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Entertaining Education or Purely Entertainment: A Case Study of the Yorktown Victory Center

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Entertaining Education or Purely Entertainment: A Case Study of the Yorktown
Victory Center

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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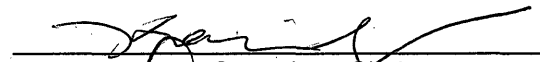
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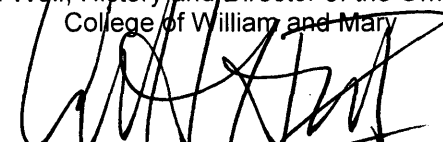
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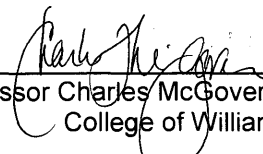
Master of Arts


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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on how museums balance their educational goals with their entertainment aspects in order to draw people in. Entertaining education has been a goal of educational theorists for centuries, and has been adopted as an unstated goal of museums. However, if a museum does not keep a balance between education and entertainment, then one usurps the other. In order to examine this balance, this project is a case study of the Yorktown Victory Center in Yorktown, Virginia. The Yorktown Victory Center is a prime museum for such a case study, because it is a museum in the middle of a great change. It has received funding to expand the museum and its living history offerings. By examining the Yorktown Victory Center's interpreter training manual, hands-on activity schematics, educational film screenplay, and the museum's exhibits and living history offerings, it is evident that though the museum staff believe they are offering an entertaining education, in actuality entertainment has overtaken education. When the balance between education and entertainment is upset, the museum loses its educational goals, and it can begin to look like historical playground, where people come to reinforce their beliefs and enjoy themselves, but not learn anything.

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Entertaining Education or Purely Entertainment: A Case Study of the Yorktown Victory Center

According to Steven Conn, the United States is in a “golden age of museums.”¹ Americans have more museums to choose from than ever before. One of the main museum organizations, the American Association of Museums, reports that in 2009 “there are more than 17,500 accredited museums in the United States.”² Americans are also going to museums in record numbers, with over 850 million visits in 2009.³ While these statistics may appear to be positive for museums as a whole, for some museums, the numbers paint a different picture. One of those areas is Virginia’s “historic triangle” of Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown. A 2011 *Daily Press* article explains that attendance at almost all of these museums declined significantly from 2000-2010.⁴ Colonial Williamsburg’s visitation fell 23.25 percent in those ten years, from 895,000 visitors to 686,000. Jamestown Settlement and Yorktown Victory Center did not fare much better during the same time period. The Jamestown Settlement’s visitation fell 16.33 percent in the same time period, from 512,600 visitors to 428,868. The Yorktown Victory Center’s visitation fell about the same as Jamestown – down 16.58 percent from 199,000 visitors in 2000 to 166,000 in 2010.⁵ Not only are the Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown museums competing with each other for visitors, but they

¹ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1.

² *Ibid*, 2.

³ American Museum Association, “Frequently Asked Questions About Museums,” accessed 2 June 2012, <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm>.

⁴ John Cawley “Tourism, hotel industry slumps an issue in Williamsburg,” *Daily Press*, 9 October 2011, accessed 22 February 2013, http://articles.dailypress.com/2011-10-09/news/dp-nws-williamsburg-tourism-20111007_1_occupancy-room-demand-colonial-williamsburg. The *Daily Press* is the newspaper of record for the Hampton Roads’ peninsula, Virginia area. There was no visitation information offered on the national parks in Jamestown and Yorktown.

⁵ These percentages were calculated by subtracting the 2010 attendance figures from the 2000 figures, and dividing that answer by the 2000 figures.

are also competing with a nearby amusement park, Busch Gardens. The same *Daily Press* article also profiled the slight decline in Busch Gardens' visitation from 2000-2010. While visitation did decrease more than any of the "historic triangle" museums, by 30.79 percent, during those ten years, from 3.15 million to 2.18 million visitors, Busch Gardens' 2010 visitation still outpaced the entire "historic triangle" museums' visitation combined, which collectively was 1.28 million visitors.⁶

As these figures indicate, competition is fierce in the "historic triangle" for visitors. While the current purpose of a museum is to provide "primarily educational services to the public," there needs to be some draw to bring the public into the museum so they can get those educational services.⁷ In order to draw people into a museum, the institution needs to entice visitors into their doors with more than just education. Museums may not mention it explicitly, but in addition to providing education, they also provide entertainment. Or, another way to phrase it is that museums want to provide an entertaining education.

With all the museum options out there for visitors, combined with the competition from other entertainments that do not aspire to also educate, how can museums combine and balance entertainment and education? A case study of the Yorktown Victory Center in Yorktown, Virginia can provide an answer to this question. The Yorktown Victory Center is a museum in a state of flux. It is a museum in major transition – not only in focus, but also in how the museum presents its information. A study of the Yorktown Victory Center illustrates that while the museum staff and interpreters believe that they are providing their visitors entertaining education, they are, instead, focusing too much

⁶ Ibid. The Busch Garden attendance percentage change was calculated the same way as the museum ones.

⁷ Stephen Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 28.

on the entertainment aspect of the equation, and providing a way for their visitors to be passive “tourists of history.”⁸

In *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, Marita Sturken defines historical tourism as “a particular mode through which the American public is encouraged to experience itself as the subject of history through consumerism, media images, souvenirs, popular culture, and museum and architectural reenactments.”⁹ To sum up this detailed definition, Struken goes onto explain the term as “a form of tourism that has as its goal a cathartic ‘experience’ of history.”¹⁰ While Sturken’s “tourists of history” excludes those “people [who] visit sites of established historical and entertainment tourism, such as Williamsburg and Disneyland,” and is focused on those “for whom history is an experience once or twice removed,” the basics of her definition can and has been expanded to include those tourists who visit places of “established historical and entertainment tourism.”¹¹ Just like those tourists who visit sites of recent history, like Oklahoma City and Ground Zero, the visitors to sites and museums, such as the Yorktown Victory Center, still use simplistic ideals such as “notions of good and evil...to define complex conflicts and tensions.”¹² Tourists, no matter what history they are revisiting, want a “mediated, reenacted experience.”¹³

This “mediated, reenacted experience” aids visitors in forming a “prosthetic memory,” according to Alison Landsberg. Landsberg explains in *Prosthetic Memory*:

⁸ Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), first used in context, 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 10.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture that this type of memory “emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum.”¹⁴ Instead of visitors just “simply apprehend[ing] a historical narrative,” they situate themselves into a larger history with a “more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.”¹⁵ The combination of a more personal connection to the past and the “cathartic ‘experience’ of history” can expand Sturken’s definition of “tourists of history” to include historic sites like the Yorktown Victory Center.¹⁶

After an examination of the current scholarship on museums and a brief review of educational theories, this case study on the Yorktown Victory Center is built in three sections: 1. what the museum, and the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, the foundation that runs the Yorktown Victory Center, believes it is accomplishing; 2. what it is currently presenting to the public; and 3. how it is preparing itself for the future. The logic behind this structure is basic. In order to properly assess the success of an enterprise, it only makes sense to first examine what it believes itself to be doing. Once that is completed, then judgment of the success or failure of that enterprise can be obtained. Since the Yorktown Victory Center is in the process of re-creating itself, it only makes sense that the case study concludes with a look towards its future, and what could happen if museums continue prioritizing entertainment over education.

Entertainment is something that people do to primarily enjoy themselves, and it does not

¹⁴ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 9.

have to include acquiring new information. Education is when people acquire and synthesize new information.

One way to study the Yorktown Victory Center's execution of its mission is to examine the museum's internal documents, such as its training materials. The museum's main training document is its *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, which provides new employees basic information about working at the museums, from operations to the Yorktown Victory Center's theory of interpretation. In addition, the museum also produces programming sheets to explain hands-on activities and other interpreter duties at the various locations around the museum. The programming sheets explain everything about an activity, from step-by-step directions to execute, to the information relevant to interpret each activity.

While the Yorktown Victory Center believes it is accomplishing the interpretive educational goals the museum lays out in the training manual and programming sheets, their final product, the exhibits and living history areas, is the real barometer of the success or failure of the museum's interpretive plan. The middle section of this case study is an examination of the end product, or experience, the Yorktown Victory Center offers its visitors – not only the information presented, but how that information is presented.

After studying what the current Yorktown Victory Center believes itself to be doing, and actually does, this case study ends with a look forward at the museum's possible paths – either their “entertaining education” goals, or continuing to facilitate visitors to be “tourists of the past.” For comparative purposes, this section examines what the more recently renovated Jamestown Settlement (the sister institution to the Yorktown

Victory Center) presents to visitors, and analyzes the ideas and information the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation presents about the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown, currently under construction.

Current Scholarship: Museums, Theory, and Case Studies

Current museum scholarship is largely concerned with museums' deficiencies, and ways to remedy them. In the 1980s, scholars began to call for a critical examination of what museums presented to the public. Collections of essays, such as *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* and *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, claimed that museums are important "sites in shaping the public's perception of the past," and consequently argued that academics need to pay attention to the presentation and interpretation of history in museums.¹⁷ Since history museums have such a profound influence on the American populace's knowledge and view of their history, professional historians need to critically examine what the American public understands from them about the nation's past. Leon and Rosenzweig, summarizing the points of the essays in *History Museums in the United States*, pointed out that while their "authors are especially concerned with how recent historical scholarship has and has not been translated into museum presentations... the authors represented here generally applaud the appearance of the new social history as a positive force in the life of museums."¹⁸ *Presenting the Past's* editors also confirmed that "Americans confront a multitude of historical images and messages in docudramas, ...movies...museums and historic houses," which means that these forms have a "profound impact on public consciousness because of their constant repetition and their slick and palatable

¹⁷Roy Rosenzweig and Warren Leon, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), xii.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, xvii-xviii.

presentations.”¹⁹ *Presenting the Past*’s editors argued that studying public history is important, because it is how the majority of Americans learned about their history. While the reasoning is basic, these scholars need to begin with the basics of critically examining American public history so their scholarship can service as the building blocks for the scholarship to follow.

Taking up the mantle of these scholars, other museum professionals and academics began examining museums, and thinking critically about various types of museums. A collection of essays, *Museum Economics and the Community*, edited by Susan Pearce, attempts to “focus on ways in which museums function as economic and social institutions within their communities.”²⁰ Stephen Weil, in *Making Museums Matter*, discusses all manner of museum theory, from a rubric to rate museums to the shift from museums as glorified object storehouses to visitor-service focused.²¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, examines not only how museums create the information presented, but also how “Museums – and the larger heritage industry of which they are part – play a vital role in creating the sense of ‘hereness’ necessary to convert a location into a destination.”²² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett looks at museums as an important facet of the worldwide tourism industry, and explains the various reasons that they are successful.

While all of these studies further critical analysis of museums, they either focus on singular aspects of museums, such as economics for Pearce and tourism for

¹⁹ Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), xvi, xvii.

²⁰ Susan Pearce, editor, *Museum Economics and the Community*, (London and Atlantic Highland, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1991), 1.

²¹ Stephen Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

²² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, or, as in Weil's case, are too general. Pearce, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Weil all offer museum theory, but none of these scholars attempt to apply their theories to critically examine a particular museum.

Other scholars have completed case studies of historic sites. In *Here, George Washington was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument*, Seth Bruggeman examines the development of the George Washington Birthplace National Monument, and the importance of "birthplace" in America. Birthplace is a strong concept in modern American culture, as "tourists travel to famous birthplaces because, not unlike pilgrims bound to holy shrines, they believe on some level that by coming into physical contact with the places...associated [with] great people, [they] somehow partake in their greatness."²³ Bruggeman's study fluctuates between a straight forward history of the commemoration of George Washington's birthplace and broader ideas about memory and material culture. While Bruggeman's study has a narrow focus, it does add to the museum literature about the history of the commemoration of history.

Perhaps people believe that "greatness" is not just confined to birthplaces of people, but also places where great things are considered to have happened. Richard Handler and Eric Gable critically examine one of those places in *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*. Handler and Gable conducted ethnographic research at the living history museum between 1990 and 1991, and attempt to "show that social history has hardly had the kind of insurgent effect its

²³ Seth Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington was Born*, (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 14.

critics claim for it.”²⁴ Handler and Gable came to this conclusion about Colonial Williamsburg, calling the museum a “Republican Disneyland,” where Colonial Williamsburg used the “social history” to nonetheless continue “an uncritical retailing of some old American myths and dreams: the Horatio Alger story, the drama of consumer desire, the wisdom of progress, the primitiveness of the past, the universality of middle-class familial emotions.”²⁵ From Handler and Gable’s perspective, it is impossible for a mega-museum, like Colonial Williamsburg, to include a heavily documented, scholarly historical narrative, because these institutions do not want to offend, undermine, correct, or confuse visitors. Instead of truly teaching, Handler and Gable argue, Colonial Williamsburg’s frontline interpreters were expected to keep visitors happy, and “if the customer is always right, good vibes always take precedence over good pedagogy.”²⁶

This overview of the museum scholarship provides a cross-section of the current work. The forbearers of modern museum studies, the theorists, and the case studies, together create the scholarship of the field. However, they have not been combined in a way to create a cohesive case study of a museum – one that combines theory with an individual case study. The current examination of the Yorktown Victory Center aims to do just that, apply the theory to an actual museum. Theory is where this study begins, with a comprehensive look at educational theories.

Education Theory: From Locke to Technological Impacts

While entertainment and education appear to be a dichotomy, some scholars believe that the two concepts can and should be combined. These scholars postulate that

²⁴ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 220-221.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 205.

the combination aids students in better retaining the presented information. This is why it is important to examine educational theory when studying museums, because their goal is to provide effective education. According to these scholars, this means providing an entertaining education. The educational theory offered in this section is a brief overview of seventeenth through twenty-first century theories, both in formal, teacher and student, and informal, museum, settings.

Entertainment and education have been topics of discourse and philosophy for centuries. In 1693, enlightenment philosopher John Locke wrote *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Locke believed that, in general, “Gentlemen should use their Children as the honest Farmers and substantial Yeomen do theirs.”²⁷ Children of the gentry, or upper levels of society, should not be spoiled with “cockering [coddling] and tenderness.”²⁸ Locke also advised those parents that “children should not be too warmly clad or cover’d, Winter or Summer,” as “nothing...more exposes to head-aches, Colds...Coughs and several other diseases than keeping the head warm.”²⁹

While Locke believed that children need to become accustomed to physical labor, he did not believe that hardship should extend to education. Locke explained that “none of the Things they [children] are to learn, should ever be made a burden to them, or imposed upon them as a Task.”³⁰ When presented as a task, a subject “becomes irksome,” and the “mind takes an aversion to it.”³¹ However, when a subject is not a task, the child can view it as “a thing of Delight.”³² Learning, according to Locke, should

²⁷ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (London: Printed for J and J Churchill, 1693), 3.

²⁸ Ibid 4.

²⁹ Ibid 4, 5.

³⁰ Ibid, 75.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

not be drudgery, it should be entertaining. When explaining how to approach reading, Locke states that “some easy pleasant Book, suited to his [the child’s] Capacity, should be put into his Hands, wherein the Entertainment that he finds might draw him on.”³³ Though the book should be entertaining as to “reward his Pains in Reading,” it should not “fill his Head with perfectly useless Trumpery.”³⁴ Locke believed that a balance should be met, that the book should “Increase...Knowledge.”³⁵ As these examples illustrate, Locke believed in an education that students could have fun with, and striking a balance between, entertainment and education.

In the early twentieth-century, John Dewey, in *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, argued that education is important for the continuation of a society. Dewey made the analogy “what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life.”³⁶ Education is focused on communication, a “process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession.”³⁷ In order for a society to flourish, its younger members need to be taught to share the ways and ideas of the older members. This is why when “societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases.”³⁸

Though Dewey mainly argued that education is essential to the success of a society, he still believed that education should be entertaining. In the first chapter of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey commented that informal education, the “education

³³ Ibid, 183.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 11.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

everyone gets from living with others,” is “natural and important.”³⁹ While Dewey believed that formal education was “important to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society,” he still argued that “formal instruction...easily becomes remote and dead.”⁴⁰ When a society gets institutional, standardized education, Dewey believed that, eventually this formal education “ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life.”⁴¹

In order for formal education not to be “remote and dead,” Dewey pointed out that “experience has shown...when children have a chance at physical activities...going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden, and learning is easier.”⁴² While some teachers may just use these activities only for the aforementioned reasons, Dewey argued that there is “no reason...for using them merely as agreeable diversions.”⁴³ Dewey pointed to studies that have “made evident the fundamental worth of native tendencies to explore, to manipulate tools and materials...etc.”⁴⁴ When these activities “are part of a regular school program, the whole pupil is engaged, [and] the artificial gap between life in school and out is reduced.”⁴⁵ Though Dewey never outright used the phrase “entertaining education,” it is evident from his writing that he believed in a more entertaining than not education.

Research has evolved about learning in recent years. Currently, brain research is being applied to learning, especially to how the rapid increase in technology has impacted learning. Renate Caine and Geoffrey Caine, in *Natural Learning for a Connected World:*

³⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid, 10.

⁴² Ibid, 228.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Education, Technology, and the Human Brain, examines the combination of technological growth and “the latest brain research” to argue that “if we look at learning a new way, it may just be possible to reconcile what is occurring all around us and find a way through to a radically different and expanded type of education.”⁴⁶ Caine and Caine explain that “the current emphasis on making test scores the primary and often only criterion for learning, all too often left great education further and further behind.”⁴⁷ Instead of focusing on memorization and repetition, Caine and Caine argue that in this technological age, where “71% of all 8- to 18-year-olds” have a bedroom television, teaching needs to focus on “educators who can lead learners into *their* unique interests, talents, understandings, and expertise, while simultaneously embedding and dealing with the academic, social, and emotional capacities that students have and will need for the future they will face.”⁴⁸ Since twenty-first century children spend, on average, seven hours and thirty-eight minutes “using entertainment media across a typical day,” they need educators that will “successfully bridge the gap between videotech [technology students use] and formal education.”⁴⁹ Another way to look at it is that a successful modern educator will find a way to keep students’ attention, entertain them, while at the same time providing them with useful information, or an education.

While Caine and Caine have an interesting theory about the effect of technology on the current, and these scholars argue, outdated American education system, the way they present their argument is problematic. The scholars make leaps of logic without supporting them with evidence. Caine and Caine make the statement that “most teachers

⁴⁶ Renate Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *Natural Learning in a Connected World: Education, Technology, and the Human Brain*, (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2011), 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 9, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 9, 23.

are woefully out of date when it comes to using computers and technology in the classroom,” but they never explain how they know this.⁵⁰ The scholars provide no statistics or other evidence explaining why they can make such a bold statement.

While all of these previous discussions focus on formal, classroom learning, others are applying educational theory to museum learning. In *What Makes Learning Fun: Principles for the Design of Intrinsically Motivating Museum Exhibits*, Deborah Perry focuses on one exhibit in the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, *Colored Shadows*. Perry uses “learning theory...about educational endeavors that are designed to be fun” to redesign the *Colored Shadows* exhibit so that it will be “possible to increase the ‘learning’ that took place at the exhibit without compromising the delight, awe, and enjoyment” that visitors already had about the exhibit.⁵¹ Perry explains that “visiting a museum is first and foremost a social experience.”⁵² Visitors come to a museum in order to have a pleasant time with other people, and “education or learning may not be the primary visitor agenda.”⁵³ While this may be the case for visitors, museums’ main goal is to “educate the public.”⁵⁴ The combination of visitors’ entertaining, social agenda and the museum’s goal of education in an exhibit is the aim of “interpretive activism,” or “the process of advocating for and incorporating research-based, visitor-centered exhibit design principles and strategies that facilitate active visitor participation in the interpretive process.”⁵⁵ “Interpretive activists” want more visitor involvement in the information presented in exhibits.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁵¹ Deborah Perry, *What Makes Learning Fun: Principles for the Design of Intrinsically Motivating Museum Exhibits*, (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012), 5, 4.

⁵² Ibid, 11.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 27.

Perry then goes on to describe some of the research that these “interpretive activists” use when designing engaging and educational exhibits. One of those is the “Selinda Model of Visitor Learning.” This model, the author explains, is constructed from “three complementary perspectives on visitor learning: (a) an outcomes perspective, (b) an engagement perspective, and (c) a motivations perspective.”⁵⁶ Perry believes that all three perspectives “work together to describe and mutually shape visitors’ educational experiences.”⁵⁷ The author describes each perspective in detail, and brings up an interesting concept – knowledge hierarchies. Perry explains that instead of “assessing whether or not visitors got a particular idea or achieved a particular narrowly defined learning outcome, a knowledge hierarchy articulates a learning journey that captures virtually all visitors’ learning...of a particular topic.”⁵⁸ Knowledge hierarchies go from level zero, “I don’t know; I don’t care,” to level five or six, “sophisticated understanding of [a] concept.”⁵⁹ While the knowledge hierarchy helps to explain how exhibits may affect visitors, it does cause the barometer of the success of an exhibit to change. Perry explains that “anytime a visitor leaves an exhibit, exhibition, or museum feeling incompetent, intimidated, or overwhelmed,” then the exhibit or museum has failed.⁶⁰

While Perry has offered a good theory and some information about the evolution of an entertaining, engaging exhibit into an engaging, educational one, this in-depth evaluation of an engaging, educational exhibit is focused on a children’s museum. We need to see a similar study of a museum or exhibit created for adult visitors.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 48.

Entertaining Education: The Yorktown Victory Center's Mission

Handler and Gable's "Good vibes" may have taken precedence at the Yorktown Victory Center, even though its mission statement, interpretation manual, and programming sheets suggest otherwise. The Yorktown Victory Center is a Virginia state-funded museum focusing on the American Revolutionary War and the Siege of Yorktown that effectively ended the war. According to the mission statement of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, the non-profit organization that runs the Yorktown Victory Center, their mission is to "foster...an awareness and understanding of the early history, settlement, and development of the United States through the convergence of Native American, European, and African cultures and the enduring legacies bequeathed to the nation."⁶¹ The Yorktown Victory Center's part of this broad mission is "chronicl[ing] America's struggle for independence from the beginnings of colonial unrest to the formation of the new nation."⁶² Though this mission is less broad than the overall foundation's mission, it is still a vast, complicated topic to cover in one museum.

Mission statements, by their nature, are general, broad statements that cover an organization's purpose. They provide a brief overview of what an organization aims to do, but do not go into the details of what they actually do. One way to get a clearer, more detailed picture of what a museum's objectives are is to look at an interpretation manual to examine what information a museum believes important to provide for their staff. Examining the Yorktown Victory Center's interpretation manual can also reveal what the

⁶¹ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, "Jamestown-Yorktown Facts 2010," PDF, <http://www.jamestown-yorktown.state.va.us/downloads/2010%20JYF%20Fact%20Sheet%208.5x11.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2012, 1.

⁶² Ibid, 4.

museum believes itself to be doing, which in the Yorktown Victory Center's case is providing visitors with entertaining education.

The Yorktown Victory Center staff did not arrive at the entertaining education concept on their own.⁶³ It is pulled from various museum theories from the time when the museum began to take its current form – the late 1980s through the early 1990s, the same time that both academic and public historians began commenting on the lack of critical assessment of museums. In the introduction to 1986's *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, the editors comment that, until recently, “professional historians have paid remarkably little attention to the presentation and perception of history outside the classroom.”⁶⁴ The editors explain further that “most academic historians have shown little interest in speaking directly to that [the public] audience.”⁶⁵ In 1989 *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* aimed to bring some of the critical attention to museums that *Presenting the Past* was looking for. In its introduction, the editors claim that the volume “seeks to initiate formal, critical discussion of historical interpretation at museums and to stimulate additional efforts at professional dialogue.”⁶⁶ The editors of both of these volumes wanted more discussion about the history presented at museums. *Presenting the Past* explains that the volume “examines the place of historical consciousness in American life and asks how ideas about history shape current beliefs and actions.”⁶⁷

⁶³ While the training manual does not actually include the term “entertaining education” that is what it is doing by explaining to employees that interpretation is about “mak[ing] history come alive” for the visitor, and advising employees to “try to focus on things that enthuse them personally.” (4-1).

⁶⁴ Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presenting the Past*, xvi.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Roy Rosenzweig and Warren Leon, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, xiii.

⁶⁷ Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presenting the Past*, xvi.

Other historians began to critically examine museums as well, and began pointing out things that may not be working in museums' favor. Stephen Weil explains in *Making Museums Matter* that "the American Museum is being substantially reshaped."⁶⁸ Instead of museums "focused primarily inward on the growth, care, and study of its collection," they have "shifted [their] focus outward to concentrate on providing primarily educational service to the public."⁶⁹

This is what the Yorktown Victory Center appears to be doing. Instead of focusing on their collection, the focus is on their interpretation and connecting with their visitors. As stated earlier, the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation's mission statement emphasizes "foster[ing]...an understanding and awareness of the early history, settlement, and development of the United States."⁷⁰ The mission statement does not mention taking care of collections, or even cultivating the appreciation of early United States history through a study of their artifact collections. While this mission statement was updated in 2009, the foundation's previous mission statement of "educat[ing] and promot[ing] understanding and awareness of Virginia's role in the creation of the United States of America" also lacks mention of the museum's collection.⁷¹ The Yorktown Victory Center is thoroughly focused on their visitors' experience.

According to the Yorktown Victory Center's *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, the goal of their interpreters is to "make history come alive so that it makes sense to people of all ages and backgrounds."⁷² With this goal in mind, the Yorktown Victory

⁶⁸ Steven Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 28-29.

⁷⁰ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, "Jamestown-Yorktown Facts 2010," 1.

⁷¹ The 2008 fact sheet, published in 2009, is the first appearance of the new mission statement. Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, "Jamestown-Yorktown Facts 2007," 1.

⁷² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, (Training Manual, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Williamsburg, VA, 2004), 4-1.

Center provides new employees with an introduction to interpretation. The interpretation manual explains that employees should “use the objects, buildings, and activities around them to make their information become real to museum visitors.”⁷³ It also points out some “interpretive skills” that work well with anyone who works with the public – using “open body language, be friendly and inviting,” and try to “focus on things that enthuse [you] personally; it is easier to get visitors involved. ... Getting people interested is the first step to getting them educated.”⁷⁴ According to the manual, the basic requirement for successful interpretation is to be a friendly, inviting person.

While getting the visitor involved is a good first step, interpretation should not end there. The manual explains that a “good interpreter...use[s] questions and visitor interest to work toward museum interpretive objectives.”⁷⁵ For a successful interpretation, a Yorktown Victory Center employee should not let a museum visitor dictate that interpretation’s direction. While interpreters are getting visitors involved and using their interests and questions to guide interpretations, they also have to make sure that all these interpretations are “planned ahead of time, with a clear beginning and ending.”⁷⁶ The manual explains to new employees that a “good interpreter focus[es] the demonstration and activity around the teaching objectives of each station and/or activity.”⁷⁷ To summarize, the Yorktown Victory Center believes a good interpreter focuses their interpretation to their visitors’ interests and uses those interests to guide the visitor back towards museum objectives. At the same time, the interpreters need to

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 4-1 – 4-3.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 4-2

⁷⁶ Ibid, 4-3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

prepare their interpretations and make sure those pre-planned interpretations are focused on the learning objectives of that day's particular demonstration or activity.

After introducing the concept of interpretation, the manual provides some interpretation theory. The manual explains that the Yorktown Victory Center gets many of its ideas about interpretation from Freeman Tilden, who, working with the National Parks Service, published *Interpreting Our Heritage* in 1957. According to the Yorktown Victory Center, Tilden "was a pioneer in identifying interpretive principles and created a classic of interpretive philosophy."⁷⁸ The Yorktown Victory Center directly reproduces Tilden's six principles of interpreters:

- I. Interpretation that does not relate what is being presented to something within the experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- II. Information as such is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelations based on information, but they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- III. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- IV. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- V. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- VI. Interpretation addressed to children...should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program.⁷⁹

It is evident from these principles that Tilden believes interpretation to be a combination of a skill and a gift – something that can be taught, but also something that people can have talent for. Tilden gets directly to this combination by explaining that "interpretation

⁷⁸ Ibid, 4-4.

⁷⁹ Ibid. While Tilden's work was originally published in 1957, it is still referred to and used heavily in museum interpretation training and manuals – not only the Yorktown Victory Center's, but also in Colonial Williamsburg. Handler and Gable comment that "Tilden's book is the virtual bible for frontline work at Colonial Williamsburg." (174)

is an art, [but] any art is in some degree teachable.”⁸⁰ Interpretation, for Tilden, is not about relaying information to others, but something perhaps intangible. It is that intangible quality that the Yorktown Victory Center attempts to relay in their manual.

The Yorktown Victory Center believes Tilden’s principles to be important enough to create a mnemonic device to remember them: SHARPR, or “Specialized, Holistic, Artistic, Revealing, Provocative, [and] Relevant.”⁸¹ Though the museum believes that Tilden’s principles “have survived a half-century of scrutiny and trial, and are just as valid today,” that does not stop it adding to the mnemonic SHARPR an E for “enthusiastic.”⁸² The manual explains that the Yorktown Victory Center believes that “if interpreters are passionate about their presentation, the visitors will join in the excitement.”⁸³ The Yorktown Victory Center uses Tilden’s ideas about interpretation as the building blocks of its interpretive program. From the museum’s use and expansion of Tilden’s main principle, it appears that the Yorktown Victory Center intends for Tilden to be a foundation on which to build its interpretive theory.

The Yorktown Victory Center wants to help its interpreters use the theory presented in the manual to educate its visitors. In order to accomplish that, the manual explains the basics of learning theory. The manual explains the three learning domains, “cognitive – logic, thinking, and understanding; affective – attitudes, emotions and feelings; [and] motor skills – learning and carrying out a physical task.”⁸⁴ In order for its interpreters to use these learning domains to educate the Yorktown Victory Center’s visitors the manual provides various interpretive techniques, such as lecture, object

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 4-5.

⁸² Ibid, 4-6.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 4-7 – 4-8.

analysis, and role playing.⁸⁵ Each of these techniques relates back to at least one of the learning domains. For example, a lecture technique that provides “visitors with background information quickly and ... answer[s] visitor questions” plays into the cognitive learning domain, because it aids people with “translating new information learned from the museum experience into meaningful concepts and knowledge.”⁸⁶

The Yorktown Victory Center also has a simple mnemonic for its interpreters to remember what their interpretations should aim for: ARCH. These interpreters “should always be Accurate...Relevant...Consistent...[and] Hands-on.”⁸⁷ While most of the components of ARCH are only briefly mentioned in the manual, the first one, accurate, shows up repeatedly. One of the points the Yorktown Victory Center attempts to impart to its interpreters is that while entertainment may be important, activities and demonstrations will not be added to interpretive sites, such as the encampment, unless they can be “reasonably documented.”⁸⁸ In order to provide its interpreters with documentation, included in the manual is a brief bibliography of the materials used as reference for each interpretive site, as well as one for their interpreters to research the concepts and themes that they should be discussing with visitors.⁸⁹ These bibliographies focus on easy to convey historical information. For example, the “selected secondary sources for the Encampment” are all about the Continental/British army experience, American Revolutionary field medicine, and crops – either corn or tobacco.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Ibid, 4-8 – 4-9.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 4-8, 4-7.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 3-1.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3-9 – 3-12.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 3-10.

Interestingly, none of these secondary sources was published after 1992. This observation indicates that the Yorktown Victory Center might have stopped looking for new information about same time their renovation began in the late 1980s-early 1990s. This makes the Yorktown Victory Center stunted in the information it presents not only to its new interpreters, considering the fact that the manual was last updated in February 2004, but also to its visitors.

Along with providing basic bibliographies for the sites, the manual also goes into some detail about the big ideas that should be focused on in the interpretive sites. For example, in the encampment, interpreters should focus on “demonstrate[ing] aspects of daily life, roles, and activities in a Continental Army encampment during the American Revolution.”⁹¹ After the major theme of the site, the manual includes lesser points that should be made during the interpretation, such as “discuss[ing] the reasons Americans joined the Continental Army, [and] explain[ing] the roles, status, and duties of enlisted men, officers, women of the army, and African Americans.”⁹²

While the Yorktown Victory Center is focused on having its interpreters provide accurate information about the American Revolution to visitors, they also want to focus on what the manual refers to as “customer service.”⁹³ At the same time that Yorktown Victory Center interpreters should be providing educational information to visitors, they should also “be the one to speak first and last to our customer,” and “within five (5) feet of you, give the customer your full attention.”⁹⁴ These may be basic rules to abide by and skills to have when working with the public, but their location in the manual is

⁹¹ Ibid, 5-4.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 2-10.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

interesting. They appear before any information about the material culture, or the major themes of the interpretive sites. Based on their location in the manual, it appears that customer service is one of the first things that new interpreters are taught when they begin their employment. Another interesting thing about this section is that the Yorktown Victory Center's visitors are referred to as "customers" in this section, and "visitors" in all the sections pertaining to interpretation and the historical information presented in each site.⁹⁵

Perhaps the reason for that change in nomenclature is that in this section the manual is focused on the "box office" side of museum work. With more of museum funding coming from "'box office' income – not merely entrance fees but also the related funds derived from shop sales and other auxiliary activities," it only make sense for museums, such as the Yorktown Victory Center, to become more invested in the customer service aspect of museum work.⁹⁶ Added to that, the Yorktown Victory Center has added competition from the immediate museums in the "historic triangle." The museum needs to make sure its customer service is at least on par with, if not superior to, the rest of the "historic triangle" museums. As the budgetary make up of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation indicates, there is an increased reliance on entrance fees. From 2007 to 2012, the percentage of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation's budget that came from the state of Virginia dropped two percentage points, from 48% to 46%, while the reliance on income from "non-general funds, which consist substantially of admissions revenue" increased that correspondingly needed two percent, from 52% to 54% of the

⁹⁵ Ibid, examples of the different language in sections 2, 3, and 4.

⁹⁶ Stephen Weil, *Making Museum Matter*, 31.

total budget.⁹⁷ For the purposes of this side of museum work, “visitors” become “customers,” because in this instance, the Yorktown Victory Center focuses on the “customer service” more associated with a retail establishment than a museum.

From this examination of the Yorktown Victory Center’s interpretation manual, it is evident that the museum is focused on providing historical information in a pleasant, customer-service oriented manner: entertaining history. The manual describes it best by saying that “visitors generally expect to enjoy themselves, have a good time, and learn something new.”⁹⁸ People go to a museum because they want to have fun, first and foremost. In order to provide visitors with a both educational and entertaining experience, the Yorktown Victory Center provides its interpreters a sample way of crafting their interpretation in order to both educate and entertain. Accurate information is extensively focused on in the sample interpretation worksheet by explaining how to create an interpretation with a beginning, middle, and end; as well as reminding the interpreter to have a few endings “based on different lengths of time or interpretation.”⁹⁹ Though education is the main point of the interpretation, the sample interpretation worksheet also has sections to “think about how you [the interpreter] want to excite and involve the visitors,” as well as how to involve hands-on activities, because “objects can give visitors a feeling of connection to the past, especially when they get to handle and use them.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Analysis of Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown-Yorktown Foundations Facts 2008,” <http://www.historyisfun.org/pdf/Publications/2008JYFFactSheet.pdf>, accessed 5 September 2013 and “Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Facts 2013,” <http://historyisfun.org/pdf/fact-sheet/2013%20JYF%20Fact%20Sheet%208.5x111.pdf>, accessed 5 September 2013.

⁹⁸ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Sites Manual*, 4-11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-14, 4-8.

The manual describes the basics about what the Yorktown Victory Center believes itself to be doing, providing entertaining education to their visitors. Other internal documents are created for activities that the museum presents to their visitors. The Yorktown Victory Center also creates programming sheets, for example, for the various hands-on activities at their interpretive sites. The sample of fifteen activities also illustrates what the Yorktown Victory Center believes itself to be doing, which is offering entertaining education. The activities explained on these sheets are things that museum employees believe visitors would enjoy doing, such as “reasoning out a typical message that could have been sent between units and commanders,” or drilling with “wooden muskets.”¹⁰¹ Though both activities would be considered entertaining by children, the various authors of these documents focus on the education aspect. For example, the “18th century code and ciphers” activity’s purpose is described as “provid[ing] the visitor with a learning experience regarding methods of clandestine communication used during the Revolutionary War.”¹⁰² Nothing is mentioned about entertaining visitors with this activity. The “information” section of the document goes into great detail about what sources the author examined to create this activity, but not too much about how entertaining a visitor might find it.¹⁰³ These programming sheets illustrate how the Yorktown Victory Center believes that its interpretive theory will be executed in the museum. However, the sheets do not provide any information about how visitors reacted to these activities or if they were used in the museum.

¹⁰¹ Yorktown Victory Center, Interpretive program schematic, “18th century codes and ciphers,” undated and “To Provide for the Common Defense,” 24 January 2000.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The programming sheets focus on the hands-on portion of the Yorktown Victory Center's entertaining education, but the interpretive manual briefly explains how, if at all, the museum uses its collection for the same purpose. Some historians believe that museums' collections have gone from their "raison d'être [to] merely [serving] as one of their resources."¹⁰⁴ That is how the Yorktown Victory Center treats its collection. It is only mentioned in its manual's "material culture" section as the way a site can "reflect the way of life for the society depicted."¹⁰⁵ In the section specifically about the encampment, material culture is essentially referred to as props. The manual explains that the "reproductions used in camp will, whenever possible, be based on appropriate surviving objects that date to the Revolution, and...can reasonably be expected to have been readily available in North America."¹⁰⁶ The objects, or their reproductions, are treated just as they would have been in the 18th century, rather than being put behind glass for visitors to examine. These objects are also used by the Yorktown Victory Center in order to provide entertaining education to their visitors as a learning technique. Remember, "objects can give visitors a feeling of connection to the past," which is why "the outdoor hands-on history sites use reproduction objects to boost visitor learning...and increas[e] interest."¹⁰⁷ While the entertaining education aspect is heavily emphasized in this section, there is a small reminder to interpreters at the end to "always think about SAFETY, for the interpreter, the visitor, and the object, before any hands-on experience."¹⁰⁸ Objects may not be the focus of the manual, but the Yorktown Victory

¹⁰⁴ Steven Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, 3-1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-9.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-9.

Center wants to remind their interpreters that object safety, and perhaps breakage, needs to be considered before using an object to interact with a visitor.

As an examination of the Yorktown Victory Center's interpretation manual illustrates, the museum believes itself to be providing its visitors with entertaining education about the American Revolution. The museum appears to have based this goal on the latest museum theories available at the time that this current incarnation of the Yorktown Victory Center came into being in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This may be what the museum believes itself to be doing; however, it might be accomplishing something different.

“Tourists of the Past”: What the Yorktown Victory Center Presents to the Public

One way to judge a museum's success is by its exhibits. In Steven Weil's essay “Organization-wide Quality: A Theory of Museums and Immodest Proposal,” Weil discusses what he considers the four points of evaluation for museums: purposiveness, capability, effectiveness, and efficiency. Weil puts the most emphasis on purposiveness, or the museum's ability to convey their message, or purpose, to the public, because “a museum, in the end, is worth no more than what it is able to accomplish.”¹⁰⁹ What the public sees when they visit a museum is the end product of all the museum's theorizing and interpretive training: the exhibits.

While the move towards a museum experience that focuses more on visitors than on a collection is understood by most historians as movement in a positive direction, some disagree. A minority of historians believe that there is no need for this shift, because the “museum – if not at the height of its salvage and warehouse days, then not long thereafter – was already a mature, fully evolved, and inherently good organization in

¹⁰⁹ Steven Weil, *Making Museum's Matter*, 16.

no compelling need of further change.”¹¹⁰ According to these historians, there was no need for change, because the museum already served a purpose – to collect, store, and study various historical artifacts. Others believe that it is possible to combine this more conservative view with the more modern, visitor oriented view by explaining that a museum is comparable to a university; “they argue that the museum’s traditional activities of preservation...interpretation...and scholarly inquiry...are not merely instrumental steps toward an...outcome, but should be valued...as an end as well as a means.”¹¹¹ Even more are concerned that museums are going too far towards entertainment, and that the “spectre of museums as theme parks, of ‘disneyfied’ and academically emasculated fun places haunts many.”¹¹²

While museums being theme parks is up for debate, some academics have examined the idea of a museum being more than just a place where visitors learn and are entertained at the same time. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, explains how museums are “experiencing a crisis of identity as they compete with other attractions within a tourism economy that privileges experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure.”¹¹³ Museums may fear that they “will be bypassed [by visitors] as boring, dusty, places, as spaces of death - dead animals, dead plants, defunct things.”¹¹⁴ Some museum officials believe that “visitors are no longer interested in the quiet contemplation of objects in a cathedral of culture. They want to

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 29. Weil never expressly explains who the “minority” of historians who believe that museums were fine being object storehouses.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Guy Wilson, “Planning for Visitors,” in *Museum Economics and the Community*, ed. Susan Pearce (London; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: 1991), 94.

¹¹³ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 139.

have an ‘experience.’”¹¹⁵ While museums realize that people go to them to have an experience, it is what they expect that experience to be that has changed. No more are people content to quietly look at objects behind glass cases. These visitors want “an engagement of the senses, emotions, and imagination.”¹¹⁶ They want to be engaged in a place that is “alive, exciting, and unique.”¹¹⁷ Traditional warehouse type museums may not be considered alive or exciting, especially to the 2.18 million people who visited the Busch Gardens adjacent to the Yorktown Victory Center in 2010. The very same people the Yorktown Victory Center is attempting to attract.

This idea of “experience” can be expanded beyond visitors wanting something new and exciting to include the idea of mindless entertainment, and not challenging visitors’ preconceived notions. Because museums believe themselves to be in competition with other tourism attractions, they might lend themselves more toward the “experience” side of the tourism equation and less towards the education side. Is the Yorktown Victory Center focused more on drawing in visitors with an “experience,” or is it truly accomplishing what it thinks it is – entertaining education? One place to look is in its exhibits.

The Yorktown Victory Center is comprised of two buildings and the living history exhibits outside. The visitor purchases tickets in the first building, where there is also a gift shop. Once the visitor purchases admission, they walk to the main exhibit building through an American Revolution timeline. At the end of the timeline, the visitor enters the museum building, where they encounter the “Witnesses to Revolution” and “Converging on Yorktown” exhibits, in that order. In the “Converging on Yorktown”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 138.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 139.

exhibit, the visitor has the option of viewing the film, *A Time of Revolution*. After looking at all the museum building has to offer, the visitor then continues outside to the Continental Army encampment living history area.¹¹⁸

Once the visitor purchases their tickets, they receive an introduction or refresher to the American Revolution's events in the timeline.¹¹⁹ Some of the Victory Center's visitors may still think of the American Revolution as only the war years, 1775-1781, as it has been traditionally taught in public schools.¹²⁰ The Yorktown Victory Center works to expand on that traditional thought. Instead of just the war years, the Victory Center defines the American Revolution using the mid to late twentieth-century academic interpretation, which begins with the taxation of American colonists by the British government to pay for the Seven Years War in 1763, and ends with the signing and adoption of the Constitution in 1789.¹²¹ By using this definition of the American Revolutionary era, the Yorktown Victory Center is able to include more information in its exhibits. As a result, their outdoor timeline starts earlier, and is able to include information not traditionally considered part of the American Revolution. This educates the museum's visitors and may make the Yorktown Victory Center staff believe that the museum is not just entertaining visitors by catering to their historical myths.

The path timeline also expands on the events of the timeline's narrative with four "take outs." They are located on the opposite side of the walkway as the timeline, and

¹¹⁸ This description of the Yorktown Victory Center is based on the flow of the site before construction began on the new museum in 2012.

¹¹⁹ This description and all future descriptions of the exhibits at the Yorktown Victory Center are from the author's own experiences at the museum in February 2008, February 2010, and November 2012.

¹²⁰ Events before the war years are taught as "events leading up to the Revolution" instead of included in the American Revolution movement. For an example of this definition, see Banks, James et al., *Our Nation, Volume 1*, (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill with National Geographic, 2003), 260-305.

¹²¹ This is how mid to late twentieth century histories of the Revolution frame it. For an example, please see Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: the American Revolution, 1763-1789*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.)

illustrate what the Yorktown Victory Center views as the major events leading up to the conflict: the effects of the Seven Years War on colonist/Great Britain relations (Treaty), colonist reaction to British taxation (Taxes), the Tea Act and the Boston Tea Party (Tea), and the formation of the Continental Army (Troops.) These “take outs” use text, images, and reproductions of materials to augment the text-only details of the timeline.

According to the Yorktown Victory Center’s manual, this exhibit allows visitors to interact with the information on their own terms. It is an example of the artful combination of the cognitive and affective learning domains. The Yorktown Victory Center interpretive manual explains that “effective learning experiences come from combining these multiple influences.”¹²² In order for the most people to learn, more than one learning domain must be used. The cognitive learning domain, according to the manual, involves “translating new information learned from the museum experience into meaningful concepts and knowledge.”¹²³ Affective learning is about “attitudes, emotions, and feelings,” all of which can be “aroused during cognitive discussions.”¹²⁴ Ideally, the timeline provides visitors with information that they may or may not already know, but also gives them something to discuss on their way into the museum building. In these discussions, visitors can share what they know or learned with one another, and share their feelings about the actions of the colonists and British during the years leading up to the American Revolutionary War. These discussions may not be taking place all the time. Groups may not discuss the information the timeline presents, for example, but hopefully they are absorbing and contemplating it.

¹²² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, 4-8.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 4-7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 4-8.

It appears that the timeline stays with visitors, even after they leave the museum. A recent visitor review of the Yorktown Victory Center commented about the timeline, saying that it “allowed you to see how the events transpired up to the birth of our country.”¹²⁵ Another reviewer remembered even more from the timeline, commenting that “it starts in 1750 and stops close to 30 years later, having addressed the Stamp Act and the Tea Act, the concept of taxation [without] representation and people on both sides of the ocean taking [in] both sides of the conflict.”¹²⁶ From these two examples, it appears that this exhibit is memorable for visitors, and that some of the information presented there is important to what they take away from their experience at the museum. This is perhaps because of the combination of employing the cognitive and affective learning domains.

The only drawback of the timeline exhibit is that it does not go beyond the major events and people outlined in school history textbooks. By its very nature, the timeline is not conducive to presenting the complex ideas and interactions necessary in order to fulfill Yorktown Victory Center’s previously discussed purpose of “chronicl[ing] America’s struggle for independence from the beginnings of colonial unrest to the formation of the new nation.”¹²⁷ It provides basic information, but not the detail that the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation’s mission of “foster[ing]...an awareness and understanding of the early history, settlement, and development of the United States

¹²⁵ Dudette77, “Walkthrough History Plus,” 19 October 2009, accessed 10 October 2010, http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60775-d102448-r47273600-Yorktown_Victory_Center-Yorktown_Virginia.html. The travel review website TripAdvisor has 179 reviews of the Yorktown Victory Center. TripAdvisor, founded in 2000, is an extensive website offering user generated reviews about lodgings, restaurants, and attractions in various areas.

¹²⁶ Toni M., review of the Yorktown Victory Center, 22 May 2008, accessed 10 October 2010, <http://www.yelp.com/biz/yorktown-victory-center-yorktown>.

¹²⁷ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown-Yorktown Facts 2010,” 4.

through the convergence of Native American, European, and African cultures” requires.¹²⁸

While the Yorktown Victory Center believes that this exhibit helps contribute to the idea that it is educating their visitors in an entertaining way, the museum is also doing something else – helping visitors become “tourists of the past.” The Kirshenblatt-Gimblett volume explains that “museums have long served as surrogates for travel.”¹²⁹ Tourism, combined with the rise of heritage, or “the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct,” changes what people may expect out of a museum, and plays into the “experience” expectations that the Yorktown Victory Center attempts to cater.¹³⁰ While Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses heritage tourism in the context of New Zealand and Australia’s focus on their aboriginal, rather than European, origins, it is not so far to apply the heritage tourism concept to American history museums.¹³¹ Instead of focusing on how relatively new countries created a tourist economy based on a “nature story...indigenous story...[and] later immigrants,” as is the case in New Zealand, United States’ museums attempt to combine the three.¹³²

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also explains that “tourists travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places. They set out for the very spot where the Pilgrims of Plimoth Plantation once lived...only to find that the actual spot is remarkably mute. Hence, the need for a re-created Pilgrim village.”¹³³ Or, in the case of the Seige of Yorktown, visitors find the actual battlefield “mute,” so they go to the Yorktown Victory Center for

¹²⁸ Ibid, 1.

¹²⁹ Barabara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 132

¹³⁰ Ibid, 149.

¹³¹ To see full discussion of heritage tourism in New Zealand and Australia, please see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Destination Museum,” in *Destination Culture*.

¹³² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 141.

¹³³ Ibid, 9.

a “recreated” experience. The outdoor timeline provides visitors the context for their visit to the past. They can brush up on any events that they do not remember, reconfirm their knowledge, and generally become prepared to “travel” to the past.

At the end of the outdoor timeline, the visitor comes to the actual museum building. Once they enter the building, one of the first exhibits they encounter is entitled “Witnesses to Revolution.” This exhibit combines material culture, text, and audio-visuals to create an interactive experience for the visitor. One side of the room is filled with various statues of real individuals, the “witnesses,” who represent different groups that were affected by the Revolution. The specific groups included in this exhibit are women, Native Americans, Africans, and the Continental Army’s enlisted men. Each statue has a story, obtained from primary sources, which a voice relays to the visitors as each individual statue is lit by a spotlight. If the visitors are further interested in any of these groups’ experiences, there are reproductions or original objects to illustrate their material lives during the war, as well as the specific witnesses’ stories written out on a display board directly in front of the statues.

This exhibit is an example of how the Yorktown Victory Center strives to fulfill both the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the museum’s own stated educational goals. “Witnesses to Revolution” brings the experiences of an average English, Native American, and African during the American Revolution alive to the visitor. None of these statues represent a Continental Army general or elite white male. These representations of various ordinary people provide the visitor with a perspective on the Revolution that they may not have encountered in their formal education. The “Witnesses to the Revolution” gallery shows to the visitor that the American Revolution

is more than military maneuvers, George Washington, and the Boston Massacre. It demonstrates that the American Revolution did not occur in isolation, and that many people were affected by it, regardless of whether or not they were in the army.

Not only does the “Witnesses to the Revolution” exhibit introduce the visitor to the Revolution experiences of everyday people, but it is done in an entertaining way. The visitor feels that they are watching a series of short films, each focusing on a different, personal story. In a way, the “pinball effect” that some museum educators may be worried about works to the exhibit’s advantage. The “pinball effect” is achieved when a visitor goes from one interesting, eye-catching exhibit to the next, “enjoying [them]...but making no effort to understand them [the exhibits].”¹³⁴ Educators may worry that if they make the museum too entertaining, then “the museum, in essence, [would be] reduced to a giant playground.”¹³⁵ In “Witnesses to the Revolution,” instead of visitors flitting from one exhibit to the next, the exhibit does this for them, quickly going from one person’s American Revolution wartime experience to the next. This might allow the visitor to watch the exhibit for an extended period of time, and perhaps better absorb the information presented. Sometimes the “task of interpretation [is] first and foremost a task of connection” with the visitor, allowing them to “connect to what they see, on whatever terms that might be.”¹³⁶ While some may view the “Witnesses to Revolution” exhibit as an example of the “pinball effect,” the exhibit visually engages the visitor, which allows them to spend more time in the exhibit. The more time they spend in the exhibit, the more they may “connect” to the information presented.

¹³⁴ Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 18.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

While the “Witnesses to the Revolution” exhibit does appear to follow the Yorktown Victory Center’s goal of providing entertaining education, it also allows visitors to be true “tourists of the past.” It is similar to the nineteenth century panoramas that “featured virtual grand tours and simulated the sound and motion of trains and ships...[and] a guide lectured and otherwise entertained these would be travelers.”¹³⁷ While there are no grand tours in this display, the singular vignettes do allow the visitor to see various people’s experiences of the American Revolution. They do not have to do anything to get this information. All they need do is sit or stand and watch the rotating cast of characters each tell their story, and be entertained by the same “pinball effect” that may also help them retain the information presented.

When the visitors emerge from the “Witnesses to the Revolution” exhibit, they come to a hallway funneling people to the “Converging on Yorktown” exhibit. Along the wall there is a continuation of the timeline visitors encountered outside. This timeline takes them through all the major events of the war years, concluding with the armies, as the exhibit is titled, “converging on Yorktown.” Just like the timeline outside, this timeline provides visitors with a quick refresher or primer for their next stop in their travel through history.

This main gallery of the museum is dedicated to the Siege of Yorktown, where visitors can see all sides of the conflict depending on where they are looking. One side of the gallery is dedicated to the military maneuvers and “great men” of the siege. This side provides the sort of information that can be found in a modern elementary school textbook, such as the emphasis on George Washington’s leadership and the French naval

¹³⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 132-133.

blockade.¹³⁸ Here the great men and their military maneuvers are praised, and the traditional, military driven narrative that visitors expect to experience is there.

While this side of the gallery focuses on a more traditional, military interpretation of the Siege of Yorktown, it does so in a fairly interactive way. Rather than the lecture based interpretation style of their National Park Service run counterpart, the Yorktown Battlefield, the Yorktown Victory Center attempts to employ more interactive means to make a more traditional narrative that visitors are comfortable with entertaining and engaging.¹³⁹ For example, in a map of the battlefield, there is a text block explaining the directions the British, American, and French forces approached from when they converged on Yorktown. The map itself has three trails that light up when a visitor presses one of three buttons. One trail lights up red for the British, blue for the Continentals, and purple for the French, so that as visitors push the various buttons they can see exactly how each side advanced on the place that would end the American Revolutionary War.

The buttons and their corresponding light up army routes provide the visitor with the visual information that some need to completely understand how the Siege of Yorktown came together. This is an example of a sidebar adage in the Yorktown Victory Center's *Interpretive Service Site Manual* "tell them, they forget; Show them, they remember; *Involve* them, they understand."¹⁴⁰ If an interpreter explained how all these forces came together for the siege, perhaps visitors would forget, but if they have a map

¹³⁸ Banks, James et al. *Our Nation, Volume 1* (New York, NY: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill with National Geographic, 2003), 302.

¹³⁹ The museum portion of the National Park Service run Yorktown Battlefield has a large, three dimensional, relief map of the Siege of Yorktown, which has an accompanying lecture track that explains, in great detail, the military maneuvers of the various factions.

¹⁴⁰ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, 4-8.

showing the different routes each army took, then visitors might be more likely to remember it. Add in a small task of pushing buttons, thereby “involving” the visitors, and they will most likely understand the Siege of Yorktown.

On the other side of the exhibit hall, there is a different story being told. This side provides the experiences of four individuals who lived through the siege. These historical witnesses to the siege: a civilian woman, a French officer, a British Navy sailor, and a Hessian mercenary, tell the story of the siege through the eyes of those who experienced it on the ground. Their accounts vary, from the civilian woman’s tale of officers from both sides riding through town, to the British sailor’s account of the battle from the water. Artifacts representing each of these people’s lives complement their written accounts, so visitors can see what the material lives of these witnesses to Yorktown were like.

This exhibit is similar to the “Witnesses to the Revolution” in premise, but it does not execute that message in the same way. There are no three dimensional statues representing the people, instead they are represented by silhouettes at the ends of their respective cases. Their stories are not in audio, but written next to their silhouette. The objects in the cases, in most instances, are eighteenth century objects that are representative of ones that these Yorktown representatives would have owned. Overall, this exhibit is more static than its counterpart.

Along with the exhibits illustrating both the “great men” and everyday people Yorktown narratives, this gallery also includes an exhibit feature. Before visitors exit the “Converging on Yorktown” gallery, there is a document holder with various original documents pertaining to the siege. These primary sources include map sketches of the

siege area and letters from prominent generals, including Marquis de Lafayette and Nathanael Greene. Visitors can pull on the handles of the vertical document holder to examine the various documents. This primary source exhibit allows visitors to examine the documents, and see how the gallery might have used the documents in various smaller exhibits. Allowing visitors to read and interpret primary sources also incorporates one of the learning domains, “cognitive – logic, thinking and understanding,” into the exhibit.¹⁴¹ A visitor is able to read the primary sources, and form their own ideas or interpretation based on the information presented.

Not only does this exhibit incorporate the cognitive learning domain, but it also encourages the visitor to control their own educational experience. The visitor has to take the initiative to examine the document case, to pull out each document and take the time to read it. They are in control because no one forces visitors to read these documents, and as a result, the visitor that chooses to investigate this exhibit is perhaps more engaged with the information. In that same vein, there is no museum staff stationed there to explain, or interpret for the visitors what they are reading in the documents. While there are museum staff floating around the exhibit, there is no one staff member stationed by the document display with a working knowledge of what the documents say, explaining the sources to the visitors.

In fact, through this exhibit, the Yorktown Victory Center is opening up its interpretive process to the visitor. The Victory Center displays original documents to the visitor, and prevents them from being “left out of the 'loop'; and...again, encounter[ing] an anonymous, authoritative, scholarly voice” without any input.¹⁴² Instead of dictating

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 4-7.

¹⁴² Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative*, 116.

what the visitors should be learning from an exhibit, the Yorktown Victory Center allows the visitor to decide for themselves what the documents mean, and what can be learned from them. This makes this small and simple document exhibit a very effective way for visitors to synthesize the information into their own interpretation, since there is not an explanatory placard to provide interpretation, except to explain that these documents are from the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation's collection.¹⁴³

These two mini-exhibits may provide the education that the Yorktown Victory Center wants, but they are both more traditional exhibits: glass cases filled with "objects [that] are set in context by means of long labels, charts, [and] diagrams," among other things.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there is no way for the visitor to engage with the objects or information, due to the cases' perpendicular position to the wall. All of the cases are in close rows, which, while protecting the objects from light, do not allow the visitor to examine their contents up close. Traditional exhibits, such as the ones mentioned in the "Converging on Yorktown" exhibit, create a museum atmosphere of visitors coming to "look, to wonder, and to admire what [is] set before them," instead of using the information presented to become educated about the Yorktown Victory Center's purpose.¹⁴⁵

These exhibits are in sharp contrast to exhibits such as the "Witnesses to Revolution" exhibit, which invites visitors to hear the various experiences of the American Revolution, because they do not facilitate the visitor to be a "tourist of the past." They do not help create an "experience" for the visitor, they do not allow for an

¹⁴³ Observation from visit, 21 November 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Steven Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 30-31.

“engagement of the senses, emotions, and imagination.”¹⁴⁶ In that instance, these exhibits may fail to gather much attention from the visitors, as they may “no longer [be] interested in the quiet contemplation of objects in a cathedral of culture.”¹⁴⁷

Before exiting the museum building to go outside to the military encampment, there is one more thing that visitors can see – the Yorktown Victory Center’s film *A Time of Revolution*, which screens every thirty minutes.¹⁴⁸ This film, as one reviewer described it, is “not your typical history museum documentary.”¹⁴⁹ The film does not feature a detached narrator explaining the Continental Army’s battle strategy for the Siege of Yorktown; rather, this film tells the story of the enlisted men of different races who lived and fought during the siege. For example, one of the enlisted men, an African-American named Bill, describes how he became part of the army. Bill explains that his “master, up in Connecticut, gave me up for the enlistment bounty.”¹⁵⁰ Bill’s fictional enlistment experience in the army draws upon various instances and occurrences in American history that contradict commonly held notions about American slavery. Bill is not a local Virginia slave, but was pressed into service by his master in Connecticut, a northern state Americans commonly believe to have always been “free,” or anti-slavery. The historical record illustrates that all of the original thirteen colonies had one form of slavery or another.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 138.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 139. Observation made on February 2008 and February 2010 visits.

¹⁴⁸ The description of the film is from the author’s viewing of the film in May 2008.

¹⁴⁹ Catherine M. Lewis and Thomas J. Schlereth, “Exhibition Reviews: Yorktown Victory Center,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 84 (June 1997), 160.

¹⁵⁰ *A Time of Revolution* screenplay, 17 February 1995, 3.

¹⁵¹ Slavery existed in all colonies before, during, and after the American Revolution. For more information about how the Northern states abolished slavery and distanced themselves from the practice, see Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

Some Americans also hold onto the idea that slavery “had *very little* to do with the *Revolutionary War*.”¹⁵² While slavery may not have been the main focus of the founding fathers’ discussions, it indirectly affected the fighting of the war. Masters, like Bill’s, sent their male slaves in their stead to fight in the Continental Army, or these slaves took advantage of both the British and Colonial governments’ promise to free those slaves who fought for their respective sides, and joined themselves.¹⁵³ While this is one small scene in the film, it is filled with a history that most visitors are probably unaware of, and contributes to the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation’s mission of educating visitors on the “early history, settlement, and development of the United States through the convergence of Native American, European, and African cultures.”¹⁵⁴

In addition to addressing slavery during the American Revolution, the film also touches on another topic that visitors may not know much about: the general lives of the enlisted men. The film opens on a scene around a camp fire. A crowd has gathered around the flickering light, listening to fellow soldier, Ezra, tell a story from before the Yorktown encampment. Ezra regales his fellow enlisted men with the story of Goggins, who, in the summer of 1775, marched “himself out on a wharf in Newport. He bends over and shows his backside to one of King George’s big ships settin’ in the harbor.”¹⁵⁵ In between the snickers of the listeners, Ezra explains that Goggins was “drunk as Dale’s

¹⁵² Quote from a Yorktown Victory Center visitor comment book; emphasis theirs. Quoted in Catherine Lewis and Thomas Schlereth’s review, “Yorktown Victory Center,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 84, no. 1 (June 1997), 159.

¹⁵³ For the British side, Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation of 1775 promised freedom to those slaves who ran away from “rebel masters” and joined Dunmore’s army to fight against the patriots. To read the document, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h42t.html>. Accessed 17 October 2009. The Continental Army also welcomed both slaves and freemen. For more information on this, see George Washington’s letter to the Continental Congress 31 December 1775, Series 3a, letters to Continental Congress 25 June 1775-22 September 1776, Library of Congress, Washington DC. Also online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/>, accessed 17 October 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown-Yorktown Facts 2010,” 1.

¹⁵⁵ *A Time of Revolution*, screenplay, 2.

sow that day. But a lot of us felt as strong as he did against England, had that liberty fever.”¹⁵⁶ Ezra’s short fictional story sets the tone for the rest of the film. The setting, in the encampment around a fire, is how the enlisted men spent a lot of their time in between battles. They had to find something to pass the time, and sharing humorous anecdotes about past events in the soldiers’ lives was probably one of the ways that the enlisted men passed that time.

Ezra’s anecdote may expand the audience’s knowledge of how everyday people experienced the war that they had gained from the “Witnesses to Revolution” exhibit. He is an ordinary person, telling a story about an experience he had during the Revolution. Goggins expressed his displeasure with his current government in a humorous way, but it was not too different from what others did during the early years of the war. Ezra’s tale of Goggins and his drunken escapade on the wharf was not included in the film just for comedic effect. This small yarn shows the audience that the primarily elite founding fathers were not the only individuals unhappy with England’s conduct towards the colonies in the early years of the American Revolution.

While Ezra’s tale of Goggins is fictional, it does draw on what some historians wrote about during the time frame that the Yorktown Victory Center produced *A Time of Revolution*. Alfred Young, for example, looks at George Robert Twelves Hewes and his participation in Boston’s pre-war displays against, and protests of, England’s actions. Young explains that Hewes, a shoemaker from Boston, “briefly became a somebody during the Revolution,” the most obvious example of that being Hewes’ participation during the Boston Tea Party in 1773.¹⁵⁷ Hewes, similar to the fictional Goggins, was an

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 5.

ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances. Both Hewes and Goggins took direct action to stand up for what they believed.

The similarities between Hewes and Goggins may appear to be a coincidence, but they are not. When the Yorktown Victory Center changed the interpretive focus of the museum in the early 1990s, they brought in academic historians as consultants so that visitors could have exhibitions that “reflect the best and most innovative scholarship of the past two decades.”¹⁵⁸ Young was one of those consultants, along with John Selby, Philip Morgan, and Mary Beth Norton, among others.¹⁵⁹ While they may have mainly assisted with the “Witnesses to Revolution” exhibit, their contributions are also felt in the film.¹⁶⁰ The main focus on the film is on the everyday encampment of a soldier, not on the “great men” of the American Revolution. With Young’s focus on the everymen and Norton’s on women, the social history produced during the period of the Yorktown Victory Center’s renovation is evident in this film.¹⁶¹

While *A Time of Revolution* shows off the contributions of the social history of the last quarter of the twentieth century, the film itself also enlightens visitors on topics that may have been new to them. For example, Ezra’s telling of the story also offers an interesting insight into the experiences and feelings of everyday American colonists. As previously quoted, Ezra explained that “a lot of us felt as strong as he [Goggins’] did against England, had that liberty fever.” The line that Ezra says right after that is “Course, a lot didn’t. Can’t deny that.”¹⁶² Instead of pretending that all American

¹⁵⁸ Catherine Lewis and Thomas Schlereth, “Yorktown Victory Center,” 159.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 158.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 156-157. The Yorktown Victory Center conversion from visitor center to museum took place from the mid 1980s-early 1990s.

¹⁶² *A Time of Revolution* screenplay, 2.

colonists were united against their British government, the Yorktown Victory Center wanted to make it known that there was no consensus for revolution, and trying to hide that fact would not be historically accurate.

In addition to educating visitors about a portion of American Revolutionary history they may not know much about, the film also addresses historical topics that visitors may be more familiar with – the officers running the army. Interspersed with the enlisted men’s conversations are discussions among Continental Army and French officers about their experiences as allies. A Continental Army officer, Alexander, talks with a French officer, Guillame, about the American successes and failures in the war. Both Alexander and Guillame praise the other’s commanding officer, with Alexander explaining that “the Marquis de Lafayette volunteered early...without your [the French’s] help, we’d have never trapped the British here.” Guillame immediately replies that “General Washington has been ingenious with keeping your [American] army together.”¹⁶³ These small snippets of conversation between two officers of the allied French and Continental armies illustrate the more traditional interpretation of the war, by praising the great leaders of the two forces. Alexander and Guillame do not mention the enlisted men whose actions influenced these generals’, especially Washington’s, ability to direct and keep their respective armies together. This brief interaction between these two characters provides the audience with the traditional focus on the war’s great men and battles that they expect at an American Revolution museum, like the Yorktown Victory Center.

A Time of Revolution is filled with scenes such as those previously discussed, and is perfectly orchestrated to fulfill the Yorktown Victory Center’s stated purpose of

¹⁶³ Ibid, 8.

providing entertaining education about the American Revolution to their visitors. It may have accomplished that goal, save for one point – visitors are not seeing the film. On any given day, the theatre is empty.¹⁶⁴ Perhaps the reason for visitor absence from the film’s theatre is the fact that museums, such as the Yorktown Victory Center, and living history entities, such as Colonial Williamsburg, have “curatorial interventions [which] may attempt to rectify the errors of history, and make the heritage production a better place than the historic actuality it represents.”¹⁶⁵ History becomes sanitized in museums and living history exhibitions, and, similar to “tourist areas” on Caribbean islands that “insulate tourists from the lifespace represented there, while controlling its representation,” visitors become uncomfortable when presented with a harsher reality.¹⁶⁶ *A Time of Revolution* does not sanitize history, and presents the enlisted men as they probably appeared in the eighteenth century – tired, dirty, and shabbily dressed around a camp fire, swapping stories from home. This is not an image you can put on a postcard to send home from a vacation, which means visitors probably are not going to seek it out.

Perhaps this is also the reason that the Yorktown Victory Center employees do not promote the film as fully as they might. In the material handed to visitors by ticketing staff, the film is described as being “shown daily every 30 minutes.”¹⁶⁷ There is no description of the film, no stills from the film in the museum guide, nothing to indicate to the visitors that this is something that they might want to see. In contrast, the encampment has a full write up, explaining that “historical interpreters describe and depict daily life of American soldiers...[with] seasonal demonstrations of musket and

¹⁶⁴ Observation on visits made February 2008, February 2010, and November 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 8.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 146.

¹⁶⁷ Jamestown Yorktown Foundation, “Yorktown Victory Center Museum Guide,” pamphlet.

artillery firing and surgical and medical practices.”¹⁶⁸ From the guide’s wording, it appears that the Yorktown Victory Center wants visitors to focus on the sanitized history, rather than a depiction of the way encampment life was actually like.

Another possible reason why the Yorktown Victory Center film is not attracting crowds could be the film’s vintage feel: not quite “classic” but not cutting-edge either. In a technology savvy culture, visitors do not want to just see a film projected on a wall, they want an interactive experience. In the twenty-first century, more and more people are using technology. According to a Keiser Family Foundation study, 8 to 18 year olds “devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day.”¹⁶⁹ During that almost eight hour day, children are also “media multitasking,” so these young people “actually manage to pack 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those 7 ½ hours.”¹⁷⁰ Young people are not the only ones who “media multitask.” A 2011 study showed that “nearly 59 percent of Americans watch television while also using their computers to access the internet at least once per month.”¹⁷¹ All of these statistics indicate modern “media multi-taskers” have a “fracturing of attention with rapid attentional shifts and reorientation.”¹⁷² With such fractured, short attentions spans, it appears that museums need to take a more multi-media experience to their films.

Some history museums have adopted these new, “interactive” history films. For example, the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has a

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Caine and Caine, *Natural Learning for a Connected World*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ S. Adams Brasel and James Gips, “Media Multitasking behavior: Concurrent Television and Computer Usage,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, (2011 September), doi:10.1089/cyber.2010.0350, accessed 20 September 2013.

¹⁷² Ibid.

panoramic film presented in a circular theatre. The film, *Freedom Rising*, not only visually immerses the visitor in the film, but also includes live actors that enter the theatre and recite various famous historic monologues.¹⁷³ Geographically closer to the Yorktown Victory Center, is the new film at the National Park Service section of Historic Jamestowne. This film is presented in a round theatre, similar to the one at the National Constitution Center. This film at Historic Jamestowne lacks live actors, but still enthralls visitors with a more immersive retelling of the founding of the North American English colonies¹⁷⁴ At one showing of *A Time of Revolution* on a rainy Saturday afternoon, there were only four people in the theatre, while on a sunny Friday afternoon at Historic Jamestowne the theatre was half full, about twenty people.¹⁷⁵ There are numerous factors that could play into these attendance rates, such as the weather or the day of the week, but one of those factors could be the films' different technological levels.

Also competing with *A Time of Revolution* is what some people consider a "classic" historic film, *The Story of a Patriot*, at Colonial Williamsburg. This film, which had its first viewing in 1957, still packs in visitors over fifty years later. *The Story of a Patriot* tells the fictional story of John Fry, a landed gentleman, who becomes a member of the House of Burgesses in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Through Fry is of high socio-economic standing, he is presented as an everyman, who struggles with the idea of American independence, ultimately deciding to support the independence movement.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ This description is of the author's own experience watching the film during her time in Philadelphia, summer 2006.

¹⁷⁴ Author's viewing of the film at Historic Jamestowne, November 2007.

¹⁷⁵ Author observation during viewings of both films. Historic Jamestowne's film viewed Fall 2007, the Yorktown Victory Center's Winter 2008.

¹⁷⁶ Synopsis from author viewing of the film, 31 July 2009.

While the film is very out of date, visitors find something comforting about it to this day. This could be because of the film's theatre. Colonial Williamsburg specially built the theatre so visitors would become immersed in the eighteenth-century world they created.¹⁷⁷ In some ways, this makes this classic film more on par with the technologically advanced films shown at the National Constitution Center and Historic Jamestowne. Some visitors claim an "emotional connection" with the film, and though these visitors recognize that it is not a beacon of historical accuracy, they still declare it to be "much more truthful than Mel Gibson's *The Patriot*."¹⁷⁸

The location of the theatre for the Yorktown Victory Center's film *A Time of Revolution* may also play a role in visitors not seeing it. The theatre is directly behind the cases of objects of the witnesses to the Siege of Yorktown. There is no distinguishing marquee, or even a sign that explains to visitors that this is the location for them to see *A Time of Revolution*, if they were interested. The doors leading into the theatre are flush to, and painted the same color as, the wall behind the cases. Five minutes before the next show time, the open doors automatically, and a recording explains "the next showing of *A Time of Revolution* begins in five minutes."¹⁷⁹ This, combined with the lack of promotion on the part of the Yorktown Victory Center, may not entice visitors to want to see the film. Visitors know very little about the film, and, compared to the well publicized reconstructed encampment, perhaps it does not seem as fun. So, visitors may bypass it to get outside to the encampment.

¹⁷⁷ Introduction to film, viewed on 31 July 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Jenna Simpson, "*Williamsburg: The Story of a Patriot* as Historic Artifact, History Film, and Hegemonic Struggle," unpublished MA Thesis 2006, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 48.

¹⁷⁹ Observation made on visits to the Yorktown Victory Center February 2008, February 2010, and November 2012.

Directly outside and behind the museum building is a small, reconstructed Continental army encampment, which may be the centerpiece of the Yorktown Victory Center's entertaining education. This encampment, according to the manual, is supposed to "demonstrate aspects of daily life, roles, and activities in a Continental Army encampment during the American Revolution."¹⁸⁰ Depending on staffing, it is either a free flow site, where visitors can spend as much or as little time as they like, or is experienced through tours, which run at varying times throughout the day.¹⁸¹ The encampment's success at achieving the Yorktown Victory Center's goal of entertaining education relies on the costumed interpreters in the site. The costumed interpreter not only dispenses information about the realities of an enlisted man's daily life, but a successful one also keeps visitors entertained and engaged.

The encampment's focus is supposed to be on an enlisted man's daily life, and in order to introduce that topic, the costumed interpreter begins with the living conditions in the encampment. When the visitor first enters the encampment, the costumed interpreter explains the varied living conditions at the encampment. The interpreter usually discusses the cramped conditions that the enlisted men slept in, and invites the visitor to take a peek inside one of the simple triangular shaped tents. They then compare those conditions with the conditions of the officers, which are much more spacious and have more amenities. This directly fulfills one of the "goals and objectives" of the

¹⁸⁰ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Sites Services Manual*, 5-4.

¹⁸¹ During visit in February 2008, tours of the encampment and farm were every 2 hours until 4pm. On other visits in February 2010 and November 2012, the site was free flow. For the purposes of this study, the tour scenario is used.

encampment – to “explain living conditions for soldiers (officers and enlisted men) and civilians (women, African Americans) in the Continental Army encampment.”¹⁸²

Daily encampment life was not exclusively about the enlisted men and their officers. Civilians were also present in Continental Army camps, and the Yorktown Victory Center does not pretend they were absent. After the interpreter describes the soldier encampment conditions, they continue the living conditions discussion by explaining to the visitors about the environment for camp followers, specifically women camp followers, at the encampment, using a reconstructed camp follower shelter. Camp followers are any civilian who supported themselves by following the Continental Army from encampment to encampment, peddling wares and doing odd jobs for money, food, or a combination of both. Camp follower is an umbrella term used to describe all who followed the army, but is most commonly used as a label for the miscellaneous women, usually the wives of enlisted men, who followed the men into war as a means of survival.¹⁸³ Camp followers and support services are often not mentioned at all in military, or great men based, interpretations of the Revolution, and their experiences are normally omitted from interpretations of encampments, even some social history interpretations.¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, the Yorktown Victory Center has included the camp follower experience in their reconstructed encampment for more than a decade.¹⁸⁵ Their discussion of camp followers is basic, with the main focus being on their living

¹⁸² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Sites Services Manual*, 5-4.

¹⁸³ This definition is the one I used when discussing camp followers in this study. For more information on these women, as well as other camp followers, please see Holly Mayer *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁸⁴ For examples of historians leaving out camp followers and support services, please see Wayne Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers in War*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Author conversation with Yorktown Victory Center curator Edward Ayres, 19 February 2008.

conditions and duties within the encampment, following the museum's "interpretive plan" for the site.¹⁸⁶

Building on the topic of daily encampment life, the costumed interpreter leads the tour group to the surgeon's tent. This tent is where the interpreter explains to visitors about the medical practices of the Continental Army, focusing on the interpretive directive to "introduce surgical and medical procedures typically practiced in a Continental Army encampment."¹⁸⁷ The interpreter focuses specifically on the medical practices of the eighteenth century, and how the Continental Army used them.

The surgeon's tent is the location where the costumed interpreter involves the visitors, especially the younger ones, in object analysis. Instead of the interpreter solely lecturing about various medical practices or medicines of the eighteenth century, they allow visitors to handle some of the reproduction instruments. Object analysis is when the interpreter passes around a reproduction of a period object, and allows the visitor to examine it and explain what they know about the object from touching and smelling it, facilitating, at least in theory, a "feeling of connection to the past."¹⁸⁸

During various points in the medicine interpretation, the interpreter passes around reproductions of eighteenth-century medicines and medical implements to the younger visitors of the tour group, and asks them to describe the smell of a medicine or texture of the implement. This not only engages children, but also teaches them about the progress of western medicine, and how museum staff "figures out what they [the original artifacts] are made of, and how they might be used."¹⁸⁹ The younger visitors then learn about

¹⁸⁶ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Sites Services Manual*, 5-4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*, 4-10.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Continental Army encampment life, and they also get a “behind the scenes” experience, by doing guided object analysis.

The hands-on, active portion of the encampment continues after the surgeon’s tent. When on tour, the interpreter escorts visitors to a roped and fenced off area near the camp follower section. This is where, during every tour of the encampment, an interpreter demonstrates to visitors how Continental Army soldiers loaded and fired an eighteenth-century musket, and twice a day in the winter an interpretive team demonstrates how soldiers loaded and fired a cannon. These firearm demonstrations are the pride of interpretive services, and both costumed and non-costumed interpreters make sure to tell their visitors the times that these demonstrations begin.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps the reason for the staff’s focus on this demonstration is that the Yorktown Victory Center’s interpretation staff believes that the visitors will “experience” soldier life more concretely here than in other sections of the encampment tour. Instead of visitors imagining soldier life while strolling through the empty reconstructed encampment, they get a better understanding for a portion of a soldier’s encampment life with this facsimile experience. While visitors may not actually fire the loaded arms, through this demonstration a soldier’s life becomes real for them. This may be the most lasting experience of the visitor’s trip, which is evidenced by an evaluation of online site reviews. In the reviews, Yorktown Victory Center visitors routinely mention the demonstration, either exclaiming that the demonstration’s interpreters “weren’t speaking from a memorized script; [they] really understood the weaponry,” and explaining it to be

¹⁹⁰ The author’s impression after going to discuss museum interpretation with curator Edward Ayres and the head of interpretive services, Todd Johnson. After a discussion with Mr. Johnson, in March 2008, he led me over to the window overlooking the encampment to see the cannon demonstration, because “it’s something everyone has to see.”

“the absolute best show. [The interpreter] gave a full and animated description of what it was like to be ‘on the line’ under George Washington’s command.”¹⁹¹

The idea that first-person experiences stay longer with museum visitors is a not a new one. It is taken, in part, directly from Freeman Tilden’s example of demonstration in *Interpreting our Heritage*, “you may write pages or talk interminably to me about the process of grinding flour and meal between stones revolved by a wheel driven by the flow of a stream, and I shall still...[not be] aware of what actually takes place. After seeing the operation in process...my curiosity is satisfied.”¹⁹² Concepts and ideas become more concrete in visitors’ minds when they are demonstrated and experienced, rather than discussed abstractly. While visitors may not consciously tie the soldiers’ living conditions together with the complicated process of loading and discharging a firearm, the visitor will retain the information from the demonstration, and they will, hopefully, take away a better understanding of the difficulties of being a Continental Army soldier.

Another portion of the firearm demonstration that involves the visitors is the hands-on activity of allowing visitors to handle the musket. During these firearm demonstrations, the costumed interpreter also allows visitors to hold the unloaded firearm, and pretend to load it. This hands-on activity appears to be a hit with visitors, as everyone in a blustery Saturday afternoon tour group wanted to hold and “load” the

¹⁹¹ Sparky1954, “Superb Experience!,” 13 August 2008, accessed 10 October 2010, http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60775-d102448-r18926529-Yorktown_Victory_Center-Yorktown_Virginia.html#REVIEWS. Kwbt124, “History Comes to Life!,” 15 April 2007, accessed 10 October 2010, http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60775-d102448-r18926529-Yorktown_Victory_Center-Yorktown_Virginia.html#REVIEWS.

¹⁹² Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, revised edition, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 71.

weapon.¹⁹³ While this activity does not appear to teach the visitors anything other than how soldiers loaded and fired their weaponry, the effects are similar to when the interpreter demonstrates how a Continental Soldier loaded and discharged an eighteenth-century firearm and cannon. This pantomiming exercise allows visitors to imagine themselves as Continental Army soldiers who needed to quickly load heavy firearms to defend themselves. The experience helps the visitor identify with the Continental Army enlisted man, which, in addition to loading and discharging the firearm by a costumed interpreter, makes the abstract soldiering experience much more concrete for the visitor.

The previously discussed firearm demonstrations belong in the “role playing” interpretive category. In this type of interpretation, the interpreter asks the visitor to “put themselves in someone else’s shoes” for a brief time.¹⁹⁴ Instead of the interpreter lecturing the visitor about the difficulty soldiers had with their unwieldy weapons, they invite the visitor to take on the “role” of an enlisted man who needs to load his weapon. Role playing makes the visitor take an active part in their education, which increases the possibility that they will retain the information that they learned from that activity. This interpretation exercise has the visitor “experience” part of the life of an enlisted man, and makes the visitor realize that soldiers had a difficult job that they had to learn to swiftly execute. Instead of seeing the Continental Army soldiers as a faceless mob, visitors see them as individuals who had a tremendous responsibility. This hands-on activity humanizes the soldiers, and hopefully gives the visitors a better idea about what the soldiers’ responsibilities included.

¹⁹³ Observation from Yorktown Victory Center visit, February 2008.

¹⁹⁴ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, 4-9.

Not only do these demonstrations involve the adult visitors, they also engage children. For the twice-daily cannon demonstration, the interpreters invite groups of children to go up to the cannon, and mimic loading it. After the children are through mimicking, they go stand back in the safety zone, behind the fence, and the trained interpreters load and fire the cannon. This hands-on demonstration allows the children to be involved in an activity that would entertain as well as educate them about the basic mechanics of war in the revolutionary era. By involving children, the demonstration becomes another example of Tilden's belief that children needed to have programming that was not a watered down version of the adult programming.¹⁹⁵ Children, according to Tilden, more than adults, have "the urge to know 'what it feels like,'" such as having the opportunity to "load" a large cannon.¹⁹⁶ The cannon demonstration, and other similar activities, allows the younger visitors to stay engaged with the subject matter, and show these visitors that history museums are not just shrines to antiques that they cannot touch.

While the encampment does follow the Yorktown Victory Center's goals for the site in their manual, it also contributes to visitors being able to be "tourists of the past." Similar to the tourist attractions built on Caribbean and Pacific islands to exhibit native people's culture, such as the "Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii," the Yorktown Victory Center's encampment puts people on display, in a way.¹⁹⁷ This is also similar to when people go to Australia, one of the things they want to do is "meet aboriginal people," or when tourists go to Hawaii, they want to see a traditional, Pacific Islander dance.¹⁹⁸ While portraying Continental Army soldiers does not carry the same

¹⁹⁵ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

¹⁹⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 146.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 148, 146.

imperialist overtones as these native peoples' exhibitions, there are some similarities when history becomes a "foreign country" in museums such as the Yorktown Victory Center.¹⁹⁹ As these examples illustrate, when people travel to different countries, they want to see the native peoples of these various nations. It becomes an expectation of the trip. When visitors come to an American Revolution history museum with a living history component, they want to see eighteenth-century people, preferably firing a musket. However, it seems possible that visitors do not want to see the eighteenth-century people from *A Time of Revolution*, but the cleaned up, sanitized eighteenth-century people that manage to fire muskets and cannons in a perfectly tailored Continental Army uniform, or explain medical practices in a clean weskit, or vest, and trousers. Seeing "traditional" people, and photographing them, are part of saying to the tourists' friends and family at home, "I've been there."

Looking Toward the Future: The New American Revolution Museum at Yorktown

While the Yorktown Victory Center believes itself to be providing an entertaining education about the American Revolution to their visitors, the museum is actually allowing them to be "tourists of the past," who may or may not be absorbing the information presented to them. The museum appears to be heading more in the visitor focused "tourist" direction rather than the entertaining education one. In 2007, the Yorktown Victory Center received funding to plan a new building and exhibits. Recently, the Yorktown Victory Center received additional state funding, and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 150.

construction began in the fall of 2012.²⁰⁰ What will this Yorktown Victory Center of the future provide for visitors – more entertaining education or more “tourism of the past?”

In order to provide an answer to that question, this section will examine the Yorktown Victory Center’s sister institution, the Jamestown Settlement. The Jamestown Settlement underwent a transformation five years ago, coinciding with the 400th anniversary of the English landing at Jamestown. Since both museums are under the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, it makes sense that the foundation would do something similar to Jamestown for the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. It follows that an examination of the Jamestown Settlement might shed light on what the new incarnation of the Yorktown Victory Center might become.

Following an analysis of the Jamestown Settlement, the focus will shift to see what factors the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation might be taking into consideration during the process of turning the Yorktown Victory Center into the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. The Jamestown-Yorktown foundation may take into account changes in where funding may be coming from, as well as what they now believe visitors want to gain from a trip to a museum. After taking all of these factors into account, we will turn to how the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation describes the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. The foundation’s website, historyisfun.org, has an entire section dedicated to the future museum on the site of the Yorktown Victory Center. This section may be there to entice both new and repeat visitors to venture to the new museum when it is completed.

²⁰⁰ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “New Yorktown Museum,” <http://historyisfun.org/new-yorktown-museum.htm>, accessed 27 November 2012.

The current Jamestown Settlement opened in 2007, to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown.²⁰¹ The museum encompasses a 30,000 square foot gallery space that chronicles Virginia history from the birth of Jamestown to the rise of Colonial Virginia planter society by the end of the century. Similar to the Yorktown Victory Center, the museum also has outdoor living history areas – recreations of a Powhatan village, the Jamestown Fort, and the ships that transported the settlers to Jamestown.²⁰²

Visitors step into a sanitized, pristine past as soon as they enter the Jamestown Settlement galleries. Similar to the nineteenth-century panoramas that provided viewers “virtual grand tours,” minus the grime and poverty of an actual city, a sanitized past is history minus conflict and dirt.²⁰³ When they do enter, one of the first things they enter is a reconstructed seventeenth-century London street, complete with the expected noises of the street soundtrack. Visitors can read about seventeenth-century life on the various placards, or just look in on what seventeenth-century life was like for a Londoner in exceptionally clean townhomes. While the soundtrack does add some life to the scene, it is just background noise, and does nothing to explain the cramped, crowded conditions of seventeenth-century London. This recreated scene is one of many in the Jamestown Settlement galleries. Throughout the museum building, there are homes, theatres, and other buildings that visitors can walk through to see what life was like for seventeenth-century Virginians. The American Revolution Museum at Yorktown wants to do something similar, and repeatedly describes how their five new themes will be

²⁰¹ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Facts 2012,” 4.

²⁰² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown Settlement,” <http://www.historyisfun.org/Jamestown-Settlement.htm>, accessed 27 November 2012. For specific information, please see the subheadings “Film and Galleries,” “Powhatan Village,” “James Fort,” and “Jamestown Settlement Ships.”

²⁰³ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 132, 134.

encompassed in specific settings that visitors can experience. For example, “The Changing Relationship – Britain and North America” theme will be “within a full-scale wharf setting,” or the “Revolution” section will be within a “wartime homefront” encompassing the “re-created homes and town settings.”²⁰⁴

Both the Jamestown Settlement exhibits and the proposed American Revolution Museum at Yorktown assist visitors in becoming “tourists of the past” by providing the ability for visitors to “experience” a sanitized version of seventeenth or eighteenth-century life. The Jamestown Settlement buildings appear as if someone just left them, cleaned for visitors. As previously discussed, this is sanitized history people expect to “experience” if they are “tourists of the past.”²⁰⁵ The American Revolution Museum at Yorktown appears to want to have the same sanitized history in its museum building as well.

The overall feel of the Jamestown Settlement galleries is controlled chaos. After viewing the reconstructed seventeenth-century London street, the visitors enter the main galleries, where there are numerous colorful exhibit spaces that explain different things, as well as play all the sounds for the various exhibits at same time. It can be considered either overwhelming, or a stimulating visual and auditory experience. Either way, the “pinball effect,” where visitors flit between interesting exhibits, but absorb little of the information presented, is in full effect. Visitors travel from one exhibit to another without anything to cause them to pause and stop. They may be looking at everything,

²⁰⁴ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Yorktown Victory Center to become *American Revolution Museum at Yorktown*.”

²⁰⁵ For previous discussion, please see page 23-24.

taking in little.²⁰⁶ In this instance, unlike the previously discussed “Witnesses to Revolution” exhibit, the “pinball effect” may negatively affects visitors, and thus “the museum [is] reduced to a giant playground.”²⁰⁷ If this is the direction in which the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown heads, it too faces the possibility that visitors will be entertained by the “experience,” but it is doubtful that visitors will retain much of anything they may learn about the American Revolution.

Outside the Jamestown Settlement museum, there are living history areas, one of which is the reconstructed James Fort that depicts the daily lives of the early colonists. One activity at the fort is very similar to activities available nearly everywhere else in the “Historic Triangle” – a musket firing demonstration.²⁰⁸ In comparison to the current Yorktown Victory Center’s encampment, where their focus is demonstrating the conditions that a soldier faced on and off the battlefield, the Jamestown Settlement’s firearm demonstration feels forced. The costumed interpreter stands on a stage, explaining everything to the crowd gathered below. Unlike their Yorktown counterpart, the visitors are not allowed to handle the reproduction firearm.²⁰⁹ While this may be an activity that takes place at nearly every museum in the “Historic Triangle,” the visitors who witnessed this musket demonstration at the reconstructed James Fort still seemed to appreciate it, as they applauded after the costumed interpreter fired the weapon.²¹⁰

Though this musket demonstration is something that is found throughout the “Historic Triangle” museums, it is popular enough that all the museums to want to

²⁰⁶ Witnessed on a November 2012 visit. Visitors stopped to look at things for thirty seconds to a minute, then continued on to something else that looked interesting, never stopping to fully digest the information presented.

²⁰⁷ Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, 19.

²⁰⁸ Witnessed during trips to the “historic triangle” attractions, Jamestown Settlement, Yorktown Victory Center, and Colonial Williamsburg all do some sort of musket demonstration.

²⁰⁹ Witnessed at the Jamestown Settlement 27 November 2012.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

include it in their programming, even if it does not differentiate them from the other museums. Differentiating themselves is important for museums to do, as “destinations must be distinguishable.”²¹¹ The firearm demonstration might be something that visitors expect to consistently experience as “tourists of the past,” which may be a reason it is found at almost every “Historic Triangle” museum. As a result, the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown is going to have “additional space for musket-and artillery-firing demonstrations and military drills.”²¹² This additional space dedicated to weapon demonstrations would probably do little to increase the educational aspect of these demonstrations, but would certainly allow for more weapons to be fired, which would increase the spectacle for the visitors.

From a comparison between the current Jamestown Settlement and the proposed American Revolution Museum at Yorktown, it appears that the new Yorktown museum will have some major similarities to its counterpart. Both museums appear to focus more on what will draw people to visit the museum rather than on education. The Jamestown Settlement museum building is so full of interesting components, such a bow of a ship, a seventeenth-century London street, or completely reconstructed Virginian home, that it has the potential to overwhelm the visitor. According to the information presented by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, the new Yorktown museum will have a similar cacophony of exhibits, and visitors will possibly be equally distracted by the various exhibit structures. From its museum description, it appears that the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown has the potential to go down that path.

²¹¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 152.

²¹² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Yorktown Victory Center to become *American Revolution Museum at Yorktown*.”

The current state of the Jamestown Settlement is not the only factor to dictate the future of the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. There are also a few outside factors, including the source of the majority of funding. Unlike in the past, when funding came from government sources, modern museums gain most of their support from their “‘box office’ income.”²¹³ Since most of a museum’s funding comes directly from their visitors, it only makes sense that a museum would “focus on making itself attractive to visitors.”²¹⁴

Another factor is that a museum, for the majority of visitors, “is a pleasurable leisure-time activity, a way to relax, a form of diversion competitive with film, theater, dance, and other modes of entertainment.”²¹⁵ Going to museums is something that people do for fun, as “past school age, cultural participation is not mandatory, and the people who participate in cultural events...do so most out of pleasure, not out of duty.”²¹⁶ People want to have a good time when they go to a museum, and these same people provide a substantial portion of a museum’s income. This, once again, leads museums to focus on providing what their visitors want.

These factors suggest that if a museum, such as the Yorktown Victory Center, is undergoing a transformation it only makes sense that the museum would go in the direction of what they think visitors want at a museum. The Yorktown Victory Center is not a museum to shy away from change. It has undergone a few incarnations since it opened in 1976. The Yorktown Victory Center started as “one of three Bicentennial centers in Virginia” in 1976, then transitioned into the current museum in the late 1980s

²¹³ Steven Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 31. For previous discussion of the topic of “box office income,” please see page 17.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

through the early to mid 1990s.²¹⁷ Now, the museum is at the beginning of another incarnation, slated for completion in 2016 – the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. It is highly possible that these outside influences will have an effect on the new museum, but until it comes to fruition, their total impact is unknown.

At least one outside factor clearly appears to have an impact on the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown – what the museum believes their visitors want. According to the Jamestown-Yorktown foundation website, the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown will “capture the essence of the American Revolution...and its importance to the world.”²¹⁸ While this seems to indicate that the Yorktown Victory Center wants to continue with its entertaining education with the new museum, there is other language that seems to illustrate a more tourism-friendly approach. The Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation explains that the new galleries will “dazzle,” and “engage visitors in the tumult, drama and promise of the American Revolution.”²¹⁹ The foundation uses very catchy language to explain that visitors will get an exciting experience – only if they come to the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. These visitors will experience an “array of sensory experiences – recreated immersive environments...[and] interactive exhibits,” all to help them become tourists of the past.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation Facts 2012,” PDF, http://historyisfun.org/pdf/Contact-Us/Fact_Sheet_February_2012.pdf, accessed 23 November 2012, 4.

²¹⁸ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Yorktown Victory Center, to Become *American Revolution Museum at Yorktown*, Explores Causes, Impact, Meaning of the Revolution,” <http://www.historyisfun.org/yorktown-museum-overview.htm>, accessed 25 November 2012

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

As previously discussed, museums are in competition with each other, just like other tourism sites. This means that “destinations must be distinguishable.”²²¹ While this idea of “destination” is originally applied to physical locations, such as a town or country, it can also be applied to individual museums, especially when they are in close proximity to one another, as is the case with the Yorktown Victory Center. It is in the “Historic Triangle,” with the Yorktown Battlefield, Jamestown Settlement/Historic Jamestowne, and Colonial Williamsburg. In order to avoid “sameness,” or visitors experiencing the same things at the various museums they may visit during their trip to the “Historic Triangle,” the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown is trying to sell itself as different from the other museums. For example, in the “Revolution” section, there will be an “experimental theatre [that] will transport visitors to the battlefield in Yorktown, with wind, smoke, and the thunder of cannon fire.”²²² While visitors may go to the actual Siege of Yorktown battlefield a few miles away, there is no way for them to “experience” the actual battle. This is something that the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown can offer to visitors that other museums in the “Historic Triangle” cannot.

Currently, it appears that the new American Revolution Museum at Yorktown will lose its entertaining education interpretation, and swing more fully towards facilitating their visitors to become “tourists of the past,” with attention-grabbing, loud exhibits and more space for firearms demonstrations. The new Yorktown museum may believe that visitors want to see lots of cannon and musket fire, and in reacting to the competition for visitors in the “Historic Triangle,” the museum may have a “customer is always right” mentality. While it appears that the new Yorktown museum will eschew

²²¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 152.

²²² Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “Yorktown Victory Center to become *American Revolution Museum at Yorktown*.”

entertaining education in favor of plain entertainment, what the museum actually ends up becoming will not be known for some years until it opens in 2016.

Conclusion

An examination of the Yorktown Victory Center illustrates that though a museum may believe that it provides visitors with one product, entertaining education, it is actually encouraging visitors in becoming “tourists of the past,” where “experience” triumphs over education. As evidenced in the Yorktown Victory Center’s interpretation manual, the museum set up, in detail, a plan for their interpreters to provide visitors with information about the American Revolution from all perspectives. The manual also emphasized how to provide good “customer service” to their visitors, and keep them entertained, because the museum realized that visitors “generally expect to enjoy themselves, have a good time, and learn something new” at museums.²²³ In five years, from 2007-2012, the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation’s budget has experienced decreased support from the state of Virginia, and increased reliance on their “box office” income.²²⁴

While providing entertaining education with excellent customer service may have been the Yorktown Victory Center’s goal, their current exhibits tell a different story. Instead of entertaining education, the museum appears to be more focused on providing visitors an “experience.” The educational aspect is lost in the placards describing the exhibits. Instead, visitors are assisted in becoming “tourists of the past,” where they go from one interesting exhibit to another in quick succession, focusing on the things that

²²³ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, *Interpretive Services Site Manual*, 4-11.

²²⁴ Analysis of Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation “Facts 2008” and “Facts 2013.” For previous discussion, please see page 17.

they expect to see in a place such as the Yorktown Victory Center – the historically dressed interpreters and the musket firing demonstrations.

Added to this, the Yorktown Victory Center is in the middle of a major renovation project, with expected completion in 2016. This is not just a cosmetic transformation, this is a reincarnation. After 2016, the Yorktown Victory Center will cease to exist. Instead, the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown will rise in its place. The proposed museum space for the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown bears a striking resemblance to what is currently happening at the Jamestown Settlement, Yorktown's sister museum. In the Jamestown Settlement, facilitating visitors in becoming "tourists of the past" has strongly overtaken entertaining education. The museum is filled with a sanitized history, which is what visitors want to see and experience, rather than a more rendering of complicated history. This is the direction the Yorktown Victory Center appears to be heading.

It appears that the Yorktown Victory Center has realized that "experience itself became a commodity to be produced, promoted, and consumed."²²⁵ This realization, combined with museum visitors providing a large portion of a museum's funding, have changed the focus of the museum from entertaining education to allowing their visitors to be "tourists of the past." The Yorktown Victory Center of the future is unfortunately not attempting to moderate between the two; they are heading full steam in the direction that favors visitors' entertainment over education.

²²⁵ Lisa Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative*, 97.

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