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Journal of Interpretation Research  Vol. 6, No. 1, Summer 2001
INTRODUCTION

A Note from the Editor

Cem M. Basman
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Carbondale, IL

There has been a delay in getting this issue of the *Journal of Interpretation Research* to appear in print. I want to apologize to our readership and offer an explanation of the current events surrounding this publication. Since the journal’s inception in 1996, the National Association for Interpretation and the editorship have been committed to producing a scholarly publication of distinction for the profession of interpretation. We have maintained a standard of excellence without compromise and continue to pursue this commitment to providing materials of the highest quality on behalf of the interpretive profession. This commitment is illustrated by our manuscript rejection rate of over 80% for the past year. While we encourage all academic and scholarly works to be submitted to our journal, we continue to print items that are of the highest quality. It might be of interest to our readers that we have seen an increase in the submission of quality articles in recent months, and our production level will reflect this in the upcoming issues of the *Journal of Interpretation Research*.

Additionally, in response to many of our readers’ requests, we have embarked on a revision process for the *Journal of Interpretation Research*. Starting with the current issue, we will include more thought pieces and scholarly discussions to supplement our research and analysis articles. In the current issue we offer two commentary articles and two reviews. These new items are in direct response to the interests of our readership. We will make additional incremental changes to the *Journal of Interpretation Research* in coming issues.

The next issue of the *Journal of Interpretation Research* will be a special issue on defining heritage interpretation. The issue will include invited and submitted articles that define the current status of heritage interpretation as perceived by the academic and heritage resource management perspectives. We will continue to produce this special issue of the *Journal of Interpretation Research* every two years to capture the contemporary view of the interpretation profession.

A standard issue of the *Journal of Interpretation Research* will follow shortly afterward, which will once again put the production of the publication on a regular schedule. The editorial staff of the *Journal of Interpretation Research* is grateful for the continued support of our readership. We are fully committed to producing the finest research and scholarly publication for the profession of heritage interpretation.

As always, we invite our readers to contact us to let us know your thoughts and concerns. We invite you to visit our website: www.journalofinterpretationresearch.org.

—C. M. B.
CLICKING THE ICON: 
EXPLORING THE MEANINGS VISITORS 
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Abstract: 
This study explored the meanings visitors attach to three National Park Service sites in Washington, D.C.: the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Researchers used focus-group interviews (21 interviews, 182 participants) to identify the meanings visitors attach to park resources, their interests relative to interpretive programming, and the extent to which connections between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor occur as a result of exposure to interpretive programs. An analysis of focus-group interview data revealed four themes that reflect a sense of spiritual connection with the ideals of our nation; the role of Lincoln as the embodiment of our identity and aspirations; the elements of quality interpretation; and a sense of gratitude for those who served and of responsibility to maintain democratic traditions. Study results suggest several ways that an understanding of visitor meanings and place experience can improve interpretive programming.

Keywords: 
Interpretation, sense of place, visitor meanings, meaning-making, connections, Interpretive Development Program, National Park Service, Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial.
INTRODUCTION

British philosopher Edward Relph states: “To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places; to be human is to have and know your place” (1976, p. 1). The National Park Service (NPS) and other federal land-managing agencies are charged with caring for those places that Americans hold most dear. Interpreters at these sites tell the stories that help us define—and redefine—who we are as a people. Managing public lands goes well beyond the actions managers take to keep visitors safe, to ensure that operations run smoothly, and to preserve the ecosystem intact. An important goal of public land management, perhaps the most important goal, is to provide opportunities for visitors to come to care about the resource so that they can begin to care for the resource (Larsen, 1997). Interpretation is a powerful tool managers use to raise the level of care among visitors. Besides fostering an ethic of care, interpretive programs can yield many other positive outcomes, including helping visitors understand the intrinsic and material values of the resource (Wagar, 1978; Cherem, 1977; Trotter, 1992); increasing visitor understanding of natural processes such as glaciation and forest succession, or aspects of human history such as war and peace (Roggenbuck, Williams, & Bobinski, 1992; Masberg, 1996); promoting civic awareness of environmental and social issues (Wagar, 1978); motivating visitors to change their environmental attitudes and behaviors (Cable, Knudson, Udd, & Stewart, 1987; Ham & Krumpe, 1996; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Knapp, 1997; USDA Forest Service, 1990; National Park Service, 1991; Lustig, 1982); and encouraging resource stewardship and responsible citizenship (Wagar, 1978; Roggenbuck et al.; Zinsser, 1992; Hilten & Hilten, 1997). Interpretive outcomes such as care and responsible citizenship do not arise out of a void, however; they require a sense of relationship, a sense of being connected to something that is bigger than oneself.

A sense of connection between self and “other” forms the essence of meaningful, powerful, and even spiritual experiences (McDonald & Schreyer, 1991). The National Park Service views “connections” as personal bonds or relationships with the resource that are accessible both intellectually and emotionally (Larsen, 1997; NPS, 2000a; NPS 2000b). Herb Schroeder (1990, p. 25) equates “spiritual” experience with feeling “related to or in touch with an ‘other’ that transcends one’s individual sense of self and gives their meaning to one’s life at a deeper than intellectual level.” Providing opportunities for spiritual experiences may not appear on any list of interpreter job duties; however, interpreters should understand the power meanings of place hold as well as the value people derive from connecting with those meanings. Daniel Dustin (1994, p. 96) offers a compelling reason why front-line interpreters, interpretive managers, and interpretive researchers should reflect upon the role of spiritual experiences in interpretation:

Management could enhance opportunities for spiritual experiences through innovations in design, interpretation, and educational services. In this regard, the value of research on spiritual benefits is not likely to be in what it does for prediction and control, but in what it does for understanding and empowerment. This research could unleash the human potential.
OBJECTIVES

Three objectives guided the current study:

- To identify the meanings visitors attach to three National Capital Parks—Central sites in Washington, D.C.: the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. (These sites constitute an area known as the “Triangle.”)

- To identify visitor interests related to on-site interpretive programming.

- To identify the types of connections between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor that occur among participants who have attended an interpretive program.

The National Park Service’s Stephen T. Mather Training Center and National Capital Parks—Central (NCP—Central) commissioned this study to improve on-site interpretive programs. Drawing upon their interpretive training and management expertise, they have proposed creative ways to use visitor meanings data to expand interpreter knowledge of their audience. The assumption underlying this study is that if interpreters understand the range of meanings visitors ascribe to the resource, and if they incorporate these meanings into on-site interpretive programs, they will be able to more effectively reach a diverse audience.

This study builds on previous research on audience demographics (Rakow & Lehtonen, 1988; Wallace & Witter, 1991); visitor motivation (More, 1983; Loomis, 1996; Silverman, 1995; Rakow & Lehtonen; Wallace & Witter; Hayward & Larkin, 1983); visitor attitudes and behavior (Cable et al., 1987; Ham & Krumpe, 1996; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Knapp, 1997); and the learning process (Hammit, 1982; Meredith & Mullins, 1995; Ham & Krumpe). Previous studies focused primarily on visitor characteristics, cognitive processes, and behavioral outcomes. In general, the complex phenomenon of how visitors interact with a site was not addressed. This study explores the meanings visitors attach to park resources, their interests relative to interpretive programming, and the extent to which connections between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor occur as a result of exposure to interpretive programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of “place” and “meanings” have achieved prominence in the fields of geography, landscape architecture, public administration, historic preservation, natural resource management, education, counseling, and cognitive and social psychology. Researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding people’s meanings of place and applying the sense-of-place concept in resource management (Roggenbuck et al., 1992; Masberg 1996; Roberts, 1996; Williams & Stewart, 1998; Galliano & Loeffler, 1999). Place is a powerful concept that enables researchers to understand people’s attitudes, values, motivations, and behavior more holistically (Williams & Stewart, 1998; Lippard, 1997). Specifically, place-based research explores the process of psychological engagement that transforms space into place (Tuan, 1977).
Scholars tend to tightly link the concepts of place and meaning. Tuan (1974, 1977) describes place as a center of meanings that are formed through experience. Further, place represents a collective expression of the intellectual and emotional meanings people attach to a place. Relph (1976) contends that place fuses meaning, action, and context. Galliano and Loeffer (1999) define place as “a geographic area that has meaning to people” (p. 1). Despite increased interest in the concept of place, Williams and Stewart (1998) argue that the concept of sense of place is “elusive, ill defined, and controversial” (p. 18). They propose five dimensions that constitute sense of place, including people’s emotional bonds with a place; the strongly felt values, meanings, and symbols associated with a place; the valued qualities of a place that may go unnoticed until they are threatened or lost; place meanings that are actively constructed individually and corporately; and the cultural, historical, or spatial context that shapes cognitive responses and social interactions. These definitions suggest that places embody both personal meanings such as individual identities and histories (Tuan, 1974, 1977; Fishwick & Vining, 1992; Roberts, 1996) and communal values such as proper social relations and ethical land-use practices (Simonson, 1989). Place exerts a powerful influence on human consciousness. People have a real but sometimes unmet need to connect with significant places. Authentic place experience is direct and genuine, and it instills a sense of interconnectedness. In contrast, inauthentic place experience is stereotyped, prepackaged, and imposed upon one from without (Relph). Galliano and Loeffer assert that understanding place meanings helps managers discern how people interact with their environment.

The concept of meanings also plays an important role in the education, counseling, and cognitive and social psychology literature. In these disciplines, researchers focus on the nature of knowledge and how we come to know what we know. Postmodernism, constructivism, and multiculturalism represent three distinct conceptual frameworks within which the concept of meaning is analyzed (D’Andrea, 2000; Silverman, 1995). Postmodernism calls into question traditional assumptions about the nature of truth (i.e., truth as absolute) and tends to view reality as a socially constructed phenomenon (Schneider, 1998; Tierney, 1993; Hayes, 1994). Constructivism is a process by which individuals (i.e., psychological constructivism) and groups (i.e., social constructivism) actively construct meaning and ascribe significance to life experiences (Mahoney & Lyddon, 1988; Sexton & Griffin, 1997; Guterman, 1994). Multiculturalism examines the unique belief systems and truths that people from diverse cultural groups create to define their identity and understand their life experiences (Daniels & D’Andrea, 1997; Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996). The process of meaning-making is a hotly contested area within constructivism (Phillips, 1997). Gergen (1994) contrasts two opposing views regarding the origin of meaning:

In the intersubjective account of meaning, the mind of the individual serves as an originary source. Meaning is generated within the mind and transmitted via words or gestures. In the relational case, however, there is no proper beginning, no originary source, no specific region in which meaning takes wing, for we are always already in a relational standing with others and the world (p. 264).
Whether meaning-making is viewed as an intersubjective or relational phenomenon affects how educators, counselors, and interpreters engage in professional practice. If meaning is purely intersubjective, then all meaning is ascribed and represents an independent construction of the individual. If meaning is strictly relational, then meanings held toward an object, event, or place accumulate over time, forming a socially agreed-upon domain with which individuals interact. Some scholars resolve this debate by acknowledging multiple processes and influences in the construction of meaning:

To have a position that is credible, constructivists of both types—psychological and social—have to find room for the fact that our knowledge is about something. And whatever it is, that it is about, has to be granted a role in influencing our constructions....Nevertheless, I do not want to deny that the social constructivists are on to something—something they spoil by overstatement; this is the fact that our constructions are not, and could not possibly be, solitary individualistic endeavors...the activity [of meaning-making] is inextricably social and depends upon the use of social resources (Phillips, 1997, p. 191).

Phillips (1997) links three components in his conceptualization of the meaning-making process: individual ascription; social consensus; and the specific attributes of the object, event, or place. The National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program (IDP) adopts a similar approach to understanding meanings. The IDP views meanings as inherent in the resource (i.e., “the resource possesses meanings and has relevance”) due to social consensus and specific attributes of the resource (Larsen, 1997). The IDP also recognizes that visitors ascribe personalized meanings to the resource (NPS, 2000a). Thus, a resource represents layers of meanings, while humans bring various perspectives to the site. The IDP also emphasizes the importance of incorporating universal concepts into interpretation. A universal concept, as defined by the National Park Service, is any intangible meaning (e.g., idea, concept, system, process) that is relevant to almost everyone but that does not mean the same thing to any two people (NPS, 2000a). Universal concepts can be any broadly relevant concept, including, for example, beauty, family, love, death, justice, change, survival, power, and freedom. They can be applied to human relationships, cultural resources, or the natural environment. Harj (1992) refers to these concepts as “highly personal things,” including “ourselves, our families, our health, our well-being, our quality of life, our deepest values, principles, beliefs and convictions” (p. 13). Universal concepts can be used to tap into the memories, values, and experiences that many visitors share (Silverman, 1997; Wagar, 1975).

The use of universal concepts in interpretation can increase the likelihood of provocation. Because universal concepts are relevant to more people, visitors are more likely to have ascribed personalized meanings to those concepts. Tilden (1977) identifies the visitors' chief interest as anything that relates to something within themselves. The IDP maintains that interpretation facilitates a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor (Larsen, 1997). Connections are defined in the IDP “Module 101” as (a) “linkages” and “relationships” that are “broad based and accessible both intellectually and emotionally” (Larsen,
1997; NPS, 1997; NPS, 2000a) and (b) as the linkages that visitors forge with the resource when they “develop an active stewardship ethic” (NPS, 2000a). Loomis (1996) emphasizes the importance of facilitating resource meanings/visitor interest connections: “Interpretation should not only raise curiosity (attract central attention) but also provide opportunities for involvement by relating content to personal meanings” (p. 41). The best interpreters always strive to connect their ideas to the lives of their audiences, creating opportunities for intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings of the resource (Mahaffey, 1973; Ham, 1992; Silverman, 1997).

Unique challenges and opportunities present themselves as one tries to interpret resources, such as the memorials in our nation’s capital, that reflect such diverse meanings as war and peace, freedom and slavery, civil rights, and an obligation to serve (Martinez, 1988; Machlis, 1992; Bennett, 1998). Wasserman (1998) notes that memorial landscapes can function as sacred space, “transmitting community stories and validating those actions deemed honorific in a given culture” (p. 43). The memorial landscape is a place for memory, mourning, reflection, healing, ceremony, and collective ritual action (Wasserman). Memorials, however, are often caught in the cross-fire of conflicting interpretations regarding the meanings of past events. At sites such as the USS Arizona Memorial and Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument, “history lives and the unmistakable specter of controversy thrives” (Martinez, p. 144). Both World War II veterans and visitors of Japanese descent have found the interpretive signs at the USS Arizona Memorial offensive. Little Big Horn reflects the dark side of the American government’s political agenda and reminds visitors of the painful wounds inflicted upon the society and psyche of Native Americans. Interpretation at battlefields and war/peace memorials must convey complex and often contradictory meanings: honor, bravery, triumph, and sacrifice—as well as the human and environmental costs of war, including the pain and loss of soldiers and civilians, increased disease, general malnutrition, the destruction of habitat, increased pollution, economic upheaval, and demographic changes (Bennett; Machlis). When discussing whether the realized or desired outcomes of these conflicts justified the human and environmental costs, multiple perspectives must be employed. By discussing events comprehensively, interpreters can reach an audience who themselves have diverse beliefs about the cultural politics of war and peace.

An expanded understanding of the meanings of the resource, a sense of connecting with significant places, and spiritual experiences sound like worthwhile goals, but is this what visitors want? Visitors come to sites with a range of preexisting meanings, but it is often unclear what meanings they bring. How does on-site experience influence the meanings visitors attach to these sites? Do visitors really care about relating to park sites in a way that transcends their sense of self and provides meaning at a deeper than intellectual level (Schroeder, 1990)? When interpretive rangers are overwhelmed with daily responsibilities and visitors’ “ludicrous questions” (Tilden, 1977, p. 46), they can easily overlook the extent to which these dynamics might be in play. This study was therefore undertaken to better understand the meanings visitors ascribe to three significant places on our national landscape: the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial.
METHODS

This study used focus-group interviews to bring together a cross section of visitors to three National Capital Parks—Central sites: the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The study sites were selected based on predetermined selection criteria related to location, resources, programming, and staffing. NCP—Central was chosen due to its proximity to the Stephen T. Mather Training Center and West Virginia University. In addition, in conjunction with two other research locations (Great Falls Park, Virginia, and Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C.), NCP—Central contains a diversity of park resources and a wide range of potential visitor meanings. The Lincoln Memorial is a tribute to President Lincoln and the Union he sought to preserve. The memorial records Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address. The steps, plaza, and reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial have functioned as a place of protest and a forum for discussing issues such as race, civil rights, war and peace, and AIDS. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the most visited NPS site in Washington, D.C. The site commemorates the sacrifice of American military personnel during one of the nation’s least popular wars (NPS, 1998b). A journalist from the New York Times described the memorial as “a hallowed site” with a “spiritual dimension that transforms it into something like a sacred shrine, where pilgrims come and devotions are paid” (Niebuhr, 1994). The Korean War Veterans Memorial is dedicated to all those who served during the Korean War (1950–1954), the first major conflict of the Cold War. The returning veterans were the first Americans not to receive a hero’s welcome in recognition of the hardships they endured in their fight for freedom (NPS, 1998a). Taken together, the three study sites at NCP—Central represent diverse meanings related to war and peace, freedom and slavery, civil rights and patriotic duty, national leaders and common heroes, and the fundamental ideals upon which our nation was founded.

A total of 182 visitors participated in 21 focus-group interviews conducted over a period of six days during summer 1998. Interviews were held on a consecutive Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in mid-July and on a consecutive Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in early August. Interviews were conducted on both weekdays and weekends, and in the morning, afternoon, and evening on each of the six days to ensure that the sampling pool contained the widest possible range of visitor types. Focus-group interview participants were recruited from among those who had attended an on-site interpretive program (9 groups, N=87) and from among those who had not attended an on-site interpretive program (12 groups, N=95). For the purposes of this study, groups of participants who had attended an on-site interpretive program are referred to as “post-groups”; groups that had not attended an on-site interpretive program are referred to as “pre-groups.” The average size of a focus group was 8 to 9 participants, including individuals, couples, friend groups, and families with children. To recruit participants, at a specified time, park rangers and researchers working in a 3- to 4-person team canvassed the area between the Lincoln Memorial and the reflecting pool, inviting each individual or group encountered to participate in the focus-group interview. Approximately one visitor (or group of visitors) for every 10 approached agreed to participate. Park rangers
who presented on-site interpretive programs recruited post-group participants via announcements that preceded and followed their interpretive talk. Interviews were conducted on site under a canopy tent set up alongside the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Refreshments were served. Door prizes such as tickets for the White House, Washington Monument, and Holocaust Museum were provided to participants.

Self-selection bias exists for this sample population because participation was voluntary and overall participation rates were low. However, those who agreed to participate may have been as motivated by the cool beverage and a chance to sit down in the shade, or the opportunity to obtain White House tickets without waiting in long lines, as from a keen desire to discuss their on-site experience. Some participants may have participated primarily because someone in their group agreed to participate and they felt they had to go along. Therefore, although participants were self-selected, their motivations for participating were varied.

Focus-group interviews were ideal for this study because “…the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about a population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation” (Krueger, 1994, p. 87). Focus-group data also have high face validity because of the believability of participant comments (Krueger). During the focus-group interview, researchers sought to elicit participant responses to open-ended questions about visitor meanings, interests, and connections. Sample interview questions include the following:

- What drew you to the site today?
- What do these sites teach us?
- When you look at the statue of Lincoln, what thoughts go through your mind?
- What would you tell the younger generations about this place?
- When you are here, do you have a sense of interacting with history? How so?
- If you were a ranger, what would you tell your audience?
- (For those who had attended an interpretive program.) Did the ranger’s talk help you think about this place in a new way?

Focus-group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis of interview transcripts was accomplished using the following process: (1) hand-coding the data; (2) sorting the data into related categories; (3) analyzing categories to identify recurring patterns and themes; (4) clustering and specifying the range of visitor meanings, interests, and connections; (5) making contrasts and comparisons; (6) subsuming particulars into generals when appropriate to do so; and (7) ensuring conceptual coherence (Weber, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Steps 3 through 7 represent an iterative process in which related participant comments were examined and either further subdivided or collapsed to form coherent groupings. Once internally consistent groupings were identified, their underlying unity or significance was verbalized in a theme statement. A qualitative approach allowed researchers to explore the multiple factors that shape a process or a
perspective, including how these factors interact on a situation-by-situation basis (Weber; Miles & Huberman). In addition, a qualitative approach was appropriate due to the study emphasis on visitor meanings: “Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning—how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (Creswell, 1994, p. 145). Researchers also conducted a computerized keyword frequency analysis and developed a profile of participant demographics.

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

Focus-group interview participants (N=182) were approximately half male (47%) and half female (53%). They were from diverse geographic regions: 13% were from Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland; 60% were from states east of the Mississippi River; 15% were from states west of the Mississippi River; and 12% were international visitors. Participants from the United States represented 30 states and the District of Columbia. International participants came from England, Canada, Israel, Mexico, China, France, Nigeria, and Germany. Participants were drawn from a wide range of age groups: 14% were under 13 years of age; 17% were 13 to 25 years old; 30% were 26 to 40 years old; 25% were 41 to 55 years old; and 14% were 56 years of age or older. The majority of participants were first-time visitors to the site (44%), though 17% had visited the site twice, 16% had visited the site 3 to 4 times, and 17% had visited the site 5 or more times. (Note: 6% of participants did not indicate the number of times they had visited the site.) Most participants were of Anglo descent (90%), though participants of African (4%), Hispanic (2%), and Asian (4%) descent did engage in the interview process.

In terms of demographics, the 182 participants interviewed in this study closely mirrored participants in a much larger visitor study (N=2,720) conducted at National Capital Parks–Central during summer 1998 (Littlejohn & Hoffman, 1999). One notable difference between the two study populations is that the current study included more participants who had visited the site 5 or more times (17%), compared to Littlejohn and Hoffman, who found that 8% of their sample had visited the site 5 or more times. Similarly, 44% of participants in the current study were first-time visitors to the site, compared to 56% first-time visitors in the Littlejohn and Hoffman study. Although the relative proportions still hold, these differences suggest that repeat visitors may have been more inclined to participate in an on-site focus-group interview, and first-time visitors may have been less inclined to do so. The close demographic correlation between the two studies across all information categories suggests, however, that the current study obtained a fairly representative sample of on-site visitors.

Visitor Meanings, Interests, and Connections

Four themes emerged during data analysis. The data revealed the meanings that visitors attached to the sites, the interests visitors had relative to interpretive programming, and the connections visitors made as a result of exposure to on-site interpretive programs. The four themes reflect: (1) a sense of spiritual connection
with the ideals of our nation, (2) the role of Lincoln as the embodiment of our identity and aspirations, (3) the elements of quality interpretation, and (4) a sense of gratitude for those who served that in turn stimulated a desire to maintain democratic traditions.

**Theme 1: The Triangle embodies the ideals of a nation and functions as a sacred place.** The Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and Korean War Veterans Memorial confront visitors with an array of historical events, eras, and episodes—some of which are disturbing and others of which represent our highest aspirations. These sites seemed to elicit a sense of interacting with something bigger than oneself. They challenged visitors to consider whether there is anything that can or should lay claim to our allegiance. One participant likened these memorials to a “cathedral of the soul”:

What these three monuments mean to me is the spirit that pervades these grounds, [and this] is the spirit of sacrifice and humility, but at the same time, greatness. Because the people who died [in these conflicts] left their mark here, [they] left their mark on the whole country. The dream is not quite finished, but it is still in the process of becoming a flower. All these three sites come together and they bring that [message]—without pain there is no gain. I do believe that places like this are the cathedral of the soul. They bring out the depth of human beings and you begin to see what a nation is supposed to do to make all living things free (Pre 4, p. 4).¹

Participants recognized that although these sites represent an ideal, collectively and individually we have not always lived up to that ideal. Nonetheless, these sites focus attention on what ultimately does matter. One participant expressed this sentiment as follows:

This is an opportunity for us to show the rest of the world what our ideals are supposed to be, and when we do something stupid, and when we show the wrong side of ourselves, maybe people coming here will say, “Somebody made a mistake, but this is what America really means.” This is not about the gentleman sitting on that chair; it is about what these things tell us (Post 4, p. 3).

The Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and Korean War Veterans Memorial triggered strong emotional responses among participants. The Lincoln Memorial and the plaza in front of the Lincoln Memorial provide a nationally recognized gathering place for social movements and a forum for discussing civic issues. Participants encountered these sites as a holy ground, a sacred place that embodies ideals and aspirations. One visitor indicated that for him the site symbolizes our tradition of free speech:

¹Each “pre-group” and “post-group” was numbered. Pre-groups were numbered 1–12; post-groups were numbered 1–9. Participant quotes are attributed to the pre-group or post-group in which the comment was made. The page number indicates the page of the transcript in which the quote occurs.
Even just walking up here, I was recalling that Dr. King had spoken here and other events had taken place here. And to just associate [this place] as a big meeting ground for different causes and the protesting of the war in Vietnam. It’s just a symbol (Pre 2, p. 5).

One woman commented:

I don’t know—when I look at Lincoln, I just feel warm inside or something. It is very difficult to explain. It is something that makes your body kind of shake and say, “I am proud to be part of this country” (Pre 5, p. 1).

The Triangle has the potential to overwhelm visitors with the sheer force of what it represents and what it signifies for people’s lives today. One man conveyed this sense when he said:

I think it is all overwhelming. It is hard to take it all in at one time. So, I’ll have to come back, multiple times. I don’t think you can really get a true feeling for what it is [in] one time or two times (Pre 11, p. 5).

Another man acknowledged the profound effect that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial continues to have on him: “We have been here many times and you know what? I cry every time I come to the Vietnam Memorial. I can’t help it” (Pre 5, p. 2).

**Theme 2: Lincoln is a symbol of unity, strength, and freedom.** The Lincoln Memorial evokes the ideal of freedom and represents the unification of the nation. The statue of Lincoln constitutes the focal point of the memorial, reminding participants of the service he rendered for his time, for all time: “Lincoln kept the nation together” (Pre 3, p. 5) and “Lincoln so solidly represents the Union, and also the idea that the country is one” (Post 4, p. 9). Lincoln also possessed a strength of character that inspired participants and added meaning to their lives:

I think the Lincoln Memorial reminds me how important it is that we stay united as a nation. I really admire Abraham Lincoln—his integrity and what he stood for, that he stood by what he believed no matter what happened. I really admire him for that. That means a lot to me (Pre 4, p. 2).

Participants who attended an on-site interpretive program recognized Lincoln’s unwavering resolve, citing specific ways in which he persevered despite failure and personal adversity:

**Man 1:** *Perseverance* is the word for Lincoln for sure. He failed so many times at elected office before he was elected as President. Before he was elected to Congress, he failed many, many times….

**Woman:** Lincoln had such a hard life. He failed in business three or four times. He had a nervous breakdown. He lost children. He lost his first love—
she was not his wife. Yet he persevered. [He is] considered to be a great man now, and he was.

Man 2: He never quit (Post 8, p. 3).

Participants recognized Lincoln's accomplishments and strength of character, but they also related to him in very personal ways. One woman explained, "Abraham Lincoln is my favorite president. He is very inspirational, clearly a man who had a heart" (Post 6, p. 2). Even the ubiquitous photo-taking sessions that rangers sometimes dismiss as nothing more than a quest for the perfect "Kodak moment" can have deep underlying significance for visitors. One participant expressed the feeling he had as he climbed the steps to the Lincoln Memorial and then caught a glimpse of the statue of Lincoln:

[Regarding] the statue of Abraham Lincoln, I always wanted my picture to be, to have a picture close to the great man who made the important, I will say, history of making this country. I think he was one of the first and the most important ones (Post 1, p. 2).

Participants considered Lincoln's contributions in the context of other leaders and the cadre of unsung soldiers. One man observed that Lincoln did not establish the democratic system that he labored so earnestly to preserve; thus, his contributions stand only in relationship to the accomplishments of those who went before him:

[Lincoln reveals] the power and the significance a really strong and charismatic leader can have on a nation. He kept the nation together. [Lincoln reveals] the importance of the leader at that time. Lincoln couldn't have done what Washington did. Washington couldn't have done what Jefferson did. Each one is unique for what they did for the country. There is a stark contrast between all of them. They all had a key role to play (Pre 3, p. 5).

Similarly, one woman identified Lincoln as one among many who served, as one among many who paid the ultimate price for their country:

Something that strikes me is not just Abraham Lincoln. I have a second cousin whose name we go to see on the Vietnam Wall. Our country stands for not just heroes like Lincoln, but for all people. That is what I think of all those monuments. It is really wonderful to be in a country that lifts up Lincoln and lifts up my cousin (Post 1, p. 4).

Participants recognized Lincoln's role in preserving the union, his strength of character, his fellowship with those who have furthered the cause of democracy and freedom, and his commitment to freeing the slaves. Some participants related to Lincoln in a personal way; others used his ideals and beliefs as a foil to assess where we are today, what we have accomplished, and what remains undone. One man saw in Lincoln's commitment to equality an idea that was ahead of its time:

I know that it was his ideal that all people would be equal; not necessarily that it's true yet. But it's an ideal to strive for, I guess. I don't think that it's
true that people are equal, but it was an ideal that was ahead of its time. That's why he was unpopular…. (Post 9, p. 5).

Several participants acknowledged the “dark side” of U.S. history that slavery represented. Two participants contemplated Lincoln's sense that the human toll exacted by the Civil War was, in essence, divine retribution for the sins of the land. By focusing on the idea of “penance,” these participants began to ask penetrating questions about whether our penance has in fact been completed, and whether the price for our sins has been paid in full:

Man: Another important point is that Lincoln believed deeply that the Civil War was about penance. We as Americans, both North and South, had committed a crime by buying into slavery. And we did not know when the war would end—there was a sentence there—maybe it will not end until every drop of blood is paid for with a drop of blood. That is very important. Americans tend not to want to think about the dark side. And what we have done is wrong. And that is something we can have with an historical perspective, [we can have] a new attitude. Lincoln is very contrasting, and maybe Americans can share that feeling, the sense that this is our penance, and that this war is going to go on until God has decided that we paid for it.

Woman: Maybe we have not yet paid for it.

Man: Exactly.

Woman: So there should be a connection between now and the past. What he is saying is that what we [think we] accomplished, perhaps we didn’t (Post 4, pp. 10–11).

**Theme 3: Visitors have a strong sense of what constitutes a quality interpretive experience.** Participant comments revealed an appreciation of the same interpretive elements that are valued by the interpretive profession. Participants articulated the importance of tangible experience and the use of tangible objects in interpretation. They demonstrated a strong desire to be provoked and find relevance. They emphasized the power of the cohesive development of an idea. And they revealed the importance of opportunities for intellectual and emotional connections.

Physically being present in a significant place, moving through the site, viewing it from different angles, and immersing oneself in the richness of sensory experience added to visitor enjoyment. One participant commented upon this dynamic when he said, “Anyone can read a book, [but] when you’re here, you get the tactile sensation of enjoying history” (Pre 2, p. 8). At the Triangle, tangible experience had the power to bring home the reality of the people, events, and ideas being commemorated. One participant referred to the sculptures of soldiers at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, saying, “They are so real…they just say so much” (Pre 6, p. 6). Another participant agreed: “You see the faces and then you have a personal sense of what they must have been feeling” (Post 3, p. 7). On-site experience helped visitors sense the magnitude of the lives lost in the Vietnam War. In comparison to seeing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the pages of a textbook, one child
observed: “It is a lot more meaningful to see all the names [on the Vietnam Wall]. You see them in the textbook, but you do not really realize all the lives that were lost in the Vietnam War” (Pre 4, p. 8).

Participants reflected on why physically “being there” contributed to such a powerful experience of the meanings of the resource. One man suggested that on-site experience transforms “head knowledge” into something physical, something personal, something that activates one’s emotions:

That is why I wanted to come here, because I am fascinated with American history in particular. I can’t imagine a better place to come...I’ve read about it. I’ve learned about it. I’ve taken exams on it. But this actually makes it physical and makes it personal. You know, I’ve seen pictures of it, but there’s nothing like walking through the Smithsonian and seeing how black people were treated at the turn of the century and how the whole civil rights movement has evolved. That’s very emotional (Post 9, p. 9).

Participants recognized that resources at the Triangle function as icons; that is, they are tangible objects that serve as a “window” or “portal” to deeper meanings and a fuller sense of reality:

Woman 1: I think [this place] brings the actions of the past—brings the history—kind of like they were saying. It refreshes that for you, brings it to you instead of reading it in a book.

Woman 2: It’s something concrete in the present that you can attach all the things you’ve read about and heard about, you can attach it all to it now. You have something to look at and remember everything you’ve learned (Pre 1, p. 11).

Although an entire site can represent intangible meanings, at the Triangle the memorials are composed of a range of symbols—some obvious, some not—each of which also represents intangible meanings. These symbols can seem remote and inaccessible, especially if they feel disconnected from one’s life experience. They can also become clichés either through overuse or through a process in which the symbol’s meaning is reduced to something trite or trivial. When used to full advantage in interpretation, however, participants found that these symbols linked the tangible resource to its intangible meanings:

Man: That was great, because [the ranger] is a gentleman who had been there. He has a passion for the events, for what occurred.

Woman: Particularly when he mentioned the flag. [He said,] whenever you see one of those, you know, that is the one. It is for freedom. I thought that was real personal (Post 5, p. 4).

At the Triangle, tangible objects like the flag, the Vietnam Wall, the statue of Lincoln, and the statues of combat soldiers serve as catalysts that provoke visitors to think about universal concepts like “freedom” or “sacrifice.” Several participants regarded the memorials as conveying one central message, or illustrating the cohesive development of one idea, that is, freedom. One participant observed, “I see
these sites as having an overpowering message of freedom” (Post 8, p. 3). Another man viewed the phrase etched on the wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial—“Freedom is not free”—as a unifying concept linking the three sites at the Triangle. He commented:

That saying, [“Freedom is not free”], is the high tide of the memorial; it ties into the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial…. “Freedom is not free” is a very powerful emphasis, just like democracy. Those people who miss the corner [where the message is etched] will miss the message. I think there should be a sign right there, right at the central point, saying, “Freedom is not free” (Post 5, pp. 3–4).

Participant comments also illustrated the power of universal concepts to provoke questions and facilitate reflection upon many levels of meaning:

Man: This setting is being used for this one concept—freedom. [As] Martin Luther King [Jr.] said in his great speech, “Let freedom ring.” And there are a lot of people in the country who say are we free or aren’t we free? But freedom comes at a great cost with the lives that were lost in the wars.

Woman: And there are different levels of freedom. And that’s what you have to be reminded of, too (Pre 1, p. 7).

The use of the universal concept of “freedom” provoked visitors to consider multiple aspects of the topic and reflect upon its meaning for our lives today. Because the concept of freedom was viewed as relevant to their everyday life, participants reflected more deeply upon its meaning and considered ways to integrate emerging insights into their everyday lives. Participant comments suggested that one way relevance can be established is to ensure that interpretation touches the human side of visitors, satisfying, among other things, people’s love of a good story: “Pure facts don’t enthrall. Make it human. Tell a story based on fact, but elaborate if necessary” (Pre 2, p. 6).

Participants emphasized tangible experience, provocation, relevance, and the cohesive development of an idea; they also emphasized the importance of opportunities to form intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings of the resource. One participant, quoted previously, described the emotional impact visiting the Vietnam Wall has on him: “We have been here many times and you know what? I cry every time I come to the Vietnam Memorial. I can’t help it” (Pre 5, p. 2). Though overpowering, and perhaps disturbing, the intellectual and emotional connections gained through on-site experience drew the man back to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial again and again. Intellectual and emotional connections are not antithetical to each other; further, they can occur in tandem. Recall the participant, quoted previously, who was a history buff. He read history, studied history, took exams on history. By his own admission, his on-site experience borrowed heavily from his intellectual interests and knowledge base; however, the on-site experience was unique in its ability to graft emotional experience to intellectual meanings.

One strategy for fostering intellectual and emotional connections through interpretation is to incorporate universal concepts like “family”:
I think the ranger touched on that a little bit when he said that he saw that there were parents here with children and [asked], “How would you feel if you lost a child? The ranger was pointing out that Lincoln lost more than one child. It is true of all these memorials. Like the ranger said, “That’s somebody’s brother, somebody’s son, and somebody’s father” (Pos: 8, p. 7).

Participants who attended interpretive programs expressed appreciation when interpreters provided them with the opportunity to form intellectual and emotional connections. One participant summarized his experience of an on-site interpretive program as follows:

I just thought that the [ranger program] was an incredible presentation, probably one of the best I’ve ever heard. I really appreciate the way the ranger made the whole thing come alive. And I thought about it in terms of how unpopular Lincoln was in his day and yet he persevered and stuck with his ideals. The ranger talked about how Lincoln was maligned in the press on a daily basis, and yet he stuck with his ideals. I like that the ranger shared that with people—the struggle that Lincoln went through (Post 1, p. 6).

Theme 4: The Triangle inspires a sense of gratitude for the sacrifice of others and stimulates a desire to participate in democratic life. Participants constantly reflected on the meaning of the phrase, “Freedom is not free.” This quote is etched on the black-granite wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial, but it seems to be etched on the hearts and minds of many of the participants as well. Participants revealed a sense of gratitude for the sacrifice of others and an awareness that their sacrifice bought our freedom. This conviction is revealed in the following exchange:

Moderator: So for the war memorials…do they teach us anything?

Man: They teach us war is horrible.

Woman: The price paid for liberty. There you go. I mean, we are walking around, but these actual people gave up their lives for us, you know. I mean that’s a very general statement but it’s true. They fought. Some of them didn’t want to. Some of them were drafted. They died there. And it’s like they died so we could be free (Pre 2, p. 3).

Another participant expressed a sense that war is unavoidable and that those who get caught up in these conflicts perform a patriotic service:

Nobody really wants to go and die for their country. But sometimes, it’s something that has to happen. I don’t know that necessarily the Civil War had to happen; but somebody had to fight, somebody called them out to fight. And they fought; they served their country (Pre 11, p. 7).

One participant commented that the memorials remind us that those who served our country had a willingness to rise to the occasion. He felt that this mindset, this
strength of character transforms ordinary people into heroes and represents an ideal for our children to emulate:

I think there is a lot to show the young people. To see that there are a lot of heroes and these people are probably just regular people. But when the situation fell upon them, they became heroes, because they did what they had to do and did it right. That could be anybody. So the children of today are going to be our presidents and heroes tomorrow (Post 4, p. 7).

Participants did not glorify war or regard the conflicts that these memorials represent uncritically. They expressed gratitude that we have the freedom to ask questions and voice discontent when our leaders engage in conflicts or ignore social concerns. In fact, the Vietnam War protests and civil rights demonstrations were some of the most salient historical events that participants associated with the Triangle. One participant reflected upon the pros and cons of this tendency to actively resist U.S. involvement in overseas conflicts and shared how this dynamic had affected him personally:

I think we’re even farther. I mean that’s the price of freedom, actually. I think it is [that] we have the freedom to choose and are able to question why it is that we’re doing things. Being in the military, I mean, obviously we don’t really get a choice of what we want to do or what we don’t want to do. But as a civilian you very much have a right to call up your congressman or anyone so you can know why. That’s why Desert Storm was such a big deal. We only got broad-based support when we started winning. But for those first six months prior to that, you know, there were a lot of demonstrations right here. You know, why are we even in there? I remember “Blood for oil” was the big slogan while I was waiting to be sent out myself (Pre 2, p. 4).

Some participants, especially those of the older generations, asked penetrating questions about war, sacrifice, and gratitude. Their concerns could be summarized as follows: “Is this tendency to question why a mixed blessing? For those who serve today, do we maintain a sense of gratitude? Do the younger generations take their freedom and the sacrifice of others for granted?” One woman expressed her concerns in the following way:

The loss of lives was the price of freedom; [it] was so much more costly. It seems like the Vietnam [War] has so much of a negative emphasis. As an older person, it bothers me. Because a lot of people paid a very high price for freedom—I wonder if they appreciate it (Post 5, p. 2).

Participants also expressed a sense of gratitude that we live in a democracy, that we have options other than war. One woman commented that because our democratic system is in place, we can defuse conflicts before they escalate:

I think the reason why we have memorials is that they are like cemeteries or tombstones that you can go to; and if you or your family were involved, you can go and feel the passion. But also, for those who have never been to war,
for them to realize that people actually die. Sometimes we glorify war. People
see marching bands and that kind of stuff. The veterans are hidden away. The
importance is to realize how lucky we are, especially when we think about
all the other countries. We do have politicians to [determine] what the goals
are. We can sit down at the table and negotiate, [we can consider] all the
possibilities. Some wars are avoidable (Post 5, pp. 2–3).

Participants stressed that not only can we work within our democratic system
to avoid unnecessary conflict, but we are duty-bound to do so. Moreover, as citizens
of a democracy our duty extends beyond decisions about war and peace. It extends
to every decision we make about how we want to function as a society. One man
perceived a moral obligation on the part of all Americans to strive to uphold the
ideals upon which our nation was founded—even if achieving those ideals actually
exceeds what is humanly possible:

We have a higher responsibility than other nations because we are the ones
who said that “All men are created equal.” And we are the ones who set
ourselves up as the supporters of that ideal. Other countries did not do it.
Nobody else ever made that promise or claim. And if we are going to make
it—and we’ve made it for 220 years now—if we are going to make that
claim, then we have the responsibility to at least attempt it. We are all human
and no one is going to achieve that; but we have a high responsibility to
attempt it (Post 4, p. 6).

Participants recognized the importance of equality and social justice; they also
perceived that there is strength in diversity. One man suggested that as we work
together to overcome problems, a common bond of unity emerges:

[This place teaches us that] however big the problem, and however diverse
the people involved, if you all have a common goal you can get together and
do it. All races, all religions, they have experienced what these [sites] memo-
rialize. And we’ve all [overcome the problems] in the U.S. together (Post 1,
pp. 4–5).

Participants felt, as citizens of a democracy, that we owe a debt of gratitude to those
who have served. In addition, we have a responsibility to participate in democratic
life. The Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Korean War
Veterans Memorial help us connect with our past, understand its meaning for our
lives today, and renew our commitment to building our desired future. One woman
suggested that the function of the memorials, and our job as citizens, is to remem-
ber what others have done, and what our country is all about, and to “keep it
present”:

I think connecting with your past can help you plan for your future. You can
know what happened in the past, and see what’s going on in the present, and
figure out if you want the same thing in the future or not. And they repre-
sent a lot. They stand for a lot. They’ve done a lot of hard work—the people
that we’ve honored. And remembering that, keeping it present, helps us live as a nation, as a whole (Pre 1, p. 4).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study contribute to an understanding of how the concepts of place and meaning operate in an interpretive setting. Results reveal how visitors interact with a memorial landscape to cultivate a sense of place. Results also yield insight into how visitors engage in the meaning-making process. By highlighting the richness of visitor meanings and place experience, study findings beg the question: How should an expanded understanding of visitor meanings influence interpretive work?

According to Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977), places anchor meanings. By actively engaging in the on-site experience, visitors form their own personalized meanings as well as interact with the societal meanings embedded in a place (Silverman, 1995, 1997; Williams & Stewart, 1998). For example, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial links visitors to diverse meanings and experiences:

[The Vietnam Wall] brings people into the collective realm, engendering a community sense of loss...At once the wall serves as a magnet for those dealing personally with loss (Scruggs, 1994), as a centerpiece of discussion for those wrestling with the rational disillusion of the 1960s, and finally, as a foundation for the rebirth of a people rent apart by war (Wasserman, 1998, p. 45).

Further, the memorials at the Triangle represent a story etched in bricks and mortar. They are:

[A] specific, contextual story about a moment in time that becomes encapsulated—told and retold—in built space...[the memorials] lend an air of stability and continuity to the story. Its meanings are not in the building, except in the sense that they have been projected onto it and its elements (Yanow, 1998, p. 218).

As visitors interact with the memorials, they tend to respond to the social content embedded into (or projected onto) the structures at the conscious and unconscious level (Yanow; Rambo, 1999). The meanings participants articulated were highly personalized, but they also reflected the recurring themes of freedom, sacrifice, patriotism, gratitude, unity, perseverance, equality, democracy, heroism, and responsibility—all concepts that would be touted in any civics classroom. Participants recognized this function of the memorials. One woman confessed, “You are supposed to be inspired by something powerful and by the ideals” (Post 4, p. 12). Despite these seemingly preprogrammed responses, results suggest that the Triangle does provide an authentic experience for visitors. Participants often expressed the ways in which they were moved by the memorials, rather than a sense of being manipulated to feel pat sentimentality or trite emotions. A woman from England noted the “ego” involved in the American memorial landscape while simultaneously articulating the value the memorials have for Americans and non-Americans alike:
[The memorials] bring the emotion to it, [they bring] the humanity to a building or an area. And let’s not forget these are buildings, but they generate a feeling of emotion that is [associated with] human rights or the anti-war demonstrations or whatever. It brings people together. I mean, let’s not forget they’re a glorification as well. It’s like, “Hey, look at us; we’re the best,” which I find very American. But you’ve got to take it with a sense of levity and not take it too seriously, you know. It’s Americanism. It’s like you say, it means a lot of things to Americans and to people from around the world (Pre 2, p. 5).

On-site experience can lead to a sense of belonging to a place, and past experiences serve as powerful triggers to enhance on-site experience (Fishwick & Vining, 1992; Silverman, 1995). For example, the woman quoted above, who recognized that the memorials were socially engineered to elicit specific emotional responses, also related how the Lincoln Memorial had influenced her and her family over time:

I remember being a little girl with my parents. And every time I read anything about [Lincoln] or learned anything about him, I pictured the memorial, the statue. I then brought my children back and felt a little more in charge....And for myself, I have more understanding of it. It is good to get that feeling (Post 4, p. 12).

Relph (1976) identifies what could constitute a “place imperative.” That is, people may function best as human beings when they form intellectual and emotional connections to significant places. As people cultivate a sense of place, their relationship is restored to the land, to the larger community, and by extension, to themselves (Simonson, 1989). If the meanings visitors encounter at a specific site seem relevant to their everyday life, they will tend to exert a greater effort to engage these meanings (Tilden, 1977; Silverman, 1995).

At the heart of the interpretive endeavor is the meaning-making process. Rambo (1999) specifies the mechanism through which meaning-making occurs:

Interpretation [i.e., the getting of symbolic resources] and intention [i.e., the giving of symbolic resources] are symbolic control actions directed toward real instances of symbolization and a cultural pattern of possible instances. The control is exercised, in part, within transactions....Control is the contingent element of meaning, experienced as the necessity to exert effort in order to understand and be understood. Also, it is within this relatively open, improvisational moment of the cultural process—where structure becomes text and text becomes structure—that creativity and change are possible, and indeed inevitable (p. 323).

Rambo’s formulation suggests that meaning-making is essentially transactional; that is, it is an exchange of symbolic resources through a give-and-take interaction that requires significant effort. A meaningful transaction constitutes a quality on-site experience. Study results suggest that visitors come to the Triangle seeking an
experience. They do not primarily seek knowledge or learning—although interpreters and educators sometimes view learning as the visitor’s primary motivation. If learning were their main objective, visitors could obtain almost all relevant information off site. Instead, visitors seek intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings of the resource. Because of the transactional nature of meaning-making, many visitors want their on-site experience to be facilitated. Visitors may be aware that the resource has meaning—they know there is something powerful there—but they may lack the knowledge or personal experience to connect to those meanings or interpret what they are seeing. One couple described how attending an interpretive program at the Korean War Veterans Memorial totally changed the nature of their on-site experience:

Man: We walked through and we didn’t understand what we were seeing. What the ranger described changed the whole picture for us. We were not educated very much [about] the Korean War. We saw that and I said, “Yeah...,” I recognized it for what it is. But I didn’t know what it means.

Woman: We were the lucky ones. How many people walk through it but do not know what they are seeing? (Post 5, p. 5).

Many visitors, perhaps most, ascribe and connect with meanings they can only vaguely articulate or decipher. For example, one participant found herself at a loss to adequately explain her experience:

I don’t know, when I look at Lincoln, I just feel warm inside or something. It is very difficult to explain. It is something that makes your body kind of shake and say “I am proud to be part of this country” (Pre 5, p. 1).

The question remains then, How should an expanded understanding of visitor meanings and on-site experience influence interpretive work? If interpreters understand visitor meanings, they should be less inclined to underestimate visitors, and this in turn should facilitate respectful dialogue. In addition, visitors tend to rally around certain meanings as highly significant and highly relevant. Incorporating these meanings into on-site interpretation increases the likelihood of establishing relevance and facilitating intellectual and emotional connections. Martinez (1988) suggests that by understanding visitors’ “preconceived ideas” and “sincere interests,” interpreters may increase the likelihood of “building the bridge” between visitors and the resource. However, interpreters are not limited to incorporating generalized visitor meanings. For example, an effective interpretive technique might be to include actual visitor quotes in interpretive programs. Because visitor meanings are not a static phenomenon, interpreters should strive to continually expand their understanding of visitor meanings. The simplest way for interpreters to expand or update their knowledge of visitor meanings is to conduct informal visitor interviews. Asking a few simple questions like those used in these focus–group interviews (i.e., What drew you to the site today? What do these sites teach us?) should enable interpreters to better understand visitor meanings. In addition, the simple act of talking to visitors and eliciting their perspectives should help renew an interpreter’s passion for the resource and for the visitors themselves.
The crux of interpretation is this: how can interpreters facilitate intellectual and emotional connections between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor? Moreover, in transactions in which meanings are exchanged, some symbols are controlled and others are left uncontrolled depending on the actors’ interests (Rambo, 1999). Therefore interpreters must also exert effort to expand the scope of the meanings that are “controlled,” to use Eric Rambo’s terminology, or alternatively, the range of meanings that visitors have the opportunity to attend to. In their efforts to expand the scope of meanings visitors can connect to, interpreters confront the “taken-for-grantedness” of many important meanings in contemporary society. They also confront the need that all human beings sometimes face, that is, the need to have their domain of interests enlarged:

...At most only a small part of what is in the field of attention is experienced as a problem that has to be solved. All else is taken for granted. In principle every interpretation or intention can become problematic. Any sign within a text can be called into question regarding its meaning....The taken-for-granted elements of cultural structure and text suffuse actors’ interests, and limit attention in what must be called an unwitting, nonpurposive way. They are a reality constraint on interest attainment....The decisive issue is whether actors can reopen taken-for-granted cultural structures and see their interests within them (Rambo, 1999, pp. 332–333).

Study results reveal that visitors actively ascribe meanings to site resources, though they do so to varying degrees and levels. For every visitor who explores the taken-for-granted aspects of what freedom means, for example, there are undoubtedly many more who lack either the personal experiences or the motivation to probe deeper. The degree to which a meaning is taken for granted varies on an individual-by-individual and a meaning-by-meaning basis based on the individual’s perceived interests. It is important to note that taken-for-grantedness is not problematic in and of itself; rather, it is a mechanism by which individuals streamline the matters to which they devote conscious attention, thus enabling them to function in everyday life (Rambo). However, creativity and change require unpacking and reexamining that which is taken for granted. National parks, and the interpretive opportunities they provide, set the stage for such reexamination and function as an important arena within which this kind of reflection occurs.

Interpretation facilitates the process by which meanings move from being taken for granted to being actively engaged; therefore, interpreters should consider some of the ways in which this shift occurs:

Much [that is taken for granted] is just below the awareness of interest and symbolic control, former problems that carry a trace of their having once been resolved, but which could be visited again if needed. Some of what is taken for granted is in fact periodically opened up as a problem, readdressed, then laid to rest again in a ritualistic cycle. Some is relegated to a trust in, or solidarity with this— or other—worldly others: an assurance that others hold insight the actor is lacking. Some is actually a nagging project for future resolution (Rambo, 1999, p. 333).
One educator reflected on taken-for-granted meanings through her participation in the focus-group interview. The insights she gained motivated her to reexamine her approach to teaching history:

You know, listening to this whole conversation, what’s interesting to hear and what you’re saying, maybe our approach to teaching history needs to be examined so that we look at the big picture, because those are the type of questions you are asking—the big picture questions. What is coming out of these wars that is affecting us as a people, as a nation? And maybe the focus of how we teach it to the kids might be, “What have all these conflicts and wars given us, or not given us, or [how have they] made us what we are today?” [We could] look at it as a big picture instead of individual actions (Post 3, p. 10).

Interpreters wrestle with the taken-for-grantedness of meanings. They also wrestle with the difficulty people have in conceiving of natural and cultural systems holistically and from multiple perspectives. Eric Rambo (1999) frames the challenge as it relates to the cultural realm thusly: “[T]here are no system needs, per se, but only the interests of individuals—who imperfectly and episodically conceive something equivalent to a system, and take an interest in it” (p. 337). Interpretation provides a brief episode during which visitors can connect intellectually and emotionally with the meanings of the resource, (re)establish a system-level perspective, and expand the scope of their interests—a process by which they come to care about the resource so that they can care for it.

CONCLUSION

“Clicking the icon” is an apt analogy for what happens when visitors interact with resources at the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Computer users click screen icons to speed navigation and accomplish specific tasks. In some respects, visitor experience parallels that of computer users. When visitors engage the meanings of site resources—when they “click the icon”—windows pop up, revealing a larger set of meanings. Sometimes a “click” executes a whole new program and new identities or new insights into how things function as a system emerge. “Clicking the icon” represents the process by which visitors make intellectual and/or emotional connections with the meanings of the resource. This study identified a wide range of meanings that visitors attach to three significant places on our national landscape. It also explored how visitors interact with a memorial landscape to create a sense of place, how visitors engage in the meaning-making process, and the role an expanded understanding of visitor meanings could have in improving interpretation. Understanding how the concepts of place and meaning operate in an interpretive setting, and integrating that understanding into interpretive program development, represents an ongoing challenge for the interpretive profession.

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REFERENCES


THROUGH THEIR EYES:  
THE MEANING OF HERITAGE SITE EXPERIENCES TO VISITORS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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Abstract:
Little research exists that explores the meaning of a heritage site visit from the perspectives of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning of heritage sites and the heritage site visit from the point of view of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Forty informants, identified through network sampling, participated in in-depth telephone interviews. Analysis consisted of the constant comparison method. Among informants, a heritage site was typically thought of as a place of history where stories are presented. The meaning of a visit was characterized by the availability or unavailability of specific interpretive media, such as hands-on opportunities, site personnel, and audiovisual media; by visit companions; and by the built environment. Implications include the need for visitors who are blind or visually impaired as well as interpretive staff to be advocates, trainers, and facilitators to enhance heritage site visits.

Keywords:
Blind, visually impaired, heritage sites, heritage, visitors, visitor behavior.

INTRODUCTION
From historic sites to our national parks, hundreds of unique sites across the United States bear the vital responsibility of preserving and interpreting the country’s cultural, natural, and built heritage to both American citizens and visitors from around the globe. While long recognized for this important cultural function, sites such as

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historic monuments, museums, towns, and cities appear to be gaining popularity for their recreational value as well. In a random sample survey of American citizens, more than 57% reported visiting a history museum or historic site at least once in the past 12 months (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). In another national assessment, visiting historic places emerged as the fastest growing outdoor recreation activity expected through the year 2050 (Cordell & O’Leary, 1998). Scholars and professionals alike have catalogued the potential benefits of heritage site visits—including education, relaxation, and opportunities for social bonding (Beetho & Prentice, 1997; Falk & Dierking, 1992; Masberg & Silverman, 1996; Prentice, Davies, & Beetho, 1997). The popularity of heritage sites is increasing; as such, more attention should be given to the experiences of all visitors. This research focuses on one type of visitor, the visitor who is blind or visually impaired.

By law, public sites such as heritage sites must provide “equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits” (Groff & Gardner, 1989, p. 16) to persons with disabilities. Among those entitled to a rewarding heritage site experience are approximately 14.3 million people with visual disabilities, nearly 125,000 of whom are totally blind (Majewski, 1987). Despite these numbers, virtually no systematic research has examined the heritage site experiences of visitors with visual disabilities. As a result, there is a void of research on which to base evaluations of current accessibility efforts and program design, or appropriate approaches to the use of heritage site visits. As the popularity of heritage visiting continues to grow, it becomes increasingly critical to understand the meaning and nature of heritage site experiences for people who are blind or visually impaired and other individuals with special needs.

Individuals with visual disabilities include those who are blind and those who have low or partial vision (Groff & Gardner, 1989; Majewski, 1987), and most wish to enjoy active and enriching cultural, educational, and tourist experiences. Indeed, “disabled people are entitled to the same cultural life as the rest of us and their right to it is inalienable” (Weisen, 1991b, p. 107). Nonetheless, heritage sites are typically biased toward a fully sighted audience, conveying a great deal of information and experience through highly visual means such as exhibitions, labels, brochures, and films. The need to conserve valuable historical and natural resources and protect them from wear and deterioration usually precludes much tactile communication in heritage sites, further hindering those with visual impairments. While some sites offer special alternative tours or programs for those with visual disabilities, the result is often an experience that is not enjoyed “in the same way as everyone else” (Weisen, 1991a, p. 84). This “segregation” mirrors the broader social context in which those with visual impairments all too often find themselves.

Some sites appear to offer promising efforts (Zorpette, 1989). Over the years, art museums in particular have designed experimental programs and exhibits, which sometimes involve visitors with visual impairments and other visitors together in descriptive programming and viewing through touch (e.g., Haseltine, 1966; Bourgeois-Lechartier, 1981). Computers and audio methods are also being used (e.g., Corvest, 1991). Yet there exists no baseline understanding of the heritage site experiences of visitors with visual disabilities in order to assess and inform these efforts,
or to assist specialists in facilitating the most beneficial heritage site visit possible for visitors with visual disabilities.

Many times when interpretive exhibits are being designed, the opinions and ideas of the general visitor are not sought. This is doubly true of the visitor who is blind or visually impaired. The resulting exhibit is often inappropriate or inaccessible for people with disabilities (Covington, 1994). Many books and articles provide guidelines and recommendations for making museums, historic sites, and other tourist destinations accessible to people with disabilities (e.g., Majewski, 1987). However, the majority of this information has been generated by experts, rather than having emerged from the actual perspectives and recommendations of visitors with disabilities.

This lack of focus on the visitor’s perspective or meaning of a heritage site is not limited to visitors with disabilities. Despite a growing body of scholarship on heritage tourism, there is a surprising lack of understanding of how visitors of all kinds define a heritage site and what the activity of visiting a heritage site means to them (Moscardo, 1996). Little research into visitors’ experiences at heritage sites has been designed to explore the visitor’s perspective—to elicit and present visitors’ own terms, discussions, and meanings related to heritage site visiting. In the tourism industry, which is highly dependent upon the satisfaction of visitors, such a gap in knowledge seems ill-advised.

In a recent study, a qualitative approach borrowing from the tradition of phenomenology was utilized to explore the meaning of visitor experiences at heritage sites for college student visitors (Masberg & Silverman, 1996). The tradition of phenomenology emphasizes the discovery of the structure of the phenomenon under study from the point of view of the individual experiencing the phenomenon (Husserl, 1965; Heidigger, 1962). The results of this study on college student experiences suggested that student visitors’ heritage site experiences are multidimensional. Students’ experiences were personal and emotional in nature, stressing the importance of the activities in which they engaged while at the site (e.g., picnics and bike rides), the companions with whom they were visiting, the site personnel they encountered, and the information and learning they gained from the content of the site. The results of this research indicate the need of heritage sites to provide facilities and services that incorporate learning and activities, information, and social interaction. The richness of the findings seemed to support the fruitfulness of a qualitative approach for understanding visitor experiences. These findings also feed into creating exhibits, interpretive programs, and sites and facilities that better serve varied populations.

Qualitative research has been characterized as the opportunity to take the subject’s perspective, or to “see through their eyes” (Bryman, 1988). How poignant this approach is in the case of individuals who are blind or visually impaired!

The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning of heritage sites and the heritage site visit from the perspectives of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. How do people who are blind or visually impaired define a heritage site? What does the experience mean to them? Such insight can provide practitioners with valuable information with which to facilitate beneficial recreation experiences for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
Methods

Forty informants in Indiana were identified through a network-sampling technique. Network sampling is a strategy whereby each successive participant is named by a preceding individual (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This approach is particularly useful when the desired type of informants are scattered throughout the population. Several organizations for blind and visually impaired citizens, including the American Council for the Blind and alumni organizations of the Indiana School for the Blind, assisted with recruitment of participants by announcing the study to their members. Names, phone numbers, and addresses of potential informants were collected. An initial telephone contact was made with a potential informant. At that time, their participation was individually solicited. If the individual consented to be interviewed, an informational letter and consent form were sent (made available in print, large print, Braille, or audio formats), and a telephone interview appointment was made. Telephone interviews were determined to provide the informants with the least hardship in order to participate. With initial recruitment from an organization and individual confirmation of participation, few individuals declined to be interviewed. Individuals declined to participate due to unavailability during the interview period. All non-participants were asked whether, if contacted at a later time, they would be willing to be interviewed. All consented. All informants reside in Indiana, which may limit the results of this study, though sites located outside the state of Indiana were recollected by informants.

Each informant participated in a semistructured, in-depth telephone interview. The interviews lasted from 25 to 45 minutes and followed an interview guide (see Figure 1). Questions were asked to gather demographic and disability information, informants’ descriptions of the concept of heritage site, and their descriptions of actual heritage site visits. Interview questions were developed from the literature and from conversations with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The interview guide was pilot-tested with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The pilot test involved formally interviewing 3 individuals as well as having them provide feedback on the format of the interview. The pilot test and other interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data analysis consisted of analyzing the transcripts according to the constant comparative method outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Responses to Questions 1–8 and 15 only were analyzed and are reported here. Reliability and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were enhanced by three steps:

1. Data collection and analysis were conducted until saturation of the data occurred. Saturation resulted when principal themes were exhausted and no new themes emerged for several informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2. A member check was conducted to determine the validity of emerging interpretation (Lincoln & Guba). A report of initial findings was presented at two meetings of informants. The findings were discussed, and clarification and further interpretation of the findings were obtained during these sessions.

3. Cross-checking of the analysis was done by two researchers to verify the findings.
1. Demographic information:
   a. What is your current age?
   b. What level of education have you achieved?
   c. Are you totally blind or partially blind?
   d. Have you been blind/partially blind since birth? If not, at what age did you lose your vision?
   e. Note: gender.

2. In your own words, what does the term heritage mean to you?

3. Think back, what are some heritage sites you have visited?

4. Which visit do you remember in most detail? Where is the site located? Please describe your visit there in as much detail as possible as you remember it.

5. Were there any particularly positive parts of the experience? Could you explain?

6. Were there any particular negative parts of the experience? Could you explain?

7. Approximately when was this visit?

8. How frequently have you visited this site? When was your last visit?

9. What does the term accessibility mean to you?

10. What do you feel you have a right to expect at a heritage site in terms of accessibility? Refer to the site you described earlier.

11. In what ways were you enabled to participate at the site? In particular, were there things that were done at the site that enabled your participation?

12. What, if anything, were barriers to your participation?

13. Did you make the visit with anyone? Who were your companions? Did they affect your visit? If so, how?

14. Could heritage sites in general be more accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired? If so, how?

15. When you departed from the site, did you feel you left with something you did not have before? What was it?

16. Were you made aware of alternatives available for individuals who are blind or visually impaired?

17. Were there audio or audio/visual presentations? If so, did they include description of what was being shown? Was this effective?

18. Were printed materials available in alternative forms? If so, which formats?

19. Did the exhibits engage senses other than sight? To what extent?

20. Did the site personnel demonstrate knowledge or awareness of the needs of the people who are blind or visually impaired?

Figure 1. Interview guide. (Note: This is the complete guide used to collect data. Information presented in this research was obtained from questions 1–8 and 15 only.)

The sites chosen for recollections were determined by the informants. The informant determination was necessary in order that informants define heritage and heritage site in their own fashion. No effort was made to classify sites according to categories (e.g., size, type) that are considered typical in all states. More importantly, the sites chosen for recollection were meaningful to the informant, which added to the richness of the data collected.
RESULTS
The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning of heritage sites and the heritage site visit from the perspectives of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. The findings are divided into the following four sections: (a) description of the informants, (b) definition of a heritage site, (c) meaning of the heritage site visit, and (d) visit outcomes. Note that a brief description of sites that may be lesser known appears in Figure 2.

Description of the Informants
Informants consisted of 40 individuals living in Indiana who are blind or visually impaired and who had visited a heritage site. The sample included 12 males and 28 females, whose ages ranged from 20 to 80 years, with an average age of 50 years. Their education included high school diplomas ($n=10$), master’s degrees ($n=3$), and one doctoral degree. Approximately half of the informants ($n=19$) were totally blind, while half were partially blind ($n=21$). Of the totally blind informants, 12 had been blind since age 3 or younger, and 7 had been blind since age 7 or older. Of the partially blind informants, 10 had been blind since age 5 or younger, while 11 had been blind since age 33 or older.

Informants chose a variety of heritage sites for recollection, including parks, museums, cities, shrines, monuments, and outdoor settings. The decision to visit a site was made by a companion (e.g., spouse) or predetermined group (e.g., school or tour). Informants recollected arriving by bus with their school class or traveling with a relative. Most sites were located in Indiana, but sites outside the state were described by the informants as well (e.g., Smithsonian Institution). Whether a heritage site is a preferred visit choice for education or recreation by individuals who are blind or visually impaired is beyond the scope of this study.

Angel Mounds State Historic Site in Newburgh, Indiana, is nationally recognized as one of the best preserved prehistoric Native American sites in the United States.

Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art features exhibitions, festivals, and educational activities focusing on the art, history, and cultures of the American West and the indigenous peoples of North America.

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum is on the grounds of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, a National Historic Landmark. Displayed are more than 75 racing cars, early antique and classic passenger cars, engines, trophies, helmets, historic photographs, and other priceless memorabilia.

James Whitcomb Riley Home was home to the author of great works such as “Little Orphan Annie” and “The Raggedy Man,” as well as the most popular poet in America at the height of his career.

President Benjamin Harrison Home was the home of the 23rd U.S. president and noted for its Victorian furnishings.

Spring Mill State Park in Mitchell, Indiana, contains a restored pioneer village placed in the early 1800s.

Figure 2. Description of lesser known sites.
Definition of a Heritage Site
When asked to define “a heritage site,” the answers typically referred to history. For example, a heritage site is “a place of history,” “a site that is historical in some way,” “a location with some history to it.”

Many respondents felt that the history at a heritage site included a sense of connection to people who’ve come before us:

- Said a 54-year-old totally blind woman: “To me it means a place or something that tells us about our ancestors. Either where they lived, how they lived…but it gives us an idea of what our heritage is.”
- “It’s something that’s passed down to us. Something of historical value and from our forefathers. It tells us something of our roots, so to speak,” said a 40-year-old woman who has been blind since age 7.
- A 26-year-old totally blind woman said, “It means a place that tells us something of Indiana’s past if it’s about Indiana, about our past and the people who were here before us. And I also think it tells us something about what we have that we can leave to our people who follow us or offspring.”

Informants often noted that the heritage site “told a story,” as described by a 51-year-old partially blind woman:

Every person, place, and thing has a story, and once that story becomes known we could technically call it a heritage site…because we learn from every contact we have…because I sometimes consider just a walk down the block and you see a tree and there’s a story behind it….I would come close to calling that a heritage site.

In sum, a heritage site to an individual who is blind and visually impaired is typically a place of history, where stories, often stories of people, are presented.

The Meaning of a Heritage Site Visit
Informants were asked to remember a visit and describe that visit in as much detail as possible. Several themes, or salient aspects of a visit, emerged as meaningful in the data. Three dominant themes will be discussed: (a) availability or unavailability of specific interpretive media or opportunities, (b) visit companions, and (c) the built environment.

Availability or unavailability of specific interpretive media or opportunities. One clear theme emerged as common to the visit recollections of many informants: the availability or unavailability of hands-on opportunities, site personnel who provided verbal descriptions, or audiovisual media. Informants commented on the availability or lack of media. More often, however, the most salient dimension of a visit recollection was the presence or absence of opportunities. The informant provided acknowledgment that sometimes the media or opportunities were not available to everyone and that an exception was made in his or her case. This indicated his or her belief that an opportunity was not routinely made available to
visitors, or perhaps required more effort on the part of the site personnel than usual.

**Hands-on opportunities.** The opportunity for hands-on experiences at a heritage site was the defining aspect of a heritage site visit for many informants. The following three informants provide recollections that illustrate the importance of having the opportunity to touch and explore through a tactile experience. A 59-year-old totally blind woman recollected her visit to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum in Indianapolis:

A friend was in town and wanted to go see something, and he happened to be blind also and had never been out here...so my husband and I took him out there....We asked if we could touch the cars, and an old fellow was kind of a guide and he's been doing this for a long time and he's taken people through there before and they...take the rope down and allow you to touch like one car of each vintage. So we got to see a Deusenburg, a 1906 car, [and] walk all around it, and touch any part of it we wanted to....I was in shock when we touched those cars 'cause I had no idea how low to the ground they were....We got to see about eight to ten cars....That's probably the most I've ever got to touch in any museum of any description.

A 49-year-old man, partially blind since birth, visited the U. S. Capitol with his family. His recollection illustrates the “special” opportunity not provided to all visitors or at all sites:

Our congressman, one of his people, was able to give us a tour of the old part of the Congress or Senate....They got permission to remove the ropes and let us look at the old chairs, the desks, the gavel. So I thought that was pretty neat of them letting us be able to do that. There were three of us: my son, my wife, and I. Then they explained a little bit and let us go into the Legislature. Of course, that was not different than anyone else, we sat up top; but I thought that was pretty neat they let us touch that stuff.

Also appreciative of the “special” opportunity provided for her at the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis was a 46-year-old woman totally blind since birth. She noted that hands-on opportunities are not always available to visitors at sites:

Well, I can tell you one visit that's pretty vivid in my memory that I was pretty impressed with....We went a few years ago, a group of blind people to the Eiteljorg Museum....it was a group of blind ladies that went, and they had set aside a particular day and a particular time where we were just in this one particular room and they brought a lot of things in. We all sat in a circle, and they brought a lot of things in that we could pass around and touch and ask questions about. And they gave us history about it, like different utensils that the Indians ate with, all kinds of things....It was really neat ‘cause we were able to actually have hands-on experience, which sometimes is hard in a lot of sites and places....It was so neat ‘cause we could actually feel everything as it was being described.
The absence of the opportunity to touch artifacts appeared to be the defining feature of a visit. “Frustration” appeared to characterize the recollection of a visit to the James Whitcomb Riley historic home in Indianapolis by a 44-year-old man, partially blind since birth:

The most vivid thing in my memory of the visit would be I just kind of wandered around. I was with a group of fully sighted people, and at the time they assumed I could see everything....I wanted to put my hands on the furniture. They had it roped off.

A similar feeling was expressed by a 44-year-old totally blind woman:

What I remember most about going to different museums, [and] homes, and things is going through it with a tour group and stopping a: a rope....It’s not always a real good feeling that I’ve had when we’ve gone on those kind of things; it’s really kind of hard because they would let you touch things. Some things, it’s understandable, but that’s sort of what I remember going into those kinds of places...maybe touching glass, and there may be something behind that glass, but nothing that we’ve been able to touch.

The opportunity to touch artifacts appears to be an end in itself. It is a valued opportunity that often seems to define a heritage site visit as typified by a 45-year-old woman, totally blind, recalling her visit to the Smithsonian Institution:

I remember the Smithsonian, I think it was the Natural History Museum. They had a place where you could touch different birds, and I think that was great. I’ve heard birds all my life. I love birds, but I’ve never got to really touch many of them, and I remember touching several different birds and seeing how they were different, and I thought that was really great.

A totally blind 53-year-old man provides additional insight:

I think the most....exciting, [or] thrilling, or emotional [visit] maybe was at the Lincoln Home. They had Lincoln’s hand. Apparently somebody, it sounds kind of gross, but apparently they had taken his hand and made it like a plaster cast and then, you know...molded his hand so...it was actually like touching his hand which they had, of course, under glass. And they actually offered without me even asking if I would like to touch it. So they unlocked the case and took it out, and I touched his hand, which was kind of weird. It was almost like holding his actual hand and...you could feel the fingernails and the veins and so on, and it was a moving experience.

Site personnel who provide verbal description. A second interpretive opportunity frequently mentioned by informants as a defining feature of a heritage visit was the presence or absence of a guide or other site personnel to describe what was present. The ability to provide rich, useful description was considered by many informants to be an art, and therefore variable. Said a 34-year-old totally blind female of a visit to New Orleans:
I remember that the tour guide talked about how the New Orleans area was settled in the 1800s by the French…and a lot of the cooking has come from France that they’ve kind of Americanized. I found the tour guide to be very personable and very willing to describe things. The tour I went on was an event which took place during a convention of the National Federation of the Blind, so there were a lot of us there. I don’t know if she was that way all the time, but she was particularly very descriptive, and when describing the historical events that took place, she made you feel that you were there.

Another 34-year-old totally blind female said of a visit to Colonial Williamsburg:

When you went to the different homes, they had people who were in character that told you all about what their life would have been like then as you walk through the home, and they really went into detail about everything. I guess what I remember about it was the tour guides were very descriptive…they were naturally descriptive. It wasn’t something that you felt they went out of their way to do; it was part of it.

The outcome of good description is a mental picture. This outcome is important, as said by a 50-year-old partially blind female of the James Whitcomb Riley Home in Indianapolis:

I remember that we went in and…there was someone there to take you around at whatever point you wanted. They’d start a tour when there was enough people to do it. So we just waited a few minutes in a small lobby, and there were probably five or six people that were on the tour. We were given a description of how old the home was and that kind of stuff…the guide was very descriptive. There were a couple of us who were blind, and she was very descriptive about the bedspread on the bed. I could close my eyes and imagine what it looked like and felt like. She described the table settings and the old kitchen equipment, the stove….I was able to picture it and it was like back then.

The ability of a guide or site personnel describer varies. A 44-year-old partially blind man said of this ability during his visit also to the Riley Home:

The historical information that the guide was giving us was quite interesting….He tried to, but he really wasn’t [aware] of how to verbally paint the picture. It’s definitely a skill or a talent that not all people have, to verbally or orally paint a picture to anyone, sighted or blind.

The skill of a describer appears to be enhanced by experience. A 50-year-old totally blind woman commented on this skill, experienced during her visit to the Lincoln Museum:

I went with a sighted guide….I think the visit was better for me because I did have a sighted guide who is used to working with people with vision impairments, so she was more in tune to describing things that might have been
missed otherwise.... There were lots of visual things that I benefited from by her descriptions. She is used to working with vision-impaired people, so her descriptions were more in tune with things I was naturally interested in.

**Audiovisual media.** The third most commonly mentioned interpretive technique or opportunity was the presence or absence of audiovisual media. Such media were particularly appreciated by those who were partially blind, since with some acuity these individuals could appreciate some of the visuals. However, visitors who are partially and totally blind alike appreciated the audio components of audiovisual media. Said a 46-year-old partially blind woman of her visit to Angel Mounds State Park:

They've got a really nice interpretive center...they have a movie which you can sit and watch....I can't see too much, but if the screen is big enough I can see a movie if I'm close enough to it. But there was a lot besides visuals. There was a lot of talking. You could press buttons and it would tell you about things and I think that makes a difference...and actually some of their writing on the wall was big enough that the letters were big enough and I could actually read some of it myself.

Said a 35-year-old partially blind woman of her visit to Lincoln Museum in Indiana:

I think it's the largest collection in the U.S. of Lincoln memorabilia. They have...different exhibits that come from different museums....But you walk through the whole building and it has...different exhibits of things from early presidency and all the way from his birth on down....A lot of it is with just a placard that you have to read that tells about the visit. However, some of them now have like a prerecorded message. You press the button. It's an audiotape that basically reads the placard for you, which is helpful because I wouldn't be able to read the placard. Someone with me would have to read it. Most everything is up close. A lot of it is behind glass...but it's big enough where you can see it, you can get right up close to it. As far as reading the information about it, if they didn't have those audiotape things, then, you know, I wouldn't be able to get the information.

The availability of audiovisual media was the central aspect of a memorable visit for some totally blind individuals as well. A 50-year-old woman said of her visit to the Lincoln Museum in Indiana:

First of all, the museum is kind of a state-of-the-art museum, so there were lots of really good exhibits where you could touch a button and things would be read to you and described, which was wonderful. I felt like I could have gone there on my own and still gained something from it....I remember that they had several areas where they showed videos to describe some of the points they wanted to make about the period in history or what was going on, and it was nicely arranged so that with my very limited sight...I could sense a lot of movement, and some things on the screen that I would...
not have seen if we were all huddled around a typical video monitor. I remember that being very impressive. I especially appreciate and remember there were...lots of stations built in a sort of circle, and you could move from one to the next. There were stools where you could sit and, again, the buttons to punch and the voice would describe the things....I definitely benefited from the audio portion. I felt real positive about the basic design. This was by far the most blind-friendly museum I had experienced as a vision-impaired person to date, and I felt really pleased to know they were accommodating for the needs of the blind.

Visit companions. For a far smaller number of informants, the salient or defining aspect of a memorable visit appeared to be the person or persons with whom one visited—usually a spouse, family member, or significant other. While all of the informants made their most memorable visit in the company of at least one other person, and often a group, a small number discussed their site visit with particular emphasis on their companion(s). Said an 80-year-old partially blind woman of her visit to Hawaii:

We took a tour and we visited almost all of it. All the islands. That was the best one 'cause my husband was with me on that one to Hawaii. We saw Diamond Head and Waikiki Beach and the university there and gardens and everything.

Said a 72-year-old partially blind woman of her visit to Cape May, New Jersey:

The Victorian Homes were so beautiful. I was with my daughter-in-law and my grandson, and I've always had people to sort of help me around the steps....We picked up sea shells...my great-grandchildren helped me and I enjoyed the food and of course we were on a Coast Guard base; that's where they lived. I'm not really fond of the water. My grandson got nearly taken under trying to rescue something for the children. But as far as the atmosphere, I'd love to go back again.

Said a 44-year-old totally blind woman of her visit to the Benjamin Harrison Home in Indianapolis:

All I remember is it was with a ladies group. I don't know if it was from church or community service group. It was in the summertime, 'cause I remember I wanted to go back at Christmas and didn't go. That's all I remember. It's been a while.

The built environment. For a small number of informants, the defining aspect of their memorable visit appeared to be the nature of the built environment or architectural elements. Said a 54-year-old totally blind man of his visit to Pioneer Village at Spring Mill State Historic Park in Mitchell, Indiana:

You go through and they have buildings, open buildings set up to look like cabins, the old-time log cabins. The chapel, blacksmith shop, these are all in
log fashion. It’s built like the old typical 1800s town. Kind of what you’d see on “Gunsmoke.”

A 21-year-old totally blind woman recounted her experience regarding House on the Rock in Spring Green, Wisconsin:

It’s basically built up on this huge rock, and…we were taken there by bus. But everything in the house was literally rock. Everything that was built…the ceilings, some of them had really interesting slopes to them…There was a really old piano, it was well preserved. And some places where there really was a lot of rock, it was interesting ‘cause it was the summer and it was really cold. It didn’t need air conditioning. It was great.

A 37-year-old totally blind woman also reflected on her visit to Monticello:

I was probably in fourth grade….We saw the main house first. I remember seeing Thomas Jefferson’s bed, and they had the bed separating the bedroom from the study room. It was like one of our modern kitchen counter bar items, it was his bed, which I thought was really neat. We didn’t have kitchen counter bars at that time, so it was a whole new concept to enter the room and have two rooms separated…I remember them telling and showing us a lot of the things he invented, which at this point I don’t remember at all….The part I remember liking a lot about the house was that the whole architectural structure was all one piece. You have different wings that go off in little houses at the end of each wing and the barn/stable was under the house, and the wine cellars and the slave quarters and all the rest were all in one building.

Outcomes of a heritage site visit. Informants were asked whether they had left their visit with something they did not have before. Most indicated that they had. Most often, informants felt they left with a feeling, sense, or emotion, usually positive. For example, “You come away feeling that there’s real pride of the people” or “I leave with a sense of preserving [a] valuable resource to have just for…holding up over the ages.” Sometimes, the positive feeling the visitor left with stemmed more from how they were treated and the opportunities they were afforded at the site than the site artifacts or buildings. Said a 45-year-old woman, totally blind since birth, of her visit to Washington, D.C.: “I have an idea of what the Vietnam Wall was like, like I could feel the carvings and what all that was like.” Said a 53-year-old man blind from the age of one:

I felt good about it….I enjoyed the atmosphere, hearing all the other kids having a good time, and I had a good time too. It’s always been kind of hard being told, “Don’t touch this or that.” This was different.

Conclusions
The informants defined a heritage site as a place of history. However, the heritage site also tells a “story,” which is an important aspect of the recollections and a
valued outcome among informants. Given that informants were not privy to the visual communication present at the site, the concept of narrative became an important way in which visitors conceived of and experienced heritage sites.

How else do visitors who are blind or visually impaired make meaning of heritage sites? Their experiences were rendered meaningful through engagement of senses other than sight. Central to the meaning of a heritage site visit was the opportunity to engage in tactile communication, such as touching artifacts, models, or representations. Auditory communication was also key—from the verbal description of a guide and audiovisual narration, to the comments of companions, to the creak of floorboards and the whistle of wind in the trees. For those who are blind or visually impaired, all these means conveyed the interpretable character of a site. Even smells and tastes were valued. As a 46-year-old woman, blind since birth, explained:

Being that I don’t have any way of actually seeing something visually, it means using my other senses, like being able to smell, touch, hear different things, so that I can experience it in a way that has meaning for me. Especially touch and hearing.

Unlike sighted college students whose recollections of heritage site visits emphasized a variety of aspects, the recollections of informants who are blind or visually impaired emphasized one salient theme in each account. Overwhelmingly that theme was the availability or lack of interpretive opportunities that engaged senses other than sight. Special opportunities, or lack thereof (and the accompanying frustration), so impacted the heritage site experience for these visitors that little else was recalled by comparison. For some, the dominance of this theme was due to an extremely positive experience—an opportunity to touch artifacts, for example. For others, the result was due to a negative experience—the absence of audio narration, for example.

Given their reliance on senses other than sight, it is no wonder that the availability of hands-on opportunities, describers, or audiovisuals that foster the engagement of other senses would be the key focus and defining feature of a heritage site for visitors who are blind or visually impaired. Few informants went on to mention learning or other types of experience as outcomes of the experience. It may be that such goals are simply not the goals valued by these visitors. It is equally likely, however, that visitors who are blind or visually impaired are constrained in their possible experiences by the inconsistent availability of appropriate interpretive opportunities.

Visitors who are blind or visually impaired have powerful resources for making meaning of heritage sites, focusing on the “stories” told and on rich sensory experiences, when available. Unfortunately the nature of the visitors' experience and its meaning is highly dependent on others—the site itself and the visitors' companions—or the opportunities that could yield a diversity of outcomes.

Implications
This study uncovered a gap in providing "the same cultural life" for all in the case
of the individual who is blind or visually impaired. The findings suggest several important implications for heritage sites and interpreters to better serve individuals who are blind and visually impaired. To optimally serve the population of individuals who are blind or visually impaired, issues of how to manage tactile experiences arise. Ideas for future collaborative ventures and research also emerged from study results.

This study suggests that heritage sites are not necessarily meeting the needs of visitors who are blind or visually impaired. The availability of interpretive media that engage senses other than sight appears to be inconsistent, according to visitors’ recollections. The site personnel, who adapted to the needs of visitors who are blind or visually impaired by offering to remove barriers or allow close scrutiny, provided memorable experiences. Heritage sites need to make available a diverse array of appropriate interpretive opportunities, in particular those which allow visitors to touch and to hear—including narration, audiovisual opportunities, and sounds, as appropriate. Sites might also wish to look closely at the clarity and accessibility of the “stories” they tell. Skilled storytelling in which visual pictures are depicted through words would be appreciated by visitors who are blind or visually impaired.

Heritage sites are popular places to visit, increasingly providing recreational, social, and educational experiences. As heritage sites work to better meet the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired, front-line interpretive staff, including docents and guides, have an important role to play in helping visitors make the most of a heritage site visit. Understanding the needs and meanings of those who are blind or visually impaired, interpreters can better prepare and organize an optimal experience. To this end, interpretive staff can assist clients in finding out in advance what opportunities are available at a site and discussing specific needs and possibilities with clients and the site. Such arrangements might include providing verbal description and narration, and advising site personnel and visit companions in specific ways to provide clients with pointed assistance at the site. Interpretive staff can also discuss heritage site experiences with visitors who are blind or visually impaired to empower them and assist them in understanding and achieving the wide range of benefits possible from the heritage site experience.

Managers of heritage sites would be wise to think more broadly when designing exhibits and programs to include media variously accessible to a variety of audiences. This would include consulting more frequently with individuals who are blind or visually impaired in the design and implementation of exhibits, programs, and other interpretation. An approach that appeals to a variety of senses could provide an important perspective of great benefit to both sighted visitors and visitors with disabilities. The rich experiences and recollections of visitors in this study emphasize the many ways in which heritage sites might engage a multitude of senses. Interpretation for all might be very different if informed by the perspective of those with various impairments. Visitors who are blind or visually impaired could provide input into staff training so that there is an understanding of their needs. Having to provide for visitors with a disability is often assumed to require added cost, personnel, technology, and devices. This may sometimes be the case but may enhance experiences of all visitors.
Required to provide “equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits” of heritage sites, management may blanch at the idea of providing tactile experiences for even a small portion of the visitors to heritage sites. The introduction of this kind of opportunity may endanger artifacts and injects a new realm of security and staffing issues. So with the need identified and the issues known, the challenge then becomes how to balance the need and the issues. Management may wish to revisit a current exhibit with the idea of how to create an atmosphere of exploration and engagement of senses other than sight. Identifying objects that all visitors can touch or providing replicas or reproductions may be a solution. Designating one room in a historical home as a place where exploration could occur may be another solution. The solutions require careful and creative consideration with the perspective that heritage sites are recreation and learning environments as well as sites of preservation and protection.

Future research might explore what interpretive opportunities are most effective for facilitating different meanings and experiences among all heritage site visitors, particularly those with different sensory abilities. Research on potential differences in heritage site experience and outcomes by disability, the age at which the disability occurred, education level, and attitude toward disability accommodation might also help in enhancing the experiences of the disabled at heritage sites. Who better to collaborate on such an agenda than interpreters, heritage site personnel, and visitors themselves? The results might well unlock the beneficial potential of visiting heritage sites for all people.

References


ARTISTS, TOURISTS, 
AND THE ELUSIVE SUBLIME: 
THE ARTIST AS TOURIST, INTERPRETER, 
AND PROMOTER OF TOURISM

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Abstract:
Artists have played a major role in promoting and interpreting wild lands to tourists for more than a century and a half. But there is much more to the artist-tourist connection than artistic products and their seemingly infinite ability to persuade us to preserve public lands and to visit them for recreation. The little understood process of creative inspiration, beginning with artists’ need to experience nature and ending with their need to share that experience, reflects parallel needs of tourists.

Keywords:
Art, artists, tourism, ecotourism, parks, interpretation.

FROM ART TO PROMOTION

The major landscape painters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries often spoke of being in search of “the sublime,” meaning that elusive but perfect manifestation of man in nature, or “heaven on Earth.” Reflecting this artistic quest, the traveling centennial celebration of Frederick Edwin Church’s paintings bears the subtitle “In Search of the Promised Land” (Carr, 2000). Many of the idyllic scenes of nature by Church, Cole, Bierstadt, and Remington strikingly convey the artists’ reverence for landscapes which are almost transcendental in their context. Ironically they and scores of others of their era became tourism’s early promoters, often helping to propel the very heavens they had found toward a state of the sub-sublime.


Note: The author teaches environmental interpretation and issues and ethics of park management at the University of Maine.
Belanger goes on to point out that “in less than half a century the island, first regarded as merely a rocky, barren, and largely inhospitable wilderness...became a scenic destination for thousands, especially the nation’s wealthy elite” (1999, p. 19).

The artistic celebration of the outdoors of the 19th century was not limited to the visual arts, and works such as “The Poetry of Traveling in the United States” appeared as early as 1838. Similarly, singing groups such as the Hutchisons traveled around the country praising the wonders of New Hampshire’s White Mountains (Huth, 1990).

The artists of today who find their inspiration in America’s natural landscapes seem no less in awe of their subject. In an ongoing series of interviews with photographers, painters, composers, performing artists, and writers whose creations celebrate Acadia National Park and Baxter State Park in Maine, the emotional connections to the landscape are equally evident. And their creative interpretations clearly continue to influence travel to these two parks (LaPage, 2000).

The interpretive successes of nature-oriented artists has, over the past 150-plus years, catapulted tourism promotion into a multibillion-dollar business and, not infrequently, taken us from the sublime to the ridiculous. So successful have been some of today’s promotions that the numbers of visitors they produce often threaten the attraction, the tourist market, and even the resource itself. Increasingly we see reports of local concern being voiced in ways that polarize the visitor and the host community: “Welcome to Our State—Now Go Home!” or “Fishing and Bathing for Residents Only!” A recent National Geographic article about one of Maine’s premier tourist magnets reflects the growing antipathy toward tourists in its title, “Welcome to Monhegan Island, Maine—Now Please Go Away,” while paradoxically increasing tourism itself with images that capture Monhegan’s allure as only National Geographic photography can (Newman, 2001).

The search for the promised land clearly resonates with tourists. There can be little doubt that tourists in general, and ecotourists in particular, are looking for something not unlike that which drove the landscape painters of the last two centuries deeper into the wilderness. One difference between a Frederick Church interpretation and that of a 21st-century marketing firm can probably be characterized as a “truth in advertising” issue. The early nature artists were often accused of exaggeration, but the more recent depictions of serenity and solitude, sans transmission lines and development, can probably not be found anywhere today except perhaps in the airbrush studio. With today’s mass tourism to hundreds of thousands of traditional outdoor venues, perhaps we all should view that elusive perfect trip as a “work of art.”

A second difference between Church’s era and today is that we no longer have to work at finding heaven—it can be as simple as following the directions in the advertisement. While there are a growing number of tourism “advertorials,” it is the rare tourism ad that attempts to provide the visitor an in-depth understanding of the destination and what to expect. After all, advertising success is based on numbers responding, and we know that any attempt at interpretation can have the effect of reducing the numbers. “Bring foul-weather gear” might be interpreted as, “Expect foul weather” (and besides, we sell foul-weather gear here). Similarly, “Return to an earlier time when life was simpler” might be interpreted as, “Share a bath—and enjoy our limited menu.”
Traditionally at least in our culture, heritage interpreters and advertisers do not share offices and job descriptions. Both have a discrete piece of the communication job. Promotion gets the visitors to the site. Interpretation then has the job of satisfying—and managing—their expectations. Of course, the more unrealistic the promotion, the more challenging the interpreter’s job. In the field of tourism, where the universal axiom is “satisfied customers are the best advertising,” this organizational flaw would seem to be potentially fatal. And yet it is the American norm. Meanwhile, in other places like Scotland, we find this dichotomy starting to break down, and stunning interpretive books such as The Love of Scotland (Gardiner, 1997) being published with the assistance of the Scottish Tourism Board and “Interpret Scotland” being distributed to tourism promotion offices.

**FINDING FLOW**

In seeking to prevent tourist heavens from becoming tourist hells, we need to consider expanding the roles of interpreters of our cultural and environmental heritage. As one approach to rethinking traditional roles, we might look at the problem as one of replacing the flaw with flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has advanced the concept of “optimal experiences” through his extensive research on how we engage in the pursuit of happiness. Summarized in a word, a concept, and a book, Flow convincingly portrays the search for, and the achievement of, happiness as occurring in a channel lying between the states of boredom and anxiety. One of the primary characteristics of flow is a feeling of control, or of being in charge of one’s own life and more. For artists and tourists alike, flow begins with information and planning. Some artists report periods of “anxiety” related to park rules and crowds at scenic vistas, and periods of “boredom” waiting for the right conditions of light, absence of crowds, and so forth. But every artist mentioned something akin to the idea of flow when all of the human and natural conditions converged in just the right way: “The music just came to me,” “When the sun came out from behind the clouds at just the right moment it brought tears to my eyes,” “The scene almost seemed to paint itself” (LaPage, 2000). Many of the artists interviewed during this research seemed to also see a common element of time flow, seasonal and even geologic, in their interpretations of nature.

If we were to examine our own tourist travel using this model, by charting our flow through the various stages of a vacation trip, it would quickly become evident that most of us bounce between the fields of anxiety and boredom, spending less time feeling in control than we’d prefer. If each of those instances of boredom and anxiety is cumulative, rather than compensating, the result is likely to be severe trip dissatisfaction and an eagerness for home.

If trip planners, travel agents, service providers, hosts, information providers, and interpreters see their role as one of maintaining flow, tourists will be more likely to have satisfying experiences. For example, the feeling of being in control is at its highest when planning the trip. Once we start to make decisions and commitments, control starts to ebb away. Anxiety increases—we hope that we have made the “right” choices. We all know that travel is supposed to be an adventure of discovery with no negative surprises. If, upon arrival, we are confirmed that we
seem to have made a right choice, anxiety diminishes and we return to a state of near-flow. It is unlikely to be perfect flow as yet because there are many other decisions awaiting confirmation, such as where to eat, what activities to engage in, and what side trips to take. If we’re lucky, our need for control has not been so overpowering as to take away the chance for pleasant surprises; otherwise, boredom may be just around the corner.

For the traveler to a new destination, flow can be more like a tightrope than a channel. Good tourist hosts intuitively know this and respond with planned serendipity—pleasant surprises. Interpretation, in all of its many forms, is an important, if not critical, element in maintaining the visitors’ flow and avoiding boredom. Interpretation can replace the flaw in most tourism communication with flow. And it can do so by providing flow among all parts of tourism experience: planning, travel, destination, and recollection. Good interpretation, by focusing on holism, relevance, and provocation, can turn a “paint-by-numbers” trip into a work of art for the traveler. The field of ecotourism is already doing this by encouraging in-depth and continuing involvement by the tourist. Committed ecotourists do not emerge upon arrival at the site. The flow from thoughtful planning, environmentally sensitive travel, minimal impact visits, and “ending” with long-term commitment to sites and issues, is quintessential holism—travel for life. The seamless trip, one that blends with life at the edges rather than one that is an abrupt departure from our everyday lives, probably provides a higher level of satisfaction for most of us.

There is a challenge for the interpretive profession at each stage of the experience. Thoughtful trip planning clearly requires more than simple information. Good ecotourism operators know this and connect their prospective visitors with cultural and environmental interpretation. This contact not only opens the door to making decisions that are environmentally and culturally sensitive but can also begin a dialogue for the future by exploring questions such as, How can I best make a difference in the long run? Personalized, relevant, and provocative interpretation builds on that dialogue.

**Flow and the Art of Interpretation**

The twin needs for “the experience” and to creatively respond to that experience are clearly paramount for artists. However, contingent needs to share the experience and to preserve the opportunity are always present, often paraphrasing Ansel Adams’s observation that “all life and art are justified by communication and are to be shared not hoarded” (Nyerges, 2000). Like artists, tourists have a need to share the experience, which they demonstrate by taking pictures, sending postcards, purchasing gifts, and telling their friends about their trip. With the exception of ecotourism, we rarely make it easy for tourists to demonstrate what must be an equally profound concern for resource preservation. When given the opportunity to contribute, park and historic site managers are often amazed at tourists’ responsiveness. They may even see the contributions as some kind of affirmation for their good work, when in fact it may simply be an expression of the tourists’ need for greater personal relevance, which they achieve by making the experience a larger part of their lives—if only in a token way.
Holism, in terms of fitting experiences to life, is good art, good interpretation, and good tourism. It may be that ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourist market simply because it is the smallest segment. More likely, it enjoys this distinction because it focuses on creating experiences that are complete and flow with life. In that way, it fills a vital need in today’s increasingly compartmentalized society. Whatever the connections may be, it seems clear that environmental and cultural interpretation can play a vital and significant role in making tourism markets more vibrant and more sustainable. And, in doing so, the interpreter’s role becomes more personally fulfilling—from a user of art to an artist of experiences.

Flow and the Larger Picture

Robert Cahn argues, “Conditions in the national parks can provide an early warning signal that can alert the nation to what may be happening to the natural environments as a whole” (Huth, 1990, p. xxviii). Just as parks can serve as indicators of the broader environment, so can artists provide the “canary in the cage” for what is happening inside the parks. Over the past few decades, popular art has frequently lampooned the conditions in our public parks, and the landscape artist has often retreated into the less crowded areas and times, inevitably starting anew the submission of the sublime.

Just as we all need to be able to interpret parks as early warning signals of what may be happening in our environment, interpreters on the tourist scene must be cognizant of what may be happening to tourism markets as a result of unmet tourist expectations. Parks are valuable sources of human inspiration and local economic benefit. The artistic connection between these two should not be taken for granted or ignored in the scramble for economic justification of parks.

Precisely because artists provide an enhanced opportunity to better understand and appreciate how these priceless lands release our creative energies, making us who we are as individuals and as a culture, we need to vastly expand our arts-in-the-parks programs. Every park inspires; thus every park can benefit from an artist-in-residence. Because that inspiration may not always be artistic, why not a scientist-in-residence as well—someone who monitors both the natural and social changes over time at that park? While we are painting a picture of the perfect holistic park, what park is complete if it is not in some way a classroom? A laboratory? An observatory? A museum? A gallery? A provocateur? A reservoir of ideas, opportunities, and cultural pride?

“If culture mirrors national spirit, and if America’s spirit evolved from and is nourished by the land, the linkages must be demonstrable” (LaPage & Ranney, 1988, p. 24). The authors go on to point out that phrases such as the limits of acceptable change and carrying capacity, which guide our thinking about park management, take on a whole new meaning. To think that overuse of our parklands might effectively diminish national spirit and individual creativity places parks at the very top of our national agenda—a position taken by the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors in the preface to their report, which stated in part: “We find that the outdoors is a wellspring of the American spirit, vital to our belief in ourselves as individuals and as a nation….We believe that the outdoors is a statement of the American condition” (PCAO, 1987, p. 9).
Searching for the sublime in the 21st century need not be the impossible dream; it just requires a 21st-century model—one in which the sublime is defined by flow and sustainability rather than a singular conception of the idyllic. Today’s artists and tourists are still looking for personal fulfillment and meaningful experiences. But they are searching in a world vastly more populated with other searchers, many of whom are becoming weary of the trip and cynical of the destination. Unless the seemingly inevitable restrictions that go along with growth can be countered by an expansion of the opportunities for more fulfilling experiences, nature as sublime will become an illusion. A focus on whole people living whose lives must be a universal canon of interpreters and all who work to sustain a tourist economy based on nature. Art and nature are essential elements of that holism and life flow. As Ansel Adams said, “What is more natural than man?” (Nyerges, 2000, p. 24).

REFERENCES


COMMENTARY

CHANGING IMAGES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AND INTERPRETATION

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Abstract:
Popular cultural images of African-American women can foster racial stereotyping and frame one's mental images of them in ways that impact the interpretive process. This paper addresses historical and contemporary stereotypes of African-American women, offering demographic and other information with which to refute them.

Keywords:
African-American women, representation, gender stereotypes, racial stereotypes, popular culture.

INTRODUCTION
Interpretation aims to ensure that one's audience has a positive experience through provision of interpretive opportunities that stimulate them to learn and to want to know more. Knowledge of both the audience and the subject matter are important parts of the interpretive process. During that process, mental images of the people in the audience or of people we interpret to them unconsciously shape what we say and how. Stereotypes, in turn, influence one's mental images of others and, unfortunately, racial stereotypes are fertile ground for misperceptions about people.

Stereotypes are a product of many influences, including documentary photographs and images in popular cultural media that are deliberately designed to sway our perceptions and thinking. This article examines representation of African-American women through documentary photographs in print and televised news media and print or moving images in popular cultural media. It aims to provoke an interpretive moment for readers, leading them to new insights and changing mental images of African-American women.

IMAGES IN OUR ENVIRONMENT
Images in newspapers, television news, or in documentary films and television are represented to the viewer as authentic, reflecting life and social reality. Even more pervasive are the multitudes of popular cultural media to which we are exposed
daily that are created and disseminated to influence public opinion for commercial purposes or to advance a particular social or political message. The author argues that the public's mental images of African-American women are influenced by stereotypes of them perpetuated to a large degree, but not exclusively, through documentary photographs and popular cultural images.

Stereotyping and Racialized Representations

"Ideas and the mental images that they conjure up organize human masses and create the terrain on which men move and acquire consciousness of their...[subordinated] position and the struggle [to resist domination]..." (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Hall, 1996, p. 41). Five hundred years of European dominance over people of color in every part of the world was made to seem natural through racialized representations of Blacks\(^1\) and other people of color (Pandian, 1985, pp. 76–84). Stereotyping is one of the ways racialized representations of people works (see Figure 1).

Stereotyping reduces people to a few simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature. Stereotypes distort recognized traits, reducing everything about one particular person to those traits, exaggerating and freezing them in time as unchanging. Stereotypes symbolically fix boundaries and exclude everything that does not belong within them. Stereotyping classifies people according to a norm and constructs those excluded as the "other" outside that norm. It is the establishment of a world view by people in the leading class or groups so that their own perceptions appear natural and inevitable to everyone else (Hall, 1997, pp. 257–259).

During slavery, 18th-century and early 19th-century cartoons emphasized differences between "civilized" Whites and "savage" Africans. Slaves were shown to be childlike, and free "coloreds" were shown to be pretentious. The African, the object to be enslaved, was depicted as the extreme in difference or "otherness" (Baker, 1998, pp. 11–25). This visual imagery was accompanied by literature, songs, and spoken stereotypical depictions of African Americans as ignorant, lazy, and criminal. African men were typified as rapacious, and African women were characterized as hypersexed. Both were portrayed as happy-go-lucky, satisfied with simple pleasures, and eager to emulate or please their Euro-American "masters." Their physical features were depicted at worst as grotesque and at best in sharp distinction to the model of beauty embodied in neoclassical Greek sculpture. Enslavement of Africans was rationalized as necessary to bring them civilization and justified in a religious doctrine that as descendants of Cain they must pay for his sin. "Scientific" studies of the African head size, and by implication brain size, were used to support these stereotypes and the legislated subordination of Blacks in America (Pandian, 1985, pp. 79–83; Baker, pp. 34–37). Inferiority of Blacks was written into the Articles of Confederation through the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1781 and finally expressed in Article 1, Sec. 2 of the Constitution of the United States, which counted slaves as three-fifths.

\(^1\)Throughout this paper, the terms Black(s) and White(s) are capitalized when used to distinguish racial groups.
of a person for purposes of taxation and representation (Berry, 1971/1994, pp. 6–7).

During the 19th century, gender stereotypes also abounded that rationalized patriarchy and female subordination. Within male-defined “norms,” White women were generally stereotyped as “naturally” maternal or promiscuous. The “normal” place for women was in the home, dominated by fathers, brothers, or husbands, or, if outside the home, prostituting themselves, still dominated through men’s sexual desires. White women were stereotyped as weak, superfeminine, uninterested, and ill-equipped for the mental challenges of politics or other social experiences outside the domestic circle. These gender stereotypes were also advanced through visual imagery, popular literature, music, and other cultural forms and also supported by religious doctrine and “scientific” studies. Because women descended from Adam’s rib, their subordination was justified. As perpetrators of the original sin, women were evil seductresses. “Scientific” analyses of women, mostly in the form of medical studies, confirmed their physical weakness. Women, by constitutional and other legislative fiat, were appendages or possessions of men (Clinton, 1982; Cogan, 1989). From the melding of these stereotypes of Africans and Women came the enduring stereotypes of African-American women.

Leith Mullings (1997) argues that the dominant representations of African-American women are extensions of the major archetypal symbols of women in
Western society mediated by the asymmetries of race and class. Two images of Black women emerged from slavery: the “Jezebel”—a sexually aggressive, provocative woman governed entirely by her libido—and the “mammy”—a religious, loyal, motherly woman devoted to the master’s family. For Mullings (1997, pp. 110–111), there is also an underlying theme of the African-American woman as feminized, in the sense of not possessing those alleged traits that defined, constrained, but also protected Euro-American women of the time.

**Racial Stereotypes of African-American Women**

After slavery, 19th- and early 20th-century sheet music, postcards, and advertisements perpetuated the stereotypes of African-American women (Figures 2, 3). In the first half of the 20th century, the African-American “mammy” stereotype was reaffirmed in popular and material cultural forms: for example, the Aunt Jemima advertisements and later in the television depiction of Beulah, the quintessential Black maid who was more concerned for the well-being of her White employers than for herself (Figures 4, 5).

Early films such as “Gone with the Wind” and, later, the Amos and Andy television series advanced the stereotypes of African-American women in a bossy, emasculating, matriarchal image derived from depictions of the “mammy” as uncompromisingly severe with her own family as she was nurturing to the master’s family (Figure 6). Mullings (1997, pp. 116–117) contends the Moynihan Report highlighting the matriarchal family gave a pseudoscientific stature to the “matriarch” representation and added to it the stereotype of the African-American woman as a

![Figure 2. Sheet music cover, “Mammy Jinny’s Hall of Fame,” 1917. Source: Library of Congress, American Memory, Item 1 of 85 Historic Sheet Music, 1850–1920.](image1)

![Figure 3. “Lucinda Cinda Jane,” 1894/1901. Source: Library of Congress, American Memory, African American Sheet Music.](image2)
“bad” mother responsible for low educational achievement, crime, and delinquency.

Contemporary films such as “Jackie Brown” (programmed frequently on cable television), network television situation comedies, and talk shows such as “Becker” and “Jerry Springer” continue to advance stereotypical images of African-American women of all social strata as promiscuous, sexually aggressive, defeminized, bossy, or emasculating. Contemporary advertisements in television and print commercials may show African-American women as smart and successful, but some advertisements for household cleaners and laxatives continue to feature “mammy” images to sell their products. Music videos project sexual or defeminized images of African-American women. The most common news media images of Black women are grounded in general stereotypes. They show us pictures of Black women who are poor, high-school dropouts, teen mothers, criminals, or AIDS victims—almost to the exclusion of African-American women in business, government, education, medicine, or politics, or as beauty queens, brides, or stay-at-home moms. The former images perpetuate stereotypes of African-American women as poor, uneducated, inappropriately reproductive, antisocial, and/or sick while expunging from the public’s view images of African-American women that diverge from the dominant stereotypes. Such representations or omissions turn our gaze away from the role of society and racism in the reproduction of dependent women and children of any race.
Subliminal Stereotypes

If stereotyping classifies people according to a norm and constructs those excluded as the "other" outside that norm, one must ask: What is the physical appearance of a "normal" American woman? How do we know what the norm is? Where do we get our cues? American society constructs the "normal" phenotypic representation of "woman" as having "white" skin, straight nose, thin lips, straight hair, and asthenic body build with a flat posterior pelvis. While many Euro-American women may deviate from various aspects of this physical configuration, most African-American women have one or more differences, such as darker skin, wider noses, thicker lips, curly hair (in its natural state), and protruding posterior pelvic bones that result in their having rounded buttocks. The "norm" of beauty is observed in winners of beauty contests, the physical characteristics of women in advertisements for accoutrements of affluence and in stars of the large and small screen. Many African-American beauty queens, models, and successful actresses conform to European standards of beauty.

Changing Images: Contestation, Reality Checks, and Critical Analysis

From the 18th century on, African Americans used the written and spoken word to contest and subvert racialized representations of Blacks. Throughout slavery free Black women, and enslaved women too, countered notions of Blacks as unintelligent when they took great risks to teach other Blacks, particularly slaves, to read and write. Often for the same reasons, African-American women have continued up until the present to be highly involved in providing educational opportunities for Blacks, especially the impoverished and illiterate. The African-American "Women's Club Movement," which began in the late 19th century, was partly an effort to refute contemporary stereotypes of Blacks, particularly those of African-American women. Today in Essence, an African-American women's magazine, Black women film directors, newspaper editors, church women, and club women continue this tradition of countering the negative images and "re-presenting" African-American women in positive ways (Hine & Thompson, 1998; Brown, 1999).

Interpreters must critically analyze media and other depictions of African-American women for deviations from social reality and recognize reliable sources on which to base their representations of them. Women constitute about half the 12.8% of the African-American population. They live mostly in cities and in greater numbers in the South. Three-quarters of Black women have a high-school education, about 40% have completed some college, and almost three million (13%) have

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1 Related to the data presented in Figures 7, 8, and 9, more recent data indicate 12.9% of the population are Black, and 79% of African Americans aged 25 and older had earned at least a high-school diploma and 17% a bachelor's degree. African-American women 16 years and older were more likely than White, not Hispanic women, to participate in the labor force (64% as compared to 61%). The median family income for African Americans was $27,910, and 51% of African-American married-couple families had incomes of $50,000 or more while the poverty rate for African Americans fell to a record low (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001).
Figure 6. Matriarchal “Mammy” image, Osborne’s Mince Pie advertisement, ca. 1900–1920. Source: Collection of Advertising History, Warshaw Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

a bachelor's or higher degree (Day & Curry, 1998). (See Figure 7.) In 1995, the median earnings of Black women and men working year-round and full time were $21,470 and $26,400, respectively. While single-parent families, mostly headed by women with incomes below the poverty level, accounted for 2.1 million, or 26%, of all Black families, 18% of women-headed families had incomes above the poverty level, and 44% of Black families had two parents (U.S. Census, 1999; see Fig-
Figure 10. Occupation of year-round full-time employment of Black females 25 years of age and older by educational attainment. Data source: http://www.census.gov/population (1999).

ures 8 and 9). Two-fifths of Black families earned between $35,000 and $57,000, and another fifth earned $95,000 or more (U.S. Census, 1997, 1999). Black women, whose foremothers mostly worked as domestic servants, are twice as likely to be employed in the top two occupational classifications as in the “service” occupational category (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1998; U.S. Census, 1999). (See Figure 10.) Interpreters should contest depictions of African-American women that do not reflect these data.

Documentary photographs appear to reflect reality. In fact, each extant image is the result of a series of decisions concerning what to frame, how it should be framed, at what moment the picture is snapped or the video or movie cameras roll, which negatives are printed, which are preserved, and finally which are shown to the public. The relationship between the photographer and his or her subject should be taken into consideration when “reading” a documentary image. The observing eye must be careful to ask whose reality the photograph reflects (Daley, 1996).

Popular-culture materials and commercial images demand an even higher level of critical analysis in terms of their reflection of reality. Pop-culture materials and commercial images are valuable tools for exploring cultural constructs that framed the lives and experience of African-American women. Because these materials were and are created and disseminated to large segments of the American public, over time they continue to reflect and perpetuate a range of race, gender, and class stereotypes. As with documentary images, the purpose of such images and their intended audiences require scrutiny and critical analysis of their overt and covert content and credibility.
Conclusion

Words and images carry connotations over which no one has control, and these marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing people to construct different meanings and allow different things to be shown or said (Hall, 1997, p. 270). “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when… the speaker appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention. Prior to this…the word…exists in other people’s mouths, serving other people’s intentions: It is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, pp. 293–294). Meaning, Bakhtin argued, is established through dialogue—it is fundamentally dialogic. What we say is modified by interaction with others in the practices and processes that accompany language. Put another way, it is in discourse that meaning is transformed. To change racialized representation of African-American women or any racial or ethnic group of whatever gender, the stereotypes must be challenged, uncovered, and refuted. Interpreters can be leaders in challenging racialized representations of African-American women or others by exploring the stereotypical inferences that may be drawn from documentary and pop-culture images used in interpretive presentations. Through research, the interpreter should routinely seek to recognize such inferences, then objectively confirm or refute them before the images find their way into the interpretive process. Finally, one can use interpretation as an opportunity to help one’s audience recognize stereotypical images of African-American women, explain how and why they developed, and through the interpretive process help the audience to gain knowledge of what we know about the social reality of African-American women in contemporary society.

References


Questioning Assumptions is a book about front-end studies. These studies are conducted to better understand how potential visitors will respond to a proposed exhibit or program through being conscious of preexisting visitor interests, knowledge, and attitudes toward a proposed topic. Nonformal educators familiar with Freeman Tilden's principles of interpretation should immediately recognize the value of such information in exhibit and program design. Lynn Dierking and Wendy Pollock's book provides guidance to exhibit design professionals who want to design exhibits that are interesting, meaningful, and compelling to visitors. The book is a never-before available compilation of methods, philosophy, and insights on using social science research to better design museum exhibits.

In the past 30 years, research has consistently demonstrated that educators and managers have incomplete, skewed, or overly optimistic perceptions of their visitors' knowledge and motivations. Several of the major science and art museums have quietly responded to these findings by establishing evaluation offices. Dozens of front-end studies have been conducted that have proven helpful in increasing the educational effectiveness of exhibits. Until Questioning Assumptions, much that had been learned from these studies was shared only through informal professional networks or published in hard-to-locate internal reports and conference proceedings.

Front-end studies are a form of needs assessment, systematically documenting what visitors and potential visitors know and find interesting about subject matter being considered for an exhibit. These multiphase projects help design teams judge the appropriateness of a subject and the best approaches for interpreting the topic in an exhibit. A thorough understanding of the interests visitors bring to an exhibition invariably translates into markedly different exhibit designs. A further understanding of visitor misconceptions (often called "alternative frameworks") also helps designers foresee potential pitfalls of various communication strategies.

Questioning Assumptions is not a research methods book. Beginners will be frustrated if they expect to learn the mechanics of how to do a front-end study by simply reading this book. An understanding of research methods is developed through formal education, reading technical literature, and being mentored through all phases of several research projects. The authors do provide a basic framework and tips about research techniques, but the major thrust of the text is a richer understanding of how to integrate front-end studies into an institution so that the organization benefits and grows from conducting front-end studies. Consequently discussion is weighted toward the professional interrelationships among museum staff, researchers, visitors, and the communities the museum potentially serves during each stage of a study.
If the book has a weakness, it is in the introductory chapter, which assumes the reader is already motivated to conduct front-end studies. I expected a provocative chapter full of concrete illustrations of failed exhibits based on naive notions of visitor interests held by exhibit designers contrasted with examples of how front-end studies have helped identify and prevent the same. A reader unfamiliar with the details of front-end exhibits may want to start by reading through Appendix I, which contains concise summaries of 44 front-end studies.

The remaining chapters deal with defining goals, selecting methods, analyzing and interpreting results, and applying findings to exhibit design. None of the chapters provides enough detail for a beginner to actually do this kind of work, though supporting references are provided. Each chapter is liberally sprinkled with relevant quotes from researchers experienced with front-end studies. The quotes are thoughtful and provocative and should provide new perspectives for even the most seasoned researchers. The text provides myriad perspectives on each phase of front-end studies. This may be initially confusing to a beginner looking for cookie-cutter approaches.

The final chapter, titled “Time and Talk: Using Front-End Studies to Make Your Museum a Learning Organization,” makes explicit an important yet subtle theme found throughout the text. The focus on the often-unstated sociopolitical aspects of applied research is a major contribution to our professional literature. In the traditional research model, a consultant or university researcher arrives at the institution, conducts a planning meeting, implements a study, and delivers a written report, often by mail. The authors argue that study results are more likely to be used by museum staff when the staff is involved in all stages of the study and do much of the study design and data collecting. The authors describe how to raise awareness and interest in doing front-end evaluations. This involves allocating sufficient time to do the studies, involving both administrators and design staff in at least part of the process, and using design staff to collect and analyze data so that they see far more than just summary reports. The traditional research model of an aloof and uninvolved researcher has not proven to be effective with front-end studies.

Questioning Assumptions is a thought-provoking book for anyone already curious about front-end studies. A 27-page appendix includes numerous concrete examples of such studies in a variety of nonformal educational institutions. The bibliography provides a listing of many hard-to-find references. Any one of these sections of the book is reason enough for it to be on the bookshelf of museums, nature centers, and university libraries. I suspect I will return to Questioning Assumptions repeatedly throughout my career for new ways of thinking about front-end studies.

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BOOK REVIEW

Environmental Communication: Skills and Principles for Natural Resource Managers, Scientists, and Engineers
By Richard R. Jurin, K. Jeffrey Danter, and Donald E. Roush, Jr.
Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing

I often find myself searching for notes, books, articles, references, or sources of information about various topics. For years I have kept promising myself that I would devote the time necessary to compile the most valuable and concise information regarding various topics so that I can access them quickly and easily whenever I need information. Knowing I would never find the time to devote to this project, I often wondered how those important resources and references could be made conveniently available to us.

Authors Jurin, Danter, and Roush have created an invaluable source for issues of communication and interpretation in their Environmental Communication: Skills and Principles for Natural Resource Managers, Scientists, and Engineers. The target audience for this book, as stated by the authors, is "for anyone who communicates, whether for a non-profit organization, as a part of a for-profit business, a government agency charged with managing a resource, a community needing to address an issue, or an individual." This is a tall order, but the authors seem to achieve this objective.

Environmental Communication is organized into three main sections with each section providing a myriad of information on various topics in separate chapters. There are 19 separate topical chapters in the book. The first chapter offers a broad definition of the concept of environmental communication and its ramifications in a broad, global sense. Additionally, a brief overview of the history of environmental communication is offered.

In "Section 1: Principles of Environmental Communication," a philosophical approach is taken to establish the foundations of an individual's connection to the study of environmental communication. The three chapters of this section offer various discussions and resources for establishing the need for environmental communication. The authors present a detailed discussion on "environmental literacy." Additionally, discussions of investigative methods for environmental issues are presented.

In "Section 2: Communication Planning," five chapters are devoted to basic planning tenets for communication. The authors offer valuable information regarding how to plan and implement a communication strategy. The last chapter of this section is devoted to providing recommendations for creating a successful interaction/relationship with agencies and organizations in the mass-media sector.

The remaining "Section 3: Skills Building and Practical Applications" contains the bulk of the materials offered in this book. The 10 chapters of this section offer a practical guide to how to communicate successfully. The somewhat eclectic col-
lection of information ranges from identifying what constitutes a group, to personality typing, to intercultural communication, to the principles of interpersonal communication. Other important components of this section include discussions of conflict resolution and models of public communication. While these various topics may be eclectic, they are highly useful nuggets of information for those involved in environmental communication efforts.

*Environmental Communication: Skills and Principles for Natural Resource Managers, Scientists, and Engineers* is not a book that offers great detail about any of the topics or subjects it introduces and covers. This book should not be thought of as a definitive source for any of the items discussed in its pages. It should be thought of as an invaluable book that contains a vast amount of useful information for the professional and layman alike. Although some topic areas may be superficially covered, a list of recommended sources and references are provided at the end of each chapter. Think of it as an environmental communication sampler box of treats.

*Environmental Communication: Skills and Principles for Natural Resource Managers, Scientists, and Engineers* is the one-stop-shop book about quick answers to questions regarding issues of environmental communications. It is an essential tool for heritage interpreters that will enhance our ability to find quick answers to questions about the environment.

*Reviewed by Cem M. Basman, Ph.D., Human Dimensions Research Unit, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901, cbasman@siu.edu.*
APPENDIX:
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
FOR AUTHORS

The purposes of the Journal of Interpretation Research (JIR) are to communicate original empirical research dealing with heritage interpretation and to provide a forum for scholarly discourse about issues facing the profession of interpretation. JIR is published by the National Association for Interpretation, the preeminent professional association representing the heritage interpretation profession.

In recognition of how difficult it is for interpreters to keep up with the growing and diverse body of relevant literature, JIR will publish reviews of recent books, professional meetings and workshops, government publications, and original literature reviews and bibliographies dealing with heritage interpretation. Additionally, JIR will publish thought pieces that exhibit excellence and offer original or relevant philosophical discourse on the state of heritage interpretation. Review articles and thought pieces are reviewed internally by the JIR editorial staff.

JIR also includes a “Research Briefs” section. This section will accept reports of ongoing interpretation research. It will also provide an outlet for summaries of research studies with limited scope. Much heritage interpretation research consists of small “in-house” program evaluations and basic visitor studies. The purpose of this section is to communicate current research activities and allow readers to identify colleagues with similar interests.

JIR takes a broad view of the field of heritage interpretation and publishes manuscripts from a wide range of academic disciplines. The primary criterion for deeming a manuscript appropriate for publication is whether it offers new insights for interpreters or those who study interpretation.

MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

JIR is published in accordance with American Psychological Association (APA) style for sociological research. Authors are encouraged to refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed.) for all style questions.

All manuscripts will be reviewed anonymously by a JIR Associate Editor and by at least two other reviewers. Based on the nature of the manuscript, special efforts will be made to identify well-qualified Associate Editors and reviewers to evaluate the manuscripts. From the recommendations of the Associate Editor, the Editor will make the final decision of the manuscript’s disposition and communicate this information to the author.

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- Margins should be 1” on all sides.
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*All other questions should be directed to:*

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