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Negotiating problematic identities of place within the path-driven elite university: Jefferson, slavery and the University of Virginia

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Abstract

Historic and elite universities need to manage their reputation whilst facing up to problematic aspects of their own history. We determine contemporary readings of place and space require narratives to align with current, corporate thinking and values. In recent years, colonialism and slavery have been at the forefront of campaigns which, while they tend to originate as student-led, have resulted in historic universities having to 'face up' to their own role. We here focus on the University of Virginia which alongside nearby Monticello, has symbolic and charismatic hagiographic remembering afforded to the founder Thomas Jefferson. We note how competitively selected student guides are evidencing cultural change in the present as well as forming part of the alumni and present student 'family', where pride in place is contingent on such openness. Our study makes a contribution to our understanding of historic universities as heritage businesses

Key words: WHS universities, elite student guides, narrative of change, symbolic memory, charismatic founder, tourism.

Introduction

Historic and elite universities have until recently rarely been expected to focus on their own histories and influences beyond using their longevity and associations to promote their institution and to support recruitment in an increasingly competitive and globalised market. Clarke and Fine make this point clearly when they argue that "Universities are distinctive institutions, whose essential tasks include the preservation of memory and the dissemination of history. But how do universities remember their own pasts, particularly when those pasts deemed difficult or problematic?" (2010, 81). This makes a point that we wish to consider within this article – how historic and elite universities, and particularly those that are additionally designated as World Heritage Sites (WHS) - retain their tradition-based agendas whilst also being consciously memory-based organisations that collect and evidence their own histories.

Universities are influenced by each other, often as will be discussed later within hierarchies based on elite and historic reputations as "they remain influenced by established professional institutions within an institutional field and the relationships between them" (Besharov and Smith 2014, 366). Rose et al, (2013) note that universities are conditioned by the surrounding institutional environment while their culture, which is shaped by history, can be broadly defined as the values, attitudes, rituals and myths which give them identity. Thus, universities are subject to global changes within the higher education sector as well as within their locality. They are also subject to the weight and implications of their own histories (Clarke and Fine 2010; Taylor 2020); their organisational complexities making them slow and at times seemingly unsure how or whether to change (Tuck and Yang 2012). That is to say, their very

place-based history is central to their status as historic and elite universities. As research-based organisations they act as heritage 'containers', developing and holding subject specialist knowledge in libraires and archives that is collected, analysed and taught by academic staff across a wide range of subject disciples.

Clarke and Fine argue that the university "bridges "history" with the present" but treats "the topic as an object of study, rather than as a matter of live contention" (2010, 86). It is also worth noting that many of the rituals such as graduations and matriculations focus on celebratory moments (Rose et al. 2013) that link directly to the historic nature of such occasions. Such rituals are symbols of continuity, expressions of the performative nature of history/heritage as celebratory. The geographical location of many of the world's elite universities, and in particular within our case study area the United States, offers another layer of complexity given the political and economic importance of these countries as (largely) Western 'players' on the world stage. For instance, only 3 of the top 25 universities in the THES Global Ranking 2022 were outside the US or Europe. Rowe determines the United States and other First World Nations "claim an even greater responsibility for global economics, politics, language and identity" (1998, 18) reflected within elite universities' values, and which demands they maintain a cultural diplomacy role as well as having to reflect diversity inside and outside the institution (Bryce and Carnegie 2013). Inevitably, in so doing they have been required to adapt or are feeling both internal or external pressures within contemporary society that will lead to change. One of the key current issues facing historic and elite universities is how to acknowledge problematic aspects of their own past, requiring reputation management in the present and a willingness to reassess and rethink their strategies for change.

This article focuses on how cultural change is impacting on the sector and, by focusing on one specific and historically significant case study, offers a clear contribution to our understanding of how successive generations of staff and students can bring about change through reassessing their own organisational values from within, at a time when there is increasing pressure on established or elite universities around the world to acknowledge problematic elements of their own past. A current key concern is past associations with, or even involvement in, the oppression of minorities. Essentially, this article explores a key conundrum for such organisations – how can they delegitimize or at best move away from the potentially controversial figureheads, actions and relationships that shaped their history where that very history is central to their elite status? (Brophy 2007; Clarke and Fine 2010; Taylor 2020). Universities depend on their own history to legitimate a present based on continuity. Negative associations can impact on their status, yet pressures may equally come from within the universities as staff and students seek to create a more inclusive future. This approach – as evidenced in the case study – encourages strategic responses from the centre to embrace the willingness to 'remember' allowing for collective remembering (Mordhorst 2014).

We initially offer some debates around universities as conflicted heritage spaces, considering the thorny problem of hagiographic remembering of influential figures, and the often underplaying of origin myths before going on to focus on our case study of the University of Virginia which has been subject to conflicting and competing agendas and violent protests in recent years (Taylor 2020). We consider that the students themselves have been instrumental in both managing and influencing agendas for change, acting as intermediaries in external relationships with visitors to the University and their initiatives shape the key case study. We then go on to consider those agendas for change in general terms.

World heritage and the modern university

Gumprecht's assertion that the university campus "is a symbol of the college as a place apart" (2007, 96) reflects the tension that is sometimes found in relationships – institutional and physical - between so-called 'town and gown'. This topic is explored by O'Mara (2012) and by Pereira Brando Albino (2015) who consider the case of what they term 'elite' universities – that is, institutions renowned for a tradition of academic excellence and which, because of their longevity, often have single buildings or assemblages on campus that are recognised as being of particular renown and whose historical significance is of appeal to tourists as well as to those who work and study there, as indeed are statues, busts and portraits erected or displayed on site to celebrate past notables associated with the institution. The presence of these statues is also important because, as Goodrich and Bombardella, (2016) suggest, statues provide a point of entry into the link between modernity and the past and here we argue links to coloniality.

Gendelman and Aiello note that ornamental or architectural details associated with specific types of building "represent particular ideologies and power dynamics" (2010, 256) which "conglomerate across time and through genres often beyond the intent of the architect" (256). The accretion of monuments and statues on campus also reflects the heritage of the institution within its national context, creating challenges where these become seen as symbols of a problematic past. Indeed, Drayton determines that "edifying civic monuments were in fact the ideological and historical twins of the modern public museum" (2019, 652). Thus, although presenting an attractive aesthetic on the surface, many university campuses also present the iconography of a challenging past that can be at odds with the contemporary values that the institution wishes to present. In many ways they are challenged by their own long history and place boundedness.

World Heritage Site (WHS) status, a recognition of the outstanding universal value (OUV) of selected tangible heritage assets (Orbasli 2008) has been conferred on several historic universities, further reinforcing the special and unique qualities of those places. These include the University and Historic Precinct of Alcalá de Henares in Spain (inscribed 1998) and the Campus Central de la Ciudad Universitaria (UNAM) in Mexico City (inscribed 2007). In Northern England, the University of

Durham occupies many of the core buildings within the Durham Castle and Cathedral WHS (inscribed 1986) including the castle itself. Parts of the University of Greenwich in London occupy buildings located within the former naval college that are now part of the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site (inscribed 1997) whilst some buildings of the Lithuanian University of Vilnius are within the boundary of the Vilnius Historic Centre WHS (inscribed 1994). The university that forms the case study for this paper, the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987.

As well as maintaining an elite status as institutions of higher education, these universities therefore share a further signifier of elitism, namely their status as globally significant heritage assets deemed to be of Outstanding Universal Value. And as the term suggests, that value is based on the heritage past of these spaces as education businesses and other cultural associations. World Heritage universities of course reference the importance of their history, but this status can also be seen as an endorsement of present-day value, of continued *relevance* further reinforcing their traditions. Being inscribed on the list of WHS also bring expectations of increased visitors for whom the status is the key driver and thus endorser of 'quality'. Clearly with the WHS status and elite nature of universities themselves there is the need to maintain the physical environment and values inherent in place but also of reputation management in line with UNESCO's notion of universal value. This is particularly problematic when values associated with a specific site no longer serve a universal audience (Tucker and Carnegie 2014). As is discussed within the case study, student guides interviewed for this project feel both proud of the WH site status their university has but recognise it can be seen to endorse elements of a now problematic past if such complexities are not openly debated in the present.

Dissonant heritage

Heritage site managers are increasingly required to acknowledge and engage with controversy, so they are able to tackle established cultural understandings and political positions relating to a property's past. Yet tackling an organisation's difficult history or a community's dissonant heritage is not always as straightforward. Wallis notes, for instance, that the decision to frame some histories as 'difficult' can lead to a simplistic, values-based binary that excludes other dimensions of what is often a complex past, arguing that "engaging with 'difficult histories' requires a willingness to engage with 'discomfort', and an equal commitment on the parts of educators and learners, in order to change of influence existing perspectives" (2019, 2). This is as valid to World Heritage universities, and particularly our case study institution the University of Virginia (UVa), as it is to historic properties such as stately homes built on the proceeds of slavery (Huxtable et al. 2020) or to museum collections obtained under dubious circumstances (see for instance Jenkins 2018 or Hicks 2020).

The iconic nature of some buildings, statues and other historic structures, when associated with a particular cultural or ethnic group, or political or religious tradition, means they perform a particular function within society. As Wallis suggests,

> through their commemorative form, sites such as public monuments, memorials or statues can still reproduce celebratory or glorifying narratives, allowing some individuals or groups to gain a sense of belonging from historical developments and their connection to them. Conversely, others may feel excluded – they might struggle to derive a similar sense of meaning and identity from the same site (this may be on the grounds of religion, race, political viewpoints, social values, cultural heritage, or memory) (2019, 20).

Thus, and as we explore in more detail below, it is incumbent upon elite, World Heritage universities to reflect on how they present and celebrate all aspects of their history whilst understanding, as Richter suggests: "the most important political issue surrounding heritage tourism is whether …. an extensive exposure to it leads to a better informed or perhaps more tolerant individual" (2005, 269). In other words, as institutions of learning, it is incumbent upon them to pay particular attention to how their past is used to support broader educational and social responsibilities (Taylor, 2020) within an increasingly global context where such sites are also increasingly tourist contact zones. A growing media and public awareness of the need to reassess all cultural spaces (and we would argue this should include university campuses) is increasingly shaping agendas (Hicks 2020; Carnegie and Kociatkiewicz 2021).

Historic universities and links to the slave trade.

The key focus of this article is to look at the role of student guides in raising complex issues within their campus tours and specifically at UVa. However, in order to do that we need first address the ways that WHS and elite universities formally approach the challenges of their own historic past in the political present. By that we mean that debates are formalised and conducted at the organisational centre (core) although the pressure to do so may originate from the periphery through students, staff or external sources. A key concern in recent years has been the growing public awareness that historic universities have links to the slave trade. Major historic universities host internal commissions, fund research institutes and collaborative working groups, often in response to external challenges that impact on their reputation, or even relevance in contemporary society.

Taylor writes of buried knowledge where an organisation's history is often well documented but submerged in archives and libraries, but he also notes that "there is also disqualified knowledge" (2020, 314). Yet Brophy (2007) contends that when a university actively considers the issue of slavery, it embraces its core values in that universities are built on narratives of open debate. This is an important point for this paper in terms of the framing of discussions around the past, as will be discussed more fully later - that the right to open debate is not just the province of knowledge givers or even institutional values, but also of the student body.

External pressures may force or encourage (allow?) historic universities to 'face up' to their own role. Clark and Fine add that "this is bolstered by two additional features: the pressure placed on universities by activists and the ideological commitment of universities to be places of conscious deliberation" (2010, 83). Protests may originate as student-led with universities' academic and professional responses being largely peer-to-peer in their construction and inception.

There are three key ways in which these historic universities are considered to be implicated in these narratives – by association through funding or labour sources (Wilder 2013; Stein 2016), by their location on disposed lands (Nelson and Minthorn 2018) and by their association with influential figureheads and once considered charismatic leaders who were known to support the slave trade or whose philosophies were based on colonial, imperialist or eugenicist stances (Clark and Fine 2010; Minthorn and Nelson 2018). Indeed, a complex mixture of both funding sources and associations is to be expected (Brophy 2007). Additionally, authors such as Brophy (2007), Clark and Fine (2010) and Taylor (2020) highlight that some notable university staff, for example the President of William and Mary, Professor William Small, had argued against the abolitionists maintaining slave labour allowed the slave-owning classes to be freed up from labour to enable them to get an education as well as being necessary for the continued success of universities themselves. He taught moral philosophy to Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, who set up the University of Virginia (that forms the case study in this paper) and who went on to be the third President of the United States (1801–1809).

Minthorn and Nelson (2018) also point out that land was often taken from indigenous people to build the universities and that contemporary debates must also include the dispossessed as well as the enslaved. Building on the ideas of indigenous authors Deloria and Wildcat (2001), Minthorn and Nelson develop arguments that space – in this case the university campus - does not function solely as "a physical space but as a space that considers the historical, emotional, and socio-political contexts that ultimately create and inform experiences" (2018, 76). Clearly those experiences and indeed histories have shaped the lives of the present inhabitants of both place and space, of campus and of community. WHS and historic universities also have considerable numbers of visitors and tourists whose own knowledge and experience might contradict or challenge the accepted narratives of place (Tucker and Carnegie 2014). Through campus tours and associations, they are also having their views of the past shaped by the formal narratives of place but as our case study shows visitors can also influence how or what histories are discussed.

The 'Post slavery' university: apologies and reparations debates

Taylor notes:

> We will not really understand our embeddedness in slavery's legacy until we lay bare our relation to the "post-slavery" historical developments constituting that legacy…None of us, especially in US higher education, is free from being entangled in the webs that slavery and

white supremacy have spun. None is free from embeddedness in the material and symbolic structural legacy of slavery's hydra-headed, multi-layered, generation-spanning apparatus (2020, 209).

And Brophy raises this point succinctly when he argues that:

> William and Mary's president's contributions to the defence of slavery raises a different issue: whether we should atone for the teachings of our predecessors? In the case of William and Mary, there is a further question of what to make of the teachings of the College's president, rather than the College's ownership of humans? (2007, 1139).

Atonement, whether in the form of apologies or debates on reparations, necessitates 'unburying' the past and understanding the complex relationships the past has in creating and establishing 'white normativity' and the legacy of how that influences present day lives on an off campus (Taylor 2020). Critics of university attempts to remember individuals and create positive stories in the present from historic narratives in what Sharpe determines the "curation of enslaved persons' stories. Thus, a university may be similarly crafting a "useable past"…to reassert its own benevolence and potentially refuse "in the present to account for the persistence, necessity, and instrumentalization of black suffering" (2014, 197).

However, apologies may also be understood as public demonstrations of institutional remorse and rectitude that are necessary to preserve not only an internal sense of pride but also a positive external identity (Clarke and Fine 2010). Elite and Ivy league universities, notably Brown and Yale, led these debates and in the case of UVa, institutional materials note that "peer institutions" have taken steps to address their histories of slavery, suggesting that at least part of the motivation to act was an imperative to prove itself equal to these elite private schools. Historic and elite universities and indeed WHS Universities form research links with each other through shared grants, peer review and for quality assurance purposes in teaching and learning approaches. However, they are all essentially competitors and tend to be united when such relationships are geared towards economic, regulatory, and legal or compliance related changes (Alagaraja and Li 2015).

Such debates are not confined to the United States or Canada but have become key issues with universities elsewhere and notably within the United Kingdom. In 2015 in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town, mass protests were directed against a statue on campus that commemorated Cecil Rhodes, the nineteenth century politician. Those protests against the heritage of colonialism led to the formation of the 'Rhodes must Fall' movement which spread not just to other South African universities but also to the University of Oxford in the UK, where students called for a statue of Rhodes to be removed from Oriel College. In 2021 the decision was taken to 'retain and explain' on the grounds that, "the process would be protracted and time-consuming, highly costly to take through to completion,

and there is a very strong likelihood that the process would fail in the end". (Oriel College 2021). The college instead erected a plaque and committed to funding internal activities that would address diversity issues and a call for decolonisation of the curriculum. In the spring of 2019, Cambridge University in the UK also launched an inquiry into historic slave trade links to examine whether financial bequests to libraries, museums and departments were made possible from the profits of slavery.

Drayton (2019) shows that the destruction of public statuary is 'hardly a new impulse' and indeed, in relation the toppling of the Cecil Rhodes statue, Goodrich and Bombardella note that "in South Africa the practice of toppling statues is as old as the practice of erecting them" (2016, 2). They go on to argue that "removing the statue removed the point of entry without in the slightest affecting the link because the link does not require a statue" (8). Johnson (2002), however, argues that monuments shape cultural identities in the present. This is an important point in the context of this article since historic universities are framed by often centuries of association with historic figures and this impacts even on foundation narratives within the case study at UVa. The renewed interest in the past has led to a greater engagement with individuals such as Colston in Bristol (Dresser 2007) and indeed David Hume in Edinburgh.

At the time of writing Edinburgh University, set within the Old Town part of that capital city's World Heritage Site, has taken the decision to formally rename The David Hume Tower over the philosopher's comments on matters of race". It is now known simply as 40 George Square. The University of Edinburgh, is over 430 years old and like any other historic and elite university is subject to forgetting and remembering in terms of impacts and influences on it and of it within both town and gown. Glasgow University, the second oldest University in Scotland founded in 1451, has been at the forefront of campaigns to take responsibility for its own role in the slave trade and has agreed to pay reparations as a consequence of this past relationship (Mullen and Newman 2018). Moreover, in so doing they have ensured these debates are core to the University's present values. In 2020 they were awarded the Time Higher Education University of the Year Award, and the awarding body was reported in a local newspaper as saying:

 "At a time when universities are too often on the back foot in public debates about value and relevance, Glasgow stood out as a shining example of what a university should be: institutions of courage and action, uniquely placed to tackle the biggest issues facing the world…By taking a moral position and leading the way in facing up to the legacy of slavery and making amends, it has set the bar high both for itself and for all universities" (Harrison 2020).

All universities are competitive and yet subject to peer review and the elite status of WHS universities is primarily enhanced by their historic nature. They are now having to view their own histories as flawed, problematic and above all representative of the times of their creation and continued success

'where that bar is set high'. They equally are responding to sectoral influences and changes. We now go onto outline our study approach before looking in detail at one significant case study; The University of Virginia, USA (UVa), to determine the ways in which students are leading these debates.

Study Methods

This article draws on a longitudinal study being carried out by the authors investigating 'value' at World Heritage Sites. Since 2010 they have been considering World Heritage Universities within Europe and the United States and for this paper have widened that out to look at historic and elite universities that still carry out their original founding role as research and teaching institutions. This definition and distinction is important as many WHS and important heritage spaces are given value in the present because of what they once were known for and are therefore frozen in that moment in time (Tucker and Carnegie 2014).

Both authors are White academics with the first author identifying as a working-class Scottish female and the other a man from a traditional middle-class family based in the North East of England who has been studying and writing about heritage contexts and spaces for over 20 years. We share an interest in heritage management and indeed representation of heritage in both the public and private sphere. The first author has been working on decolonising the curriculum agendas and such debates had started to influence her more in recent years and to push her to understand more about the historic and current contexts of how such narratives are shaped, framed or ignored within historic, elite and contemporary universities. In this she is being mindful of Chambers and Buzinde's (2015) caution that Western scholars remain influenced by their subject position and inherent biases and accept Taylor's statement quoted earlier in this article that we are all "entangled in the webs that slavery and white supremacy have spun" (2020, 209).

Thus, the context of this article grew from our shared interests in the wider project and indeed how they were starting to diverge for different projects yet came together for this part of the project. It is important to note that while we were focusing on student tour guides and the narratives of place that shaped their historic campus tours, our initial intention was to look at whether students felt proud of their university and of being part of its present and legacy. Although we were sensitised to current issues, it was the students themselves who formed part of this study that were keen to explain that pride of place was for them at least in part dependent on their and their universities willingness and ability to frame key debates such as slavery, gender and ongoing regional disquiet and to share these with external audiences. On that basis this paper grew from what we did not expect to find but which we recognised as important topic worthy of engaging with fully and separately.

We apply mixed-methods approach to the investigation to consider both tangible elements (the façade and associated buildings) and intangibles of place (the framing of Jefferson at UVa, ambience and values that arise from this association). Our key focus here is on how historic and WHS universities

engage with their own past and how at this present time the heritage turn (Huyssen 2003) challenges the smooth and continued traditions of historical university business. We are interested in the meeting point of the heritage of such universities – here the focus is on University of Virginia - internally (within the university to staff and students) and externally (the public face of a contemporary and competitive public university).

The key aims for this part of the wider project specifically at UVa were developed as follows:

- To determine how a historic and WHS elite university currently negotiates problematic elements of its own past.
- To gain an understanding of students support or subvert narratives to increase the democratic reach of the university.

Data gathering initiated at UVa included analysing secondary sources such as web-sites to include statements of intent to highlight how the university was framing its own 200 years as a public university within a public setting. Interviews and participation observation were carried out followed by focus groups and one-to-one interviews with students and representatives at Charlottesville. Finally, tours were taken of both UVa and Monticello. We focus on the external engagement and student responses as we determine they show the public face of the university within the locality whereas the formal university responses tend to be carefully managed in peer-to-peer arenas. This is in line with Huyssen's arguments that while contemporary issues reflect globalisation concerns, they largely impact on "localities and specific spaces" (2003, 16). We now go on to introduce the case study in some detail.

Introduction to the case study

The University of Virginia (UVa) was established in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the American Declaration of Independence and the 3rd President of the United States. Appendix 1 presents a brief chronology but key events in the history of the University include the phased admission of women up until 1970 and Black students from the 1950's. The University currently has a student cohort of around 22,500 whilst the town itself is home to around 46,600 people. UVa is ranked the number 4 Public University and in the top 30 universities overall in the USA (2021). Located on the outskirts of the town of Charlottesville which lies 120 miles south-west of Washington DC, the original campus (referred to, to this day, as the Academical Village) was designed by Jefferson around a central Rotunda rather than a church in recognition of his belief that scientific enquiry should be separated from religion (Dabney 1981). The core of the campus was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1987 (along with Jefferson's home Monticello) and is one of only three modern man-made sites in the US on the list – the others being the Statue of Liberty in New York, and Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Stretching south-south eastwards of the Rotunda on either side of a vast green space called the Lawn are a series of classical buildings containing the original class rooms and student accommodation designed by

Jefferson. These residences are much sought after and allocated only to 54 final year undergraduates who have excelled in their studies and service to the University, further reinforcing the elite nature of the cohort of students whose temporary home is at the core of the UVa campus. For student guide Grace pride in place is clearly linked with the relationship to the past and the sense of continuity of place. She notes:

> I always like to mention that UVa is the only WHS that is still in use for its original purpose so the library, woodlands are still lived in, professors and students still live in the lawn rooms and something I think is a really cool fact to know as tourists then understand how important this place is and to know that it is still used for its original purpose. I honestly believe there is not a school in the entire world like it.

The campus at UVa was the site of civil unrest on August 11th 2017, the night before a 'Unite the Right' rally, when a group of white supremacists marched through the campus to protest at a statue behind the Rotunda – the symbolic heart of the campus - of the University's founder (and noted slave-owner) Thomas Jefferson. The march turned violent when they were met by counter-protestors and several brawls ensured. This evening march preceded a larger demonstration the following day which was also stimulated by the City's proposals to remove a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from a downtown park. The August 12th rally attracted a large number of protesters and counter-protesters and ultimately resulted in the deaths of one counter-protestor struck by a car and two Virginia state troopers whose helicopter crashed whilst transporting them to the scene. What is interesting about UVa is its willingness to support students seeking to open up these discussions, and therefore how they affect the historic campus tours. The statue of Jefferson remains as a representation of university values in the present day.

The University of Virginia (UVa) offers a charismatic form of institutional remembering where history is defined and framed yet the founder's role is currently underplayed in the external advertising of the university. The focus is instead on academic excellence, inclusivity and value for money universities in the US. The university has committed to "exploring and commemorating its relationship with slavery, as well as the lives of the enslaved people who were an integral part of early life at Jefferson's University" (UVa 2019). This statement offers evidence that UVa is now at a stage of remembering where late modern thinking forces a reappraisal of the hagiographic accounts of founders (Rowlinson and Proctor 1999) and of organisational and political past(s) (Bryce and Carnegie 2013).

As a key tourist destination in the State of Virginia, UVa serves a public role within the region and narratives of their combined history has come to include elements that challenge hagiographic and charismatic accounts of people and place. Monticello now includes aspects of enslaved people in guided tours and acknowledges that Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman owned by Jefferson bore children to him. Sally Hemings was herself the daughter on an enslaved woman. Knowles (2019) raises the

polarising effect that talking openly about slavery can have on the largely white audiences who visit, as staff note discomfort with or even unwillingness to hear such narratives as part of a guided tour of the site.

The historic nature of place, the relationship to Monticello and founder Thomas Jefferson, led directly to WHS (it exists as a consequence of the conditions of its creation), yet it must also show awareness of the past if not to be tainted by the very association with Jefferson that had endorsed the university's central values as a public university for two centuries. and is indeed central to the brand (King and Halfpenny 2014). Both Monticello and the University have been subject to the need to frame the present though the lens of their understanding of their own past in order continue to be associated with that past. In the case of UVa that means drawing on the public and community orientated nature of the university trying to be true to founding and founder narratives of place, while framing the present as a space in which students and staff can interrogate negative aspects of that history.

Negotiating the past in historic tours

UVa, in common with other elite and historic WHS Universities, attracts many local and international visitors, many of whom are drawn by the relationship to Jefferson and their interest in his heritage and associations with the early history of the USA and with Virginia (Woodward 2013). The university as 'destination' is almost always mediated by engagement with the student body on either a formal or informal basis. Gelbman and Maoz argue that tour guides are "mediators and commentators of local cultures" (2012, 109) and that "in official sites they serve as the voice of their governments, who use tourism strategically in order to address issues of national significance" (109). Thus, we consider how the elite students draw on their sense of pride and privilege to render less visible the privileging of institutional power (Hollinshead 2007) within a time of 'geo-political and geo-cultural shifts' taking place within both universities and heritage spaces (Winter 2013).

The University selects and trains historic campus guides (there is 650-page package of information successful guides need to learn) and they then spend a semester in training learning everything about the UVa 'family' including what Grace referred to as: "Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's father, old traditions long gone that you read about*"*. In 2013 students produced a visitor's guide entitled 'Slavery at the University of Virginia' (UVa 2013) which concludes:

> this brochure is the result of a student-led initiative to explore the existing scholarship concerning slavery at U.Va. and to make the information available to the public. Efforts are underway to continue the research and discovery of U.Va.'s past and to recognize the contributions of enslaved laborers. It is our hope that in the future, we know more about our past.

The brochure and indeed the student tours highlight both Jefferson and the architecture of place, although as tour guide Alicia notes:

> because Thomas Jefferson is such an integral part of these conversations it seems like maybe to the students and all of the visitors there is more of an emphasis on Thomas Jefferson the man, versus the architecture of the place.

Suzanne posits that:

> we're still finding out more, it's sad how little we know. Charlottesville's not going to have any natural terracing as you see on the lawn and that was all done by manpower, by slaves moving the land so I usually take my tours out into a garden where the slave quarters were. I absolutely feel comfortable talking about, I know it can be sensitive still especially when you talk about Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings. There are still tourists who will deny there was any relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemming even although there's pretty much definitive DNA evidence.

Suzanne believes the relationship of Jefferson to slavery is now being actively promoted as a theme:

> so there's a couple of things we're encouraged to hit on, and one of the things is slavery at the university and integration of the university.

For Grace this is an important part of her role as:

> every single tourist that I have ever taken on my tours and talked to about slavery has seemed to appreciate that and are nodding their heads and even have sad expressions on their face which makes me happy as it makes me sad, and when I see people being sad about what I say it makes me feel I'm doing a good job.

Yet by encouraging guides to discuss some of the aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life such as his relationship with Sally Hemmings, and the fact that the students loaned their slaves to build the college and adjacent gardens, the university is moving beyond the formal conservative values to allow the dissonant heritage discourse to be discussed. Grace believes this is necessary to challenge the 'cult' of Jefferson. She notes that:

> lectures often start or end with a quote. There are quotes in the gym. They put him (Jefferson) as God but you know in general most guides really want to address the fact of slave owning on their tours because I think we are all very aware it is a very sad part of our history and want to address it in our tours and every single tourist that I have ever taken on my tours and talked about slavery to has seemed to appreciate that.

Elizabeth acknowledges that:

slavery is coming out more and more. There has been a push, especially from African American enthusiasts and African-American members of the university community that's brought this to light.

She believes it was not ignorance but a conscious desire:

to hush it up, maybe pretend it never happened. It was the elephant in the room no one wanted to discuss. They did contract slaves that did a lot of work here so now they're starting to acknowledge that and they're now starting to bring to light applications of African-American people who had applied to the university but that were rejected. They never said it is because you were black, they just said "We do not think your application is suitable for the university at the time".

Grace feels passionately that it is important to discuss slavery as a natural part of her historic tours.

I take them to a garden at first and then I talk about how this is a very beautiful place and how it wasn't always this way. Originally, this was a workplace where animals were kept and the gardens were and also where slaves lived. And there were slaves at the UVa and it was a very big part of Thomas Jefferson's life therefore it was also a big part of the university's life. I will mention that Thomas Jefferson was a slave owner who owned 600 slaves throughout his lifetime and then I will go through like the history of African Americans at the university briefly first talking about what slaves did in the construction of the university doing the actual construction work and building of the Rotunda and the terrace and the lawn. UVa was actually the first university to purchase a slave as in owned by the university which was unheard of at the time. Prior to that all the slaves that worked here were contracted out by individual people so were hired through professors or hotel keepers or the students.

By allowing and even encouraging students to shape their own historical tours for tourists, universities are performing and highlighting the democratic nature of university life. The role of slave labour in building the University of Virginia and changing attitudes to diversity in general provides a key example. Student guides need to represent the university values, whilst at the same time challenging them and making themselves appear both as individuals and as a 'body politic', approachable.

Magolda interprets such tours as "one of many formal rituals that transmit the institution's political, social, environmental, and cultural expectations and norms for prospective members" (2001, 2). If this is the case for applicants, then is it also true for other tourists and visitors? Guides serve as another way for universities to market and to brand their offering (Salazar 2005) through the provision of intellectual hospitality (Kaufman 2001 as quoted in Lynch et al 2011).

The transient nature of students themselves who are a mobile body, often moving into and then away from the University area once their studies are complete, means is that there is the potential for a lack

of continuity within the student guide systems. The baton is passed over the years and successive cohort of student guides will have interests and issues that reflect the times.

For visitors, such tours offer privileged access to elite organisations which might otherwise be denied them. Salazar determines that it is "the human contact, the close encounters with people…the feeling one has of actively participating in the lived life" (2005, 640) that tourists remember about tours. Historic tours taken by student guides, themselves insiders of an elite organisation, offer privileged access, a seemingly authentic engagement with the lived lives of elite students, who are proud to share their internal and private world with visitors. That the tour guides that form part of this study are drawn from the most privileged student groups in the main - many live within the prestigious rooms on the lawn at University of Virginia - further enforces this sense of real and intimate engagement. It also serves to highlight the importance that the student themselves who undertake to be guides, the majority of whom are history majors, place of highlighting the problematics of the past to ensure they can feel proud to be part of the present. They also seek to share that transparency with visitors to and from the locality. In this way history and heritage pasts are being used to communicate present individual and institutional values and aspirations.

Although this paper is concerned with tourist audiences, (and we accept it is possibe for vistors in this context to be there for formal reasons and as tourists) our interest lies in how rituals are a vital part of the experience. Student guides have a strategic and necessary role within the more formal context of elite universities welcoming tourists within increasingly globalised tourist (Salazar 2005) and student markets. As mentioned earlier student guides can effectively challenge 'path dependant' narratives of organisations and equally may actively seek to raise issues that do not form part of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006). Their tours often respond to and reflect tourist interests and concerns and tourists may come from various parts of the world (Salazar 2005) or are drawn from migrant communities within the broader locality. Thus, guides reclaim, reshape and openly debate aspects of history and present-day university life, albeit from their perspective as ambassadors and intermediaries.

Concluding remarks

The contribution of this research lies in its exploration of historic and elite universities anchor institutions of place (Birch et al. 2013). We have specifically focused on historic elite and WHS universities to consider the unique challenges that their own history represents within both localities and as a consequence of an increasingly mediated globalisation within what we have argued there is a heritage turn – what Drayton (2019) terms 'the crisis of the modern' where traditions and heritage values and valorisations have been challenged. Indeed, we have argued that it is now impossible for organisations to see their history as a continuation of tradition without critical debate and this is further compounded when the organisation's elite nature grew from its own history making it impossible to

maintain their elite status if they reject that past, but equally problematic if such organisations fail to effectively address their past.

As noted, historic universities, and of course WHS universities in particular, also function as visitor attractions and as such we have compared them with the role museums and other heritage spaces have as contact zones (Clifford 1997) re-negotiating the circumstances of their own creation as colonial institutions (Hicks 2020). At the time of writing these debates are moving from the periphery where they instigated because of external criticism and growing global debates and concerns, to being central to funding and activism from within. For instance, in March 2021 the Virginia State Legislature passed House Bill 1890 which required five public universities in the State, including UVa, to "identify the enslaved people who worked for the university and memorialise those individuals" and to "provide a tangible benefit such as a college scholarship or community based economic development programme to people or communities with a demonstrative historic tie to slavery". In the case of UVa, this will be facilitated by the results of the detailed research carried out by the university into its slave heritage, during which it has identified between 4,000 and 5,000 enslaved individuals who either helped build the original university or who worked there. And later in 2021, the statue of General Robert E Lee was finally removed from its plinth in downtown Charlottesville with the intention that it be melted down and the bronze recast into a unifying piece of public art though this proposal is being challenged in the courts at the time of writing by a group of Confederate heritage activists. This aspect of the town and gown's nineteenth century heritage remains contested.

Thus, we conclude that future stability is not to be found in the comfort of traditions but in transparency and willingness for historic and elite universities to critical examine their own present values from the centre rather than allow these debates to be raised at the periphery even organisational boundaries by the students themselves. Finally, we align with Drayton who argues that "There is a legitimate case for renegotiating the idea of heritage so that it means a claim to many silenced pasts and not just a bondage to that claim on the future made by those who once enjoyed the privileges of domination. Heritage requires a perpetual attention to the most inclusive view of citizenship and cosmopolitan inclusion" (2019, 2).

That is to suggest that the complexities of history as organisational heritage are not so readily reductive to good or bad or then and now but rather it is a question of what organisations - and in this case elite WHS universities that function as containers of pasts through archives, alumni relationships and staff specialisms can contribute to wider debates through opening up their own pasts to contemporary critiques. As noted above and throughout this paper, often that long relationship to history and their own heritage is represented through rituals and traditions that reinforce continuity. Indeed, this is how universities market their pasts into the present through the intangibles of the university sold as

experiences. We argue that if such universities are to weather the storm of their own histories they need to do so from the centre, openly and where the bar is set high.

Appendix: Chronology of key events at the University of Virginia

1819 – University of Virginia Founded

1825 – teaching commences on the Charlottesville site

1861 – 90% of enrolled student body joins the Confederate Army to fight in the Civil War

1880 – UVa offers summer instruction to female school teachers through a summer school (though only male teachers attending the summer school gain credit)

1893 – A chemistry professor at UVa offers private instruction to a female student

1894 – all education for women at UVa revoked by the Board of Visitors

1920 – UVa Board of Visitors approves co-education (white women only) for the graduate and professional schools. Seventeen (17) women matriculate in three different schools

1950 – first male Black student enters the University (Law School)

1953 – E. Louise Stokes Hunter becomes the first Black woman to earn a UVa degree

1955 – first Black male undergraduate students enter the university

1970 – women finally allowed to enrol as undergraduate students on any programme

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