of Interpretive Education saw reversing the order in which visitors to the site encountered slavery as a way to comply with Dennis O'Toole's mandate "to mainstream" black history--literally, "the last shall be first." But an argument can be made that the effect was the opposite, that this kind of shift in focus minimized slavery.

I had found the confrontation between the "slave" and the guide, the first person and the third person, a powerful ploy. It was disconcerting for both the white guide and her group. Here was this "living artifact," this object, but it was out of its appropriate physical context, the kitchen, and it was also out of its appropriate chronological context, the 18th century. That "Clarissa" could come into the group without warning and then force the group to respond to her on her terms (in terms of her life--18th-century slavery) took the control of the moment away from the guide and from the visitors. The guide, of course, expected the "intrusion," but I never saw one who seemed comfortable with it. And perhaps it was her discomfort which made the real impact. "Clarissa's" arrival mixed

categories without warning--first person and third person--and it also forced the guide (along with the visitors) into the role of slave owner, mixing the guide's own personal categories.⁵⁸ She was, after all in costume, playing at the edges of the 18th century, being partially an object by virtue of her outfit.⁵⁹

Powell House

Interpretation at the Powell House was significantly different from that at Wetherburn's Tavern. It was not that the two buildings looked so different: as described above, the Powell House, though smaller, was white clapboard with dormer windows, a roof of cedar shakes and two brick chimneys. But it was located, unlike the centrally placed

⁵⁸ As we have seen in this project (particularly in the last chapter), first-person and third-person categories were frequently "mixed" in introductions, or were juxtaposed when an interpreter in first-person broke frame to become a third-person interpreter. These differed from the confrontation in the Great Room where, even though the tavern guide knew the AAIP character was coming, she seemed to have no control over the character's interactions with either herself or her visitors.

⁵⁹ Museum educators evaluating the revised program at Wetherburn's Tavern reported that "visitors talked about slavery with more sophistication and depth after they had encountered a first-person interpretation of the subject than after the third-person interpretation." Furthermore, the educators said they found that the white interpreters preferred having AAIP first-person interpretation "because of the positive response and questions they provoked from visitors" (Graft 1987:3-4). But I did not find out whether the evaluators looked at the first-person/third-person interaction inside the tavern, which I found so unsettling, or only at the first-person presentations in the kitchen.

Tavern, on the fringe of the museum, facing a street which ran behind the Capitol. It was also marginal in other ways. According to the Visitor's Companion, the Powell House, unlike Wetherburn's Tavern and the forty-some other buildings in the museum, was not listed as an official "Exhibition Site." Although the Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg included the Powell House as "original building," one which required an admission ticket for entrance, the site's apparent purpose was not to serve as an object itself, or as a place for exhibiting the traditional objects in the museum's collection. At the Powell House, visitors saw one, sometimes two, of the house's three downstairs rooms, the furnishings of which were neither copious nor "original." It was a situation closer to a stage set than a museum exhibit, with a few "reproduction antiques" serving as props for the character interpreters on exhibit in the rooms.

Visitors who arrived to tour the site were met on the street outside by a third-person interpreter who explained the "rules:" when the visitors crossed the threshold of the front door they entered the 18th century where they would meet interpreters who were portraying 1770 people--members of the Powell family, the Powell slaves, and friends of the Powells.⁶⁰ These people could not come out of the 1770

⁶⁰Most of the exhibition buildings had a costumed employee outside the front entrance to organize visitors waiting to tour the site. Called Visitor's Aides, these

time frame but, visitors were told, they were eager to converse within the colonial context.

The interpreter ushered the group to the front door of the main house to meet "Mr. Powell," portrayed by a character interpreter with CCP. (It could be Mrs. Powell, and sometimes it was both of them, or occasionally a substitute like Grandma Geddy or Mr. Hubbard--here I will use only Mr. Powell). Mr. Powell led them into a room where they stood--or sometimes sat (depending on the availability of chairs or if members of the group felt comfortable on the floor)--and "chatted" for the duration of their allotted time, ten to fifteen minutes. In numerous trips through the building, I never experienced one of these encounters which was not awkward. The visitors were usually tongue-tied, leaving the burden of conversation on the character interpreter who coped by delivering a monologue about his or her life--Mrs. Powell might complain about her sick cook or

employees were at the bottom of the interpreters' hierarchy at Colonial Williamsburg. (Think of the word "aide," as in nurse's aide, teacher's aide, aide-de-camp--servers at the beck and call of someone of training or rank.) At the Powell House, however, the person who greeted visitors was usually a bona fide historic interpreter, either an AAIP first-person interpreter or a character interpreter in the Company of Colonial Performers. For instance, in the morning, interpreter Emily James of AAIP might be stationed at the front steps counting off twenty people for the next group to enter the house, and at 3 in the afternoon she would be found in the Powell garden, shelling peas in the role of Nan the cook. I think that the absence of authentic objects at the site affected these employees' attitudes toward the museum's hierarchical organization. Without the objects there was no need for the hierarchical order of people required to present those objects.

her irresponsible teenaged daughters, while Mr. Powell would be jolly and hospitable while giving self-aggrandizing descriptions of his career as an undertaker.

(The undertaker "joke" cropped up throughout the museum with reference to Mr. Powell, from both first- and third-person interpreters. Visitors would usually gasp slightly at the term and most would fail when asked the question, "Mr. Powell was an undertaker. Do you know what that was?" "Oh, yes," someone in a group would reply, "a person who buries dead people." "Not in the 18th century," the interpreter would explain. "An undertaker in the 18th century was one who 'undertook' to build, a contractor." The macabre misinterpretation of the profession seemed to delight those interpreters who focused on it, partly, I think, because death, as a taboo subject in 20th-century America, was generally avoided by the museum. I also felt that here was a situation, similar to the one about the number of bricks it took to build the Wythe House, in which an interpreter took delight in making visitors feel a little uncomfortable. Maybe it was both. But, to give it credit, the "undertaker" was a good device for showing 20th-century visitors that American language and culture really were different in the 18th century.)

Whereas on the tour of Wetherburn's Tavern visitors heard stories about inanimate objects in the museum's collection, at the Powell House they heard stories from

animate objects, Barney Barnes' "living artifacts" (Barnes and this concept are discussed at length in Chapter Four). Granted, the presentation of slavery at Wetherburn's was done, at least partly, by first-person interpreters. But whether the AAIP interpreters at the site met the visitors before or after their tour of the tavern, they followed the same format of being a first-person character who broke frame after several minutes to answer questions about slave life. This meant that visitors never had to cope for long with a slave character, or, indeed, any first-person interpreter. At the Powell House, neither the "master" nor the "slaves" came out of character during the tour.

After their time inside the main house, Mr. Powell sent the group to see the kitchen and laundry, telling them to go "speak to our slaves." Stepping out of the back door onto the porch, he would call imperiously in the direction of the kitchen, some twenty yards away, "Cate! Rose! Someone's comin' to see you," or "I'm sendin' some folks out there."⁶¹

⁶¹Although I spent much of two summers in and around the Powell House, I was never fully prepared for this moment, when the white master went out and yelled at his slaves the way a hunter calls his hounds. I always shuddered, not only when I was on the tour, but even when I was in the second-floor offices of the Powell House, interviewing or using the telephone. "Mr. Powell's" summons affected me in a way that no other attempt at portraying slavery at Colonial Williamsburg ever did. I think it was partly the juxtaposition of master and slave, a situation rarely presented in the museum except in evening plays (the proscenium arch offers great protection), and partly the stark sense of Cate and Rose being at his absolute beck and

The visitors then made what some AAIP interpreters referred to as the "death walk" from the main house to the kitchen, so named, it was explained, because they went as slowly and reluctantly as people heading to an execution. At the laundry and kitchen they met two interpreters portraying slaves. The two-roomed kitchen (described in connection with Judith's tour in the last chapter) faced a working vegetable garden across a brick walk which ran from the back porch of the main house to the stable. Each room had an outside door to the walk and there was an internal door joining them. The usual arrangement (and the one I focus on here) was for visitors to enter the first room, the laundry, where they encountered the slave Cate, and then move into the second room, the kitchen, to meet the slave Judith.

The AAIP staff portraying slaves at the Powell House rotated among the museum locations where African-American life, as presented by black staff members, was a focus, moving between the Wetherburn and Powell sites in "town," and the slave quarter "out at" Carter's Grove. At the Powell kitchen AAIP interpreters developed an individual with a personality and a life history, characters which were uniformly open, upbeat, and friendly towards the visitors. Because of this general similarity in how AAIP interpreters

call. It was a dramatic display of power and powerlessness.

presented slavery, I concentrate here mainly on one, Susan Josephson's interpretation of Judith, her same character Judith in which she led the tour.

Joining Josephson in the Powell kitchen was Christy Coleman of CCP, portraying Mr. Powell's slave Cate, a woman with an outlook quite different from Judith's. Where Josephson-Judith was cheerful and friendly, Coleman-Cate was depressed and surly. The two presentations could not have been more unlike. Visitors would arrive at the first door of the building and slowly squeeze themselves into the small room where Cate sat in a chair against the opposite wall, observing them in total silence. There was no fire to warm and lighten the room, and Cate was not doing a chore. She simply sat with her hands folded in her lap, watching. Usually she would wait several minutes, not uttering a word, while the group became more and more uncomfortable in her presence. Eventually a visitor would break the silence with a question--What do you do? Who lives here? Do you have children? What's upstairs?--to which Cate would respond in a monotone in the fewest possible words. She did nothing to help the visitors out; indeed, the longer the encounter went on, the more tense the atmosphere became. Some visitors would actually leave the room, going back outdoors and missing the continuation of the visit into the kitchen to meet Judith.

In almost every one of these encounters with Cate a visitor would eventually get around to the topic of beatings. The exchange went more or less as follows:

Visitor: What do you think of Mr. Powell?
Cate: What do you mean?
Visitor: Is he fair?
Cate: What do you mean fair?
Visitor: Does he treat you well?
Cate: Depends on what you mean by well.
Visitor: Does he beat you?
Cate: Sometimes.
Visitor: Did you deserve it?
Cate: Nobody deserves to be beaten.

Most visitors would drop the subject at this point, but not always. There was the time when Cate got to "Sometimes," and a man standing next to me muttered sarcastically, "I wonder why he beat her." Coleman overheard and pounced, asking him, "Why do you wonder why, sir?" He muttered something about Mr. Powell not approving of the way she was treating his guests. On another day, a woman who had heard the beating exchange left the building saying she thought Cate "had an attitude." She told me that she was from Chicago and had not come all the way to Williamsburg to see a black with an attitude.

Coleman rarely offered visitors any help in this experience. Unlike other interpreters in the museum portraying 18th-century slave life, her character was intended to convey the grimness of slavery not only by telling--either as an Other Half Tour guide or a first-person interpreter in the Wetherburn kitchen--but even more by doing or being. The concept had originated in the mid-

1980s with Arthur Barnes and Coleman, who was working with him then. It was felt that the image of the slave as a clever, industrious survivor not only failed to convey the real horror of the institution, it falsified the past. In their view, if visitors were able to leave an encounter with a slave character feeling unmoved, or worse, if they left feeling good, then the interpretation must have been inaccurate.

After a period of time with Cate (it could seem interminable, but in reality was at most fifteen minutes), visitors began to edge out of the laundry room into the kitchen. To their relief they were met there with a jolly greeting from Judith. She immediately put them at ease, chattering about the food and utensils she was working with, and about the lives of her husband and children "out at Carter's Grove," while slipping in jabs at the Powells--"No, Miz Powell she can't read. Her mama thought it best that she be instructed in cookin' and housewifery, so's she could fetch huhse'f a husbun (Judith would chuckle here) and that's what she did," she would say, laughing outright. Or, when asked if slaves ate what the Powells ate, she would respond, "Leftovers? You see Master Powell, you know there ain't no leftovers." Or, asked about the Powell daughters, she would exclaim, "Cook?" "Dem Powell girls can't do nothin' foh 'emselves."

Most of the information which Judith discussed in the kitchen was material covered on the Judith tour: slave families, daily routines, buying freedom, reading and writing, being hired out, attending church. Judith's tone was conspiratorial but cheerful, matter of fact rather than grim, and even with such dire topics as being sold away from her husband, or losing her children, her attitude was resigned, as opposed to angry or rebellious. Visitors asked questions about food, cooking, the garden, and relationships between the slaves and the Powells, but with Judith they rarely broached the topic of beating. It may have been that Cate's despondency and anger prompted visitors to assume its cause as physical abuse or to assume that it would lead to her master whipping her. But the approach could backfire--there were visitors who concluded that it was no wonder the master beat her, given her bad attitude.

Visitors were uncomfortable with Cate although most of them were sympathetic. With Judith visitors were visibly relaxed and could even forget they were talking about slavery at all. It was the exotic aspect of her information that got their attention--exotic foods like hominy, and exotic rituals like jumping the broom--and it enabled them to refocus from the fact that she was property (the property of an illiterate woman with a buffoon for a husband) to the details over which she had some control. Coupled with the exotic was the "Williamsburg fantasy." The charming little

kitchen with herbs hanging from the beams, a cheerful fire, and the large table cluttered with pie crust preparation, sliced apples, baked bread, and a steaming chicken--all of it spoke of well-being and bounty. The experience with Judith was the "mainstream" Williamsburg experience: entertaining, educational and, above all, positive.

Conclusion

The decision to present the surly slave Cate had caused disagreements within the museum since its debut several years earlier, and it continued to create tension. According to Coleman and her supervisor Mary Wiseman, the sullen slave was the most accurate presentation of an individual slave, and of the institution of slavery. But for Rex Ellis and most of the AAIP staff, presenting slaves as rude, surly, and depressed was dangerous. In Teaching African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg, he focused on the need to "constantly remind our visitors that the world of African-Americans was not simply a world of incessant work under the yoke of the master," and reemphasized that "blacks were not just inhuman wretches. . .they were resourceful survivors" (1989b:4). Ellis feared that instead of seeing surly behavior as perfectly appropriate for an enslaved person (and therefore historically accurate), visitors, like the ones quoted above, were likely to see it as the inappropriate behavior

of a 20th-century black. So while the (mostly white) CCP department viewed a surly slave as the most authentic way of presenting slavery in the museum, the AAIP department maintained that such a portrayal might lead visitors to make inaccurate assumptions about blacks, or worse, might allow them to confirm negative preconceptions about black people.

There was another aspect to the controversy over these interpretations which was particularly difficult for the African Americans. I think Ellis and many of his colleagues at AAIP would have preferred the grim interpretation, if at stake had been solely the historical narrative, the most accurate account of slavery. Most of them felt that the grim story provided a more accurate picture of the past, but they also knew that in the present it could become a liability. This was because they believed that it was not simply a matter of a white middle-class American image of a black with an attitude; they saw it as the tougher issue of the psychological well-being of the individual African-American interpreters.

All through the museum, there were employees who seemed consciously, and unconsciously, to adopt 18th-century personae, and it was especially true of those in 18th-century costumes. But for the African-American interpreter to "become" a slave, was for that person to become an object in ways more complex than just being part of the museum's collection. In terms of the 18th century, it was to become

property, even to enter a sub-human category, or, at the very least, to join the ranks of an oppressed class struggling to resist the power of the dominant group.

According to Ellis, the negatives attached to these 18th-century conditions resonated through the consciousness of the 20th-century African American who pretended to be such an object, an enslaved human.

It's been very, very hard for me to convince Colonial Williamsburg. . .that interpreting black history is different, that when a black person puts on a costume it is different than when a white person puts on a costume. That when a black person portrays a slave it is different. (Interview, Rex Ellis, 3/2/90; he also told this story to many other people, in many other settings)

More than once Ellis recounted to me an incident to describe this. A group of Williamsburg performers was presenting vignettes at a promotional event in Washington, DC. He described the other museum interpreters. There was

the director of the fife and drum who was dressed in his military garb. He had badges and buttons all over him, his hat cocked to one side, coiffed, and he had his drum major banner there and he was looking good. Mary Wiseman was there also. And she had her hair coiffed and she had this hat sassied to one side. And she had this brocade dress on and her shoes were shiny and all that (Interview, 3/2/90).

Ellis could not go through with the event. It was too embarrassing, he said, too demeaning. Their costumes made them bigger, he explained. "It puffs you up. The deeper they get the better they feel; the deeper I get the worse I

feel. It's like asking a Jew to interpret at Auschwitz" (Ibid.).

How, ultimately, do the presentations at Wetherburn's Tavern and the Powell House fit into the framework I have proposed of a museum unconsciously reproducing the racism it sought to expose and diffuse? Switching the tour route at Wetherburn's Tavern was to have incorporated black history more into the museum's focal narrative--that of the lives of 18th-century Williamsburg's white residents. My conclusion, however, is that this change did not more effectively introduce the issue of slavery at the site.

Rather, eliminating an encounter between a black first-person interpreter presenting a slave and a white third-person interpreter who is interrupted in giving the standard house tour made the two stories more separate. Putting the slave interpretation first on the tour insured that visitors saw and heard about slavery, but it meant sacrificing a dramatic presentation of slave life, one made the more powerful through the discomfort of the white participants. It also meant that they could put slavery behind them, literally and figuratively.

Furthermore, I see the confrontation as mimicking, at least occasionally, black-white experiences in the visitors' lives. But if nothing else, when "Clarissa" asked a white visitor standing in Mr. Wetherburn's Great Room, imagining himself a patron of Wetherburn's lectures and concerts,

whether he intended to buy slaves in Williamsburg, she nudged or jolted him into a reality of 18th-century Williamsburg and into the absurdity of his posture. It can be argued that every time a visitor identified with the white slave-owning class at Colonial Williamsburg, there was an unconscious reproduction of racism; only when, as I cited historian Peter Wood observing, the white visitor identified with the black slave, would the museum move away from such "reproduction."

In the character interpretations of Cate and Judith one can see racist issues surfacing in a different way. Here was upbeat Judith, a member of the "marginalized" AAIP department, giving the "mainstream's" preferred version of slavery, while the problematic story, the "fringy" version presented by sullen Cate, was presented by the member associated with CCP, a department of the museum associated with "mainstream" values and people--the upwardly mobile building Mr. Powell, the prototypical grandmother Mrs. Geddy.

The AAIP character Judith embodied the attributes which white, middle-class (mainstream) America considered important. She was "mainstream" both in terms of the museum and its rules--the code of hospitality--and of middle-class America and its rules--be upbeat and cooperative, help yourself and others will, too. This made visitors feel good about themselves, and the museum's management and marketers

felt good because the visitors did. The CCP character Cate deviated from museum hospitality rules and white America's preferred image of its past. Although within the museum she was an anomaly among CCP characters, who were the image of the mainstream--the lawyer, builder, storeowner, teacher, grandmother--she reflected the opinion of those staff members whose agendas ranked accuracy above the comfort of visitors, and who thought downplaying the starkness of slavery made the museum less accurate. In other words, in a museum where the lead value, accuracy or authenticity, was held by the people in charge and by most of those in the rank and file (the "mainstream"), Cate's interpretation was a paradox. Because it was the more accurate portrayal of slavery, one can see it as coming closer to dovetailing with the "mainstream" of the museum. But because it conflicted with how AAIP members needed to be seen and with how the museum's "mainstream" visitors wanted to see themselves and their past vis-a-vis African Americans, it was on the fringe.

The important issue for this project is how the two perceptions of slave portrayal did, or did not, contribute to the reproduction of racism in the museum. Some in the museum argued that only through the very grimmest picture was it possible for interpreters to communicate the system of slavery with any realism, while others were convinced that having personalities with spunk and initiative was the

best means to an accurate interpretation. Apparently, one solution to the conflicting approaches was to present them both, to have Cate and Judith side by side. Ellis's fears about emphasizing the downtrodden, rebellious side of slavery were alleviated by Judith's performance and the social historians' goal of realism was achieved through Cate's presentation.

Chapter Six

Acquiring Objects: Carter's Grove Slave Quarter

This site right here is very special because it is the only, I emphasize only, 18th-century, totally reconstructed, slave quarter built on the original site located any place in the whole world.

(Frederick Saunders, AAIP interpreter, 7/18/90)

In the late 1980s, on property it owned outside the historic area, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation constructed four log buildings for the purpose of presenting a narrative about 18th-century slave life. For the first time in its sixty-year history the museum had acquired for the slave story the same kinds of objects--buildings--on which the museum itself had been founded. This chapter describes how those objects--the slave houses and their furnishings--came into being. I focus on three aspects of the project, aspects mentioned in every interpreter's introduction to the site: the location of the slave housing ("original site"), the styles of the buildings ("18th-century, totally reconstructed"), and the quantity and type of their furnishings. The fact that Frederick Saunders was standing at the slave houses in 1990 talking about life on the plantation reflects the fourth concern of the chapter. From viewing the site as an opportunity to present an 18th-century agricultural exhibit, the museum came to see it in

terms of the 18th-century agriculturalists; the focus had shifted from the crops to the slaves who produced them.⁶²

In 1989 the four log buildings designated the Carter's Grove Slave Quarter opened to the public, one of three exhibits on the Carter's Grove plantation site. The slave quarter was composed of two barracks-like structures, designed to represent living space for six to twenty-four field hands; a single-family house for the driver or overseer; a corn crib; two fenced garden areas; and a chicken yard.⁶³

⁶²Sources for much of the information in this chapter were the archives of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWFA) and the files of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Department of Architectural History (CWFDAH). Citations in the text show a document's author in the case of a memo or letter (when known to me), or its file name (abbreviated) in the case of minutes and committees; its location at either CWFA or CWFDAH; and its date. More detailed information about the materials is at the end of the references section of this paper.

⁶³A quarter (the singular) or quarters (the plural) were both used in the museum, sometimes to describe a single slave dwelling and sometimes to refer to the group of such dwellings. In this study, I will use quarter to mean the group of slave dwellings, and cabin or house to mean one of those dwellings.

In fact, as far as I could tell, a museum-wide decision about proper quarter terminology was never final. But for the anthropologist the discussions were useful in illustrating some of the thinking in a history museum surrounding conclusive answers about the past, and in suggesting the difficulty of keeping information consistent within a huge organization. For instance, refinements in the definitions of "quarter" in its assorted forms turned up several times in the minutes of the various meetings of the architectural historians. This group seemed to agree that a collection of slave dwellings on a plantation should be called a "quarter," in the singular. But historian Phillip Morgan, guest speaker at one meeting, explained that a quarter was also a term for a particular type of slave

dwelling, and that in this sense quarter and cabin "bore distinct, non-equivalent meanings." A quarter was a building which, according to Morgan, housed up to eight slaves, probably unrelated, whereas a cabin would hold fifteen to twenty slaves divided into three family units (Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH, 6/6/85). (Attempting to adhere to this, a curator I was interviewing once corrected herself at great length after she referred to a slave dwelling as a slave cabin. As she explained it, her mistake was calling a cabin a cabin when in Virginia a cabin was called a quarter [Martha Katz-Hyman, 8/20/91]).

There were also different kinds of (group) quarters. Historian Lorena Walsh explained that a home house quarter, or simply home quarter, was one located near the main house, while a home farm quarter, was located on a farm where there was no main house for the owner (Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH, 5/9/85). Walsh also pointed out that "slave quarter" was the term used for a group of slave houses on a plantation which was a specific kind of agricultural enterprise, one which produced a cash crop (tobacco in 18th-century Virginia).

From this perspective, Carter's Grove was a bit problematic for the museum. Built by Nathaniel Burwell (grandson of Robert "King" Carter who was described as colonial Virginia's "wealthiest and most powerful" planter), the Carter's Grove mansion was intended as a showplace--some said Burwell built it to rival the Governor's Palace. It was not conceived as a tobacco-growing enterprise, which meant that the only crops grown there would have been foodstuffs for the inhabitants. Under this interpretation, Carter's Grove was technically a farm, not a plantation, and thus the slave housing was technically a "home farm quarter," not a slave quarter. Calling the museum exhibit the slave quarter seems to have been a concession to the public's preconceptions--best to use a term people are familiar with. At the same time, it is at least partially "accurate," since what was eventually constructed was a composite group of buildings, one of which was a "true" generic slave quarter.

There were, finally, differences in terminology resulting from changes in how slaves lived and were used. For instance, historian Morgan noted that there was a shift in the late 18th century from constructing mostly large quartering houses to building individualized cabins, "reflecting the development of the Afro-American family unit" (Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH 6/27/85). And, throughout the museum, interpreters liked to make distinctions between 18th-century and 19th-century slavery, and between slavery in Virginia versus the deep south. Slavery in the 18th century, they would explain, was more relaxed, less

Also on the plantation property were a reception center with a slide presentation and display, both of which focused on "the 400 years of history you will encounter" at Carter's Grove; a minimal reconstruction (foundations outlined with beams, and a few partially raised walls) of Wolstenholme Towne, a 17th-century English settlement, with (in 1991) an archaeological museum of artifacts excavated at Martin's Hundred, the parent settlement of Wolstenholme Towne; and the Carter's Grove mansion, originally constructed in the 1750s and exhibited as it was restored in the colonial revival style of the 1930s.

Visitors reached the site via public highway or on the museum's seven-mile "Country Road" which ran from the historic area through undeveloped woodlands and marshes. Admission was \$8.00, unless one had purchased the all-inclusive Patriot's Pass (\$26 for adults; \$17 for children). A brochure describing the four areas advised visitors to allow a minimum of three hours to tour all of the exhibits.

institutionalized (less grim), and they cited as evidence the circular arrangement of the houses in the Carter's Grove Slave Quarter. In the 19th century, they said, the antebellum cotton plantation with its precise rows of cabins suggested a rigid system in which slaves were part of an industrial (more grim) enterprise.

While the researchers struggled to distinguish among the fine points, museum interpreters seemed to use the singular to refer to one dwelling and the plural to refer to the group, as in "You must go to the Slave Quarters at Carter's Grove to see a slave quarter [the individual building]". . .except when they said that a visitor "must go see the quarters at the Slave Quarter!"

There were, as we have seen, buildings at Colonial Williamsburg which served as objects in talking about the slave past. In several kitchens, laundries, and stables visitors were told about the work of slaves, and some of the structures were settings in which AAIP interpreters portraying slaves "became" museum objects. But none of the buildings had the distinction of being museum objects acquired solely for the 20th-century presentation of black history. Moreover, none of these buildings' 18th-century function was devoted only to the domestic and communal lives of slaves. Kitchens, as both white and black guides would make clear, were adjunct spaces in which the first interpretive priority was the work performed in support of the master's household; living space for the workers was described as a secondary function of the buildings, a view captured in the oft-repeated phrase of interpreters, "Slaves lived where they worked." Whether designated kitchen, laundry, or stable, nomenclature followed function, a reminder that for the slaves associated with them, it was the job that was paramount.

In naming the new buildings "slave quarter," the museum attached for the first time the word slave to a collection; in the narrative approach at the buildings was another first, the focus on slaves' free time. ("Nonworking" is a more accurate adjective, since obviously slaves never, legally, had "free" time.) A priority was to show how

slaves lived when they were not working--that they were human in addition to (or in spite of) being chattel whose purpose in the eyes of their owners was labor. Put another way, the slave quarter was a place where slave life was intended to be viewed as much as possible from the slaves' perspectives, and presented to the visitor from the slaves' perspectives, not from the perspective of the master.

While the 18th-century residents of the slave quarter would have been owned by a white master who legally controlled every aspect of their lives, the creation of a space in the museum devoted to their lives as thinking, feeling people, and not solely as members of a work force, made the plantation site distinct from the slave sites in town. Of course, as part of the Carter's Grove Plantation property, with the formal name, Carter's Grove Slave Quarter, the new buildings had neither a site nor a title independent of the historical fact of ownership. Still, the slave quarter was by the museum seen as an "official" slave site, certified in name and designated in function to interpreting slave life in terms of domestic life--family relations, their gardens and animals, and their furniture, clothes, utensils and tools.

Background of the Construction

It may be that no Colonial Williamsburg exhibit took longer to evolve. As early as 1950 the acquisition of an

18th-century James River plantation was being discussed by the chief administrators of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. In response to a direct inquiry by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., then still actively involved in museum policy, Foundation officers A. Edwin Kendrew and Dr. Edward P. Alexander began researching the project. A year later, in January 1951, they reported, "'there is no question in our minds that the whole educational and interpretive program would be enhanced if a plantation were owned and exhibited by Colonial Williamsburg.'" The research led to Foundation offers to purchase nearby Shirley Plantation in 1953, which was turned down by the owners, and subsequently Carter's Grove, which was also rejected by its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Archibald McCrae. Rockefeller died in 1960, but the project was picked up by his son Winthrop who approached Mrs. McCrae a second time, and following her death in 1960, the Foundation ultimately obtained Carter's Grove (CWFA, Humelsine 1974).⁶⁴

⁶⁴Curiously, the exact details of when and how Colonial Williamsburg eventually took ownership of Carter's Grove were related differently in two museum publications, while Humelsine's 1974 letter seems to offer yet a third date. According to the Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg, In her will, she [Mrs. McCrae] stated a long-standing 'hope and ambition' that the property might be maintained for the benefit of subsequent generations. Sealantic Fund, a [Rockefeller] philanthropic organization, purchased Carter's Grove from Mrs. McCrae's estate in 1963. In 1969 it was transferred by deed of gift to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, which today preserves Carter's Grove and its grounds for exhibition to the

Before Carter's Grove could be developed into the "working plantation" which Winthrop envisioned, he too died, and 1973 found Colonial Williamsburg grappling with the dual problem of what to present about plantation life at the site and how to finance whatever programs were agreed on, now without the project's chief supporter/benefactor. The museum turned to the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation and, in a proposal drafted in October 1973, it requested \$7.5 million and outlined plans for presenting Carter's Grove as "an operating plantation." This fourteen-page document, "A Program for Carter's Grove Plantation in Virginia," focused on establishing recreating 18th-century agricultural life at the plantation and on refurnishing the mansion in 18th-century style. It also included plans for construction of

public (CWF 1989a:145).

In the brochure, "400 Years of History at Carter's Grove," a shortened version of the acquisition noted only the following:

Carter's Grove was acquired for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation from the McCrae estate in 1964 through the particular interest of Winthrop R. Rockefeller, then the chairman of the Foundation's Board of Trustees (CWF 1990a, 1991b).

And earlier, in the 1974 Humelsine letter, there was evidence that Winthrop Rockefeller's direct influence on Mrs. McCrae led to instructions in her will which made acquisition of the plantation feasible for the museum. Wrote Humelsine, "I am convinced that Mrs. McCrae's will reflected the results of Winthrop's conversation with her concerning the possibility of acquiring the property for Colonial Williamsburg" (Humelsine 1974). He went on to note that "the rest of the facts are clear regarding Winthrop's key role not only in purchase but also it is my remembrance that he underwrote the first five installments required under the lease-purchase agreement. . ."(Ibid.).

the "country road" from the historic area to the plantation property, for a visitors' center, parking, and various other site improvements, and for development of a waterfront area to show the "wharfs and landings. . .so vital to the Virginia economy during the eighteenth century" (CWFA, Proposal 1973).

The proposal outlined programs for agriculture and crafts in detail, but without reference to who would be presenting or interpreting various activities. The list ranged from tobacco production to spinning and weaving, bootmaking to blacksmithing, all aspects of "total life-on-the-scene." The focus was on the activities with no mention of the people who would carry out the projects--people who, in the 18th century, would have been slaves in almost every case. Among the descriptions were the following: "The crafts we plan for Carter's Grove include kitchen activities. . .baking, cider and wine production, . . .the operation of an ice house," and "we will show the trade of the blacksmith, the cooper, the brickmaker, the carpenter, the tanner and others required to interpret properly plantation life" (Ibid.: 9).

Whether by design or inadvertence, the authors of the proposal separated the "activities" from the individuals who would perform them, referring to "livestock operations" and "gardening endeavors." In discussing the crafts to be demonstrated, the writers cited bootmaking, not a bootmaker,

and the operation of an ice house, not a person who chopped and stored ice. Outlining the trades which the museum anticipated presenting, the writers of the proposal appear to allow individuals to creep in--"we will show the trade of the blacksmith, the cooper, the brickmaker." But I would argue that this was not so, that the trade of the bootmaker is not the same as showing a bootmaker, a person who made boots. It is a view which I think is supported by the results of an "informal survey" of Monticello visitors, conducted by historians James Horton and Spencer Crew in the mid-1980s. Horton and Crew found that "tourists did not associate slaves with such titles [as cook or skilled craftsman] and that although most of the adults understood that Jefferson held slaves, . . . slaveholding was seen as incidental to his life and that of the plantation" (Horton and Crew 1989:231).

It is difficult to think that anyone in the museum administration really thought of the 18th-century plantation without its slave work force, yet the language about crafts suggested just that. Reminiscent of the Monticello tour guide observed by historian William Greenfield, in the Williamsburg proposal those responsible for the "activities," "crafts," and "trades"--the people who would have done the work in the 18th century and who would do the work in the 20th century for Carter's Grove to operate as a working plantation--those people were invisible. As

Greenfield described Monticello, the problem was the passive voice which "made all the black people 'disappear'. . ." He gives such examples from the tour as, "The doors were installed originally in 1809," and "The nails and bricks were all made right here on the estate." Reported Greenfield, the guide said, "Mr. Jefferson designed these doors." Jefferson was in the foreground, as one would argue he should be, but the people who made his designs a reality were invisible. (1975:146-7). Although Colonial Williamsburg did not avoid slavery entirely in its Carter's Grove proposal, by focusing on the actions without mentioning the actors, as if bootmaking or tobacco raising could be accomplished without a work force, the author(s) of the proposal created a similar scenario.

Specific reference to slavery was made in connection with the agricultural plans, but nothing in the proposal suggested that Colonial Williamsburg intended to deal more than peripherally with the topic: presenting the "subject of slavery" was mentioned twice, as part of agriculture and crafts, a section which occupied fewer than two of the document's fourteen pages. Within the section, slavery was added to a sentence about outbuildings, and was the subject of a single short paragraph.

The sentence including slavery concerned proposed buildings in which the crafts would occur. It mentioned a slave quarter at the end of a list of necessary structures

for "domestic life activities:" "Barns and bake house, wells, privies, stables, carriage houses and slave quarters [sic] all will be required" (CWFA, Proposal 1973:9-10). While the particular order in which these buildings were listed may have been random, the order is there: interpretations related to livestock, bread, water, waste, and transportation all preceded the human laborers who would have been essential to the work associated with the structures. Too, except for the slave quarter, the buildings mentioned are all in a category of structures for animals, or for activities. The living space for the plantation's black workers is linked to horses, cows, and other denizens of the barnyard or to spaces for work (fetching water, making bread) or storage (carriages). The exception was the privy, which, to my mind, further diminished the reality and humanity of the slave quarter inhabitants. The paragraph devoted to the inclusion of slavery at Carter's Grove did not elaborate on a program; it only emphasized the importance of the topic. Read today, the emphasis is ironic, revealing a naivety on the part of Colonial Williamsburg's leaders in 1973--both in how they imagined a working plantation, and in how they imagined a working-plantation-as-museum. The paragraph went, in its entirety:

This [agriculture and crafts] portion of the program at Carter's Grove offers a good opportunity to treat directly the subject of slavery. The role of the black in colonial

America is only now emerging in its rightful perspective. There are few better places to illustrate both the tragedy and contribution of the slave than on a working plantation (Ibid.:10).

Despite the stated intention to "treat directly the subject of slavery," slavery is here more an adjunct than focal, not a subject in its own right. Carter's Grove was seen as a "good opportunity" and as one of the "better places" for showing both the good and the bad of the slave system. But there is a conceptual irony in imagining a working plantation first, and slavery second (or last), when the 18th-century working plantation which the museum sought to recreate could only have existed through slavery. Slavery in the proposal was almost an afterthought, an issue which the museum realized it might as well go ahead and add to the program, given the congenial nature of the proposed agricultural project.

In fairness, one must remember that the proposal was written in 1973 and that Humelsine's letter on the working plantation, with its avowed intention to deal with slavery at the site (emphasized by the inclusion of the slavery paragraph), was dated 1974. Although America was a decade past the Voting Rights Act and moving away from a national focus on civil rights, few, if any, "mainstream" institutions--schools, museums, corporations--were out pursuing civil rights issues, much less a controversial

topic like slavery.⁶⁵ At Colonial Williamsburg, the changing of the administrative guard which brought in the social historians who insisted on including black history and women's history was still two years away. But the proposal indicated how the museum thought about slavery, at least at Carter's Grove. More than a decade later, in 1986, the topic was still coupled with agriculture in some museum circles: in a report from the Carter's Grove Planning Committee, plans for presenting slavery received one paragraph in a three-paragraph section, "Agricultural and Slave Life" (Brown 1986:2).

But there were also groups in the museum where thinking was changing, moving toward greater recognition of the

⁶⁵The Rockefeller Foundation was one of those few "mainstream" institutions in America which had made a long-term public commitment to civil rights. At Williamsburg, as early as the 1940s, Rockefeller family members had pressured the museum administration to include blacks on the staff in other than minimum wage jobs, and in 1957, following Brown vs. Board, the Foundation insisted that the Colonial Williamsburg restaurants and hotels be integrated. These Foundation attitudes which were not looked on kindly at the time by many in Virginia, a state which went on to mount its own "massive resistance" to school integration in 1959 (Hall 1992).

Presenting slavery in the museum was apparently being pursued by the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, guided by Thomas Wahman who had joined RBF in 1968 to head "Southern Programs. . .[especially] voter registration, research activities for minority groups, helping Negroes keep ownership of farms" (CWFA, Dietel 1974). Humelsine was, in part, responding to an accusation by Wahman that Colonial Williamsburg would not present a realistic interpretation of slavery, that it would be "dishonest, romantic and sentimental" (CWFA, Wahman 1974). Humelsine felt that the Foundation had "been able to handle this question for years in a scholarly and informative way" (CWFA, Humelsine 1974).

workers as part of the agricultural picture. Beginning in 1981, the museum designated an Agricultural Committee which was charged with creating an agricultural program at Carter's Grove. The committee was composed of representatives from crafts, the livestock department, historical research, educational programs, but also included in its membership Rex Ellis, whose title at the time was Black Programs Manager. Among its stated goals was to "interpret plantation labor comprehensively," an exercise which involved construction of "appropriate accommodations for three representative households" (Randolph 1984:2, with Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH 1985). Various options were considered and discarded, with the issues of funding, archaeological and historical accuracy, visitor appeal, educational value, and social responsibility recurring in different guises and relationships.

Under the guidance of the Agricultural Committee, two projects had been attempted at Carter's Grove--operating an apple orchard and cider press, and cultivating tobacco. The cider project was dropped after it failed to catch on with the public and when architectural researchers raised objections because the shed housing was inappropriate for an 18th-century farm. The second project, an attempt in 1985 to cultivate tobacco, seemed at last to move toward presentation of slavery. Although the crop was still paramount, attention was also given to the people involved.

Attired in slave costumes, AAIP summer employees (high school and college students) tended a tobacco field simulating 18th-century agricultural methods--using period tools and plants species. The employees found the project difficult and unpleasant--no one liked snapping the heads off the tobacco worms. Five years later I heard an African-American interpreter describing that summer as "brutal." "Nobody ever wanted to do it again" (Christy Coleman, "Judith Tour," 7/18/90). Apparently nobody ever did do it again, although I was not able to determine whether the reason was because of the difficulty of the project itself or because the grant from Phillip Morris which had underwritten this and other agricultural activities at the site had ended (Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH, 4/11/85).

Design and Construction

Although as late as 1986 there were Colonial Williamsburg administrators who still viewed slavery at Carter's Grove solely in terms of an agricultural program, by the spring of 1985 the Carter's Grove Quarter Study Group (CGSQSG) was officially in place to develop a proposal for slave housing. At least in some sectors of the museum, the focus had turned to the work force; slave life had taken precedence over agricultural and crafts activities in showing rural life in colonial Virginia.

The study group was chaired by Edward Chappell, head of the architectural history department at Colonial Williamsburg.⁶⁶ As early as 1982, Chappell, writing in The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter, the museum's in-house publication, had discussed the kinds of living quarters inhabited by 18th-century slaves in several southern colonies, including Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Maryland. That the article appeared at all indicates to me an interest in the museum in the issue, while the actual content contradicts an often-cited excuse for not presenting slave life--that there was not enough evidence available to reconstruct such buildings. No doubt as a way of emphasizing the existence of such evidence, Chappell included a reading list. There were works by, among others, historians Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, and Peter Wood (1982:i,ii,iv).

⁶⁶Ed Chappell was the third of the informants in this project--with Mary Wiseman, Director of Character Interpretation, and Christy Coleman, a CCP character interpreter (Cate and Hattie) and administrator--who was thoroughly helpful. Far ahead of me in his thinking about the nature and agendas of museums, Chappell was a prolific essayist who wrote about museums for The Nation, and had published numerous articles in books and journals on the cultural meaning of museums, ranging from Winterthur to a reconstructed town in Ukraine. He gave me unlimited access to all of his department's files on the construction and furnishing of the Carter's Grove Slave Quarter, and was available for a number of taped interviews as well as informal meetings. He was enthusiastically committed to his part of the Colonial Williamsburg project, yet eager to examine the purpose of that project and to dissect it for "hidden" cultural meanings.

Chappell's interest was evident, but a movement toward a revised approach was also surfacing in other sectors of the museum. As early as 1977, a museum curriculum committee cited Carter's Grove as "the best place to tell the story of black immigration [sic] and the rise and growth of Afro-American history" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1977:44). The African-American interpretive corps had grown steadily since 1979, and with it an increased awareness museum-wide about the black past. Over in the museum's fund-raising department, staff were developing the \$400,000 grant proposal to AT&T for black history programs--during almost the exact months Chappell and the study group were deliberating construction decisions.⁶⁷ All of these efforts were part of the administrative changes of 1976 which brought the social historians into the museum.

Between April 1985 and March 1989, when the slave quarter opened to the public, Chappell steered--in succession and sometimes overlapping--the study group which conceived and researched the slave quarter, the design group which formulated the precise plans for the quarter, and the construction group which oversaw their actual building. He also played a significant role in the furnishing of the buildings, which in turn involved him to some extent in

⁶⁷The AT&T funding, which the museum eventually received, was for archaeological work, furnishings, costumes, a research historian, training, and education. None of it sent directly to the project at Carter's Grove.

decisions about their interpretation to the public. From his voluminous files on these four years of research, planning, and execution emerge the philosophies which shaped the project.

Chappell was committed to accuracy in the detail of the museum's objects: the more perfect the details, the more authentic the whole--buildings, furnishings--and thus the closer to a true recreation of the 18th century. He was also committed to the notion that the slave quarter should present a realistic view of slavery, that, as he wrote, "the ultimate goal of the Carter's Grove quarter is to present, as accurately as possible, an alternate view of eighteenth-century life with all its stern realities and persistent unknowns" (Minutes CGSQSG, CWFDAH 7/12/85:3). However, these "stern realities" and "persistent unknowns" meant different things to different museum constituencies. A look at some of the scholarly and political agendas surrounding decisions in the siting, designing, and furnishing of the slave quarter is useful in understanding what the objects came to mean in interpreting slavery.

The Site: Cellars or Pits

Frederick Saunders' introduction to the slave quarter which is quoted at the head of this chapter focused on its location: the buildings were reconstructed on the original 18th-century site. This information was based on

archaeological excavations which had revealed a number of shallow holes that resembled the root cellars of 18th-century slave dwellings. Along with Saunders, most interpreters cited these holes as the crucial element in siting the reconstruction. Having the holes meant that the new buildings stood where 18th-century slave houses had stood. Through them the project, and thus the history it illustrated, approached the sort of authenticity associated with the museum's "real," or original, objects, the ones most valued in its collection--Colonial Williamsburg's "eighty-eight original buildings."⁶⁸

But the slave quarter had a problem. The archaeological work was not conclusive with regard either to the holes themselves or to the site in general. Unlike, for instance, the well documented foundations on which the

⁶⁸In its section on the slave quarter, the Carter's Grove brochure noted that the "reconstruction employed building techniques from the eighteenth century." For staff in the museum's research and crafts departments this seemed to be a powerful factor in making the reconstructed quarter more authentic, and indeed, much of the record of the design and construction committees focuses on these 18th-century methods and details. Interpreters at the quarter, however, touched on the building process lightly, if at all. This may have been partly due to the absence of substantial African-American representation in the planning and design phases of the project; AAIP director Rex Ellis does not appear in the minutes as a regular participant until the construction phase. But I think it was something more. While "authentic" methods may have invested the buildings with a special "reality" for the historians and housewrights (they were the museum's own!), for the AAIP staff value seemed to lie in a "real" place as opposed to a "real" reproduction, however constructed. Because the construction was not an issue for interpreters I am not dealing with it in this paper.

Governor's Palace and the Capitol were built, these holes were surrounded by doubt, both archaeologically and historically. Thought initially to be tanning pits, they had been described as root cellars only in a second survey of the area, one made when museum planners were already leaning in the direction of putting the quarter on its present location. This is not to suggest that the surveying archaeologist--William Kelso, then head of the archaeological work at Monticello and considered a consummate professional--changed his analysis of the original data. Rather, in the fifteen years between surveys he, like many of his colleagues, had begun to think about how people other than the elite of colonial society lived. Because of his work at several Jefferson sites, Kelso was looking increasingly for artifacts related to the lives of slaves, and he was finding such evidence. There was a shift in thinking about the data at the Carter's Grove site which stemmed from a change in the questions being asked about that data, and which reflected a general shift in the thinking of many archaeologists, spurred, one could argue, by Deetz's work as reported in his In Small Things Forgotten(1977).⁶⁹

⁶⁹At a lecture at the National Park Service's Booker T. Washington Birthplace in November 1992, I heard William Kelso discuss this addition to his research interests, and point out the fact that researchers often do not find what they are not looking for. He said that his work on Mulberry Row, the slave quarter at Monticello, caused him to start thinking about slaves as people whose artifacts were important as ends in themselves, and not simply as adjuncts or property with which to define Jefferson.

In the pit-cellar disagreement there were two broadly opposing camps. One group wanted the quarter where it eventually was placed, immediately across the footbridge from the reception center, adjacent to the path to the mansion and the archaeological site and museum. Among these proponents were the museum's architectural historians, its historians, some of its archaeologists, the director of the Carter's Grove complex, and the Black Programs staff. Another group felt that the quarter, if constructed at all, should be some distance off to the left of the mansion, beyond a field that would symbolize, if not actually recreate, the long-held notion of an agricultural endeavor at the site. Leading proponents of this plan were the museum's chief archaeologist and the vice-president for programs and exhibits. The arguments of both groups turned on the authenticity of the holes--whether they were root cellars or not--but the arguments were driven by different agendas. It was not the controversy itself which is

In July 1990, he told me that uncertainty about the holes at Carter's Grove would remain until the area had been systematically excavated, but indicated that he felt that such an excavation would definitely provide evidence for a slave quarter. As to the existing reconstruction, he described the presence of a pit or cellar along an axis which, had a house been constructed over it, would have made the quarter more of a row than the present slave compound. He suggested that the compound idea arose from a need seen by some staff members to show "Africanisms"--the circular garden and outdoor cooking-living area between the two buildings. (Kelso lecture, "Slavery at Poplar Forest," 11/6/92; personal communication, 7/22/90).

relevant here, but the ways in which it affected the slave story at Colonial Williamsburg.

The first time that the area was surveyed the holes were dismissed as tanning pits (CWFA, Kelso 1971 from Noel Hume 1987). By the mid-1980s, when Colonial Williamsburg committed to constructing slave housing at Carter's Grove, Kelso had excavated at nearby Kingsmill Plantation and found similar holes which he concluded were probably root cellars for slave houses. The archaeological pros and cons at the Carter's Grove site were complex, but the issue seems to have come down to there being enough doubt about the holes as tanning pits, and enough evidence that they could have been root cellars, to permit placing the quarter in the area of the holes (Kevin Kelly, interview, 7/3/90; CWFA, Noel Hume *ibid.*).

Trying to decide where to locate a building was nothing new at Colonial Williamsburg. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the Palace and the Capitol had been reconstructed, and other buildings were reconstructed or relocated according to various rationales of the 20th-century museum. In the case of the slave quarter a chief rationale was a logistical one. As imagined in the early stages of the project, the slave quarter would be set off to the left of the mansion as part of the cherished, if diminished, agricultural project. This would have put it not only beyond (as opposed to en route to) the mansion from the

reception center, but away from all the other exhibit sites. Advocates of the slave quarter feared that visitors would hike from the reception center to the mansion and go from there to the Wolstenholme area by the river. But then, when faced with the choice of trekking to the slave quarter to the left or the archaeological museum to the right, they would probably choose only one, and it would probably be the museum, both because it was on the way back to the reception center and because people, it was felt, found archaeology easier to deal with than slaves.

When the director of the Carter's Grove complex (a man hired in 1985 to get the project up and running) saw this plan, he decided that the components were too far apart for the "convenient comfort" of visitors, and recommended that everything be "collapsed closer to the house" (Kelly interview, 7/3/90). At about this same time Kelso, his own focus expanded to include plantation workers along with plantation owners, was brought back to Carter's Grove to consider the possibility that the tanning pits could have been a "domestic site" (Kelly interview, 7/3/90). As shrinking budgets had all but eliminated the agricultural program, the slave quarter could really go anywhere. The need to shorten distances between exhibits, the reinterpretation of the tanning pits, and the financial drain of an agricultural operation all were at work in the decision to locate the slave quarter at the center, or at

least a center of the Carter's Grove exhibits. The visitor would arrive, park, receive an overview in the reception center and cross the pedestrian bridge to the path which passed within feet of the slave houses.

The location became a boon to the political agenda of the museum's social history faction. These, the research historians and architectural historians, were determined to give the "other half" of colonial society a prominent forum, and having the quarter on the only route to the three other exhibits meant that it would be impossible for visitors to miss it. Even if they chose to walk by the area on their way from the reception center to the mansion or museum, they could not avoid seeing the slave houses and hearing the voices of the interpreters. This was what the faction advocating a high profile for slave history had hoped for: rather than having to go out of their way to find the black past, visitors would have go out of their way to avoid it. (It has been pointed out to me that Disney would put the path right through the center of the quarter, making any choice impossible.) One can argue that when it is possible to choose whether to encounter certain facts about the past, those facts are in danger of being ignored or forgotten. Of course all such facts, all past events, are in some jeopardy, but those which are made optional (like the optional reading in a course--or charitable donations versus

taxes) are in a category taken less seriously, and may be considered less "real."

While proponents of the "root cellar" site wanted the location near the reception center because of the prominence and authenticity it lent to the slave story, opponents used the same points--prominence and authenticity--against it. A museum historian told me that one museum vice president was opposed to putting anything on the walkway that would divert visitors' attention from the mansion. In his mind a slave quarter was "some sort of damaging thing" (Kelly interview, 7/3/90). Presumably it would be more damaging in a prominent location. "To him the history was self-evident and right and didn't need to be questioned much. What you needed to do was to see the buses run on time" (Kelly interview, 6/16/90). What was "self-evident" history at this site was the Nathaniel Burwell mansion, and it was only with the timely retirement of this administrator that slave houses could be put along the main walkway.

Another staunch opponent of the site was Colonial Williamsburg's chief archaeologist, Ivor Noel Hume, a person considered by many as the dean of modern colonial archaeology, even its creator. Noel Hume based his chief objections to constructing slave houses on the tanning pits on the museum's main operational ethic, authenticity. Calling the "footprint" a "bogus archaeological claim," he managed to avoid attacking Kelso's research (more or less)

while disparaging the conclusions drawn from it by museum personnel.⁷⁰ To his argument that the site's authenticity was questionable, Noel Hume added the rule of "reconstructive ethics." As he put it, "if you don't know what it looked like don't impose it on an archaeological site." I find these objections, taken as a pair, contradictory: if the "footprint" was bogus, it should not hurt to impose whatever one wanted on the site.

The prominence of the site, making it the first exhibit visitors would encounter after leaving the reception center, was a positive factor for its proponents. For the opposition it was a negative. The problem here, according to Noel Hume, was not slave life per se, but the fact that visitors would be likely to think the buildings were original. He thought it would be all but impossible for the interpreters to keep the site, the houses, and the archaeological and architectural dilemmas in perspective while talking about slave life. His worry was not so much that visitors would know or not know that the quarter was reconstructed on a questionable site, but that they would be confronted with variables and uncertainty all over Carter's Grove.

⁷⁰Noel Hume was utterly convinced of his position (or a canny debater) in that he never, in any of the material I saw in this discussion, referred to the holes as root cellars. He called them pits, tanning pits, or holes.

It was suggested to me by some museum personnel that one reason Noel Hume resisted the reconstruction of the slave quarter was that the museum was not reconstructing Wolstenholme Towne. This might have been more convincing if \$3.1 million had not already been allocated to the archaeological museum, his pet project. It seems more likely that the problem as Noel Hume explained it was the truth as he saw it. He believed the site as a whole would suffer from too many diverse messages. He imagined a scenario in which visitors would encounter a slave quarter that may or may not have been what and where they found it, and then tour a mansion that was more of the 20th century than it was of the 18th, and finally be told at Wolstenholme Towne that buildings were not reconstructed because there was not enough information to do so. The problem went beyond the variety of messages, for as he put it, "to impose full-scale reconstructions on the 'tanning pits' site on infinitely less direct evidence than we have for the Wolstenholme structures, would do both Carter's Grove and Colonial Williamsburg's hard-won reputation a considerable disservice" (CWFA, Noel Hume 1987).

Whatever his motivations, Noel Hume's objection presented a new problem for African-American history in the museum, one which I did not see emerging in connection with interpretations of slave life in the historic area. Noel Hume's concern was that visitors would be confused by the

juxtaposition of reconstructed slave houses with a colonial revival mansion and a "real" archaeological site, and that this confusion would be a disservice to the museum's reputation (a reputation to which Noel Hume, through his innovative work, had undeniably made a significant contribution). His implication was that the history presented through the buildings at the slave quarter diminished not only the other, "real," history of the Carter's Grove site, it called into question all historical interpretation throughout the museum, even that for which there were traditional documents and artifacts. This was different from the concern usually voiced--that in having fewer documents and less prestigious artifacts the slave history was itself diminished. As I read it, Noel Hume's notion was that juxtaposing narratives (about slavery) that were possible or plausible with narratives that the museum felt it could claim was certain or "real" (those about George Wythe or Lord Botetourt) made the "real" less credible. If this was true, even while the slave quarter provided objects for telling the slave story and so strengthened the presentation of the slave narrative, the quarter also became a potential threat to the museum's traditional historical narrative about the founding fathers.

The Buildings: Specific or General

A second controversy surrounding the slave quarter concerned whether the buildings would be specific to Carter's Grove, or would represent a generic view of 18th-century Tidewater slavery. Here the root cellars were again a factor. In the early stages of planning, when the quarter was to be located beyond the mansion and adjacent to the proposed agricultural site, it was to be a "representative slave quarter." However, when the Carter's Grove project was scaled down and the quarter moved to the root cellar site, the buildings were changed "to conform with the evidence" at that location. At that point, according to historian Kevin Kelly, the museum said it was no longer free to design just any quarter, one based on 18th- and 19th-century documents and maps describing slave quarters. Once the museum accepted the holes as root cellars and not tanning pits, the holes became the constraining fact, because they were the authenticating evidence. With the root cellars, the representative slave quarter became the reconstructed slave quarter, in the sense that the Palace or the Capitol were reconstructed. As Kelly explained,

once this site [the root cellar site] was chosen, the issue of how to array the buildings on the piece of property was foreclosed. You put them where the footprint suggested they were. . . this is where the slave quarters [sic] really were and they were arrayed like this and therefore if you're recapturing what it was, then you go back and use those footprints as your first

piece of evidence of what the slave quarter looked like (Interview, 7/3/90).

In the end, the quarter was both general and specific (as, indeed, any reconstruction is). That is, the architectural historians designed and the housewrights and craftsmen constructed three kinds of slave houses: a "duplex" with a wooden floor to represent housing for two family groups; a double-sided barracks type building set on the bare ground as housing for single farm hands; and a better quality single family house to represent where the overseer or driver and his family would have lived. These houses and corn crib were constructed in an area just to the left of the path to the mansion, in a "clump" (as opposed to a row) over or "around" four or five root cellars.

Interestingly, on the right of the path, according to Kelso, there was at least one hole likely to have been a cellar that was not chosen as a site. I was given several reasons for this. First, money--there was not enough for a fifth structure. Second, location--it would have meant that the quarter straddled the path, which the "mansion" historians felt might cause problems for visitors who did not want to deal with a slave presentation yet would be forced to go through the quarter to reach the mansion. And third, Africanisms--the location would have suggested more of a row arrangement than the "village" effect achieved by joining the two group houses through a communal living and cooking space, and including the circular garden and chicken

yard. These reasons suggest decisions in the construction of the slave quarter associated with presenting slavery from a generic perspective, as opposed to a specific one. The footprint dictated the quarter's being located on the site, but clearly choices were made as to which cellars would be used and what kinds of houses would be built over them.

At the same time, having the footprint enabled the museum staff to think about the houses in terms of particular slaves known to have been owned by Nathaniel Burwell. In other words, by thinking of the quarter as being built on the Burwell quarter site, historians and interpreters could "people" it with Burwell slaves. What this meant, specifically, was that names and family configurations of Burwell's slaves, as they appeared in York County tax records and his will, were appropriated to be the "inhabitants" of the slave quarter. Both the historians and interpreters at the site were straightforward about the fact that they had no way of knowing which of the twenty-four names they lifted from records had actually lived at Carter's Grove. Burwell owned many slaves on several different farms and plantations; some or none of those named in the documents could have lived on this particular farm. But the intent was to make the quarter home to a specific group of people--to make it specific to Carter's Grove even while the construction was of generic buildings. As for the footprint, it seems to have gone only as far as the creators

of the quarter wanted it to go. Within a range of options (the number of the cellar/pits, and where they were), both the styles of the buildings and their locations were open choices.

The Furnishings: Grim or Less Grim

While the slave houses were still being designed, discussions began about what objects to put into the completed buildings. The museum's architectural historians wanted the rooms furnished sparsely with a minimum of cookware and utensils, little or no furniture, and straw mattresses or simply blankets on the floor for sleeping. They felt strongly that the most accurate way to show slavery, the institution, was to show slave life as grimly as possible, and certainly this meant fewer and meaner items (Chappell, interview, 8/9/91). The curators, on the other hand, were for using the setting to display as much of the museum's collection of slave artifacts as possible. If such objects were not part of the collection, or were reproductions, the curators' idea was to use the buildings to demonstrate what some, if not all, slaves might have had in their domestic existences. For the curators it was not a matter of making slave life better or worse than imagined, but of giving visitors a chance to see as complete a picture as possible of the kinds of objects slaves could have had and used (Katz-Hyman, interview, 8/20/91).

These two sides opposed each other through months of discussion, reaching compromises only late in the process. One of these disagreements, which came to symbolize the tension, was known throughout the museum and was not settled until after the slave quarter was opened to the public 1989. Briefly, the architectural historians planned for the houses to have no bed frames, only straw pallets or blankets on the floor, and these they wanted to be in a messy, dirty pile. After all, they reasoned, no field hand would have time to fold and arrange his blankets in the few predawn minutes he was awake before heading out to work. The curators, however, had found a documented reference to a bed in a slave cabin, and so strove to have a bed frame with a rudimentary mattress put in at least one of the houses. Neither side was talking about either an "original" artifact or a model for one. The argument was strictly about how to present slavery, about whether the public should come away with an idea of life in the slave quarter as utterly grim (they slept on the floor), or as a little less so (there was a raised bed with a straw mattress).

In the end, the architectural historians agreed, reluctantly, to a bed-shaped space created with four boards on the floor of one house, and a rough, off-the-floor bedstead in the driver's house. They were not happy, even though the curators cited the documents to show a slave with a bed. The architectural historians argued that "bed" could

mean blankets or a pallet, implying that the curators did not know how to read historic documents. But more than that, the architectural historians argued that just because one slave had a bed, if indeed it was a bed, the majority of slaves did not have beds and thus to include a bed was to be misleading about the life of a typical slave.

It was not, however, the curators' opinion which was decisive. It was the position of the AAIP department. For them, no beds, or, worse, a pile of blankets in the corner, raised the crucial issue of perceptions about 20th-century African Americans. They feared comments--and said they had heard them--about slovenly blacks not keeping their things neat and clean. They felt that many visitors would see, not a poor slave with no time to straighten or wash his blanket, but a person who did not care enough about his belongings and living quarters to keep them "nice."⁷¹

Conclusion

Deciding how to use the Carter's Grove property consumed thousands of staff hours and generated volumes of

⁷¹In an interview with a curator (a white woman) at the DeWitt-Wallace Museum, we heard another solution to the controversy. Her view was that once AAIP staff began talking about the individuals who lived in the quarter, and included "Joe the carpenter" as a resident, the bed issue should have been a dead one. With a carpenter living right there, not to have beds seemed absurd, she said. She added that it was not just absurd, it denigrated the slaves, making them appear to be people who would not use their skills to improve their living quarters.

archival material during the nearly twenty-five years between its acquisition by Colonial Williamsburg, through the opening of the slave quarter, to the 1991 dedication of the Winthrop Rockefeller Archaeological Museum. In the process, the museum made some intriguing, even revolutionary, decisions about preservation and historical interpretation. One was to leave the mansion in its colonial revival state. The McCraes had purchased Carter's Grove in 1928 and remodeled the house in the early 1930s, following the colonial revival style. According to the 1973 proposal, Colonial Williamsburg's historians and curators planned to refurnish the house with 18th-century antiques, with the intention of interpreting it to the public as 1770, the year in which most historic area exhibitions were presented. With lack of funds as a factor, but also a realization of the historical value of the house and its contents as a "complete" colonial revival artifact in itself, the museum decided to interpret the mansion in its 20th-century form, a setting in which to present the McCraes and their world, especially in the parallels with John D. Rockefeller in his restoration of Williamsburg.⁷²

⁷²In a 1974 memo, Noel Hume, then the chief archaeologist at Colonial Williamsburg, argued against trying to return the Carter's Grove mansion to a condition appropriate for an 18th-century exhibit. "The antiquary's myopic vision is, in its way," wrote Noel Hume, "every bit as detrimental to the past as is the land-developer's bulldozer," and he pointed out that although the mansion was more than two hundred years old, it "by accident came to its full flowering not in the eighteenth century but in the

Another important decision was the result of routine archaeological excavations along the James River below the mansion, possibly in preparation for the reconstruction of the 18th-century wharf. Excavation revealed the existence of the 17th-century settlement Wolstenholme Towne whose residents had been massacred by Indians in 1622. This discovery led to a "partial reconstruction" of the village and construction of a \$3.1-million archaeology museum in which to exhibit the excavated artifacts. Finding a 17th-century community, deciding to present the 18th-century mansion in its 20th-century incarnation, and a growing commitment to an 18th-century slave quarter led museum researchers and administrators to create a site encompassing

twentieth." The full flowering had to do with "a long series of historical figures well known to the American public. . . Gertrude Stein, McKenzie King, . . . the Duke of Gloucester, each of whom, in her or his own way became part of the history of Carter's Grove." This explanation of a historical building's value in terms of the "great" people associated with it resonated with America's thinking about history in general, and reflected the Colonial Williamsburg perspective.

Noel Hume continued, "a hypothetical refurnishing of the house to an arbitrarily chosen date in the eighteenth century will eliminate both truth and two hundred years of history." But it was not only "truth" that would be lost. My sense is that Noel Hume, thinking about the colonial revival Carter's Grove, resembled John D. Rockefeller, Jr., thinking about 18th-century Williamsburg. According to Noel Hume, "At Carter's Grove we have an opportunity to make sure that one splendid Virginia example is preserved as it was in the glory days before Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and other assorted disasters opened a water gate to sweep away the American Dream. In other words, a new golden age of American history was emerging, the pre-World War II "glory days" which seemed to parallel and might even replace the pre-Revolutionary era as a time for which later generations would long (CWFA, Noel Hume 1974).

four centuries of American history. For Colonial Williamsburg, a museum publicly committed to the 18th century--indeed, to a single year within the century--the decision to encompass four centuries at the Carter's Grove site was a major one.

I would judge the impact of both of these decisions on the slave quarter project as positive from the perspective of construction, but negative in terms of the interpretation of slavery at the site. On the one hand, not having to work closely within the context of the 18th-century white population gave the designers and builders of the quarter a freedom to focus on the slave cabins. The quarter was in a sense autonomous. There was, for instance, discussion about where to locate the cabins, whether to be guided by archaeological data or a spot deemed most congenial to visitors. In neither case did planners have to wrestle with the slaves' relationship with a specific master, as they would have if the mansion was to be focused on the Burwells.

On the negative side, this decision isolated the slave quarter from the context of an 18th-century white existence, specifically the existence of the slave owner. The slave houses were separated from a white population, the very context through which the reality of ownership and dominance, of being chattel and subservient, could be made most explicit. With the lives of the McCraes being presented instead of the 18th-century Burwells, the

interpretation of the mansion was separated from the interpretation of the slave cabins by much more than physical distance. In replacing the Burwells with the McCraes, the museum eliminated the existence of "owners" on the Carter's Grove property, which in turn limited the impact of two crucial elements of the slave story: being owned and white responsibility. None of this was ever suggested to me as intentional--as being in any way calculated to diffuse the slave story or "whitewash" history. Nor was there any indication that museum personnel were aware of the possibility that isolating the slave quarter could have such an effect. But considering the meticulous efforts at Colonial Williamsburg to interrelate activities, individuals, and life styles in the historic area, it is surprising that the slave quarter would be presented without a comparable context.

Museum architectural historian Chappell, talking about the importance of detail, once explained to me the necessity of having the precisely correct 18th-century locks on every building in the historic area, even buildings never entered by the public. It was not in and for the locks themselves, he said, but because of their function as "part of the web which creates authenticity." If one looked at the slave quarter along these lines, it could be argued that having no object devoted to the interpretation of the 18th-century owners of the slaves meant that the slave quarter had no

"web" to be part of, which in turn diminished the reality of the slave story. As with the architectural historian's locks, the slave houses would acquire value in relation to other objects, and in this case would achieve the greatest "authenticity" in relation to a master's house.

In looking at the "acquisition" of these slave objects--the buildings and their contents--we are looking at a "collection" which the museum procured not by restoring or purchasing old objects, but by creating new ones. The cabins, of course, were not unique to the museum in being totally constructed--or reconstructed--from the ground up. As mentioned, the Capitol and the Governor's Palace, among others, were rebuilt from their foundations in the early days of the museum. But in the case of the slave quarter, the reconstruction illustrated particularly well some of the museum's conflicting approaches regarding its philosophy of authenticity. For instance, one could argue that given the infinite care taken to reconstruct the slave cabins, as Saunders said, "authentically. . .using 18th-century methods," these structures should be considered more real, or more authentic, than either the Capitol or the Palace. The latter buildings were created in the 1930s using the finest new-old Virginia brick and state of the art construction methods, while the cabins were put up by museum craftsmen who hewed the logs by hand and used ropes to roll them up a ramp into place.

On the other hand, unlike the Capitol and the Palace, the slave quarter was not built according to a single blueprint or picture, on the exact spot of a particular 18th-century quarter. The Capitol was copied after a known building which had stood in 18th-century Williamsburg, as was the Palace, and each was placed on the foundation where its predecessor had stood. The slave quarter was devised from research among many examples of slave housing--not necessarily at the Carter's Grove site or even at nearby sites in Virginia, but from research in North Carolina and Maryland, and from 19th-century as well as 18th-century sites and sources. Too, there was a question from the beginning of the project about the cabins' "foundations"--that is, whether the spot chosen for their construction at Carter's Grove was the site of the plantation's 18th-century slave quarter, as opposed to some other kind of building or activity.

Almost from its conception, then, and certainly at its completion, the Carter's Grove slave quarter was envisioned by many in the museum as a composite of buildings, a collection of objects with which to talk about more than one particular history. While the cabins were designed to represent slave life at Carter's Grove, they were also supposed to represent a generic Tidewater Virginia slave quarter. Tension between the specific (Carter's Grove) and the general (Tidewater Virginia) emerged early on in the

design process, and along with it the parallel tension between presenting the slave as an individual, and slavery as an institution. In the first approach, the focus was on the slave as a person, that is, a group of particular people with names and ages belonging to Nathaniel Burwell. In the second, emphasis was on the institutionalized oppression of slaves, workers about which nothing was known but age and worth, information culled from York County's 18th-century tax records. There were, of course, construction decisions which raised interpretive issues common to both the general and the specific. One of these--maybe the most problematic--was a focus on the African origins of Virginia slaves. The idea was to suggest, if only in small ways, that there was an "African" culture which survived in the slave living areas of a colonial plantation. A difficulty with this, however, was that while the Africanist interpretation linked the specific and the generic presentations of 18th-century African Americans at the slave quarter, it also tended to create a generic "Africa" from which Virginia's 18th-century slave population all originated.

The multifunctional nature of the slave quarter emerged as the Carter's Grove project evolved through the conceptual and construction phases and into the interpretive stage. As Epperson points out, "the complex [was] not a literal reconstruction, but rather a compilation based upon site-

specific documentary and archaeological investigations, extensive comparative research, and the requirements and goals of CW's [Colonial Williamsburg] interpretative and educational programs" (Epperson 1990:31). Different departments in the museum were responsible for different facets of the compilation--Epperson cites archaeologists, historians, and educators to whom should be added architectural historians and curators--which resulted in different emphases in the slave story which were not always compatible.

Maybe the most important fact about the conception and construction of the slave quarter was that almost all of it was carried out by divisions in the museum in which there were no African-American staff members, and that the AAIP department had (at least from what I can determine) relatively little input. Rex Ellis's name rarely appeared in the minutes of the design study group meetings or in the construction committee minutes. The argument about where to put the quarter was among the architectural historians, the archaeologists, and a management executive. Among the museum's housewrights who actually built the slave quarter there was only one African-American craftsman. Although this was to be a "black" site, it was apparently not a problem that most of the thinking and planning for it was done without the benefit of a significant portion of the AAIP department. Once the quarter was complete, however,

this changed. When the AAIP interpreters took over the site, the quarter became their in surprising ways.

Chapter Seven

Slave History in Slave Cabins

The guides who volunteered for the slave quarter assignment said they can feel the presence of their ancestors in the humble dwellings.

"It's like them saying, 'It's about time somebody spoke for us,'" said Rachael Bradley, a supervisor of the interpreters.

(McNair 1989)

With the opening of the slave quarter in 1989, Colonial Williamsburg had at last a discrete collection of objects for talking about the African-American past, at least the slavery aspect of that past. The four log buildings at Carter's Grove were constructed and furnished to represent the living space of rural slaves in colonial Virginia. In a modest sense (some would say an ironic one) the area paralleled the historic area with its 500 buildings for interpreting the lives of 18th-century Anglo-American gentry and craftsmen. In earlier chapters I dealt with interpretations of the African-American past in the historic area, where few buildings were associated primarily with slaves and none were devoted solely to a slave's "free" time (i.e., a slave's "home"). The subject of this chapter is the presentation of slave life through the slave quarter, and particularly the roles of the houses, their contents, and surroundings in those presentations.

Given that the slave quarter represented the slaves' "own" space, one might expect from its interpreters perspectives on slavery that differed from those found in Colonial Williamsburg proper. This chapter explores the possibilities of that perspective: how it was, and was not, different--that is, the effects of these objects and spaces on the content and the form of the presentation of black history at the site. Did, for instance, the existence of a collection of objects assembled through a museum-wide effort (so presumably valued by the museum) cause AAIP interpreters to follow more closely a traditional interpretive approach, an approach that adhered to the museum rule which frowned on presenting any account of the past which could not be meticulously documented? Or was it the case that having a "pure" slave site intensified the tendency of interpreters to resist standard museum interpretive methodology? And, the most important question, how, if at all, did the slave quarter interpretation figure in the reproduction of racism which I saw occurring elsewhere in the museum?

Preliminaries: Exhibit, Film, and Brochure

Visitors to Carter's Grove arrived at the reception center, a contemporary brick building set unobtrusively in a grove of towering oaks at the edge of a ravine. Inside the center were a theatre, an exhibit area, and a book and gift shop, along with a small vending area, public restrooms, and

several offices. Admission was either via one of the historic area tickets, which included Carter's Grove, or by payment of the \$8.00 entrance fee (the vast majority had an inclusive ticket). Visitors received a brochure which contained a map, a brief history of the overall site, descriptions of the four Carter's Grove exhibit areas--the slave quarter, mansion, Wolstenholme Towne, and (beginning in 1991) the Winthrop Rockefeller Archaeology Museum--and suggestions for guiding themselves through the property.

They were encouraged to begin by walking through the exhibit, "The People of Carter's Grove," a presentation of the Carter's Grove property through artifacts, labels, maps, and illustrations, and by attending "A Thing Called Time," described in the brochure as "a fourteen-minute multi-image slide presentation." Together, the exhibit and slide presentation were billed in the brochure as preparing the visitor "for the 400 years of history you will encounter at Carter's Grove." The slide presentation focused on a history of the site, beginning with the landscape as it was (or was imagined to be) before the Europeans arrived, and moving through the changes brought about by people and events over the centuries. The exhibit dealt primarily with the human inhabitants through time, beginning with the Indians and covering English settlers, colonial plantation owners, African slaves, 19th-century farmers, and the last private owners in the 20th-century. Both the exhibit and

the slide program included an account of slavery, presenting it as one of several events which wrought change on the place.

The concentration on a geographical spot--the land and river--as the central "character" in these introductory presentations served several purposes. It seemed to solve the problem of how to incorporate into one site many time periods, a thorny issue for a museum committed to interpreting one moment (or one year, 1770). Whereas in the historic area, the "Becoming Americans" theme ostensibly focused the interpretive direction on process--on change--in reality choosing a finite period of time seemed to freeze the process. At the Carter's Grove reception center, in both the museum and the theatre, the notion of a process came across better. Although the title was inaccurate, since space, not time, was the subject, the main "character" was the geographical spot, and the plot was the process of change "experienced" by the site.

My hunch is that the focus on the place, rather than the objects at the place (slave quarter, mansion, archaeological discoveries), also served to satisfy the champions of each. By making them all part of the bigger story, subordinate to the over-arching saga of the physical place, none was privileged over the others. The disadvantage of this was that each sub-site became less than a spoke in the wheel; each became incidental in a much

larger scheme. If the museum's goal was trying to tell a story about slavery and to communicate its impact on American history and American life today, this treatment tended to minimize that goal. At the same time, two hundred years of slavery in America is a part of a continuum which began with a 17th-century Indian massacre and concluded with the conspicuous consumption of a 20th-century capitalist.

Whatever the impact of the exhibit or the film, neither was carried out of the building by the visitor (or the anthropologist). In contrast, the brochure, a self-guiding tool with its map and information about the sites and how to see them, became the visitors' companions while at Carter's Grove, influencing what they saw and how they saw it. Further, given that museum visitors in general take brochures home, it seems likely that the Carter's Grove brochure became the visitors' record and souvenir of their experience. For these reasons I am analyzing the brochure more thoroughly than the slide program or the exhibit.

Titled "400 Years of History at Carter's Grove," the brochure was, like most publications produced at Colonial Williamsburg, a model of its genre.⁷³ Printed on heavy tan paper in black ink with highlights of red and green (more

⁷³There were two brochures about the site, one used in 1990, before the archaeology museum was completed, and a second one distributed beginning in late June 1991 after the museum opened. In descriptions of the slave quarter, they were almost identical. I will refer to them as one in this analysis except for those specific differences between the two in the slave quarter treatment.

precisely, rust and sage), it was clearly written and simply illustrated, providing both historical and practical information relevant to visiting Carter's Grove and an easily accessible map showing the sites on the property. In its presentation of the separate sites, the brochure appeared to allot space to the slave quarter which was equal to that given the mansion and the Wolstenholme Towne-museum complex. Looked at more closely, however, its presentation in fact subtly diminished the African-American story and the slave quarter in at least three ways: in the recommendations for the route to visit specific sites and the amount of time at each; in the brief or non-existent mention of slavery in sections focused on sites other than the slave quarter; and, in the 1991 version, in the space it devoted to the slave quarter itself.

When fully open, the brochure (3" x 8" when folded) had two 16" x 22" sides, one of which included the map (approximately a third of the side); a brief paragraph about each of four areas--reception center, Wolstenholme Towne (combined with the museum in 1991), slave quarter, and mansion, in that order; a panel giving visiting details (hours, directions, etc.); and an overview of the history of the site (approximately a quarter of the side). The other side was divided into four roughly equal sections, with each section devoted to one of the four areas mentioned above.

The slave quarter appeared on the map precisely where it existed in the geographical landscape, the first site encountered when starting out from the reception center. Despite this, the recommended route for visiting the various sites at Carter's Grove did not start with the slave quarter. In two places, once on either side of the brochure, the following sentence concluded the touring instructions. It read "Check the welcome board for today's schedule of events and proceed across the pedestrian bridge to Wolstenholme Towne, the slave quarter, and the mansion" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1990a). One might argue that the "author" of the brochure was presenting the sites in chronological order, reminding visitors of the time span covered and not necessarily suggesting a specific route. A visitor will be seeing a 17th-century site, move to objects representing the 18th and 19th centuries, and end at the mansion, which, though built in the 18th century focused on its 20th-century incarnation and inhabitants.

This argument could be persuasive, especially since the brief descriptive paragraphs about the sites appeared on the page in the same chronological order. But two facts undermine it: the specific language of the sentence, and the inclusion in the 1991 brochure of the archaeology museum. The wording and tone of the sentence were those of a command or a set of directions. It was a statement telling the reader what to do and how to do it. "Check the

welcome board and proceed across the bridge to Wolstenholme Towne. . ." All that was missing was the word "then" inserted between "and" and "proceed." The problem is that if one were following the map, Wolstenholme Towne would logically be the final site visited, not the first. A visitor setting out from the reception center for Wolstenholme Towne would encounter the slave quarter first, as the first part of the main path to all of the Carter's Grove sites passes within feet of the cabin area.

But suppose this curious reversal was a matter of listing the sites according to how they would have appeared chronologically in Carter's Grove's 400-year history. One might accept this explanation but for the similar sentence in the 1991 brochure. It read, "Check the welcome board for today's schedule of events and proceed across the pedestrian bridge to the archaeology museum and Wolstenholme Towne, the slave quarter, and the mansion" (Colonial Williamsburg foundation 1991b, italics mine). Here the visitor was again instructed to walk out of the reception center, cross the pedestrian bridge, and go to the next closest site after the slave quarter, the museum--to start, in other words, with the most recent structure on the property. Granted, the museum was about Martin's Hundred, the 17th-century settlement of which Wolstenholme was a part, so that if one accepts the logic of starting with Wolstenholme Towne, then this companion to it might be a logical destination. But,

again, if one were following the map, the museum might be the second site visited, not the first.

Whereas the brochures' recommendation for the order of touring the sites at Carter's Grove seemed to diminish the importance of the slave quarter by taking it out of the map's natural sequence, the length of time suggested for seeing each site also diminished the importance of the quarter, in this case by giving a significantly shorter estimate for how long one would need at the site. In a paragraph outlining what visitors should expect at the slave quarter, the brochures made the following recommendation, "Allow fifteen to thirty minutes to see the quarter." This paragraph appeared in two different sections of the brochures. The recommendation for Wolstenholme Towne was forty-five minutes; for the archaeology museum, thirty minutes to one hour; and for the mansion, forty-five minutes. Yet Wolstenholme Towne, as described in the brochures, was nothing more than "partial reconstructions. . .described by audio-tapes that can be heard at barrel-housed stations around the site" (Ibid.).⁷⁴

⁷⁴This comes from the 1991 brochure which put the archaeological museum first and the archaeological site second. In the 1990 brochure, the comparable paragraph began, "The voice of the archaeologist who directed the excavations at Wolstenholme Towne can be heard at eleven barrel-housed stations around the site. His narrative describes what was found and how the evidence was used to document the partial reconstruction of palisades, fences, and buildings." My view is that the voice of the excavator served as a kind of authenticating "object" in itself, providing substance for an otherwise sketchy exhibit. This

Just as the route to the sites implied a ranking in their importance, the time required at the sites suggested a ranking in terms of their value as objects and of the narratives associated with them.

Slavery and slave life were also minimized in the section of the brochure presenting the history of Carter's Grove. In an approach similar to that of the film and exhibit, this account focused ostensibly on the four centuries of human life at the site. In fact, the chief topic was the inhabitants of the Carter's Grove mansion. In the narrative of some 550 words, there was one sentence about slavery: "Their [the gentlemen planters'] wealth and resulting power were built on tobacco and the gangs of enslaved Africans and African-Virginians who grew it for the" (Ibid.).

Also in this account, concerned so with the activities of the mansion's owners, the narrative ignored the fact of who had actually constructed the house: "Burwell inherited the property and by 1750 began to build on it. . . ." In one sense, of course, he did build the house--his resources made it possible. But in the section of the brochure devoted to the house and its garden the descriptions were

could become particularly important if visitors were to see the 17th-century Towne and the 18th-century quarter as little communities, the one for settlers and the other for slaves. As discussed in Chapter Six, Noel Hume's fear was that the conjectural, the quarter, would become for the visitor more "real" than the better documented Wolstenholme Towne site.

the same; there was no evidence of the system of slavery or the slaves who constructed and maintained the mansion and its grounds. For instance, there was a paragraph which began, "The great house that Carter Burwell completed in 1750. . .," and concluded, "the fine brickwork of the exterior remains from their [the owners'] day as statements of the craftsmanship and taste of eighteenth-century Virginians." Finally, in yet another paragraph, one describing the reconstructed garden of the mansion, was a sentence beginning, "Some of the plants that would have been grown in a garden of this period. . ." (Ibid.).

A visitor who stopped to think would realize that Carter Burwell did not literally complete the house, that the craftsmanship evident in the fine brickwork was neither his nor that of his son, and that the plants were not likely to have been grown by the master. But here was an opportunity for a museum with a stated commitment to presenting slavery to present it. As with the Monticello tour in which the visitor was told "these doors were built," omitting any reference to who did the work, the brochure's narrative made the slave labor of the mansion invisible.

The other side of the brochure was divided into four roughly equal sections--reception center, slave quarter, Wolstenholme Towne (and the museum, in 1991), and the mansion. In each section was a sketch of the site with text. The 1990 brochure had a drawing of the slave quarter,

showing the three slave cabins and the corn crib, and including fenced gardens and chicken enclosures. The text focused on the discovery of the "pits" (never referred to as root cellars), using language that emphasized the uncertainty of their origins (as if in response to Ivor Noel Hume's concerns about ethical reconstruction): "Initially [archaeologists] thought these pits were evidence of a tannery. Further research suggested that the pits marked the site of a Carter's Grove slave quarter" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1990a, italics mine). The text also described the construction of the buildings, referring to the activity as "reconstruction," and explained that slaves who did agricultural work lived in the quarter, as opposed to those who served the great house and so lived in or near it.

This text about the slave quarter in the 1991 brochure was identical to that in the 1990 edition, but the sketch was different. Two of the buildings were eliminated from the drawing, reducing it by about half and making room for the addition of a paragraph under the heading "Agricultural Landscape." The paragraph focused on Colonial Williamsburg's rare breeds program for plants and animals, mentioning slavery only circuitously: "This landscape of fields, orchards, and animals suggests how an eighteenth-century plantation would have looked and, with the encircling woods, represents the workplace for many of the

residents of the nearby quarter" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1991b, italics mine).

Whereas in the description of the mansion the museum missed the opportunity to raise visitor awareness about who was responsible for the fine brickwork, here it missed, or avoided, the chance to be explicit about what work was like for most rural slaves. Words like "workplace" and "residents" and even "encircling woods" deny the stark, compulsory aspect of slavery. They suggest a 20th-century office complex--the workplace--located conveniently near a condominium--the quarter--in a pleasing woods-and-fields landscape. I think that this description did more than miss being explicit; it whitewashed the story of slavery. Ironically, the agricultural theme which during the 1970's and 1980's obscured the importance of slavery in plans for presenting Carter's Grove as an 18th-century plantation, resurfaced in the brochure. Including this text diminished the slave quarter by reducing illustration space, but a more dangerous consequence was calling the dehumanized victims of the planters' greed simply residents, and terming the fields where they worked under threat of punishment a workplace.⁷⁵

⁷⁵I did not discuss the brochure with the people at Colonial Williamsburg who might have explained it. Was it just a matter of the publications department failing to understand the subtle effects of these words and descriptions? Was it intentional, a move by marketing people to downplay some of the horror of slavery? If so, why did the architectural historians and the AAIP department fail to protest? But of course they may have protested. It may simply have been that nobody in the museum noticed,

The Tour

I first went through the slave quarter in March 1990, the second year it was open to the public, and I continued to visit it until the conclusion of our Colonial Williamsburg fieldwork in August 1991. Throughout that time the tours followed the same format. Most visitors arrived at the quarter directly from the reception center (the wording of the brochure notwithstanding) and drifted, or were hailed by an AAIP interpreter, into an area near the cabins just off the main path to the mansion, a space of bare ground with a scraggly tree and a few rough benches. Here the interpreter invited them to sit until a group of at least a dozen had arrived for the tour. As the tree could shade only the interpreter and some of the visitors, in summer the wait and subsequent introduction were generally sweltering.

All of the AAIP interpretive staff did stints at the slave quarter. In my first summer a rotation lasted a full unbroken month; the second year rotations varied and most interpreters split the work week between town and the quarter. At least half of them thought of Carter's Grove as a hardship post. They complained about the weather, primarily the heat--with justification, since nothing at the quarter was air conditioned. Nor was there heat during the

which could be the most important information of all for the anthropologist.

cooler months, so that with the quarter open from March to December tours were often cold and damp. (My first visit was on a blustery, cloudy day in March; visitors and interpreter alike were bundled up in their coats and scarves, lingering in the unheated cabins for some protection from the wind.)

Had there been a comfortable break room the less enthusiastic interpreters would have felt better about the assignment. But the break area occupied half of the first cabin on the tour, a room with a fan and a water cooler closed to the public. Asked why they did not have a location for breaks and lunch in the nearby reception center, interpreters said that the museum's management did not want them so far from the site.

On the other hand, for telling the story of slave life, having cabins at the temperatures experienced by their 18th-century inhabitants lent an undeniable authenticity to the site. But it also leads one to speculate on how much more "authentic" the Wythe House or the Governor's Palace would have been without climate control. Interestingly, interpreters in those places (and virtually all of the exhibit sites in the historic area but the kitchens and laundries were heated and air conditioned) would often point out a building's off-limit areas as the location of climate control equipment, or discuss with pride the merits of a recently installed system. In every case they explained

such systems as necessary for the protection of the objects at the site. The comfort of the visitors might be mentioned as well, but the primary concern was curatorial conservation and preservation of the building and its furnishings.

While this rationale that objects must be protected through climate control was a perfectly valid one for a museum, it was also one more way in which the slave furnishings could be seen as less valuable than other museum objects, those in the buildings with controlled climates. From the monetary perspective they may have been less valuable--the 18th-century air pump in Mr. Wythe's study would fetch far more than the reproduction carpenter tools in the slave quarter, probably far more than an entire reconstructed slave cabin. The problem, of course, was that in a museum the value of the historical account, and of the people in the account, was derived from the objects associated with the account. Placing a lower monetary value on an item had the effect of placing a lower social or cultural value on the story and people associated with the item.

Another discomfort of working at the slave quarter, one always mentioned by its interpreters, were the snakes and ticks. The snakes were apparently more an annoyance than a danger, but certainly a real annoyance. The ticks, most interpreters acknowledged, had been a problem the first year when the wood of the cabins was new and the site not so well

trod. The interpreters I pressed on the issue had not generally had repeated encounters with either. But the fact that such creatures had been there seemed to symbolize the marginality experienced by the interpreters presenting the marginalized lives of slaves. Snakes and ticks would have been a problem for anyone in the country in the 18th century, black or white. But in 1990 only the AAIP interpreters had the problem, and, while it was a hardship that bonded members into a group, I think it also reinforced their sense of isolation from the museum's mainstream story and its interpreters.

Pressed further, some interpreters would mention a more difficult issue: problems with racist remarks from visitors, or what were felt to be racist attitudes. Those who would discuss racist behavior as a reason for why they preferred to work in the historic area as opposed to the slave quarter said that their anxiety lay in fearing it would happen, not in frequent actual experiences. There was no question that visitors (and white staff) made racist remarks. Rex Ellis could cite a range of examples, including one of the most egregious--the visitor who, picking up a little African-American boy in costume, one of the children who participated in Colonial Williamsburg's summer program, addressed him as a "little monkey," and said, "Now don't you think you're better off in America than in Africa?" (Black History Month program, taped 2/27/90).

An event of the early eighties, it had become a legend in the museum, at least among the AAIP staff. What concerned the interpreters about the slave quarter was the very authenticity which the architectural historians, curators, and AAIP interpreters had struggled to achieve: that the realism created through having the quarter, so good for giving voice to the ancestors, would be the very quality that elicited racist comments.

This "realism" was an ironic instance of the museum's strength becoming a liability. Visitors were encouraged to suspend disbelief at Colonial Williamsburg, to "step back in time" and imagine they were talking to George Wythe or Mr. Powell. It was precisely because this so often worked that visitors seemed able to think of a 20th-century interpreter in costume who was not pretending to be in the 18th century as an 18th-century person. I think that AAIP interpreters experienced a special problem with this: that even when not in an 18th-century outfit they felt their color was a kind of costume, one which identified them with an 18th-century black person. To an extent they intended this identification; consider Rachael Bradley's comment about speaking for the ancestors at the beginning of this chapter.

The concern was that the realism at the slave quarter coupled with the presence of an African-American interpreter--even one in 20th-century attire--could prompt a visitor to think of the interpreter as an 18th-century

inhabitant of the quarter--as a slave. For a white interpreter in costume at the Wythe House to be thought of as an inhabitant of Wythe's house was one thing; for an African-American interpreter at the slave quarter to be thought of as an inhabitant of a slave house was something different. Rachael Bradley wanted to speak for her ancestors, not become one of them, but an African-American interpreter in her natural "black" costume felt that in the eyes of a white visitor she ran the risk of "becoming" the slave inhabitant of the quarter. For most AAIP interpreters, being mistaken for slaves was being seen as inferior. This might lead visitors to respond with insulting--racist--remarks, and worse, according to Ellis, the interpreters themselves internalized the inferiority which (real or imagined) the whites attributed to them.⁷⁶

Even in the planning stages of the slave quarter interpretation, Ellis and his staff had worried about this possible negative aspect of the site. As a precaution, it

⁷⁶In his Supreme Court argument in *Brown versus the Board of Education* in 1954, Thurgood Marshall had as an expert witness psychologist Kenneth Clark. Clark had researched the consequences of southern African Americans internalizing the white view that they were inferior. In a test using black dolls and white dolls with black children who attended segregated schools in Georgia, Virginia, and Kansas, Clark had found that the children routinely preferred white dolls to black dolls. And when he asked them questions about which was the "good" doll and which was the "bad" one, the children had equated white with good and black with bad. Finally, when given a choice of dolls to play with, the black children had invariably picked white dolls (Clark 1993).

was decided that except for organized staged performances, interpreters would do no first-person interpretation at the quarter. Also, even though all of their third-person tours would be given in a third-person, 20th-century persona, Ellis and his staff staunchly resisted having interpreters wear slave costumes. Having nothing but third-person interpretation was a given by the time we arrived in the museum. The costume issue, on the other hand, was not. There were non-AAIP staff--management-level administrators in the museum--who felt that interpreters at the slave quarter should be in costumes, just like interpreters in the historic area.

The head of the crafts division, a man who had been at Colonial Williamsburg for some thirty years, was particularly adamant, although the slave quarter, not being a venue for crafts except on special occasions when a basket maker or woodworker was present, was not under his direction. (He was the person who had been in charge of the interpreters in 18th-century outfits who were the wheelwrights, coopers, shoemakers and so forth, the people who, he believed, did more to preserve and present the "past" than even the curators, since these craftspeople were actually "producing" 18th-century objects in the 18th-century manner.) His concern was exactly Ellis's concern, but seen from the other side. For him, not having costumes was disjunctive; visitors suspended disbelief in town and

then were faced with people in "regular" clothes at the slave quarter. To him, the very thing achieved by costumes in town--helping visitors, and maybe the interpreters themselves to step back in time--would be lost at the quarter. What I never was able to determine was whether he saw regular clothes--or the "costume" option of 1991, a red polo shirt with a Carter's Grove logo on the chest--as polluting the kind of "history" that went on in the historic area. It could have been that for him this departure sullied the museum's interpretive efforts just as for Noel Hume perspective the slave quarter sullied the museum's archaeological efforts.

As on an Other Half Tour, with its presentation of a standard body of information, a visitor to the slave quarter heard certain information on every tour, but each tour was to some extent individualized by its interpreter. The range of a dozen AAIP interpreters ran from Sarah Lawrence, who led my first visit, to John Richards to Beverley Jones to Frederick Saunders. Lawrence, who would never expressed an opinion to me--an outsider--about interpreting slave history at the slave quarter, interacted with visitors as host to guests, presenting information but always with an eye to keeping her charges comfortable.

By contrast, Richards, who was as well versed in the tour's material as anyone I encountered, seemed on his guard. Unlike Lawrence, and almost all of the other AAIP

interpreters, he refused to allow me to tape record him, either at the slave quarter or on the Other Half Tour. The son of an Alabama sharecropper who had moved to Chicago to raise ten children (most of whom were now college graduates) Richards was working on a master's degree for which an analysis of museum visitor surveys was part of his thesis. He liked the stint at the slave quarter and was deeply engaged in his interpretation, seeing it as his responsibility to impress on visitors all the realities--the horrors--of slavery.⁷⁷

Beverley Jones, whom I described in Chapter Five in connection with the kitchen at Wetherburn's Tavern, said she was not fond of the slave quarter rotation, mainly because of the isolation. In contrast to the urban-rural model of 18th-century slavery that was usually presented in the museum (scrutiny by the master in the city versus relative freedom from white eyes in the plantation slave quarter), interpreters themselves had more freedom in town where they often moved between sites and tours during the work day,

⁷⁷In August 1991 I saw an article in the Williamsburg Gazette about Sarah Lawrence singing in and directing a choral group of museum employees, black and white. This aspect of her personal life seemed to reflect what I sensed on her tours, an attitude of racial cooperation, of--literally--harmony both for its own sake and to create a product. John Richards' perspective was that all aspects of slavery should be put in front of people, that the grimness and pain should never be soft-pedaled. He once described to me an outreach program he had presented to a mostly black sixth grade class in Maryland, telling how he had shocked students and teachers alike with his explicit explanation of a slave being drawn and quartered.

with time for lunch at a nearby restaurant, or an errand to the bank or post office. An engaging and knowledgeable interpreter, Jones was "cool" in the hip sense. I remember her in beige linen walking shorts and a red silk blouse, her nod to the Carter's Grove cotton knit polo shirt (which I doubt she would ever have worn). She had been an interpreter in Colonial Williamsburg's African-American programs for longer than anyone but Rex Ellis, but did not seem to take the whole AAIP business too seriously, being generally on the lookout for a new job, in or out of the museum.

In his efforts to put visitors at ease, Frederick Saunders (also described in connections with Wetherburn's Tavern in Chapter Five) resembled Lawrence or Jones more than Richards in his approach to interpreting the slave quarter. During my second summer at Colonial Williamsburg in the museum, he became an apprentice in the cooper's shop, a pioneering effort to combine his first-person interpretation of Adam Waterford, Williamsburg's 18th-century free black barrel maker, with the skills of a bona fide museum craftsman. Whereas Richards rarely let listeners lose sight of slavery's darkest elements, founded on the white abuse of blacks, Saunders took a conciliatory approach, dwelling on the common ground between blacks and whites, in both the 18th and 20th centuries.

A tour of the slave quarter began once the requisite number of visitors--a dozen or so--had assembled. Generally the interpreter started by outlining the archaeological and architectural research that had gone into the siting and construction of the cabins. Despite Noel Hume's fears, interpreters I encountered talked as easily about the buildings in terms of their 20th-century genesis as a museum project as about them as objects associated with an account of the 18th century. Indeed, the archaeological information was crucial to establishing the site's importance, and thus the significance, of the African-American story.

Before giving an explanation of why the site was important--the "only reconstructed slave quarter on the original site"--interpreters usually talked about the museum's "law" of interpretation: "If we don't have research--documented sources--to quote the information, we don't talk about it" (Saunders, 7/18/90). They then continued by elaborating on the uniqueness of the location and of the construction of the buildings, focusing on the role played by the archaeological and historical data in giving the slave quarter the authenticity so important to the museum. All of the interpreters gave versions of this information, citing the root cellars as the absolute proof, and I heard more than one presentation which included an account of the reassessment of the tanning pits.

While still at the benches in front of the first cabin, interpreters gave an overview of the site, pointing out the three slave cabins, and mentioning the fourth building, the corn crib, to note that it was better constructed than the houses, and that visitors should be sure to examine the lock on its door. Some interpreters implied that the more solidly built corn crib showed that the master valued his crops more than the workers who grew them; some interpreters said it outright. But I also heard an interpreter explain the well-built corn crib in a different way. She said that the slaves themselves chose to build it better "because if that crop is ruined you are the one who has to start over again from scratch" (Jones, 9/28/90). Their interpretation of the lock took a more traditional line of master-slave interaction, one of suspicion and antagonism. Calling attention to the lock's exceptional sturdiness, they said the master would have required it to protect his corn from his thieving slaves.

In discussing the three cabins, interpreters took two approaches--that is, they presented two very different kinds of information--but the two were mingled. On the one hand, visitors were given historical and architectural details of each house type and something about the construction materials and the construction process of each. In other words, they were given "facts" about the site for which there was traditional documentation. It was explained that

the clapboard building set on the dirt was called a gang house, a sort of barracks for single male field hands, and that on a big plantation it would be moved to different spots where the workers needed to be. The log house, visitors were told, had two non-connecting sides and would have housed two separate families.⁷⁸

Mixed with this information, which was drawn from the architectural historians' detailed documented research but research which made the structures generic rather than specific to Carter's Grove, was information about the lives of the "twenty-four slaves who might have lived at a Carter's Grove quarter." The material about the slaves was drawn from Burwell ledgers and tax lists, so in a sense it was more specific than the documentation for the buildings. But in fact it was no more specific to the site than the buildings were. The AAIP interpreters talked, for instance, about how many slaves lived in each house, and what sorts of work they did. They referred to the lives of Venus, Sukey, and Daniel and their children, told about Hannah (who lived

⁷⁸Interpreters throughout the museum would explain 18th-century objects and ideas in 20th-century terms. Some examples of this in the slave quarter were calling the moveable barracks "the first mobile home" and the log house the "first duplex," describing the communal space between the two houses as "your family room," and explaining the position of Daniel the driver in terms of "middle management." While the intention was to provide visitors with modern parallels with which to imagine the past, to me the phrases created the same problems as using "residents" and "workplace" in the brochure. They diminished the harsh realities of slavery.

at the mansion) and Bristol, about Joe the carpenter and his family, and about Old Paris. As one interpreters explained,

We talk about twenty-four people living here in six rooms; fourteen adults, ten children. At the time of his death, Nathaniel Burwell--sixty-five slaves were listed in the inventory list so we have taken twenty-four names from the list, field hands, and want to suggest the spaces that they may have lived in. So I will use names in the spaces to. . .bring you a little closer to the situation. (Lawrence, 5/4/90)

Colonial Williamsburg's research had shown how many slaves the Burwells had in 1770, with some names, ages, and family relationships, and reasonable assumptions had been made about how many might have lived at a home farm quarter like Carter's Grove. But which ones was entirely speculation. Nevertheless, these shadowy individuals were called up in the interpretations to people the site. Old Paris, for instance, was described as "African born, and over 70 years old, so that's why he has his own little shed," and Daniel was said to live in the single-family house with its own garden because he was the driver, "the slave who did what an overseer did only wasn't paid." My point is that the narrative about slavery at the slave quarter was given form through objects created from generic models and content through characters generated from statistics.⁷⁹

⁷⁹It could be argued that the two kinds of information found in these interpretations--the documented and the speculative--were not that different. Both derive from statistical evidence. Is there a line between objects and

Interpreters gave the visitors most of the information about the site during the introduction, and then led them through to see for themselves. They began with the single room of the first cabin, an approximately 15' by 15' space furnished with a chair, a table with some pottery and dishes, and blankets in the corner. There was, in season, fresh produce on the table or in a basket near the fireplace--gourds, greens, peppers, corn, melons. I was told by one museum historian that during the quarter's first summer watermelons had been part of the display, but that they had been replaced with cantaloupes. He explained that two sources--Burwell's farm records and evidence from seeds in archaeological excavations--had shown a huge production of watermelons at Carter's Grove, but that a negative stereotype of blacks and watermelons--happy, dumb slaves whose grinning mouths and crescent-shaped pieces of pink fruit resembled each other, their obvious contentment with a transitory treat proof of a childlike intelligence--had led to the substitution of other kinds of melons (Kelly interview, 7/3/90). The historian was aware that this change reflected a political agenda. It was a case in which the historical documentation was overruled to avoid a

people--that generic houses can be developed from statistics but specific people cannot be?

narrative which might seem, or indeed be, denigrating to the museum's 20th-century African Americans.⁸⁰

The room was too small for the group to linger (except in March), which meant that visitors looked around as they passed through, trying to connect the objects with the relevant information in the introduction. Exiting through the opposite door they arrived in an open space bounded on opposite sides by the two buildings with the circular fences of the garden and chicken yard at either end. The interpreters talked about the slaves' lives here in terms of communal living, and focused on the area as evidence of African culture, a thesis which they said was supported by the fences. Archaeologists had found the remains of a circular pattern of post holes which interpreters presented as strong evidence that there were slaves at this site, and more important, that African slaves brought their culture with them to Virginia, and held onto it.

Interpreters continued the tour by inviting visitors to look into the lean-to connected to one end of the second house, where there was a large hole thought to be a root cellar. Interestingly, interpreters were not adamant about this root cellar; some even said that this particular hole

⁸⁰Handler cites a 1937 issue of National Geographic in which an article on Colonial Williamsburg, then recently opened, featured a photograph of several black children eating watermelon. Under the picture was the cutline, "There is one custom that time has not changed," and the text talked about "pickaninnies" eating watermelon (Handler 1987:21).

was probably made when a tree stump was removed at the site. But the hole enabled them to talk again about root cellars and the purpose they served for storing "their vegetables, their clothes, and other personal items" (Saunders, 7/18/90). More important, it allowed them to pick up the African theme through Old Paris, "over seventy years old and African born," who, they said, probably lived in the lean-to. They explained that the lean-to was given him by the other slaves as a way of honoring him, and noted that intrinsic to "African culture was the honoring of age and wisdom."

Interpreters used (the possibility of) Old Paris's African birth as a means for bringing up the Middle Passage. They explained that he deserved a private living space, given his decades of slave life in close quarters with many people, but especially given his journey to America on a slave ship. At this point in the tour, most interpreters solicited volunteers for the tight pack-loose pack demonstration, the same one used on the Other Half Tour. Old Paris also served as the starting point for talking about what interpreters described as aspects of African culture--respect for the old and extended families. At least one interpreter suggested that he "held onto his African gods, that he went into the woods and talked a funny language" (Susan Josephson, 8/91).

As the touchstone for including Africa, the character of Old Paris illustrated that curious aspect of interpretations at the slave quarter, the mixing and mingling mentioned above, in which interpreters talking about a past derived from statistics (as opposed to specific documents about specific sites and individuals) did not seem to privilege the documented over the speculative. Here, where the guides had concrete objects--bricks and mortar (or chinks and logs)--they resorted to an almost imaginary figure to ground their narrative. Old Paris was "believed" to have been African born; his root cellar may not have been a root cellar; it was questionable whether he had actually lived at Carter's Grove. All that could be documented was that Nathaniel Burwell had a seventy-one-year-old slave named Paris. It was not known where he lived or whether he had been born in Africa, and certainly not whether he had a separate living space. Yet much of the information presented on this part of the tour was derived from the "existence" of Old Paris.

And he was not an anomaly in the interpretation of the slave quarter. Less specific but similar, for example, were these references, taken from various tours: "So you look at Venus at 50; she's not going [to the fields]," or "We seem to think Joe the carpenter, his wife Nanny and three children may have lived in this space," or "This is the home here of someone in management--Daniel, the foreman." Those

twenty-four slaves referred to by name, age, familial relationship, and even job who peopled the quarter were as much, or more, a part of the "evidence" of the interpretations as the houses and gardens. Again, the individuals derived from the statistics were as important to the presentation as the objects created from statistics.

The tour concluded with a short walk up an incline to the single-family cabin, which was the focal point for the two topics that ended all of the interpretations: the slave in a hierarchical situation, and the significance of the slave quarter for the white population. Interpreters presented this cabin as the house of a slave named Daniel. They explained that while twenty slaves probably lived in the two other buildings, Daniel, as driver (the term for a slave overseer), was rewarded with his own house and private garden which he shared with his wife and four children. Interpreters noted the geographical symbolism of Daniel's house, between the mansion located farther up the slope and the cabins of the other slaves down slightly below it. They also pointed out the differences in the furnishings between the other cabins and Daniel's house. Here there was a solid table, several chairs, a number of pots and pans and, especially, a raised wooden bed frame and straw mattress.

Finally, visitors were asked to think about the difficulties of Daniel's role: "Who knows about middle management? Caught between a what?" (Lawrence--she was

looking for the answer: "a rock and a hard place"). Or, "You think he's placed in the most comfortable position on this property? Most definitely not. That's why he has a fenced yard that's going to allow him privacy and you would want a fenced yard, too, being in that position that he was in." (Jones) Or, "Let's go see what management is doing because this is the home of someone in management, Daniel, the foreman [sic]." (Saunders)

The interpreters stressed the tension in Daniel's situation--trying to please the boss and your subordinates at the same time; and the advantages--better treatment as evidenced by the better living quarters. Many of them elaborated on Daniel's role as the person who had to punish his fellow slaves, using the opportunity to describe some of those punishments.

He carried out the discipline. For runaways you cut off toes, you pull out toenails. Thirty-nine lashes is most common. For stealing a hog, after two hours of having your ear nailed to the pillory you could get it cut off. He carries it out. He is still a slave, not guaranteed family or freedom. (Lawrence)

Using Daniel and "middle management" the interpreters brought home their final point: that the slave quarter, and specifically Daniel's house, represented the living conditions of ninety-five percent of the white population in 18th-century Virginia. Their tone was almost triumphant. The slave quarter did not represent only the lives of black

slaves, it represented the past for all but a tiny minority of whites.

When you go up there to the mansion, guys, . . . you're looking at one to two percent of the Virginia population, one to two. . . . When you're in the restoration [historic area] you're looking at less than ten percent, less than ten percent. Ninety percent of the white population lived just like that single-family dwelling there with the exception of one thing, the items that are inside would not have been inside the single family dwelling for the average white in the 18th century. (Jones)

This information, that most whites lived like blacks, was on every tour. When I began to think about it, I felt the other shoe had dropped. Here in the context of Colonial Williamsburg, the storybook village which was middle America's ideal image of itself, were these stark, even desperate, little one- and two-room structures with which those Americans were really supposed to identify.

Indeed, some interpreters took the notion farther. They would note that while the "mansion is nice, . . . it's two percent of the population. That's not very truthful" (Lawrence, 5/4/90, italics mine). These guides did not state outright that the buildings in Colonial Williamsburg presented an inaccurate, even a deceptive image of the past. They did, however, suggest that it was inaccurate for visitors to see those buildings as the places where they would have lived in the 18th century. This, of course, was precisely what most visitors to Colonial Williamsburg were doing, encouraged "to step into the 18th century" by

everyone from President Longworth to the anonymous visitor's aide.

In the midst of emphasizing the similarity in the living conditions between slaves and most 18th-century whites, interpreters never failed to point out the key difference in those lives: the whites were free. But, interestingly, they did not dwell on this, perhaps in an effort not to undo whatever sense had been created of "becoming Americans"--together. Blacks and whites had become Americans in a joint venture, was the message. Instead, they moved on to the ultimate point of the tour (at least on every one in my experience): that the slave quarter recreates physically the common ground for most of Virginia's 18th-century population, and represents symbolically that commonality for 20th-century society.

This building here, this whole group of buildings is nothing more than wood and mud. They're sitting on some more mud but the meaning behind these buildings is far more important. It talks about white people, black people, female contributions. An effective history is a history that includes everybody in that culture, female, blacks, poor whites, rich whites, Native Americans--the folks that contributed toward creating one of the greatest countries in the world and I'm talking about America. (Saunders, 7/18/90)

This was the most rhetorically patriotic of the examples, but all of the interpretations did as this one and tried to close the distance between the black slave as represented by the slave quarter and the white visitor touring it. There was a three-part message: one, our pasts

were not so different, which was related to the second part, that America was made by the contributions of all its people; and three, that although we cannot change history we need to know about it to be able to cooperate in the present and future.

Conclusion

Many of the issues surrounding slavery that were debated in presentations in town and debated during the development of the slave quarter, resurfaced in interpretations at the quarter--foremost among them, that of how far to go in impressing on visitors the worst aspects of slavery. My impression was that the AAIP interpreters were delivering a "softer" message at Carter's Grove, that they were attempting to de-emphasize the harshness of slave life. For instance, interpreters focused on the relative freedom enjoyed by the slaves living in the quarter, emphasizing the facts that these people had their "own" houses, simple as they were, and that their distance from the watchful eye of the master provided them some respite. These conditions, according to the interpreters, gave the slaves' lives at least a hint of the autonomy which we associate with being human, being an individual, and having some control over one's life.

My sense of a "softer" message was reinforced when I looked more carefully at individual presentations of the

slave quarter and realized that nearly all contained the upbeat, "we are one," theme. "We are one" competed with "life is stark," but in the hands of most interpreters the former became the dominant theme of the two. Curiously, however, I am not sure that their goal was to minimize slavery. I think that the interpreters' focus on the similarities between black and white housing in the 18th century--the explanation that most whites had lived in housing similar to the slave cabins--had a goal for which I, at any rate, was unprepared. By concentrating on the similarities between black and white, the interpreters shifted the visitors' orientation away from an identification with the slave occupants of the cabins, and also, if briefly, away from an identification with the owner-occupants of the Carter's Grove mansion. Instead, the AAIP interpreters suggested a perspective novel in my experience at Colonial Williamsburg. In this approach, white visitors were encouraged to identify with their "own" white ancestors--the vast group of people in 18th-century Virginia who were neither slaves nor large landowners. It was a group which seemed to coincide in ways with the American 20th-century white middle class to which most Colonial Williamsburg visitors belonged.

This new identification was part of a message that could be read beyond the interpretation given at the beginning of all the tours: if you look at what they had

and how they lived, the vast majority of blacks and whites in the 18th century were more alike than different. Imbedded in this interpretation was the notion that if blacks and whites were alike then, we are alike today. But finally, there was the message that the greatest bond between the groups in the past and in the present, was the fact of the common oppressor. The interpretation suggested that the oppressors in the 18th century were the white elite, the powerful landowner and gentry class, and that the same was true for us here today--for you, the white visitors, and for us, the black interpreters.

The AAIP interpreters acknowledged but did not emphasize the obvious difference: that the whites were free while the blacks were not. Indeed, they sometimes suggested that since the blacks were enslaved--even though both groups lived much the same--it followed that the whites, who seemed to do no better in their housing, may have been the less enterprising of the two.

The AAIP interpreters, then, positioned the 20th-century visitor as a descendant of those white small farmers whose lives resembled their black slave neighbors. A crucial aspect in this positioning was that the AAIP interpreters did not identify themselves with the slaves in the quarter. Rachael Bradley spoke only of giving the slave ancestor a voice, not of taking on the role of the ancestor. Presenting their third-person interpretations wearing 20th-

century clothes, most AAIP guides distanced themselves from the people in their narratives. Visitors were guided into identifying not with a story about slavery but with the storytellers who were more like them, the visitors, and whom the visitors were encouraged to see as their peers. The characters in the narrative at the slave quarter were objects like the buildings they were made to inhabit, but neither the interpreters nor the visitors identified with those objects.

In setting up this identification between the black slaves and the non-elite whites, the 90 percent of the white colonial population referred to by AAIP interpreters, the interpreters attempted to co-opt the middle-class visitors into a new, non-elite "mainstream" narrative which was illustrated not by the Palace or even the cooper's shop but by the slave object, the slave quarter cabin. The interpreters were saying to the typical visitor, "You are like me and this is our 'mainstream.'" But given the potent effect of the central image presented at Colonial Williamsburg, that of the "silk pants patriot," it was an uneven contest.

My guess is that in the end, however, white visitors did not leave Carter's Grove or Colonial Williamsburg imagining themselves as inhabitants of the slave quarter; they left seeing themselves, at the most modest, as carpenters or coopers, as a Mrs. Powell or a Captain

Stewart. My view is that "we are one" may have removed black history at Colonial Williamsburg (and at the slave quarter), further from "white" history, emphasizing the gap between black and white, despite the best intentions of the AAIP interpreters. Visitors would not stop at seeing black and white as simply separate. Because separate has never been equal in America, at least as it relates to black and white, Colonial Williamsburg's "other half" would have emerged as the "lesser half," despite these efforts at the slave quarter to ally "us" and "other," living in our similar houses and exploited by our common oppressor.

Chapter Eight

Some Conclusions

So you look at the past and you start trying to pull all of those pieces together because one [the white population] was just as dependent on the other [the black population]. It really was. We were very, very co-dependent on one another.

(Christy Coleman, Judith Tour 8/1/90)

In presentations about slavery at Colonial Williamsburg AAIP interpreters would suggest that the lives of the 18th-century black "other half" were in a co-dependent balance with the lives of their white owners. Coleman's statement above, from the end of one of the Judith tours, is an example, and Frederick Saunders made similar comments in his interpretations at Wetherburn's Tavern. In linking the notions of "half" and interdependent, AAIP interpreters were reinforcing a notion that slaves and masters, blacks and whites had a kind of equality. This, by extension, seemed to give the African-American past parity in the museum with the white past. This co-dependency balance was a delicate one because co-dependence between dominant and subordinate groups or individuals, past or present, cannot overcome the actual disparity in their situations. The interpretive danger was in discounting the disparity, the inequity, so that the visitor could imagine the "other half" as equal.

Interpreters at the slave quarter took this idea of interdependence and altered it, presenting two new but

related themes, ones I never encountered in the AAIP tours and presentations "town." First, interpreters at the slave quarter did not focus on the co-dependence between the slaves Venus and Sukey and their master Nathaniel Burwell; they emphasized cooperation. Visitors heard about the "efforts made by both groups [blacks and whites] to build this country." These efforts constituted an "equal stake," a phrase which slave quarter interpreters used when explaining that 18th-century blacks and whites had together settled the colony of Virginia. Sounding a patriotic note, some interpreters would go on to invoke "equal stake" to talk about black-white relations in America today. I see this "equal stake" message as similar to the co-dependence notion; interpreters risked having visitors see black history in terms of some kind of joint effort in which the whole issue of slavery--people as property, people as oppressors--is able to be diminished, even forgotten.

The second point made in the slave quarter interpretations was that of sameness--"Ninety percent of the white population lived just like that single-family dwelling here." Interpreters presented narratives which emphasized not Rachael Bradley's ancestors (the quotation at the head of Chapter Seven notwithstanding), but our--black and white--common ancestors. At the Powell House, Cate, the black slave, was dependent on Mr. Powell, and vice-versa. But the message at the slave quarter, and specifically at

the house of Daniel the foreman, was that slaves and whites--whites like you, the visitor--lived in the same kinds of houses. While objects were the touchstone for the museum's narrative, the message attached to the museum object--the slave quarter--was that if people were associated with similar objects, one could assume that they had similar lives. Even more than with "equal stake," the basic issue of slavery becomes invisible.

The slave quarter provided the black story with objects which met museum criteria for being valued--documents, archaeological evidence, "authentic" reconstruction. And indeed, when invited to "critique" Colonial Williamsburg's black history interpretation before the quarter existed, Smithsonian curator Spencer Crew had pointed to the handicap imposed on AAIP interpreters by not having "a physical structure in which to center their activities." He emphasized the need for a "site that will serve as a three-dimensional illustration of black home life" (1988:7-8), and there is no question that interpreters did use the slave quarter to present slave home life.

But as Theresa Singleton reported in a review of Carter's Grove, it was the message of the foreman's house made "the slave quarter immediately relevant to most visitors" (1993:526). That message urged the museum's middle-class white visitors to imagine and to identify with the non-elite whites of the 18th century, a group which was

more like black slaves than like white Burwells. In her positive response to the impact of relevance for all visitors, Singleton seems to fall into the trap of "similar objects mean similar lives," a message which pushes the reality of slavery out of the picture.

Finally, once the slave cabins were put forth as the museum objects which best represented the past of the white middle-class visitor, the meaning of the houses and cottages in town could be shifted. Here was a new logic: since most of the whites in the 18th century lived like the blacks--in rural cabins like Daniel's--the "true" locus of the past with which the present-day visitor to Colonial Williamsburg should identify was not in the historic area. The true locus was at the slave quarter.

I would argue that the AAIP interpreters of the slave quarter took the museum objects assembled by a group of museum professionals with an assortment of agendas--historians, architectural historians, curators, archaeologists--and created an interpretation which in some ways thwarted the agendas of them all. Although the setting and the objects provided the material for presenting a harsh existence (whether "more grim or less grim" became unimportant), the message hammered home was that it was harsh, yes, but harsh for everybody. Instead of serving to point up the "otherness" of the "other half"--the separate and utterly unequal condition of nearly all 18th-century

African Americans--the slave quarter was made to serve as a symbol for a common existence shared by blacks and whites.

Not that AAIP interpreters had not created their own agendas throughout the museum, giving objects "unconventional" interpretations or using them in nontraditional ways to communicate those agendas. Recall that on the Other Half Tour, the Palace Garden and the Wythe House were, respectively, "appropriated" as props for interpretations of the Middle Passage and of miscegenation. "Judith," herself an object in her role as the "upbeat" slave, manipulated visitors into becoming her ally, and Cate, in her sullen role, conveyed a message that disillusioned some of those would-be allies.

But having the slave quarter objects prompted AAIP interpreters to try to convert the "mainstream" story and the "other half" story into something new. In slave quarter interpretations, the attempt was made to replace "race" with economic class as the determining factor in the way museum visitors saw and identified with the past. It is possible that in this interpretation the reproduction of racism latent in most other Colonial Williamsburg presentations of black history supported, even encouraged--because of their focus on blacks as "the other"--could be temporarily suspended. But, in the end, I think the image projected by the slave quarter could not offset that of the overwhelming

accumulation of the other objects in the museum's grand collection.

"The Other Half" was the "form" for presenting black history at Colonial Williamsburg, and it I think to a great extent it determined the content. But to be black was to be "other" in not only an historical context, but in the context of the modern museum. The idea that slave and master were dependent did not change the fact that one was subordinate to the other, especially since working against this notion was the museum's focus on African Americans as "the other." The presentation of black history was separate and it was unequal--unequal time, unequal space, unequal allocation of resources. There was not an African-American "half," only an African-American "other." It was this context which underlay the efforts to present slavery at Colonial Williamsburg and from which the meaning of the presentations could not escape.

A final word: if including black history in a traditional museum like Colonial Williamsburg is destined to reproduce racism, what should be done? Should the museum abandon its efforts, or is some skewed interpretation better than none at all? Although Derrick Bell, quoted in the preface to this dissertation, was convinced of the permanence of racism in America, I think would say yes. He writes:

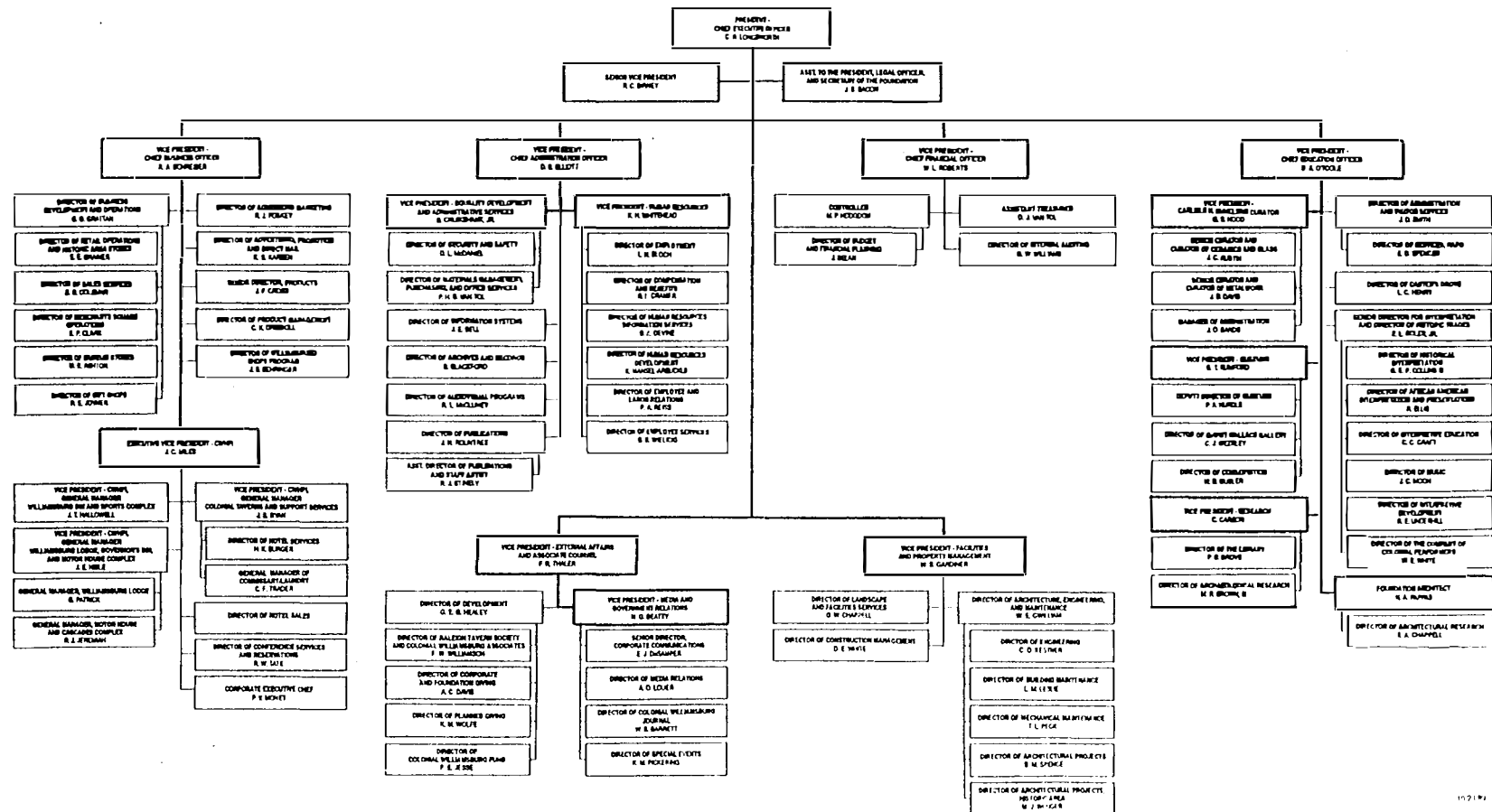
We must see this country's history of slavery, not as an insuperable racial barrier

to blacks, but as a legacy of enlightenment from our enslaved forebears reminding us that if they survived the ultimate form of racism, we and those whites who stand with us can at least view racial oppression in its many contemporary forms [even in the museum] without underestimating its critical importance and likely permanent status in this country. (1992:12)

Continuing, Bell notes that all efforts to combat racism have adapted, as I would suggest Colonial Williamsburg has, into "ways that maintain white dominance. . . . We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance." (Bell's underline) (Ibid.)

APPENDIX

THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG HOTEL PROPERTIES, INC.
Organizational Chart



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