There Is a Balm: Performance, Voyeurism, and Public History through Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*

Athena F. Richardson – University of Alabama

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There Is a Balm: Performance, Voyeurism, and Public History through Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*
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The most impactful gems of wisdom are passed down from generation to generation through stories and pictures. *Lemonade*, the visual album released by Beyoncé in April 2016, follows the African tradition of storytelling by incorporating references to African Mythology, Southern black culture and current events into a story about relationship infidelity. The release was a blockbuster success, and while mainstream media dissected the intimate portrait Beyoncé appeared to reveal about her marriage, black women discussed a message quite prominent to them but unrecognized by mainstream media.

Black women are objectified, abused, ignored, and/or exploited daily in America. This creates a shared identity that many black women immediately recognized in *Lemonade*. Through costume styling and the setting of a plantation, the film also made a strong connection between from enslaved women’s suffering and the circumstances of black women today through in a multigenerational link to shared trauma. Founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock Bernice Regan Johnson says, “you have to go back to the place that hurt you to find healing.”¹ Is it possible for black women to experience healing in the same way Beyoncé portrayed it in *Lemonade*? I believe that the answer is yes. Therefore, *Lemonade*, using a plantation as that place, is a call for black women to return to these places to find healing for themselves and their ancestors. Research at a sampling of plantations and tours confirms that healing is possible, and further more it is an important journey for black women in America to take.

Trauma is not the injury itself, but the violence that inflicts that injury. The acts escape verbalization, create fragmented memory, and put the victim into shock, paralyzing them from human emotions needed to process and heal.² Enslaved Africans and their descendants were regularly victimized in the chattel slavery system and its legacies in the Black Codes, Jim Crow, and...
and institutionalized racism. For years after the Civil War until the late twentieth century, selective memory and erasure of slavery prevented healing of inflicted trauma. But would that still be the case today, under the swell of academic research combined with movies and shows depicting stories about enslaved people?

These ideas are explored through scenes in Lemonade in concert with a concise history of tourism in New Orleans, public history, and multigenerational trauma in black women. This paper will differ from the August 2016 special issue of the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, which focused on four plantations outside of New Orleans collectively referred to as the Plantation Parade. While some themes from that issue and this paper do overlap, the focus on performance and voyeurism allow for different research objectives while traveling similar roads. By including tourism, trauma, and healing, the crossroads of these issues are illuminated through *Lemonade* analysis and personal research, compared to the special volume, which took a quantitative focus to research the tourist experience.

According to the National Council on Public History, a public historian is one who works outside of the classroom or academia. In the context of this research, public history will refer to the tours and plantation sites that are the basis for tourism and the hospitality industry in the South generally, and in New Orleans specifically. But what is tourism? It is the combination of industries, services, and activities that delivers a specific experience; including hotels, restaurants, and entertainment for groups or individuals. The hospitality industry depends on

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tourists to generate income from both leisure and business travelers. They also depend on the media to film on locations throughout the area, which also brings tourists seeking the thrill of visiting places seen on film or television. Voyeurism for this exercise is “an enthusiastic observer of sordid or sensational subjects” the second definition found in the American Heritage Dictionary.\(^7\) *Lemonade* plays on this by filming on plantations, inviting the viewers to see for themselves and be a subversive presence reclaiming spaces inhabited by white people and enslaved Africans. These topics come together in the themes of performance, voyeurism, and healing, and will be the tools used to explore the proposed research question.

**Don’t Hurt Yourself - Performance in Lemonade, tourism, and the black woman’s identity**

Beyoncé is a formidable black woman who uses the power of her music and imagery to communicate with her fans and the world. The surprise release of her 2014 self-titled album solidified her status as an innovator in the music industry. The release of *Formation* in February 2016 was a glimpse into Beyoncé’s next artistic vision. What immediately stood out was the juxtaposition of black women dressed in antebellum attire, lounging in plantation “big houses”. Black women of diverse shades, hair textures, and hairstyles were placed prominently throughout the video.\(^8\) This was something different; Beyoncé reclaimed a space and time dear to white Americans, particularly those who sympathize with the South’s loss in the Civil War. She simultaneously declared her Southern black woman identity throughout the entire piece. Not one to shy away from her racial and gender identity before; but in this post-Obama, Black Lives Matter time of activism and awareness, she boldly rejected the safe route and chose to embrace her identity at the risk of commercial failure. Conversely, Beyoncé amplified an ongoing

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\(^7\) American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

conversation that has happened among black women for generations, with a call to get in “Formation” resonated deeper than her previous feminist anthems.

The April 23, 2016, the release of Lemonade on HBO was a colossal event, especially on social media. Seven hundred eighty-seven thousand people watched the initial broadcast, topping the Nielsen Twitter TV rankings for the week while generating 696,000 tweets. It was nominated for and won multiple awards, including four Primetime Emmy awards, eleven MTV Video Music Awards, and most recently a Peabody award for film in April 2017. Candice Benbow further cemented the impact of Lemonade using social media to source recommendations to compile the Lemonade Syllabus, an academic exercise in Black woman intellectualism throughout poetry, prose, non-fiction, photography, filmography, and more ways to continue to engage with the themes presented in Lemonade.

The film’s performance and success is on par with the tourist and historical sites that are a foundational element of New Orleans tourism. Throughout the South, particularly in New Orleans and its diverse historical district, tourists find a tangible presence of the past that is the outcome of “more than a century of labor investment, and design by individuals and groups who have imagined themselves as ‘southern’ “ said historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage. First, it is important to note that New Orleans is both a distinctively Southern city in the context of the Mississippi Delta region. Its nineteenth century economy was based on the trade of cash crops like other cities in the Deep South. New Orleans stood apart because of its diverse population

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miring a Caribbean city, including Roman Catholics of African and continental European
descent compared to other cities comprised of White Anglo-Saxon and Black Protestants. For
hundreds of years The Crescent City has maintained a reputation of hedonism in a conservative
region of the country. However, the French Quarter that is recognized today survived decades
of attempted demolition to maintain its unique appeal.

During the Great Depression, American tourists eager for distractions from the hard times
and harsh business climate soon captured business leader’s attention. The city used gas and sales
taxes to supplement the budget after the financial crash of 1929. Taxation was beneficial to
tourists but detrimental to residents paying high taxes on everyday goods and services. Mayor T,
Semmes Walmsley used The New Deal program funding to preserve parts of the city’s
architectural history with tourists in mind. Robert Maestri became mayor in 1936 and further
improved on the revitalization efforts of his predecessor. Two well-known projects were the
Floral Trail, a fifty-five mile route through the city to view gardens maintained by residents. The
second was the establishment of the Sugar Bowl in 1934.

With the rise of tourism, Maestri and other New Orleans businessmen wanted tourism
companies to remain authentic, not by telling the truth but through consistency. They believed
that variance could lead tourists to doubt claims about the city. The Association of Commerce
wanted a licensing program with possible prerequisites of evening classes sponsored by the
Works Progress Administration, mainly people well versed in New Orleans history, business,
and culture. With men focused on the messaging, elite white women turned to continued
preservation of the French Quarter from those who wanted to tear down the buildings to make

way for new commercial development. These preservationists moved from their previous reformist activities of eliminating alcohol to preserving cultural sites, despite the fact the French Quarter had become the main neighborhood for Italian and black Americans, when white Creoles moved out of the city. In 1936, the Vieux Carre Commission was established, a pioneering commission of French Quarter residents empowered to enforce property codes and land rights within the district was established. What made the Vieux Carre Commission so unique was that the entire district was under their jurisdiction, not just individual blocks.

After World War II, non-white Creole citizens began to move the city toward having tourism as the predominant industry by successfully preserving the appearance and architectural elements of the French Quarter. However, a struggle began between black and white residents to protect sites important to black memory and how white people presented black culture for consumption. This racial divide in tourism and culture began during the early part of the twentieth century and continued until the late 1990s. Initially, public venues including entertainment, recreation, and convention sites were legally segregated by local elites in the 1930s. Next, the removal of black people from local promotional campaigns allowed the myth of New Orleans as a distinctive city of ethnic diversity, rich history and charm to thrive. The only time black people appeared in tour guides were as domestic servants or wage laborers, never as potential tourists, a practice that extended into the twentieth century.

Finally, according to sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham, the reversal of culture as race and race as culture was critical to the development of tourism. “Creole” means indigenous to Louisiana, but advertisements in the twentieth century began to associate the ethnic group with

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15 Stanonis, Creating The Big Easy, 100, 101, 142-144.
white culture. By codifying creole with whiteness, the path was laid for modern tourism New Orleanians, and specifically in the French Quarter, to market the city around the themes of history, music and food with little to no inclusion of black residents or tourists. For example, in 1995 black residents of New Orleans discovered the existence of a restaurant named “The Slave Catcher’s Restaurant”, decorated with shackles and bullwhips hanging from the ceiling. The community did not previously know about the restaurant before because of the legacy of black exclusion in the French Quarter. Even worse, the patrons were all black women visiting the city during the annual Essence Festival who were unaware and seemingly undisturbed to be patronizing such an establishment.

As a native daughter of New Orleans, Beyoncé was exposed to these historical developments, and through Lemonade exposes the black female audience to the potential of visiting these spaces traditionally reserved and marketed to white people. While the transition of plantations from functioning sugar cane plantations worked by sharecroppers to tourist site varies from location to location, today plantation tourism is a highly visible and well-marketed industry. For example, one can pick up a brochure with an itinerary to visit six plantations in one day the Louisiana Welcome Center, or pick up a map of plantations participating in New Orleans Plantation Country or Plantation Parade; both of which work together to increase visitation to and between these sites. The film also includes scenes from today’s French Quarter, highlighting same-sex and interracial couples in a statement of equality and acceptance beyond

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18 Gotham, Authentic New Orleans, 81-84, 86, 137.
19 Leon Waters, as told to the author during History of the 1811 Slave Revolt walking tour, 2017.
20 Alderman, Butler, & Hanna, 214.
the standardized tourist narrative. The connection of the French Quarter to plantations is not explicit, but *Lemonade* is Beyoncé’s response to the traditional tourist narrative.

Plantations present a fresh vision in *Lemonade* for viewer consumption. Two black women of different complexions part a curtain into a sanctuary of love and peace. Black women are preparing a meal for each other in a kitchen in which historically enslaved Africans and their descendants would have prepared food for white slave masters. They sit down to a meal prepared by each other, and are seen smiling, laughing, and at peace with one another and their surroundings. The scene again used the dichotomy of filming in black and white and color to imply shifts in time and meaning. First in black and white, women dressed in antebellum attire, followed by women dressed for a more recent era filmed in color. The performance of these two scenes combine to show that plantations are not just a place for white romanticizing of the antebellum South. Plantations, as museums of public history are a place where black people, but specifically black women, can and should go to connect with each other and their ancestors. Plantations are places of pain that has become multigenerational, but also holds the memory of strength, composure, wit, humor, and beauty of enslaved people.

Beyoncé could have placed her black woman sanctuary in an African country, but instead she chose a plantation. Why? Well, not only is it a distinctly Southern experience, but by extension an American experience — this country both North and South were built on the backs of enslaved labor and industry. Plantations are the origin of trauma, so while on the surface it may seem like

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21 Knowles-Carter et al, *Lemonade*
an illogical choice, it is brilliant because it calls contemporary black women to engage in public history spaces and subvert the performance of Southern tourism. The only place where black women can begin to heal from such trauma is to visit the place where their ancestors survived a tortured, pained, and degrading experience. But they persisted. And because of them, black women continue to persist.

This is why *Lemonade’s* plantation scenes are so powerful. It is a performance of trauma and healing in a dual public history and tourist site. In these moments Beyoncé makes a clear testimony that these shared experiences go back beyond one or two generations. Instead they find their roots in the foundations of this country, that of slavery and exploitation. By showing black women seeking each other for solace, in a place where their shared ancestors suffered and sought communal respite centuries prior acknowledges the generational trauma of the American black woman’s experience, especially sexual exploitation.

Constantly, black women are either hypersexualized or desexualized in every aspect of life.\(^22\) The physio-emotional and psychological drain of the black women’s experience is never ending. Where white women and other women of color may go to a spa or take a girls-only vacation, black women must worry about harassment like those who were kicked off a wine tasting train in San Francisco in 2016, their shared laughter seen as offensive and disruptive to the other passengers\(^23\). In a world that simultaneously and consistently uses and rejects black women...

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\(^{23}\) Sudhin Thanawala, “Black Women Booted From Napa Valley Wine Train File Lawsuit”, *The Press Democrat* October 1, 2015, accessed March 3, 2017. A group of eleven women, ten of which were black met on a Napa Valley Wine tour to discuss a romance novel A train employee informed the group that they needed to be quiet to not disturb the other passengers. The same employee warned them again before informing them police would be waiting at the St. Helena stop. The group was thrown off the train and arrested in front of inebriated white passengers who were allowed to continue on the train. The women sued for $11 million in damages and settled out of court.
women, where do we go to find solace and peace? When is the performance of black women’s identity while being subjected misogynoir and hypervisibility\textsuperscript{24} ever given a respite?

In the tradition of double consciousness\textsuperscript{25}, contemporary black women navigate these issues through shifting. Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, Ph.D. define shifting as “a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced ensuring their survival in our society.”\textsuperscript{26} In antebellum through Jim Crow America, black women would literally shift by casting her eyes downward or moving off the sidewalk or to the back of a city bus. Modern America finds black women shifting in subtle ways such as remaining silent in the face of sexual harassment or physical intimidation from a white colleague due to fear, ridicule, and disbelief, and shifting again at home to please a black partner who also lives with the same pain and oppression in American society. Both internal and invisible, shifting as a performance survival strategy often chips away at black women’s feelings of centeredness because of daily gender and racial bias.\textsuperscript{27} By choosing a plantation, Beyoncé is both acknowledging the source of generational trauma for black women while simultaneously inserting the presence of black women in a space traditionally reserved for white tourism, more specifically voyeurism into the romanticized but taboo lifestyle of plantation owners in the antebellum South. An examination of the voyeuristic ways Americans engage with tourism, public history, and \textit{Lemonade} will occur in the next section.

\textsuperscript{24} Moya Bailey, “Race, Class, Region, and Gender in Early Emory School of Medicine Yearbooks (doctoral thesis, Emory 2013).


\textsuperscript{27} Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 7.
Pray You Catch Me – Voyeurism through Tourism, Public History, and consumption of the Black Woman

On the surface, Lemonade appears to tell the story of infidelity and reconciliation. If a woman as intelligent, driven, and powerful as Beyoncé is singing about being cheated on, the world comes united in anger through social media. Yet Beyoncé uses the film to portray the traumatic impact of America’s voyeurism of black women. Public history and tourism depend on the public’s fascination with the antebellum past. Lemonade addresses and breaks down voyeuristic barriers for black women who find their existence and identities stalked through the white and non-black people of color gaze.

Black women consistently receive the message that they are inferior, not only intellectually, but also physically through regular rejection of black features while watching the same features appropriated by white women and other women of color to the acceptance of American culture. Lemonade is a moment where Beyoncé, through the poetry of Warsan Shire acknowledged this daily trauma but also admitted that she is not immune from this struggle despite being considered one of the most beautiful women in the world. While the world focused on the last lyric of “Don’t Hurt Yourself”, “You better call Becky with the good hair”, it is Shire’s poem that reveals the insecurity and pain in a more intimate way:

…I can wear her skin over mine
Her hair over mine
Her hands as gloves
Her teeth as confetti
Her scalp, a cap
Her sternum, my bedazzled cane
We can pose for a photograph
All three of us, immortalized
You and your perfect girl

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28 Jones and Shorter-Goeden, 11.
29 Shire, Lemonade
Beyoncé, and by extension black women in America shift their outer appearance, modify their speech, or lower their expectations. Through constant shifting between racial, class, and social groups in both personal and professional capacities, black women internalize years of pain facing a world both filed with daily rejections because of their identity, and leering at their identities to culturally appropriate the black woman’s experience.

One specific form of gendered racism that black women deal with is colorism, the practice of discrimination based on skin tone and/or hair texture. Although it is true that African women from across the continent are visually and ethnically diverse, black women in America reached this distinction through more insidious means. Many enslaved African women were from the Slave Coast, and had dark complexions. Joyce DeGruy in Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) stated that the rape of enslaved women by the masters was primarily a weapon of terror that reinforced white’s domination over human property, an act of physical and sexual violence designed to stifle black women’s will to resist and remind them of their servile status.

These women bore mixed-race children who became coveted house slaves because their appearance comforted white people, as it was closer to their own appearance. The physical manifestation of this legacy is that black women who possess light complexion, curly or straight hair, and blue green or hazel eyes are carrying the legacy of rape on their bodies. They are living reminders of the violation suffered by enslaved women. Living memories manifest themselves physically, either on the bodies of black women or in historical sites that objectify and hypersexualize their ancestors. The South capitalized on the voyeuristic appetite of Northern tourists for economic gain.

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30 Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 61.
31 DeGruy, 77.
After the Civil War, Southern states faced an economy gutted of much of its net worth after the emancipation of slaves. Northern Americans held a fascination with the Antebellum South, which led to plantations being preserved for heritage tourism. Northerners were also attracted to the South as a travel destination because of the exotic and pastoral landscapes that were visibly absent from the urban industrial landscapes of their region. Northern tourists were also seeking comfort in an area that was still predominately white, unlike the growing city populations of the Eastern seaboard and Midwest where immigrant population growth was surging.

According to cultural geographer John Jackle, reasons for travel vary within two categories. First leisure tourism, including rest, recreation, and rejuvenation opportunities. Second, the chance to engage and learn, especially with historic sites. Tourists can feel either connected or alienated from sites depending on the information provided. Thus, tourism became a tool for creating and sustaining New South propaganda. Historian Reiko Hillyer, paraphrasing Jones and Montieth in *South to a New Place*, states the South was, and still is, seen as a region that maintains its “sense of place in a world of increasing placelessness, and further a place that honors the past in a nation threatened by pastlessness.” The cost of serving as a historical anchor in a fast-changing world is the erasure of slavery and black people on plantations museums. Narratives at plantation heritage sites were initially created by white

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34 Reiko Hillyer, *Designing Dixie: Tourism, Memory, and Urban Space in the New South* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press 2014) 43.
35 Jones and Monteith, *South to a New Place*, xvi. As cited in Hillyer, *Designing Dixie*, 183.
people for white people\(^{37}\), resulting the association of the South being saturated in history and nostalgia. Compared to their Northern neighbors, the South was better prepared to make this case, and as a result, this energized Southern tourism well into the twenty-first century.\(^{38}\)

Tourists also wanted to have realistic experiences while escaping their hectic urban lifestyle. Tourist destinations have their own “spirit of place”, acting as stand ins for an imagined pre-industrial world.\(^{39}\) During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was easier and less expensive for middle class Northern and Midwestern tourists to travel South “chasing myths” versus the West, which only wealthy Americans could afford to visit.\(^{40}\) Managers of plantation museums capitalized on this form of tourism that glamorized the white planter elite, simultaneously romanticizing or minimizing the historical contributions of the enslaved at these sites.\(^{41}\) What initially started as a racist exclusionary practice, plantations today are learning to incorporate history of slavery onto their sites in a bid to be historically accurate and more inclusive to potential black tourists.\(^{42}\)

With New Orleans transitioning to a city based on its cultural identity through tourism and hospitality, residents of the city both black and white take on this history as a part of their personal identities. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage states, “Southerners, white and black, men and women, obscure and famous, have used history to mold their deepest sense of self and articulate their aspirations for the region they call home.”\(^{43}\) For Beyoncé, \textit{Lemonade} is an exercise in the tradition of ritualistic black memory as a form of cultural resistance.\(^{44}\) And by

\(^{37}\) Stanonis, 23.
\(^{38}\) Hillyer, \textit{Designing Dixie}, 183.
\(^{39}\) Tom Selwyn, \textit{The Tourist Image} 1, 7-8, 21. As cited in Cox, \textit{Destination Dixie}, 3.
\(^{40}\) Cox, \textit{Designing Dixie}, 30.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 211.
\(^{44}\) Ibid, 10.
filming scenes on plantations is a call for black people, specifically black women to participate in touristic subversion of plantation sites depiction of the enslaved. Calling black women to enter tourist and public history locations enlists them in the cultural memory battles to preserve and amplify the history of black people in America.\textsuperscript{45}

Public historians are challenged to weave new information into tours when many participants are under informed and ill prepared to have conversations about historic race relations in America. Public education on the topic is taught by high school teachers with inadequate historical training, and students are exposed to textbooks that minimize the brutality of slavery.\textsuperscript{46} However, returning to Jackle’s tenets of tourist motivation is the engagement with historical sites. It is beneficial to all tours to be balanced and inclusive. Most Americans feel connected to history when visiting historic places, and more importantly, they believe in the potential to discover “real” history at museums and historic sites according to a study by Roy Rosenzwerg and David Thelen.\textsuperscript{47} Public historians, plantation docents, and tour guides have an opportunity to educate a large swath of the population in a limited amount of time\textsuperscript{48}. Academic historians and other educators need to pay attention to tourist sites because this is where the public is learning about the American South.\textsuperscript{49} One major responsibility and objective of public historians should be to combat stereotypes founded in past white supremacist narratives designed to oppress non-white people.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 43.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 43-44.
\textsuperscript{49} Cox, 7.
Although black men are subjected to hypersexualized stereotypes, hetero-identifying black males benefit from gender privilege in a male dominated society. Black women conversely are victims of gendered racism, or misogynoir. Rooted in intersectionality, misogynoir is a term that describes how black women experience misogyny differently from other women of color, and white women specifically, due to anti-black racism. One can trace the roots of gendered racism back to slavery, beyond the stereotypes of the hypersexualized Jezebel and asexual Mammy. Enslaved African women internalized this trauma and passed lessons for survival down through the generations, resulting in learned defense mechanisms that further play into stereotypes of black women.

_Daddy Lessons – Healing through film, tourism and public history_

Being an international pop superstar does not insulate Beyoncé from the experience and emotions described previously. _Lemonade_ is transcendent due to its intricate relationship between Beyoncé as an artist and as a black woman to a black female audience. Trauma from multi-generational misogynoir, rejection from her lover (and by American society) is what makes the scenes of healing at a plantation so powerful. It is not surprising that black women would recognize the scenes of sanctuary at the end of _Lemonade_ as more than beautiful imagery, but a call to embrace each other and begin to reject harmful unhealthy stereotypes. New Orleans, an adopted home of Beyoncé, has a booming tourist industry partially based on historical nostalgia from the French Quarter to the outlying plantations. In the next section, an examination of tourism and public history in the South and a short history of the tourism industry in New

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Orleans will explain how *Lemonade* is Beyoncé’s invitation to visit these sites as a form of reclamation and resistance to the dominant white supremacist narrative.

The film serves as a literal respite from images of perfect (white) lives that black women can never achieve due to systemic and institutionalized racism. American culture typically accepts black people in stereotypical roles within the entertainment industry, such as acting, music, or athletic ability. Those who preform within the confines of the stereotypes are rewarded.\(^5\) Instead of creating a film within this standard of white consumption and approval, *Lemonade* is a subversive piece about black women for black women, designed to define its own success. A sanctuary of healing at the origin of years of abuse is an invitation for black women to visit plantation sites in honor and remembrance of the enslaved women who came before them.

Over three days in January 2017, I engaged with four plantation tours – two of them through a pre-arranged tour company, and a walking tour of the French Quarter. Each plantation – Whitney, St. Joseph, San Francisco, and Destrehan – provided a unique experience to tourists while also adhering to shared themes previously discussed. Whitney Plantation is the outlier because it is a museum that focuses on the history of slavery and is intentionally opposite a typical plantation to focus on the history of slavery. Initially, I planned to participate in the tours and engage the other tourists with a quantitative survey and holistic conversations to determine the motivations of other black tourists. Unfortunately, extremely cold weather severely depressed tourist participation to the point there was never more than five people total on any tour I took.

For this paper, I’ve chosen to spotlight my experience at Destrehan Plantation. First, it serves as a microcosm of my experiences over the three-day trip. Second, Daniel Rasmussen’s *American__\(^5\) Lewis, *Black Pain*, 236.
specifically mentioned Destrehan and the absence of its role in the revolt, piquing my interest to investigate if any changes were made after the book’s publication in 2014. All historical information unless otherwise cited was communicated verbally during the tour.

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I arrived at Destrehan, the final plantation on this whirlwind research excursion. On the 206th anniversary of the 1811 German Coast Uprising, hopes were cautiously raised that the plantation would be a better experience than San Francisco earlier that morning. This plantation had a larger welcome center/gift shop that sold pamphlets focused on the history of the property, alongside the traditional antebellum fare. The docents dressed in period attire, a decision that reinforces a romanticized view of antebellum life but just made me feel disquieted. Black docents dressed in this manner would essentially be house slaves, and thinking about them leading all-white tours is at best odd, but at worst a sinister way to satisfy white supremacist wet dreams of the past.

Unlike the other three plantations, two slave cabins were the first buildings mentioned on the tour. One functioned as an exhibit with the other appearing to be a storage space, but neither donated cabin is placed on their original footprint. Regardless, the current proximity to the main house is interesting when thinking about what people expect to see at a plantation versus historical accuracy of the property’s footprint. Our docent, Alan, mentioned that the enslaved people at Destrehan came from Senegal and Gambia, and encouraged us to visit the slave exhibit

53 On January 8, 1811, 250-500 enslaved people attempted to fight for their freedom in a highly detailed plan that involved cross-cultural communication and long term planning. A few days later the rebellion was stopped, and four courts conveyed where many enslaved Africans to varying degrees of involvement were tried, put to death, and had their corpses displayed on the road outside of New Orleans as a warning to other enslaved people not to attempt another revolt.
after the main tour. Alan highlighted that Interview with A Vampire was filmed in the main house, and as an afterthought mentioned that Beyoncé filmed a video recently, casually pointing to the other slave cabin as a location. I honestly couldn’t believe the blessings hidden within this tour. Lemonade’s black women’s sanctuary was filmed here! Combined with the anniversary of the slave revolt I was excited to explore the property after the tour.

Alan led our group of three into the main house to watch a ten-minute video about the history of the property. Destrehan’s claim to fame is partially being the oldest documented plantation south of the Mississippi River Valley, built in 1787 with indigo as the cash crop. Jean Noel Destrehan purchased the property in 1802, and by 1804, it was the largest sugar plantation in the region. Destrehan was a prominent political figure, serving as First Deputy to the Mayor of New Orleans and one of four men selected by Thomas Jefferson to meet with the House of Representatives and sign the charter declaring state rights for Louisiana in 1805. An original copy of this document is on display at Destrehan – the other claim to fame.

Chattel slavery received little attention in the film, with a heavy emphasis on the Code Noir providing “fair” working conditions for enslaved people that were superior to their American counterparts, including that they “had weekends off”. A quick minute or two were devoted to the German Coast Rebellion of 1811, focused on white slave owner’s fleeing for their safety and the resulting trial held on the property, one of four locations. Forty-five slaves were executed for their involvement, three of which belonged to Destrehan. The rest of the video
focused on the family and saving the plantation during the 1970s.

Destrehan chose a different route to incorporate slavery into their tour, using a mannequin of an enslaved house servant named Marguerite. Visual aids are excellent learning tools that crosses racial boundaries, and using the story of a real enslaved African (purchased in 1740) helped to explain the intricacies of her daily responsibilities while also balancing personal care for her two children. Another example was the bedframe in Destrehan’s bedroom that was built by Dut Rielle Barjon, a previously enslaved man who had purchased his freedom. Alan cheerfully told the story of Barjon’s success, how he built furniture for other homes in the area. A young woman on the tour asked where Barjon lived as a free man of color, and what about his family. Alan did not have any concrete answers, guessing that Barjon continued to live in the slave quarters with the other enslaved people. At the pantry, Alan again pushed the genteel slave/Code de Noir narrative of easy work hours and free time. After an emotional morning at San Francisco, that comment was the final straw. Pushing back, I said that slaves did not have it easy and that they did work past three in the afternoon and on weekends. Alan conceded the point that slavery was difficult, but kept to the company narrative of shortened weekdays.

Finally released from the main tour, I immediately set off to the Education Center and the 1811 Slave Revolt exhibit. What Destrehan has put together is an incredible combination of artifacts and artwork to tell the story of the revolt from the perspective of the enslaved. It is thorough, thoughtful, and moving exhibit. It acknowledged the trauma of slavery and the viciousness of punishment for the revolt while also honoring the men and women involved by naming them on their own exhibit label. Destrehan has curated a beautiful exhibit in which any
Black American would find pride and healing know that the enslaved freedom fighters are honored on land that tried to take all dignity from them.

**Forward/Freedom – Conclusions**

Searching for healing in a hectic, traumatic world is exhausting. Visiting four plantations in two days involved preparing myself each time for a possibly damaging experience. I found myself battling the performance of some docents and tour guides to subvert their voyeuristic feeding of white tourists. A typical tourist would most likely mix in the diversions New Orleans is known for with this potentially taxing experience. The existence of plantation of museums is vital to allowing black Americans the opportunity to visit, acknowledge, and begin to heal from the impact of slavery. Remembering historically traumatic events is critical to both collective memory and the physical health of the black community.54

*Lemonade* bolsters the argument that contested history should be acknowledged as “central and enduring” elements that shapes daily life.55 Plantation museums would do well to take notice and capitalize on the rising interest within the Black community. The Whitney Plantation already holds ceremonies honoring ancestors, but what is stopping the other locations from doing something similar? As the population becomes majority-minority, the potential to tap into the tourist dollars of black Americans is massive. This goes beyond listing slave schedules on their websites and providing filming permissions later used to promote the site for tourist monies. As the Whitney and St. Joseph plantations demonstrate, it is possible to be inclusive of the experience of enslaved Africans with economic success.

55 Ibid, 11.
New Orleans is a city evolving its tourist narrative to be more accurate and comprehensive. Coming from a history of segregation and appropriation, the city has the potential to be an example for other Dixieland heritage sites. If people learn more and have the most trust in historical sites, plantations have an obligation to stop presenting narratives anchored in The Lost Cause. Further, training of docents and other employees is imperative because an absence of empathy within gestures of inclusion are detrimental to their bottom line: dollars and positive reviews. Tourism and public history will always be exercises in performance and voyeurism, but they can also act as ambassadors of healing.

In fifty-seven minutes, Lemonade weaves multigenerational trauma, heritage tourism, and the promise of healing with the dominating narrative of infidelity in a relationship. Beyoncé and her team created a visual and musical study of the black woman’s experience in America. Within this is an invitation for black women to pursue their own journeys of healing by returning to plantation sites. Each visit will be unique, but collectively black women tourists have the power to permanently honor their ancestors and permanently shift the narrative of plantation museums by affecting their bottom lines. But most importantly black women have a pathway to find healing outside of mainstream society, a lesson graciously learned from Lemonade.
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