

ABSTRACT

THESIS: TELLING THEIR STORIES AND SAYING THEIR NAMES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXAMINATION OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETERS BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE

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In living history museums nationwide, first person historical interpreters are meeting with guests to teach history and educate through the lens of performing. These performers present themselves to the public as though they truly are the historical figure they are dressed as. Interpreters at the world's largest living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg, perform as "big name" and "big impact" characters like Thomas Jefferson, Gowan Pamphlet and Martha Washington. In this case, they are consistently reenacting 18th century social inequities due to the nature of the time period they present. Through historical methods I have tracked the path Colonial Williamsburg's journey to offering marginalized characters at their historic site, spanning from 1926-2005. Through qualitative sociological methods I have sought to examine the impact of historical interpreting on a person's identity, the influence of race and gender performances on the performer's sense of self, and reflections into the lived experience of historical interpreters.