JAUNTS AND HAUNTS: EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF THE DARK TOURISM

INDUSTRY ON SAVANNAH'S TRADITIONAL BRANDED IMAGE

by

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(Under the Direction of Cari Goetcheus)

ABSTRACT

Savannah's branded image has been deeply entrenched in the city's ability to market its Antebellum past. The tourism industry in the city has perpetuated the Old South stereotype. However, over the last thirty years there has been a shift in the tourism industry, a shift towards dark tourism. This type of tourism introduces the public to information about eerie topics, such as death and ghosts. It also introduces topics that are typically not discussed during traditional tours, such as slavery and folklore. Because of the tourism industry's connection to the city's brand, this shift could change Savannah's branded image.

INDEX WORDS:   Ghosts, Tours, Tourism, Dark Tourism, Cultural Tourism,

Savannah, Georgia, Southeast, Intangible Cultural Heritage,

Image, Branding, Marketing.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the important people in my life: To my

mother for supporting my goals and for fostering my passion for history and architecture.

To my siblings for their comic relief. To Charlotte for motivating me to be my best. To

Scully for providing me with constant companionship. To Lesa for her positive words.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this to Mallory, Kimberly, Olivia, and Audrey for their

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INTRODUCTION

*"One cannot walk down Savannah's streets at twilight without feeling evidence of her supernatural side. The old beautiful homes practically emanate the aura of lost loves, lives cut short, and other misfortunes… The dead never truly depart in Savannah."*[1]

Savannah is the oldest city in the state of Georgia. Since its founding in 1733, the city has cultivated a rich culture and a diverse heritage. The city's branded image is a reflection of its past; its cultural heritage is a product of both the experiences of Savannah's citizens (both past and present) and of major events. These events include the Revolutionary War, the rise of King Cotton, and the Civil War. These themes can be seen throughout the city in physical form, from the Cotton Exchange Building on Bay Street, to the many monuments erected in nearly every square. The city is frozen in the past, in its history. The various historic districts maintain an old world aesthetic due to intense preservation efforts by the city, foundations, and individuals alike. This has greatly influenced the tourism industry in the area, since the majority of tours focus on architecture, as well as the overall history of the city.

Every year, millions of people flock to the city to experience authentic Southern hospitality. Visitors get the opportunity to eat traditional low-country cuisine before

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[1] James Caskey, *Haunted Savannah: The Official Guidebook to Savannah Haunted History Tour Conducted by Cobblestone Tours, Inc*. (Savannah, GA: Bonaventure Books, 2005), pg. 6.

strolling through the hauntingly beautiful squares. The Spanish moss draped live oaks and Antebellum architecture transports an individual back in time. It is no wonder why the city is a popular tourist destination.

Over the past three decades, Savannah has seen a massive transformation in both its tourism industry and its overall aesthetic. While the overarching Antebellum theme can be seen throughout the city, darker themes have become more common and prominent. In recent years the shift towards dark tourism [2] has been transforming Savannah's branded image.

The 1994 release of John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* was a major catalyst for this change. The book, as well as the movie (1997), not only introduced the world to the charm and culture of the city, but uncovered a darker side of Savannah's past. The city has since embraced the eerie side of its history.

While visitors have the opportunity to experience the traditional side of Savannah's culture during the day, each night the city transforms into something much darker and eerier. Stately Antebellum mansions and historic squares become the chilling backdrop for storytellers' terrifying tales of Savannah's dead. Now when the sun sets, the city's dead come back to life through stories and otherworldly experiences; at night Savannah transforms into a flourishing necropolis. These formerly taboo stories have become some of the city's most popular attractions. The growing popularity of ghost tourism in the city has transformed Savannah into a city of the dead— a city that has been

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[2] Author Tiya Miles defined dark tourism "As a form of touristic entertainment [that] highlights violent and morbid subject matter by promoting visitation to sites of torture, suffering, murder, and death."

branded "the most haunted city in America".[3] The industry which once focused

exclusively on southern charm, has embraced elements of the city's dark and scary past.

This change in the industry reflects the city's attitude towards its history, as well as the

city's branded image. These stories, whether fact or fiction, have been incorporated into

Savannah's cultural heritage.

Tourism falls under the category of site interpretation. This term is used to

describe the method of evaluating information about a specific site and presenting it to

the public in a way that is both entertaining and educational. Freeman Tilden, as the

father of modern site interpretation, created six principles of interpretation to ensure that

interpreters present their information in the best, most effective way possible. Because of

Savannah's involvement in national, state, and local history, the city is rich in

interpretation. Almost every block has a past steeped in historical significance. This

history has allowed Savannah's tourism industry to flourish. Daniel Carey, President and

CEO of the Historic Savannah Foundation, once wrote, "By taking a tour and

familiarizing yourself with [Savannah's] history and architecture, you become sensitized

to its importance."[4] Tours allow for visitors to fully understand why the city is special

and why it is important. Nevertheless, tours can negatively affect the city. If the wrong

information is presented to the public, it could have long lasting effects; it could hurt the

city's history and perceived image. Interpretation is something that can preserve branded

images, but it is also something that can destroy them. This threat is not limited to

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[3] "America's Most Haunted City Tour | Savannah Ghosts & Paranormal," 6th Sense World,
http://6thsenseworld.com/tours/americas-most-haunted-city/.

[4] Coastal Books & Souvenirs, *The Essential Guide to Historic Savannah,* (2011), pg. 3.

traditional tours. Just like with any form of interpretation, dark tourism— in this case, ghost tourism— can have both a positive and a negative effect on a city's cultural heritage.

Dark tourism is a tourism genre that focuses on the macabre. Popular dark tourism destinations include everything from the solemn grounds of Auschwitz to the eerie Witch House in Salem, Massachusetts. Over the past few decades, sites where murders and other dark events have occurred have become popular tourist destinations. Haunted houses have become increasingly popular, especially in Savannah. Visiting these sites can be an adrenaline rush for tourists, much like watching a horror movie. Tour guides will lead patrons into the very room where a grisly murder or suicide occurred. They will amplify the intensity by theatrically telling stories about the individual or individuals who may have met their fate right in the very spot in which the patrons are standing.

Ghost tourism is a subgenre within the field of dark tourism. Like most forms of dark tourism, ghost tours focus on the terrifying experiences that occurred in a particular location. These events, typically murders and suicides, are intensified by testimonials from guides and former guests. These individuals claim that the deceased still walk the grounds and interact with patrons. However, real history is oftentimes incorporated into these stories. Ghost tourism companies, similar to traditional tourism companies, have to interpret history to create a compelling narrative. The difference between ghost and traditional tourism companies is that ghost tourism companies incorporate supernatural elements into their narratives. The basic background information may be the same, or at least similar, between companies but the paranormal elements create a totally new and unique experience.

While there are many positives to dark tourism, they tend to get overshadowed by the negative. Some individuals, such as author Tiya Miles, feel as though the industry is insensitive when it comes to certain topics, and this is a valid concern. The industry has gained a bad reputation for exploiting sensitive areas of history and not being respectful of the topics or individuals in their narratives. The industry has been known to exploit topics such as murder, slavery, race, sexual abuse, and even mental illness. While not every company, individual, or organization is guilty of such a crime, it is still a common problem. This is not the only reason why the dark tourism industry seems to have a negative reputation. Dark tourism is sometimes not seen as a legitimate form of education due to its relationship with the supernatural. While many ghost tours cover the same topics as traditional day-time tours, once the supernatural elements of the story are introduced, it seems to discredit the entire narrative. Another problem comes with the narratives themselves. Because of the lack of consistency between tours, the information being presented can become corrupted. The interpreters are typically to blame for these corruptions. Irresponsible interpreters can embellish stories to make them spookier or more interesting, changing the narrative to their liking. This could cause lasting effects; if a story is repeatedly told incorrectly, it can start to replace the facts. People tend to discredit the dark tourism industry due to the fictitious portions of their narratives.

The traditional tourism industry is not necessarily any better. Traditional tours can make the same mistakes as well as take away the focus from history. They can water down the facts or sugarcoat history just to make a more entertaining and appealing narrative. Furthermore, they will oftentimes leave out whole communities or individuals to fit their storyline. A common example is the topic of slavery. Because this topic is

considered to be taboo, the guides tend to sugarcoat the topic or simply ignore it all together. This lack of representation of difficult to talk about topics is a huge problem in the traditional tourism industry.

## Research Question

This thesis affords me the opportunity to explore the effect of dark tourism on the city of Savannah's branded image, specifically how and when the shift occurred, and if and how the city's perceived image and cultural heritage has changed since dark tourism has become popular.

As such, this research will attempt to answer the following primary question: How is the ghost tourism industry transforming Savannah's traditional branded image? Sub questions also include: How has the tourism industry transformed over the decades? How does dark tourism compare to traditional tourism? Has the dark tourism industry become a reputable or viable resource for educating the public? What are the contributions of dark tourism, if any, to Savannah's cultural heritage?

By comparing the two competing tourism approaches in one city, Savannah, I hope to shed light on the industry as a whole to see what kind of impact ghost tourism is having on Savannah and its brand. While there are plenty of negative effects on both sides of the spectrum, there are many positives as well. It is necessary to look at the available information to see how each industry is contributing to Savannah's historic narrative.

## Methodology

I began my research by gathering contextual information on the developmental history of Savannah, as well as the history of the tourism industry in the city. Two major

sources for the history of the city were: *Savannah: A History of Her People Since 1733* by Preston Russell and Barbara Hines, and *Historic Savannah* by Malcolm Bell Jr. These books contain detailed information that was useful in the preparation of this thesis.

Information about the tourism industry in the city required a more creative approach to research. While no official publication exists about the evolution of the industry in Savannah, there are books, proposals, and studies that range from the 1860s through 2015 that discuss various aspects of the industry. The earliest publication is the *Historical record of the City of Savannah* by F.D. Lee and J.L. Agnew. This book dates to 1869 and briefly talks about what the tourism industry was like during the Victorian era. Additional research focused on site interpretation, dark tourism, and Savannah's intangible culture i.e. ghost stories and legends. A major source for these stories can be found in *Savannah Spectres and Other Strange Tales* by Margaret Wayt DeBolt. Dozens of additional ghost story and legend books were also used in the preparation of this thesis. While the author did purchase many of these books, the majority of them were located in the University of Georgia's main library, Special Collections Library, and accessed via interlibrary loan.

While much background information exists in the form of books and various publications, more information on the tours was needed. It would be difficult to accurately examine the evolution of the industry and its effects on Savannah's branded image without experiencing the tours firsthand or speaking with the companies and organizations. So I did and those experiences, and related survey results, allowed for a more thorough analysis of the topic. Conducting field work and asking tourism

companies and organizations more direct questions allowed for a better understanding of the tourism industry and its role in Savannah's branded image.

The primary research of tours occurred in several ways. In order to understand how the tours functioned and what type of information they covered, it was necessary to participate in multiple tours across the city. From there, a series of questions were created to gather information that was not discussed on the tour or readily available to the public. The next step was to conduct a survey of various touring companies and organizations. There were two surveys created: one for the tourism companies and the other for organizations. Because these two entities differ in their missions, it was necessary to ask them separate questions. The surveys were conducted in a personal interview format. The author personally conducted phone interviews, as well as email surveys for those companies and organizations that were more difficult to reach by phone. However, the content and questions of these surveys remained the same across both mediums.

There are countless tours, especially ghost tours, throughout the city. It was necessary to come up with a strategy for choosing the tours and organizations for the surveys. In order to gather as much information as possible, it was necessary to attend tours and interview different companies that present their information in different ways. For example, walking tours are incredibly popular in the city, as are trolley tours. It was necessary to attend a walking tour, as well as a trolley tour, and it was incredibly important to survey one or more of each of these companies. After the surveys had been conducted, it was important to compare and contrast these companies by looking at different aspects of their tours.

Tourism organizations are different than the tour companies. There are two major tourism organizations in Savannah: The City of Savannah Tourism Management and Ambassadorship Department and the Tourism Leadership Council. These two organizations regulate Savannah's tourism industry. They do not offer tours like the tour companies, but they oversee the industry in the city as a whole. The former creates and enforces the rules and regulations for the tour companies, while the latter is an independent organization that helps the industry to grow and thrive. Both of these organizations possess a thorough knowledge of the tourism industry in Savannah. The survey for the organizations was designed to obtain information to answer questions and to fill in gaps in the research.

After the background information and surveys were compiled and completed, a thorough analysis of the gathered information was needed. These results assisted in creating a timeline of the evolution of Savannah's tourism industry, as well as the city's perceived image. Furthermore, it revealed how the industry has impacted the city's cultural heritage and branded image.

### Research Limitations

This research focused on the evolution of the tourism industry in Savannah, as well as the modern perception of the city. While there is a significant amount of information covered in this thesis, there are topics that will not be covered but could be a source for future research, as discussed below.

There are multiple genres within the tourism industry in the city; a deep analysis of each type of tour would detract from the main focus of this thesis— dark tourism in Savannah and its effect on Savannah's branded image. For example, there are multiple

food tours that take visitors to various restaurants throughout the city. While food tourism is its own genre, it would be unnecessary to fully discuss the workings of this portion of the tourism industry. There are countless other themed tours; however, because these tours are more traditional, the majority of these tours fall under the category of traditional tourism. While they are unique in their content, for the purpose of this thesis, they will all fit into the traditional tourism category.

While there is a flourishing ghost tourism industry across the United States, as well as the world, it would be nearly impossible to discuss and analyze the industries in other areas. Because the main focus of this thesis is on the city of Savannah, the research in this thesis focuses solely on the Savannah Metropolitan area.

The future of Savannah's brand is unknown. Although it is possible to see how some aspects of it may change, there are far too many factors that could affect its future. This thesis focuses on the dark tourism industry's effect on the city's modern branded image, but it is not the only factor affecting its brand. Changes in societal norms, city development, and an influx of new residents could also contribute to changing the city's character. While all of these things are important factors to consider, it is not necessary to discuss them at length in this thesis.

**Thesis Organization**

Chapter One is an introduction to the purpose and content of this thesis. It contains the research question, as well as relevant background information covering the topics of Savannah's history, the evolution of the tourism industry in the city, the introduction of dark tourism, the methodology for answering the research question and sub questions, research limitations, as well as chapter organization of the thesis. Chapter

Two provides more in-depth background information on the variety of topics briefly addressed in Chapter One. It gives information about the history of Savannah, the history of tourism and dark tourism in Savannah, and information about historic site interpretation. Chapter Three introduces the survey creation and application methodology, including the tours identified for analysis and comparison. Chapter Four is an analysis of the gathered research, as well as the case studies, while Chapter Five is the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The city of Savannah has a long and interesting history that has contributed to its branded image. Each of these event have added to the city's fascinating historical narrative. This chapter will focus on the developmental history of the city, the evolution of Savannah's tourism industry, as well as information about the city's intangible cultural heritage.

**Brief History of Savannah**

**Colonial History**

Savannah's recorded history dates back to 1732, when 37-year-old James Oglethorpe left England to settle a new colony for King George. Within a few months, on February 12, 1733, Oglethorpe landed on the banks of the Savannah River. This land, then known as Yamacraw, was inhabited by a small group of Creek Indians. The Natives were quite friendly to the new settlers. Their leader, Chief Tomochichi, was especially helpful to Oglethorpe. Tomochichi graciously gave Oglethorpe the land upon which Savannah sits today.

Soon after Savannah's settlement, Oglethorpe pushed for the development of the city. In fact, Oglethorpe designed the now famous Savannah gridded city plan that included 24 squares (22 remain). The city acted as a safe haven for many persecuted groups including English, French, and German settlers. These "economic and religious

refugees"[5] would escape persecution and turn to the new Colony for safety. Oglethorpe was quite progressive for his time. He welcomed those from different religious and economic backgrounds. Because of this, the city, as well as the Colony as a whole, continued to grow and thrive.

**The American Revolution in Savannah**

Savannah has seen its fair share of warfare, including the Revolutionary War, less than 50 years after the city's establishment. In fact, one of the bloodiest battles of the Revolutionary War was fought in Savannah. In late 1778, the city was captured and occupied by the British. The Patriots recognized the need to reclaim the port city and in the following year attempted to do so, but unfortunately were not successful. This battle was known as the Siege of Savannah. It was one of the bloodiest battles during the Revolutionary War, claiming over 1000[6] lives.[7] The British continued to occupy Savannah until 1782.

**The 19th Century**

The city of Savannah has strong ties to its Antebellum past. This was a time when the area began to economically thrive due to its connection to agriculture. Cotton was one of the major, and most financially lucrative, crops to come out of the area during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The agriculture industry saw a boom after the introduction of Eli Whitney's cotton gin circa 1794. Unfortunately, both indentured

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[5] Susan H. Albu and Elizabeth Arndt, *Here's Savannah: A Journey Through Historic Savannah & Environs* (Savannah, GA: A & A Enterprises, 1994) pg. 19.

[6] Actual numbers may vary, but many publications put the number well above 1000.

[7] Ibid, 40.

servitude and slavery was tied to this industry and had become a common practice in and around Savannah, as well as the South.

In 1861, the Civil War broke out. Savannah, because of its prime location near the mouth of the Savannah River, was highly valued. War waged on for years, crippling the South and its economy. In November 1864, General William T. Sherman began his March to the Sea. He destroyed many homes and cities along the way, including the city of Atlanta. In December 1864, as Sherman was approaching Savannah, the city's mayor decided to surrender. Fortunately for the residents of the city, Sherman accepted his offer and took the city without bloodshed. While countless cities perished at the hand of Sherman, Savannah was spared.

Because of the wealth that cotton provided to plantation owners, they were able to build very high style homes in the city that contained similar luxuries as the fine homes in London and other cities of Europe. Yet Antebellum mansions were not the only impressive thing to come of out Savannah during the nineteenth century. The city's elite class began to grow during this era. During the nineteenth and early portion of the twentieth century, some of the city's elite would throw lavish parties that made a lasting impression on the city. Many current day tours suggest that these historic soirees would sometimes be much too large for the stately mansion and would flow out into the nearest square. During this expansion of the upper social class, and all the benefits and debauchery that came with that wealth, the city began to have a separate day and night culture, similar to what exists today. By day, citizens would be going about their business, but by night they would be hosting large functions. One of these socialites included William Gaston. He was considered to be "'the perfect host' [and] as the royal

entertainer, a 'regular fellow' as he would be called today, and lived in a stately old mansion at Broughton (downtown Savannah today). His hospitality was not exceeded even by the 'Four Hundred' of New York.[8] No guest list could be too long, and his hospitality was extended not only to his friends but to strangers also."[9] Samuel Pugh Hamilton was another Savannah socialite. His home, now the Hamilton-Turner Inn, was also a popular gathering spot for Savannah's elite. Hamilton's parties were so magnificent that they are still a topic of discussion on many tours throughout the city. This gained him the nickname "Lord of Lafayette Square."[10]

After the Civil War, the South faced difficult economic times. The war had not only taken many lives, but the agriculture industry began to struggle. Cotton began to fade as an industry. Because of this, Savannah started to move away from its agrarian past towards a more industrial future.

**The 20th Century**

The early to mid-twentieth century was a difficult time for the United States as a whole. World War I had taken the lives of countless young men, including many from Savannah. Unfortunately, things did not get much better in the following decades. The stock market crash of 1929 sent the United States into the Great Depression. According to author Preston Russell, "Real estate values declined; property extensively changed hands; business stagnated. The poorer population moved into the downtown area. The

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[8] Eva J. Barrington, "Bonaventure, Savannah's "Silent City"," *The Georgia Review* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1951): jstor.com.
[9] Ibid.
[10] "Historic Hamilton-Turner Inn," Hamilton-Turner Inn, http://www.visit-historic-savannah.com/hamilton-turner-inn.html.

once magnificent townhouses were cut up into apartments".[11] By 1939, the United States had entered its second World War. Amazingly, the war effort bolstered Savannah's weakened economy. Many of Savannah's citizens sought employment building ships for the war.[12] According to Preston Russell, "Shipbuilding was reestablished, employing fifteen thousand in making Liberty troop ships."[13] This allowed for the city and its citizens to stay afloat in an otherwise financially tumultuous time.

Nevertheless, there were some good things that came out of the tumultuous Great Depression Era and the decades following. One of these good things was the growing popularity of Southern literature. In fact, this was the time when a relatively new Southern literary genre gained popularity— Southern Gothic. This genre is defined as "a genre that arises from the area's often violent and traumatic history."[14] Southern Gothic literature focuses on "dreariness, dark obsession, the supernatural, wincing humor, sacrilege, perversion, drug addiction, alcoholism, and character deformity, both mental and physical."[15] This genre gets its name from "the Gothic literary movement of the 19th century, when romance novels were dressed up in dreary ambience and set in spooky castles and decrepit manors, shot through with excess, fear, and madness."[16] Savannah has its connections to this genre. It was the birthplace of Flannery O'Connor— one of

[11] Preston Russell and Barbara Hines, *Savannah: a history of her people since 1733* (Savannah, GA: Frederic C Beil, 1992). Pg. 161.
[12] Russell, 162-163.
[13] Russell, 163.
[14] Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow, The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[15] Jamie Kornegay, "The Evolution of Southern Gothic," The Huffington Post, April 02, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamie-kornegay/the-evolution-of-southern-gothic_b_6987510.html.
[16] Ibid.

Southern Gothic literature's most famous and important writers. Her work helped foster an interest in dark and eerie topics, an interest that can still be seen to this day.

The middle of the twentieth century may have been pleasant for some of Savannah's citizens, but indescribably difficult for others. While slavery had been abolished for nearly 100 years, racism was, and still is, a big problem in the South, including Savannah. While African Americans had been abused, mistreated, and discriminated against for centuries, the Civil Rights Era brought these issues to the forefront. For decades, individuals and groups alike fought for equal rights. Surprisingly "The Savannah movement had achieved the comprehensive racial desegregation of public and private facilities by October 1, 1963, eight months ahead of the federal civil rights legislation."[17] Despite desegregation, Institutionalized racism continued to thrive in federal policy, as well as culturally in the south, including Savannah.

In the following decades, Savannah maintained its 'Old South' aesthetic drawing upon its economically successful Antebellum history. However, there was a change in the early 1990s due to one of the most famous books to come out about the city: *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt. This Southern Gothic book, along with Clint Eastwood's film adaptation, not only reinforced the Antebellum history of the city, but pulled outs its eccentricities as well as putting Savannah back on the map economically. Savannah was no longer exclusively known for its connection to its Antebellum past; now there was a growing interest in its present.

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[17] Stephen Tuck, "A City Too Dignified to Hate: Civic Pride, Civil Rights, and Savannah in Comparative Perspective," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): www.jstor.org.

While the city does maintain its old world charm, it has continued to evolve. Savannah has also embraced its artistic side. The growth of the Savannah College of Art and Design has fostered an interest in local art and culture as well as conservation of the city's historic buildings. Pop culture has also brought Savannah into the mainstream. The introduction of famed local chef, Paula Deen, to the Food Network brought awareness to the broad public about Savannah's robust culinary scene. Savannah has seen a massive transformation over the past several decades due to growing interest in the city from people all over the world

## Savannah's Traditional Branded Image

"Savannah is a lovely, gentle, sad old city. You can walk through the shadowy, cobbled streets of the town on a Sunday morning and feel the atmosphere heavy with the burden of lost greatness and relaxed by quiet decay."[18]

Branding is incredibly important to cities. Not only does it influence outside perception, but it can affect the city's tourism industry and economic development. A city's image is carefully crafted to coax individuals to visit the city. City branding is defined as "the art of creating [an] image of a city in [people's minds] so that they are attracted towards it; the unique character of the city is what makes it different from the rest of the world."[19] In order for a city's branded image to be successful, it has to be unique.

While someone's personal brand is sculpted by their past experiences; a city's brand is created in a slightly different way. City brands are created by a combination of

[18] Mills Lane, *Savannah Revisited: History & Architecture* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1994) pg. 7.
[19] "Complete guide to City Branding | Place making," PlanningTank, September 10, 2017, https://planningtank.com/city-insight/city-branding.

tangible things, such as buildings and landscapes, past experiences, and a city's/ tourism industry's ability to market those things. A "well marketed place branding strateg[y] strengthens communities' sense of place; it creates a line between the communities, business and visitors… culture, people, innovation, ideas generated and experiences given by that place contribute towards its image."[20] Creating a successful branded image can be difficult. It requires "development and maintenance of positive image and identity using several elements such as names, signs, logos, designs, symbols, slogans, color, and packages. These elements are distilled from characteristics including, architecture, heritage, language, people, myths, legends, history, politics, culture, and values."[21]

Brands can also be created by blending different cultures. For example, the South's image has ties to its multicultural past— mostly the blending of European, African, Caribbean, and Native American cultures. Aspects of these cultures can be found in Southern vernacular, music, and cuisine. Louisiana's Cajun food is a good example of the blending of these cultures. This food was created by the fusion of African, European, and Native American recipes. These particular cultural traits fall into a category— intangible heritage. Things like recipes, music, stories, etc. are important to a culture's heritage, but unlike cultural artifacts, they cannot be physically handled. They are intangible.

Savannah has a unique branded image and cultural heritage that has been influenced by generations of experience. These experiences and events, both large and small, have created the city's distinctive image. For example, Savannah is frequently

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ana Maria. Munar, William C. Gartner, and Liping A. Cai, *Tourism branding; Communities in Action* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2009).

associated with the Antebellum South because of the city's connection to the Civil War and King Cotton. While this is a major contribution to the city's distinctive image, there are other factors that have helped to create Savannah's persona. The city has been a demographic melting pot from its beginning. These different cultures eventually came together to create what Savannah is today. For example, the Gullah and Geechee cultures have influenced many aspects of Savannah's image, such as the local low-country cuisine. Cultural fusion can also be seen throughout the city's architecture. For example, the Hamilton-Turner Inn is in the French inspired Second Empire style; this building also has some Italianate (Italian) features.[22] Savannah's past and its people have created an image that has made Savannah the popular destination that it is today.

For decades, the city of Savannah and its tourism industry had taken aspects of Savannah's past and created a branded image that reflects the city's history, or rather, portions of the city's history. The city has been branded as the ideal Antebellum destination— a place where visitors can be transported to the past, to the nineteenth-century. For example, in the 1960s, the Georgia Institute of Technology's Engineering Experiment Station created *A Tourist Development and Promotion Program for The City of Savannah.*[23] This report proposed some major changes to the city's branded image. The majority of the proposed changes focused on enhancing the city's Old South/Antebellum brand. The report suggested things such as, "Strategically [placing] cotton bales… and life-size manikins depicting activities on the lower levels, tunnels, and runways as they existed in the days of "King Cotton."… Display[ing] [Eli] Whitney's

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[22] "Historic Hamilton-Turner Inn," Hamilton-Turner Inn, http://www.visit-historic-savannah.com/hamilton-turner-inn.html.

[23] H.F. Griffies, *A Tourist Development and Promotion Program for The City of Savannah*, report, Engineering Experiment Station, Georgia Institute of Technology (1965).

cotton gin with pictorial presentations of the cotton industry before and after the gin, the life of Eli Whitney, etc."[24] While these suggestions were not put into practice, the city has since "capitalized"[25] on its Antebellum aesthetic. These aspects can be seen across the city, from the countless monuments scattered throughout the downtown area, to the Cotton Exchange Building that looms over Bay Street. Savannah has embraced the Old South aesthetic and it has become a crucial part of its branded image.

### Preservation Effort

Historic preservation has been a thriving industry in Savannah for decades. Individuals and companies alike have worked tirelessly to preserve various aspects of the city— mainly the architecture and history. This was not always the case. As previously mentioned, many of the beautiful homes and stately mansions were converted into boarding houses and multifamily dwellings during the Great Depression. Over time, due to lack of funds, many of these homes fell into disrepair and risked demolition. Fortunately, there were individuals who saw the potential in these once beautiful homes.

In 1955, Anna Colquitt Hunter started the historic preservation movement in Savannah and founded the Historic Savannah Foundation. Colquitt was instrumental in the restoration and preservation of the now famous Davenport House.[26] This encouraged a preservation movement in the city that can still be seen to this day. This preservation movement, a small industry itself, has kept one of the biggest industries in the city alive— the tourism industry. Without preservation, there would be no history to preserve. Without this history and these historic buildings, Savannah would not have the bustling

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[24] Ibid, 17.
[25] Ibid, i.
[26] Russell, 180.

tourism industry that it has today. Currently, the Historic Savannah Foundation continues

to follow in Colquitt's footsteps by preserving Savannah's architectural history and

consequently preserving the city's tourism industry.

## Interpretation

According to *Interpreting our Heritage*, interpretation can be defined as "an

educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of

original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to

communicate factual information… 'an attempt to reveal the truths that lie behind the

appearances.'".[27] The author of that book, Freeman Tilden, is considered the father of

modern site interpretation. He came up with six principles of interpretation[28]:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

**Methods of Interpretation**

After content has been interpreted, interpreters and tour guides present that

information to the public. This information can be presented in a number of ways—

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[27] Freeman Tilden, R. Bruce Craig, and Russell E. Dickenson, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007) pg. 163.
[28] Tilden, 34-35.

signs, brochures, apps, reenactments, tours, and through many other creative mediums. Each medium has benefits and setbacks. For example, signs are typically permanent fixtures that can teach the public about a specific topic. However, signs only offer limited information. Brochures have similar benefits and setbacks. Tours are a common way to present information to the public. These tours are beneficial because they allow the interpreter to better explain concepts and ideas. Interpretation is at the core of tourism; tourism is essentially interpretation in motion.

**Positives and Negatives of Interpretation as a Whole**

As with any form of interpretation, there is a risk for story corruption. Irresponsible interpreters may embellish on certain stories or sometimes make them up entirely. This could have lasting effects. If an embellished story is constantly repeated, it may overtake the facts. The real story may get pushed out for a more appealing narrative. These changes could be reflected in the history books, as well as affect the way society views a city. However, some of these stories, though they may be fiction, are still important to the city's image. These stories may not be historically accurate or completely fiction, but they are important to the city's branded image. These legends have been part of Savannah's culture for decades, if not centuries.

<center>**Tourism**</center>

Tourism is defined as "the practice of traveling for recreation".[29] Individuals and families alike will oftentimes use their vacations as an opportunity to visit and learn about a new location. Tours allow for the public to learn about a specific topic in an

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[29] "Tourism," Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tourism.

entertaining fashion. There are countless tour genres, such as history tours, food tours, nature tours, and ghost tours. One of the more popular genres is heritage tourism

Heritage tourism is defined as "travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past".[30] While there are many reasons why a person could be attracted to heritage tourism, a common reason is that individuals want to find a connection to themselves. Tiya Miles said, "Visitors engage in heritage tourism to explore and reinforce their personal sense of identity as individuals and as members of cultural, social, and political affinity groups."[31]

**Dark Tourism**

In "Goat Bones in the Basement: A Case of Race, Gender and Haunting in Old Savannah", Tiya Miles defined dark tourism "As a form of touristic entertainment [that] highlights violent and morbid subject matter by promoting visitation to sites of torture, suffering, murder, and death. Sites related to the afterlife and the undead are prominent on dark tourism itineraries, as well as ghosts, zombies and vampires, entities characterized by their unnatural relationship to death."[32] Dark tourism is a form of site interpretation that focuses on the more morbid and eerier side of history. This type of interpretation will sometimes incorporate supernatural elements to create a more entertaining and theatrical presentation. Dark tourism uncovers the less pleasant, sometimes more realistic, portions of history that may get sugarcoated by history books. These stories are oftentimes unpleasant or scary, but these frightening stories can help the

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[30] "What is Heritage Tourism?" CulturalHeritageTourism.org, April 29, 2011, http://culturalheritagetourism.org/what-is-heritage-tourism/.

[31] Tiya Miles, "Goat Bones in the Basement: A Case of Race, Gender and Haunting in Old Savannah," *South Carolina Review* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 25-36, 25.

[32] Ibid, 25.

public to understand that history was difficult, hard and sometimes scary. Dark tourism deromanticizes history.

Traditional tours tend to focus on larger events and historically significant people, while dark tourism is inclusive by infusing their tours with average people in history. For example, Gracie Watson was an average little girl during the late nineteenth century, but now is the subject of one of the most famous ghost stories in Savannah. Gracie lived in the old Pulaski Hotel with her parents who managed the hotel. Unfortunately, she died of nephritis[33] at the age of six. After her death, her father hired famed sculptor John Walz to carve a life-size statue of little Gracie.[34] This monument remains in Bonaventure Cemetery to this day and is one of the most popular gravesites to visit in all of the city. Gracie was a beloved member of the community, but not historically significant. She was not a famous general or actor, but her story resonated with Savannahians and tourists alike. Her story may not seem significant, but it has been incorporated into countless tours, even tours outside of the cemetery. Gracie's story gained popularity not because of her life, but because of her death. Her ghost story is one of the most commonly told stories in the area.

Ghost tourism falls under the genre of dark tourism because of its connection to death and in some cases tragedy. Ghost tours include so much more than supernatural experiences; they tell the history of the site, and the experiences of those who lived and died in those locations. Without ghost tourism, Gracie's story may have been lost forever. Ghost tourism preserves the stories of the average person. Though their lives may not

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[33] Ancestry (shoebox) *Savannah, Georgia, Cemetery and Burial Records, 1852-1939*, Gracie Watson Death Record, Ancestry.com.
[34] Vera A. Turner, *Remember Me: Within The Walls of Bonaventure Cemetery* (2012).

have been incredibly significant to local, state, or even national history, their deaths were important.

**Post Dark Event Evidence- Hauntings**

Post dark event experience, commonly referred to as "evidence", is what sets the sub-genre of ghost tourism apart from other types of tourism. These experiences include testimonials from guides and former patrons to enhance the experience of their guests. These testimonials include otherworldly or supernatural events. For example, a guide may give their own personal experience with a ghost or ghoul.

Some house museums will offer traditional tours during the day and ghost tours during the evening. For example, if a patron were to tour the Juliette Gordon-Lowe house during the day they would learn about the history of the founder of the Girl Scouts and her family. However, during a ghost tour, a patron would hear spooky stories in addition to the daytime content. Guides may talk about a death that occurred in a room, but the post dark event experiences are typically the recurring supernatural events that have happened since that death, such as a haunting. These post dark-event supernatural experiences are typically added to the end of the stories to make patrons believe that they could see a ghost. Guides will sometimes have photographic or auditory "evidence" that these ghosts exist to back up their stories.

**Information About Dark Tourism and Its Role in Representing Cultures**

Similar to traditional tourism, dark tourism can be used to interpret history and culture. Over the past few decades, the dark tourism industry has been infused with Savannah's culture—it has become a subculture within itself. Ghost tours can be a great medium for educating the public. Because these tours focus on darker topics, they tend to

include groups and individuals who may have otherwise been lost in history. While the subject of slavery is an incredibly sensitive topic, it is important that there is representation for those who may have had relatives who were enslaved. Many traditional tours in Savannah and throughout the South tend to ignore the topic of slavery. Those who do mention the topic tend to sugarcoat the issue. They will oftentimes refer to the enslaved as "servants". One positive aspect of dark tourism is that these topics are not sugarcoated. Guides will openly talk about real topics associated with slavery, like the abuse and mistreatment of generations of African Americans. This can create a dialogue about slavery and allow people to understand that this portion of history was horrific and not a pleasant Antebellum paradise.  While some guides can be insensitive about this and other sensitive topics, there are guides who are respectful. While it may be difficult to interpret these topics in an appropriate manner, if done correctly, it could positively affect Savannah and the South as a whole.

These stories can also introduce aspects of cultures to the general public. For example, some tours may talk about the introduction to voodoo, hoodoo, and mysticism into the city. This is a popular topic associated with the now famous Mercer-Williams House. Visitors not only get to learn about the grisly deaths that occurred on the property, but they also get to learn about Savannah's connection to Voodoo. Dark tourism can be beneficial if done correctly and can be quite educational. They can educate the public about lesser-known events, cultures, and people; they can demonstrate that events in history were not always as pleasant as previously thought. They can also de-romanticize individuals who may have been previously idolized.

**Negative Aspects of Dark Tourism**

"While heritage tourism can be a positive and reaffirming experience for visitors, it can also privilege certain social identities while marginalizing others, and hence reinforce preexisting social and cultural divisions along the lines of race, class and gender."[35]

There are some potentially negative aspects of dark tourism. Some feel that the industry exploits sensitive topics for personal gain. There is some validity to this argument. Dark tourism does focus on the uncomfortable side of history. This includes issues such as slavery, murder, abuse, rape, and mental illness. The majority of Savannah's tours focus on murder and death, although there are tours that venture into more sensitive topics. For example, tours at the Sorrel-Weed House tend to manipulate the narrative to take advantage of the topic of slavery. Their story states that Francis Sorrel, a wealthy merchant, was having an adulterous relationship with an enslaved girl named Molly. When Francis' wife Matilda found out about the affair, she threw herself off of a balcony in a fit of hysteria. This is discussed at length in Tiya Miles' "Goat Bones in the Basement", as well as *Tales from the Dark South.* There are multiple problems with the Sorrel-Weed narrative. Although listeners are presented with a decent history of Savannah and the Sorrels, much of the story does not appear to be accurate. Nor is it respectful of the sensitive areas of the story. The tour does appear to exploit the topic of slavery. According to Miles, "Someone had concocted [Molly's] story of racial

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[35] Tiya Miles, "Goat Bones in the Basement: A Case of Race, Gender and Haunting in Old Savannah," *South Carolina Review* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 25-36, 28.

and sexual exploitation as a titillating tourist attraction."[36] Molly's character reinforces negative racial and sexual stereotypes. Stories like this can and oftentimes do hurt the history of an area, as well as contribute to racial stereotypes.

There is another sensitive topic that Miles did not discuss, but is a serious issue in the Sorrel-Weed narrative, as well as countless other tours throughout Savannah and the world— mental illness. Matilda Sorrel's story in the Sorrel-Weed murder/suicide narrative is an example of interpreters taking advantage of a person's struggle with mental illness. The story focuses on her severe depression, making her a one-dimensional character. She is only known for her family's wealth and her mental illness/suicide. The Sorrel-Weed House is just one of many offenders in the area of misrepresenting history.

These stories are frequently the topic of many of the ghost stories presented throughout the city. Guides frequently use these tragic events to create an eerie atmosphere. They can also use these events to create new characters and experiences- ghosts and paranormal events. Guides will sometimes unknowingly present these mentally ill characters in history as dangerous and vengeful, just like their ghost alter egos. They present the idea that these mentally ill characters were dangerous in life and thus in death. This type of presentation can be dangerous for a multitude of reasons. Like with other sensitive topics, these stories can reinforce stereotypes about the mentally ill. It can also create a false narrative, as well as affect a visitor's experience.

The traditional tourism industry is also a culprit of using these darker subjects to their advantage, although it may not be as apparent or frequent. Typically, these dark

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[36] Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 2015) pg. 26.

topics are hidden deep within the narrative. Though the main focus may be on the history of the area, building, or site, these darker topics may be hidden within. Sometimes it is necessary for these interpreters to mention these topics due to the topic's significance to the area. For example, the daytime tour at the Mercer-Williams house is very careful to not specifically mention the most famous murder in Savannah's history— the same murder that occurred inside Jim William's office. However, there is no way to completely disregard the topic. As visitors enter the room they can see props and memorabilia from the film adaptation of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (this movie focused on the real life murder of Danny Hansford). Once visitors see these props they are immediately reminded that someone was murdered in that room.

<div align="center">**Evolution of Tourism in Savannah**</div>

**Early Tourism**

Savannah has a long history of tourism. It is unclear if tourism existed in the colonial era, though it was not as likely due to the recent settlement of the area. The area may not have been well known enough to draw visitors. While locals may have vacationed in or around the city, there would not have been an overabundance of attractions during this time. Additionally, the vast majority of the buildings and structures in the area were not constructed until much later. The architecture and history would not have been a reason to visit the area.

However, there are records showing that there was a tourism industry in Savannah as far back as the Victorian Era. In the 1869 book *Historical Record of the City of Savannah*, F.D Lee wrote about the popularity of certain sites in the area. He said,

Savannah is fortunate in her suburban relations. Bethesda, Thunderbolt, White Bluff, Bonaventure, and Jasper Springs, all of easy access from the city, present attractions to the tourist that amply repay a visit. Independent of their historical associations, their intrinsic beauty is their best commendation.[37]

These destinations were located outside of the city. This is a stark contrast to modern tourism in Savannah, which focuses on locations within the many historic districts in and around the downtown area. In 1869, visitors, as well as residents of Savannah would travel to various sites surrounding the city for leisure. Bonaventure Cemetery was one of those destinations. This would have been a popular area to visit because of its prime location on the banks of the Wilmington River. It would have also been popular due to the Victorian fascination with death culture.[38]

**20th Century**

The 20th century was when Savannah's tourism industry began to grow. Unfortunately, there is not too much information regarding the early half of that century. There are a few publications that could be a good representation of the tourism industry and its trends during that era. *Quaint Old Savannah*[39] is one of these publications. This small booklet highlights the various attractions that the city had to offer. The booklet does not list a date when it was published, but the content suggests that it was published after WWI. During that era, the most popular attractions included Savannah's historic squares, old homes of historic significance, and Bonaventure Cemetery.[40]

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[37] F.D. Lee and J.L. Agnew, *Historical Record of the City of Savannah* (Savannah, GA: Morning News Steam-Power Press, 1869) pg. 197.

[38] D. Lyn Hunter, "A Victorian Obsession With Death," The Berkeleyan, April 5, 2000, http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2000/04/05/death.html.

[39] *Quaint old Savannah* (Savannah, GA: Tulias Novelty Shop).

[40] Ibid.

In 1965, the Georgia Institute of Technology's Engineering Experiment Station created *A Tourist Development and Promotion Program for The City of Savannah.* This report was created to "[stimulate] the development and promotion of Savannah's tourist industry in order to partially offset the anticipated economic impact of the closing of Hunter Air Force Base."[41] The report dissected the tourism industry in the area and made recommendations for the industry's development. It states:

> Savannah is frequently referred to as the 'country's best kept secret.' As one local resident states, "Savannah is a combination of Jamestown, Yorktown, and Williamsburg." But to cite a businessman on his first trip to Savannah, "Savannah has not capitalized on her tourist potential even though she has more historical assets than I have seen in any city along the east coast." In other words, the potential for Savannah's tourist industry appears to be limited only by the community's willingness to make the necessary investment of time, money, and united effort. The purpose of this report is to recommend a unified plan for capitalizing on Savannah's tourist potential.[42]

Prior to the 1960s, the city's tourism industry was not as refined as it is today. In fact, it was underdeveloped. The city had "not capitalized on her tourist potential".[43] This report marked an era of change for the city. The city recognized the potential of their tourism industry and that it needed to be cultivated in order to succeed. The report suggested many successful tools and techniques that have since been implemented. For instance, the report suggested that Savannah should create a "Tourist Development Commission".[44] While it goes by a different name today, The Tourism Management & Ambassadorship

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[41] H.F. Griffies, *A Tourist Development and Promotion Program for The City of Savannah*, report, Engineering Experiment Station, Georgia Institute of Technology (1965) pg. i.
[42] Ibid, 1.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid, ii.

Department, the city did create an organization to regulate the tourism industry in Savannah, though it took several decades for such an entity to be created. Currently there are two organizations that regulate the industry: the previously mentioned Tourism Management & Ambassadorship Department and The Tourism Leadership Council.

Like in previous generations, Savannah's old-world charm appeared to be the main attraction, though as the night would fall, the city would transform into something completely different. The night time in Savannah, in stark contrast to the day, was reserved for the more sinful activities. People would retreat to the nearest bar to indulge in some spirits. Though the sun had set, the city would still be wide awake.

In 1984, Margaret Wayt DeBolt published one of the first books about Savannah ghost stories; *Savannah Spectres and Other Strange Tales* is considered to be at the heart of the ghost tourism industry in the city.

Jack Richards, then an employee for the Historic Savannah Foundation, became fascinated with DeBolt's book and Savannah's local legends. In the mid-late 1980s, the Foundation asked him to create a Halloween ghost tour[45]— The Haunted House Tour. This fundraiser tour was a success. After seeing the popularity of the tour, Richards wanted to offer ghost tours regularly and by the end of the 1980s, he had created the first ghost tourism company in the city of Savannah— Ghost Walk Ghost Talks.[46]

According to multiple tour guides, Savannah's tourism industry began to boom after the release of the 1997 movie, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, as adapted from the 1994 book by John Berendt. Both the book and movie adaptation reignited the

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[45] Author's interview with Jack Richards, April 19, 2017.
[46] "About Ghost Talk Ghost Walk," Ghost Talk Ghost Walk, http://ghosttalkghostwalk.com/about.html.

Figure 1. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* Film (1997). http://blog.southernoutdoorcinema.com/filmed-in-georgia-midnight-in-the-garden-of-good-and-evil

Southern Gothic flame. Visitors from across the world were compelled to visit the city to see the infamous Mercer-Williams house, the site where Danny Hansford was murdered in 1981. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* created a renewed interest in Southern Gothic culture. It even helped propel the ghost tourism industry in Savannah forward. Prior to the mid-1990s, the majority of Savannah's tourism industry focused on the city's architecture and Antebellum charm. Nevertheless, the allure of the movie changed that. Visitors craved the romance of the Deep South, but also yearned for its dirty, dark, and eerie underbelly. Savannah's history— its dark past provided guests with that gritty experience. The book, as well as the movie, helped the world to see what Savannah has to offer.

Savannah's ghost tourism industry began to pick up momentum in the early 1990s when Shannon Scott created one of the original and most popular ghost tours in Savannah. During this time, he founded the 6th Sense Tours Company, one of the oldest and most well-respected dark tourism companies in Savannah.[47] With the success of both Scott and Richards' tours, other companies began creating their own ghost tours, taking

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[47] "Sixth Sense World Tours: A Jones Street Production," 6th Sense World, https://6thsenseworld.com/sixth-sense-world.

advantage of Savannah's scary past. Within a decade the ghost tourism industry became well-established and in 2002 Savannah was awarded "America's Most Haunted City Award"[48] by the American Institute of Parapsychology.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the whole dynamic of the industry began to change. Savannah was no longer just a daytime retreat, but a place that could be enjoyed at all hours of the day. Visitors could spend their evenings strolling down River Street, enjoying the City's lax open container laws or they could tour one of the city's countless haunted hotspots.

<div align="center">

**Tourism Today**

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**Tour Guide Regulation**

Until 2015, the city of Savannah required certification for its tour guides. Each guide would have to study a tour guide handbook and be thoroughly tested before they could work in the field. This helped to create uniformity between the tours and ensured that the public would receive consistent and accurate information. Unfortunately, the city removed this requirement as a result of a lawsuit. According to Claire Sandow[49] at the Tourism Leadership Council, Savannah amended the ordinance requiring guides to receive certification before starting work as a guide, to allow anyone to educate the community. In 2015, someone sued the City of Savannah because of the requirement, as they believed that it encroached upon their first amendment rights. Unfortunately, due to this lawsuit, the City decided to do away with the tour guide training. However, the

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[48] "America's Most Haunted City Tour | Savannah Ghosts & Paranormal," 6th Sense World, https://6thsenseworld.com/tours/americas-most-haunted-city.
[49] Author's interview with Claire Sandow, Tourism Leadership Council, April 19, 2017.

Tourism Leader Council does offer tour guide certification to provide companies with a sense of legitimacy if they choose to require their guides to get certified.

**Breadth of Tours Available**

The industry currently offers tourism experiences for almost every interest. History buffs have an array of history-based tours at their disposal in the city and surrounds. These tours typically include information about early colonial history through the Civil War era. History is just one of many tour genres available.

Food tours are also a popular activity. Celebrity chef Paula Deen has a restaurant in the downtown historic district that has become a popular tourist destination. James Oglethorpe was unsuccessful at keeping Savannah an alcohol-free city. The City's lax open container laws have made the area popular for nighttime activities involving another type of spirit— liquor. Alcohol has also been incorporated into the tourism industry. Many companies offer after hours pub crawls. Aside from alcohol-themed tours, many companies allow patrons to bring their adult beverages along for the ride.

Motorized tours are also becoming increasingly popular in the city. Not only do these tours allow patrons to see more of the city, but it makes it easier for visitors with disabilities to experience the sites that are not easily accessible.

Architecture tours are similar to the history tours, but tend to focus on the buildings rather than just its former inhabitants. Savannah is a city of diverse architecture, featuring everything from Federal style buildings, like the Pirate House, to grand Greek Revivals, like the Sorrel-Weed House. This concentration of diverse buildings in one area draws people to the city. As previously stated, Savannah was spared from the wrath of Sherman's March to the Sea and was not destroyed like other cities in the state. This,

coupled with various preservation efforts, have kept the downtown area historically and architecturally preserved.

Dark tourism is another subgenre that has become increasingly popular over the past three decades in Savannah. These tours are a popular nighttime activity. They provide patrons with an alternative to the typical after hours activities and are typically more family-friendly. Ghost tours are also an alternative to traditional history tours. These tours present patrons with typically the same content, but in a more theatrical and entertaining medium. According to internet research, there are currently at least twenty-nine ghost tourism companies within the city of Savannah. Over twenty-seven percent of the city's tourism companies are ghost tourism companies.[50]

### Summary

The background research gleaned a plethora of useful information. The history of Savannah gave contextual information about the city. The information about site interpretation explained how history is interpreted and presented to the public. This also tied into tourism and the different genres within the tourism industry. The information about the evolution of Savannah's tourism industry not only demonstrated how the industry evolved into what it is today, but it reflected the city's perceived image throughout those years.

The background research indicates that Savannah and its branded image have been in a constant state of evolution from the beginning. While the overall aesthetic of the city appears to rely on Savannah's Antebellum past, there are more and more aspects

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[50] There are 106 tourism companies in Savannah (see the Marija Bumgarner footnote) and at least 29 of those companies are ghost tourism companies.

of the city's history that are coming to the forefront. Savannah has had a tourism industry since the Victorian era, albeit since the late 1990s it has grown into something massive. In the past, the 'Old South' persona has been the overall theme for most of these tours. However, over the past thirty or so years there has been a shift towards dark tourism. Individuals have become increasingly interested in Savannah's paranormal past. Ghost tourism has become a main attraction, a reason for people to visit the city.

Although this background research did provide a considerable amount of useful information, it was necessary to take this research a step further. Gaps in the research will be filled in by gathering information directly from current ghost tourism companies.

CHAPTER 3

GHOST TOUR COMPANY AND ORGANIZATION RESEARCH AND SURVEYS

Basic information about Savannah's tourism industry can be found online and in print. However, there are still many missing pieces of valuable information. For example, information about tour content and composition is not readily available. In order to fill in these gaps, it was necessary to conduct case studies.

This chapter focuses on research and surveys that were completed over the course of several months. The purpose of this two-part study was to collect specific information about ghost tourism companies and tourism organizations. This information would not only fill in the knowledge gaps, but it would be used to analyze the modern ghost tourism industry in Savannah. The analysis of this information would be used to answer some of the more difficult research questions posed in this thesis. For example, this information could be used to evaluate what kind of effect the ghost tourism industry is having on Savannah.

The research was broken into two separate portions. The first portion was a preliminary study intended to gather information about ghost tourism companies and their tours. Content was obtained by research and by physically attending several tours. The second portion of the study was more in-depth than the first portion. This portion of the study involved interviewing tourism companies and organizations. Two separate sets of interview questions were created for the tourism companies and the tourism

organizations because these two entities differ in purpose. From the two tasks, a plethora

of valuable information was gathered.

| Type of Tour Company | Number of Companies |
|---|---|
| Horse & Carriage | 5 |
| Motorized | 13 |
| Walking | 70 |
| Step-on Guide | 3 |
| Walking/Step-on Guide | 7 |
| Quadricycle | 2 |
| Segway/Bicycle | 4 |
| Motorized/Walking | 1 |
| Boat | 1 |
| | 106 |

Table 1. Number of tourism companies by type
Table created by Marija Bumgarner, Tourism
Coordinator for the Tourism Management &
Ambassadorship Department

**Case Study Identification**

The case study identification task was intended to gather basic information about ghost tourism companies and their tours. The most efficient way to gather this information was by physically attending various tours throughout the city. Currently,

there are 106[51] tours that are offered across Savannah, each varying in content and

purpose. While the specific number is unknown, many of these tours are ghost tours. The

first step in this process was choosing which tours to attend. While countless tours



Figure 2. Savannah Carriage Tour.
https://savannahcarriage.com/?page_id
=962

appeared in the initial search, it was necessary to sort through them to find the appropriate tours for this case study. I began the filtering process by looking at tour reviews on Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Google Reviews. The goal was to find the most popular ghost tours in Savannah, while also selecting tours with different presentation

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[51] Marija Bumgarner, "Tourism," e-mail message to author, April 19, 2017.

Figure 3. Walking Tour.
http://www.savannahghostshow.com

styles (i.e. Trolley tours, walking tours, haunted house tours, etc.). It was necessary to choose reputable touring companies; selecting reputable companies allowed for a better analysis of the companies and industry as a whole. A company was deemed reputable[52] if they had been in business for several years and if they had good reviews from past customers. Reviews are a good way to gauge customer satisfaction. Typically, guests will post comments about their experience within a few hours after their tour. The experience and their opinions of the tour are typically fresh in their minds during the commenting process. Company success and survival is a good indicator of their reputation. A problem with online reviews is that some companies will try to increase



Figure 4. Quadricycle Tour.
http://savannahnow.com/news/2016-07-
04/savannah-quadricycle-tours-facing-alcohol-
ban-noise-rules

their ratings on these websites by paying individuals and companies to give them a 5-star rating. Fortunately, it is relatively easy to catch these false ratings. These ratings are typically given without comments or usernames. These false ratings were somewhat of a problem when initially

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[52] While Better Business Bureau reviews were considered, content on their website mostly focused on traditional tours. Additionally, the few ghost tours that were listed lacked comments and reviews on the BBB website.

Figure 5. Boat Tours.
https://savannahriverboat.com

choosing the tours. While some tours had 5-star ratings, the comments did not indicate that the guests enjoyed their time. By looking at the actual content of the comments, it was possible to see if the commenters actually attended the tour. If they did attend the tour, their experience was taken into consideration.

Eventually, after looking at the content of the comments, the more reputable tours were chosen.



Figure 6. Segway Tours.
http://www.10best.com/destinations/g
eorgia/savannah/attractions/tours-
and-excursions/



Figure 7. Trolley/Motorized Tours.
https://www.trolleytours.com/savan
nah#map-section

Out of the 106[53] tourism companies in the Savannah metropolitan area, only a few were selected as samples for the study. The ghost tourism companies/ tours chosen were: Blue Orb Tours, Sorrel-Weed House Tours, Sixth Sense World Tours (both the ghost tour and daytime cemetery tour), Old Town Trolley Ghosts and Gravestones Tour, and

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[53] Ibid.

Wicked Walks Savannah (digital touring app). Not only were these companies reputable, but they represent different tour presentation styles.

| Tours | Company | Specific Tour Title | Cost | Theme | Guide | Times Offered | Spookiness | Transit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blue Orb | Blue Orb Tours | Uncensored Zombies Tour | $30 | History/Ghost | Joseph | Night | 👻👻👻👻 👻👻👻👻 | Walking |
| Sixth Sense | 6th Sense World® - A Jones Street Productions | Sixth Sense Savannah Ghost Tour — Adults Only | $28 | History/Ghost | Alyssa Terrell | Evening/night | 👻👻👻👻 👻👻👻 | Walking |
| Trolley | Trusted Tours & Attractions, LLC | Ghosts and Gravestones Tour of Savannah- ADULTS ONLY | $27.45 | History/Ghost | Madam Mazara | Evening/night | 👻👻👻👻 👻 | Trolley/ Some Walking |
| Digital Walking Tour | Rothrock Group, LLC | Wicked Walks: Savannah | $1.99 | Digital Ghost/ History | Self-Guided | Anytime | 👻👻👻👻 👻 | Walk/Drive/Sit |
| Sorrel-Weed House Day | Sorrel-Weed House | Savannah Historic Home Tours | $10 | History/Ghost (mostly history) | Mari | Daytime | 👻👻👻👻 👻 | Walking |
| Sorrel-Weed House Night | Sorrel-Weed House | Ghost Hunters House and Walking Tour — All Ages Tour | $28 | History/Ghost (mostly ghost) | Michael AKA Grim | Night | 👻👻👻👻 👻👻👻👻 👻 | Walking |
| Cemetery - Bonaventure | 6th Sense World® - A Jones Street Productions | Bonaventure Cemetery Tours | $23 | History | Shannon Scott | Daytime | 👻 | Walking |

Table 2. List of tours attended and their information
Table created by author

## Tour Company and Organization Surveys

The second portion of the study— surveys— was intended to answer more in depth questions. While the research gathered useful information, there were still questions that remained unanswered. These questions were more specific to the companies and the industry as a whole.

In the surveys, tourism companies and organizations were asked a series of questions that would fill in gaps in the research. The tourism companies were asked questions specifically about their businesses and how they function. The organizations were asked questions about the technical side of the industry.

**Ghost Tour Company Survey Questions**

1.  **When did the company start offering tours and how has it grown?**

This information is important to the evolution of Savannah's tourism industry. It is possible to track the ghost tourism industry's progression by learning when these companies first started offering ghost tours.

2.  **Does the City of Savannah have any specific requirements for touring companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?**

This information is important because it shows each company's understanding of city rules and regulations. This question could also glean information about the other ways the city might influence the ghost tourism industry.

3.  **Do the guides have to have specific training or permits?**

This information is important because it could give some credibility to these companies. If their guides are vigorously trained or if they have to be certified, it indicates that the companies care about the content of their tours.

4.  **How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content for the tours and find sources?**

This information is incredibly important. While it is interesting to see why a company chose a specific story, it is more interesting to see where they got their information. These sources add a level of legitimacy to the tours because sources tend to glean accuracy.

**1.   Why did the City stop requiring companies/ guides to get certified?**

Until 2015, the city required their guides to get permits. The reason behind this change

was unknown. Requiring a permit could have been a form of quality control. It was

necessary to see why the city would remove a requirement that could help keep tour

quality high.

**2.      Do companies have special rules/regulations that they have to follow?**

This information is important because it shows how the industry is regulated.

**3.      What are the most popular types of tours available?**

This question was important because it could demonstrate that ghost tours are becoming

increasingly popular.

   The tourism company surveys were more company specific. These questions were

used to gain information about different ghost tourism companies, their tours, and their

place in Savannah's tourism industry. Each company was asked an identical set of

questions to maintain consistency in the answers. The tourism organization surveys

required less questions because of the abundance of information available through online

resources and other publications. These questions were crucial in understanding how the

tourism industry functions in Savannah.

**Tour Assessment and Survey Responses**

   Companies and their tours were chosen because of their content, reviews, and

reputation. Listed below are descriptions of the companies/tours attended, the author's

experiences during the tours, and their responses to the survey questions. The tourism

organization survey responses follow that.

**Digital Walking Tour (solo-walk)**

As technology advances, so does society. There are apps for almost everything, including tourism. There are several ghost tour apps for various locations. While there were plenty of tourism apps to choose from, Wicked Walks Savannah appeared to be the most appropriate for this study. Unlike several of the other apps, Wicked Walks had fantastic reviews. The tour cost approximately $2, which is just a fraction of the cost of other tours in the area. It features a digital map and a list of thirteen popular haunts in downtown Savannah. This tour stands out from other Savannah ghost tours because of its accessibility.  The app allows for visitors to visit sites at their own pace. While the app is intended to be used as a walking tour, it can also be used as a driving tour. With the press of a button, the app will narrate each stop. Also, this tour is unique because it allows for people to visit these haunted locations without even traveling to Savannah. Once downloaded, people can click on a link and get a fully narrated tour from the comfort of their own home.

**Experience:**

This tour was both educational and entertaining. For the purpose of time, I decided to drive the route and to listen to the narrator in the car. Each stop provided an abundance of information about the history of the site, as well as its haunted past.

**Questions:**

**When did the company start and how has it grown?**

*"2010"*[54] Since the beginning the company has released 12 touring apps (both traditional and ghost tours).

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[54] Diane Rothrock, "RE: Savannah Tour," e-mail message to author, June 16, 2017.

**Does City of Savannah have any control/requirements of tour companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?**

Because of the digital nature of this app, no regulations have been placed on it.

**Do the guides have to have specific training or permits?**

There are no guides.

**How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content and sources for the tours?**

*"The key for me is to make the tours walkable, in safe, historic areas. Unfortunately, that eliminates many of the best stories! Sometimes I'll include a lesser-known story, and maybe expand on a historical element (because that's my favorite part), to make the tours longer."*[55]

*"Pretty much all internet research. Then I map the path, visit, take photos, write the stories, record and code it. One man shop here, kind of a hobby for me."*[56]

**Blue Orb**

The Blue Orb ghost tourism company is one of the more reputable and popular ghost tourism companies in Savannah. This company exclusively offers ghost tours. While most of their content is similar to other tours in the area, their presentation is unique. The guides are more theatrical and present each bit of content as fact, never breaking character. This company also employs technology into their tours. During each stop guides will not only verbally tell the story, but they also present "evidence" in the form of videos, images, and sound clips.

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

**Experience:**

Our tour was led by a SCAD student named Joseph. He was very theatrical in his language and movements. He led us through some of the more popular haunts in the city. One of our first stops was Madison Square, the location of the Sorrel-Weed House and the haunted Gryphon Building. During this time, he played a sound clip from a ghost hunting show that was filmed in the Sorrel-Weed House in 2005. From there we made our way to one of the most popular squares in the city— Monterey Square. It was here that our guide told us about the infamous Mercer-Williams House. According to our guide, this house had a past filled with debauchery and death. He claimed that prior to Jim William's occupation of the house, countless murders occurred on the property. Voodoo was also a big topic of discussion during this time, especially when he spoke about the *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Eventually we moved on to the next stop— Calhoun Square. There our guide spoke about the legend of the hag in front of the infamous hag house. This was not the only topic discussed during this stop. Our guide spoke at length about Calhoun Square's past with slavery. According to our guide, the square once functioned as a cemetery for the enslaved. The tour continued on and ended in front of Colonial Park Cemetery where our guide spoke about the cemetery's connection to the yellow fever epidemic.

**Questions:**

**When did the company start and how has it grown?**

*"2001 and uh, as far as growing, we do more tours and have more tour guides."*[57]

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[57] Ava, "Blue Orb Tour," telephone interview by author, April 13, 2017.

**Does City of Savannah have any control/requirements of tour companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?**

They do not, *"but they do set limits on like how many people we can take per tour and things like that."*[58]

**Do the guides have to have specific training or permits?**

*"No specific training as far as we're concerned because we will train them on our stories and our routes… I believe that they used to have a license to be a tour guide, but you don't anymore."*[59]

**How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content and sources for the tours?**

*"I think some of them are probably just- immediately you recognize that [some stories] are more interesting than the other ones. Something about the stories has a hook to it that's going to be more interesting than others. And I think some of them for us we figured out as we went along, which stories people seem to comment on more… When you hear a good story that catches you, you pretty much know it… And then once, you know, the stories, then comes the research. Mostly spending time online or back in the research department, the library… especially our owner Tobias, who is responsible for our content, spends hours in public libraries, back in their research rooms."*[60]

**Sixth Sense World Tours- Group Walking Tour and Cemetery Tour**

The Sixth Sense World company is one of the oldest ghost tourism companies in Savannah. In addition to offering multiple ghost tours, the company also offers a daytime

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

cemetery tour. Their founder, Shannon Scott, is considered to be the "Godfather of Ghosts".[61] In fact, he was the recipient of the American Institute of Parapsychology's "America's Most Haunted City Award".[62]

**Experience:**

The ghost tour began on a secluded street corner. Our guide, Alyssa, approached the group and introduced herself. She was one of the veteran guides and she knew the city incredibly well. This seemingly short tour took the group from haunted house to haunted house and was incredibly informative. Our guide did not shy away from more controversial topics. She talked about slavery, abuse, and other grisly topics with sensitivity and respect. While most of the content of her tour matched other tours, she did not rely on "evidence" to back up her stories. She recognized and admitted that while many of these stories have a basis in reality, portions of these stories are legends. She spoke about the "evidence" that is frequently circulated among various tours and how these things are not real. This portion of the tour gave a sense of legitimacy to her tour. While the legends may not be completely factual, they do play an important role in the history of Savannah.

The Sixth Sense company also offers a daytime cemetery tour at Bonaventure Cemetery. Unfortunately, this tour was not a ghost tour, nor was it spooky. They did not focus on the various spirits that allegedly haunt the grounds. Instead, the tour focused on the lives of the interred and their role in the history of Savannah. The guide, Shannon

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[61] "The Paranormalist," Shannon Scott Voice. Guide. Storyist. Blog, May 21, 2014, http://www.shannonscott.com/tours-2/the-paranormalist/.

[62] "America's Most Haunted City Tour | Savannah Ghosts & Paranormal," Sixth Sense World, http://6thsenseworld.com/tours/americas-most-haunted-city/.

Scott, presented every detail of each story as fact. He claimed that he had personally researched each story, spending countless hours in the archives of the Historical Society. The tour lasted approximately three hours and covered a large geographical area.

**Questions:**

**When did the company start and how has it grown?**

*"Well the founder of our company, um, he began... serving the public twenty-one years ago. So we are one of the oldest walking tour companies in Savannah... we started offering more- he started offering more a variety of tours in the early 90s... Yeah, so he's been doing... tours in Savannah for about 20-21 years now. Um, the ghost tours he began in the early 90s, it would be about 90'-91'."[63]*

**Does City of Savannah have any control/requirements of tour companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?**

*"Well unfortunately, not anymore..."[64]*

**Do the guides have to have specific training or permits?**

The company does require training. *"... someone sued the city [claiming that the permitting requirement violated their first amendment rights] and they won, so as of now, because of this freedom of speech, um, you do not have to take a tour guide test to become a tour guide... Our tour company, we have people who actually took that test... our tour guides have to be able to answer these questions. We test our tour guides; we train our tour guides because... they have to know the accuracy of it."[65]*

[63] Stacy Hill-Hutson, "Sixth Sense World Tour," telephone interview by author, April 13, 2017.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

**How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content and sources for the tours?**

*"People came to Shannon and he actually interviewed people. So the stories that you're hearing on our tour, many of them are his personal stories… but our stories… those stories had to be, you know, the history, had to be… validated. We had to go to the historical society… it's a lot of research…"*[66]

**Old Town Trolley Tour**

Old Town Trolley tours offers an array of themed tours throughout Savannah and other cities across the United States. One of their more popular tours is the Ghosts and Gravestones tour. This tour is different from many of the other tours because it not only allows patrons to see more attractions throughout the city, but the ride creates a more laid-back atmosphere. This tour was also marketed towards families, including children.

**Experience:**

This tour began on historic River Street and took the group through the streets of downtown Savannah. While many of Savannah's tours focus on the neighborhoods around Madison and Calhoun Square, the trolley tour extended well beyond this area. The transportation aspect of the tour was not the only unique portion of the tour. Most tours do not allow patrons to enter a home after dark, but this tour granted patrons after-hours access to two different locations- The Juliette Gordon-Lowe House and the Chandlery on River Street.

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[66] Ibid.

**Questions:**

**When did the company start and how has it grown?**

According to their website, Old Town Trolley Tours started offering tours in the early 1970s. This Key West based company would give their tours in a retrofitted bread truck and trailer until they bought their first set of trolleys in 1980. Since then, the company has expanded and now offers tours in 7 different cities (including Savannah).[67]

**Does City of Savannah have any control/requirements of tour companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?**

No they do not.

**Do the guides have to have specific training or permits?**

Unfortunately, the City removed the requirement for guides to get certified in 2015. It does appear that this company trains their guides, but do not require formal testing.[68]

**How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content and sources for the tours?**

This company did not respond to the survey, but it is likely that they chose the tours based off of popularity. Unfortunately, there is currently no information about their sources. However, it is known that this company works closely with the Historic Savannah Foundation.[69] It is likely that they assisted the company with research and content, although that has not been confirmed.

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[67] "Old Town Trolley Tours Company History," Old Town Trolley Tours, https://www.trolleytours.com/our-company.

[68] Marija Bumgarner, "Tourism," e-mail message to author, April 19, 2017.

[69] Coastal Books & Souvenirs, *The Essential Guide to Historic Savannah,* (2011), pg. 3.

**Sorrel-Weed House**

House tours are some of the most popular attractions in Savannah. It piques the interest of architecture enthusiasts, history buffs, as well as other members of the community. The Sorrel-Weed House is unique in that it functions as a traditional house museum by day and a haunted house by night. The architecture alone is enough to draw visitors. This stately Greek-Revival mansion overlooks Madison Square and is surrounded by live oaks and Spanish moss. The inside of this building is equally as astounding. Patrons enter the home through the basement. This dark and empty space is contrasted by the bright and colorful ground floor. Each room is filled with priceless artifacts and antique furniture. During the day guides will tell patrons about the story of Francis Sorrel, a wealthy merchant. Sorrel had many connections to powerful people, including Robert E. Lee, whom they claim spent some time in Sorrel's home.

**Experience:**

My first exposure to the house was during the daytime. The company offers a traditional tour during the day that focuses on the history and architecture of the house. Mari, our guide, led our group through the main house and carriage house. In each room she would point out unique architectural features and educate the group about the history of the Sorrel family. At the end of the tour, one of the patrons asked about the house's haunted history. Mari did not appear to be interested in this topic, however, she obliged. She told the group about the tragic murder/suicide that had occurred on the property.

My second exposure to the house was during a ghost tour. Like with the day tour, the ghost tour took our group through the main house and carriage house. Each room had its own eerie tale. A walking tour of the neighborhood followed. This portion of the tour

took us to Colonial Park Cemetery, Lafayette Square, and Madison Square. Each stop covered a new topic such as the yellow fever epidemic, the haunted Hamilton-Turner Inn, and the Siege of Savannah.

While I had previously attended both the daytime tour and the ghost tour, this was not my only exposure to the Sorrel-Weed House or its tours. During the summer of 2017, I was a ghost tour guide for the Sorrel-Weed House. Throughout this time, I was able to learn more about ghost tourism industry, as well as the Sorrel-Weed House tourism company.

**Questions:**

*When did the company start and how has it grown?*

The Sorrel-Weed House company has a long and complicated history. However, they started offering tours in 2005,[70] after the completion of major renovations.

*Does City of Savannah have any control/requirements of tour companies regarding accuracy of historic facts?*

The city of Savannah has no control over the accuracy of the content.

*Do the guides have to have specific training?*

Yes, the guides are required to study two different books. One book is *The Sorrels of Savannah* and it focuses on the history of the Sorrel family. The other book is *Savannah Folklore*. This book focuses on the many legends and ghost stories in

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[70] Nick Wood, "Sorrel Weed House History from 1838 to Today," Sorrel Weed House, June 12, 2016, https://sorrelweedhouse.com/historic-savannah-home-tour-history/.

Savannah. Guides are also required to shadow more experienced guides for several days prior to giving their own tours. One on one training with the manager is also required.[71]

*Do they have to get special permits?*

No they do not. They are, however, required to pass a background check.[72]

*How did they decide which stories to tell? How did they come up with content and sources for the tours?*

Former manager Nick Wood stated that much of the content for the house tour came from family letters. Conveniently, these letters have since been misplaced. It is likely that the company obtained their information for both the house and walking tours from various Savannah ghost books, like *Savannah Folklore*, and online resources. Wood also once stated that he was the one who came up with the stories for the tours. It is likely that he took pieces of history and crafted stories from factual information. Additionally, the neighborhood tour focuses on Colonial Park Cemetery, the Hamilton-Turner Inn, and Madison Square. Each of these locations are attached to popular ghost stories which were the obvious choice when selecting which stories to tell.

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[71] This information came from the author's personal experience training as a tour guide with the Sorrel-Weed House during the Summer 2017.
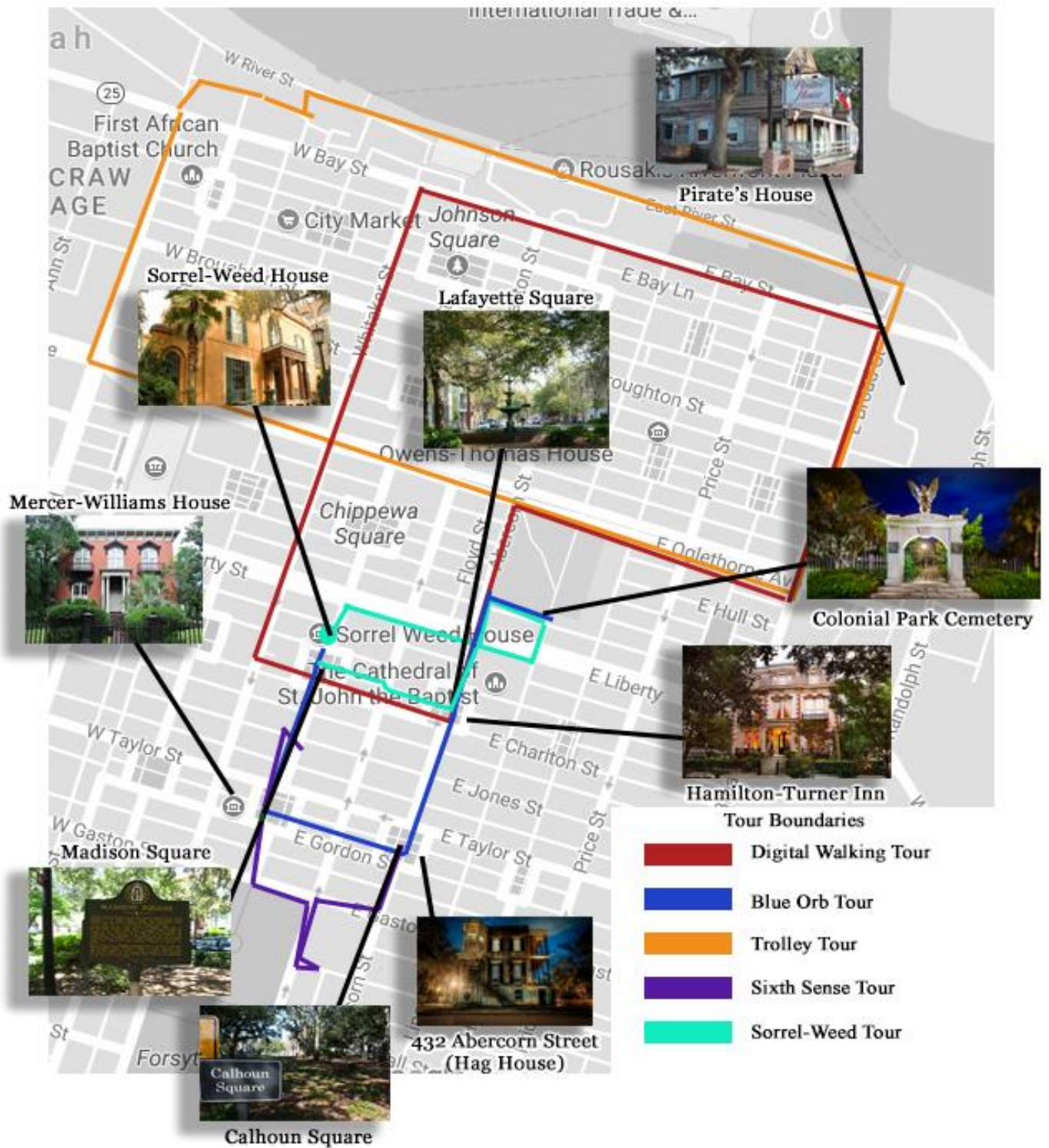[72] Ibid.

Figure 8. Tour Boundaries
Created from Author's Tour Notes and Google Maps

**Savannah Tourism Organization Survey Responses**

The content from the various tourism companies provided an abundance of information. While this information was incredibly useful, there were a few unanswered questions. In order to fill in the gaps, it was necessary to contact the two largest tourism organizations in the City of Savannah— the City of Savannah Tourism Management and Ambassadorship Department and the Tourism Leadership Council. Together, these organizations ensure that the city's tourism industry will continue to thrive. Both companies were asked an identical set of questions in order to gain a better understanding of the rules and regulations of Savannah's tourism industry.

**City of Savannah Tourism Management and Ambassadorship Department**
**Why did the City stop requiring companies/ guides to get certified?**

In an email from Marija Bumgarner of the City's Tourism and Ambassadorship Department, she said *"The Institute for Justice along with a group of Savannah tour guides filed a <u>federal lawsuit challenging the tour guide requirement</u> indicating that it is a violation of the 1st amendment right to free speech. The city's staff took a look at the tour guide ordinance and recommended several changes. The changes included eliminating the tour guide testing and permitting requirements which were approved by council on October 15, 2015."*[73] Savannah no longer requires their guides to become certified because of a lawsuit that claimed that the certification was a violation of their first amendment rights. However, guides have the option to obtain a voluntary certification through the Tourism Leadership Council.

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[73] Marija Bumgarner, "Tourism," e-mail message to author, April 19, 2017.

**Do companies have special rules/regulations that they have to follow?**

In Ms. Bumgarner's email, she stated that even though the City does not require guides to obtain certification, they do have certain requirements for tourism companies. The City is strict about requiring companies to register their guides. Their website states,

> *In 2015, City Council approved a series of revisions to the Tour Service for Hire Ordinance. Changes included eliminating permitting requirements like the tour guide test, background check, licensing fee and physical. In its place, tour service companies are required to obtain a business tax certificate and register their tour guides with the City. According to Section 6-1509, 'A tour service company shall register a tour guide with the city prior to the tour guide working as an employee or independent contractor of the tour service company. The tour service company shall provide to the City in person, by mail or on-line, on forms which may be provided by the tourism management and ambassadorship department, the name of the tour guide, and the tour service company name and contact information. It shall be voluntary for a tour service company to provide a photograph of the tour guide. Registration shall be had annually. There shall be no fee for registration.[74]*

These regulations are used to keep track of the various companies and guides throughout the city. The City does not regulate content for any tourism company.

*What are the most popular types of tours available?*

According to Ms. Bumgarner, there is no current information about the most popular types of tours in Savannah. However, she did provide a list of touring companies, sorted by type (see table 1).

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[74] *"Tour Guide Registration Process,"* Savannah, GA - Official Website - Tour Guide Registration Process, http://www.savannahga.gov/index.aspx?NID=1493.

**Tourism Leadership Council**

**Why did the city stop requiring companies/ guides to get certified?**

In a phone interview with the Tourism Leadership Council, Claire Sandow stated, *"Well the city stopped* [requiring tour guide permits] *and we took it up. It's a purely voluntary process. Now, um, but a lot of companies do it and require it of their employees. Um, there was a lawsuit that was brought forward [that said that] the process would have um, infringed on free speech."*[75]

**Do companies have special rules/regulations that they have to follow?**

She referred me to the City of Savannah's website. *"But as part of our certification process, um, everyone has to pass a background check and take the test and… they get a badge."*[76]

**What are the most popular types of tours available?**

Unfortunately, she did not answer this question.

### Summary

This two-part research and survey helped piece together missing information. The field study portion provided me with the experience of actually going on different types of tours, while also gathering information about their content. By obtaining this content, it allowed me to assess the quality and accuracy of the tours for each company. The interviews/surveys filled in the many gaps in the initial research. For example, the tour company surveys provided information about company background and information

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[75] Claire Sandow, "Tourism Leadership Council," telephone interview by author, April 13, 2017.
[76] Ibid.

about their sources. These two research methods allowed me to examine the current tourism trends, as well as answer questions that were missing from existing research.

According to the responses, the majority of the companies were founded during the 1990s to the early 2000s. Their answers indicate that the city of Savannah has little control over tour content. However, most, if not all companies require some form of training for their tour guides. Additionally, each company differs in content and sources. Some may get their sources from books, while other may get their sources from oral histories. These companies appear to have chosen stories that were more well-known and popular with the public.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

**Tour Companies**

The purpose of this thesis is to see how the ghost tourism industry influences Savannah's branded image. However, before this question could be answered it was necessary to answer several sub questions. These questions included: How has the tourism industry transformed over the decades? How does dark tourism compare to traditional tourism? Has the dark tourism industry become a reputable or viable resource for educating the public? What are the contributions of dark tourism, if any, to Savannah's cultural heritage? While the first two questions were answered during the background research, the remaining questions remained unanswered. Fortunately, answers to these questions could be gleaned from the survey results.

One of the ways to determine if the ghost tourism industry is a good resource for educating the public is by evaluating each company's method of interpretation. As previously mentioned, Freeman Tilden was a pioneer in the field of site interpretation. He wrote the *six principles of interpretation*, a guide that is still used by heritage tourism professionals to this day. By comparing each company's methods of interpretation to Tilden's principles, it is possible to see if the ghost tourism industry is a good resource for educating for the public. Tilden's six principles are as followed:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

There is another useful way to evaluate the ghost tourism industry's ability to educate the public. By looking at the content of these ghost tours and evaluating their educational qualities, it is possible to see if these tours are an effective means of educating the public. If stories or aspects of the stories from these tours present real and accurate information, it could be a good gauge of the tours' ability to educate. Areas to check would be the basic historical narratives and information about the people involved in the stories. Because of the supernatural aspect of the ghost stories, it would be impossible and unnecessary to check their validity.

Lastly, it is important to look at the ghost tourism industry's contribution to Savannah's cultural heritage. While the background research touched on this topic, the case studies could potentially back up that information.

In this chapter, each of the previously discussed tours will include a comparison to Tilden's principles, an evaluation of the educational qualities of each tour, and a list of important topics covered on the tours that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative. Additionally, a summary will be included to piece together the above information and to come up with some conclusions.

**Digital Walking Tour**

**Comparison to Tilden's principles**

Did the tour align with each principle?:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

   Unfortunately, this tour was somewhat disconnected from its patrons. The

wording of the narratives, while pleasant and informative, did not attempt to connect with

the audience.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

   This tour contained a plethora of information. It was incredibly educational,

although it was presented in an entertaining way. However, the information was

presented in a straightforward manner and not as creative as the other tours.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

   This tour did combine different mediums to create a cohesive whole. There were

voice narrations and countless images. These tools helped the audience to learn

throughout the tour.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

   The digital walking tour did provoke the interest of our group. We left each stop

wanting to learn more. This tour was both entertaining/fun and educational. The fun

aspect of this tour made learning feel less tedious and more enjoyable. For example, we

left the Pirate's House with a desire to learn more about Savannah's possible past with pirates.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

This tour did address the whole and it maintained the ghost theme throughout the thirteen locations. While each story differed from the next, each maintained the same overarching theme.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

This tour did not offer a different presentation for children. Although the information was presented in such a way that most children would not have a problem understanding the content.

**Evaluation of educational qualities**

According to the author's interview with Diane Rothrock, content and sources for the Wicked Walks Savannah app were obtained through online research. While there is an abundance of valuable information online, there is an overabundance of misinformation. Unfortunately, Ms. Rothrock did not say which online resources she used.

Much of the content for this tour was historically accurate. Names, dates, and even aspects to certain stories were accurate. For example, during the Colonial Park Cemetery stop, the app gave accurate information about the history of the cemetery. While there were portions of the tour that were fiction, the narrator never suggested that those elements were factual. The interpreter was careful in the crafting of the script. They

used phrases such as "some say" and "it's believed" to indicate that those portions of the story were part of a legend and not historical fact.

The tour covered many dark topics. While some aspects of these stories may be fictitious, the tour spoke about real topics and events from Savannah's past. For example, Savannah was severely impacted by the yellow fever epidemics. This may not be a common topic covered on traditional tours, however, it is a common topic for ghost/ dark tours in the city, including the Wicked Walks app.

**Topics that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative**

- **Yellow fever epidemic**
- **Pirates**
- **Indentured servitude**
- **Mental illness**
- **Slavery**

**Blue Orb**

**Comparison to Tilden's principles**

Did the tour align with each principle?:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

   This tour itself did not *fully* connect with the everyday lives of the audience. The guide, however, narrated the tour in a way that did connect with some individuals on an emotional level.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

   This tour contained an abundance of information. It was both educational and entertaining.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

This tour combined many mediums to create a sense of message unity. Every detail of the tour was considered, from the way the guide dressed to the wording of his narrative. This tour featured many visual and auditory aids that helped the audience to better understand the stories and concepts.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

This tour was incredibly popular with guests. They were engaged and interested in the stories. This tour was fun and provoked the interests of its guests.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

This tour did address the whole. Like with any ghost tour, the Blue Orb tour had an overarching supernatural theme. However, each stop differed greatly.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

This company does offer a different tour for younger patrons. This tour is nearly identical to the later tour, but is more appropriate for a younger audience. This is common amongst ghost tour companies. They will offer a more PG version of the tour. This version will include less profanity and slight word changes when the subject matter is a bit inappropriate for children, i.e. sex and adultery.

**Evaluation of educational qualities**

According to Ava, an employee of the Blue Orb touring company, the Blue Orb tours are thoroughly researched. She claimed that they obtained their information online and from extensive library research. This claim is backed up by *Savannah Shadows:*

*Tales from the Midnight Zombie Tour*, a book based off of the Blue Orb tour. This book was written by Tobias McGriff, a paranormal historian and content creator for the Blue Orb touring company. In this book, McGriff included a detailed bibliography. This reference list indicated that while many of his sources were obtained online, McGriff did use several print sources.

The content of this tour was fairly educational. The guide was careful to introduce the history of the area before explaining why it was haunted. For example, one of his first stories focused on the Siege of Savannah. He made the story come to life through his colorful use of words and animated expressions. He taught a short history lesson about the battle before talking about the ghosts of Revolutionary War soldiers, who he claimed still walk the Earth. He blended these two narratives into one entertaining, yet informative, story. The guide also spoke about a topic that is not normally discussed on the average tour— slavery. He was very careful with this topic. He showed reverence for those enslaved individuals who lived and died in the city. His narrative did not sugarcoat the depravity of the practice of slavery, but emphasized that this was a very real part of Savannah's past. The guide also spoke about different legends and lore associated with different groups and cultures within Savannah. A major point of discussion was the topic of Voodoo. The Hag was another topic that was discussed at length. One of our stops was 432 Abercorn Street, also known as The Hag House. It was considered to be one of the most haunted houses in Savannah. This house was believed to be inhabited by a "hag" –

a spirit that "feeds off the unhappiness of people".[79] This legend is well-known in

Savannah and is a topic frequently covered on many ghost tours throughout the city.

**Topics that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative**

- **Mental illness**
- **Slavery**
- **Voodoo**
- **Abuse**
- **Yellow fever epidemic**

**Sixth Sense World (ghost and cemetery tours)**

**Comparison to Tilden's principles**

Did the tour align with each principle?:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

   Both the ghost and cemetery tours mainly focused on the stories of individuals in

history and did not attempt to connect the content with the lives of their audiences.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

   The ghost tour presented a massive amount of information. This tour was

somewhat unique in its delivery and at the end of the tour, the guide revealed a main

point to her narrative. During the end of the tour, the guide led the group to the infamous

Hag House. As the group stood in Calhoun Square, the guide brought out a small speaker

and began to play a sound clip. She went on to tell the story of the house and the many

tragic events that occurred on the property. At the end of the story she revealed that

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[79] Tobias McGriff, *Savannah Shadows: Tales from the Midnight Zombie Tour* (Blue Orb Publishing, 2012) pg. 134.

everything she had just said was untrue. She explained that these stories are just that—

stories. She continued to point out that while these stories may not be accurate, they are

still important Savannah legends. Unfortunately, the cemetery tour did not reveal a main

point. It did, however, present the guests with an overabundance of information.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

The ghost tour combined different presentation mediums. Between the narrative

and the supporting audio and visual materials, the whole tour flowed together seamlessly.

The cemetery tour was quite the opposite. While there were some images that were

shown, there did not nearly enough to support the guide's narrative. Many guests seemed

lost in his words, at times.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The ghost tour was informative and educational. While the guide was not as

animated as some of the other tour guides, she still kept the attention of her audience. She

did provoke the interest of her audience. The also cemetery tour provoked the interest of

the audience. We left the tour wanting to know more about the lives of the individuals

who are buried in Bonaventure Cemetery. Both tours were fun and educational.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

The ghost tour had a slight ghost theme. There was not a unifying theme on either

the ghost or cemetery tour.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

Like with the Blue Orb Tour, as well as other ghost tours in the city, the Sixth Sense World Tours offers an alternate tour for younger patrons. This tour is a verbally cleaner tour. The tour that we attended, however, was for adults only. The Bonaventure Cemetery tour was for all ages.

**Evaluation of educational qualities**

According to Stacy Hill-Hutson with the Sixth Sense World touring company, their content and sources for their tours were acquired through oral histories and archival research at the historical society. Oral histories can be a valuable resource for communities because they document the experiences and stories of individuals. The archival research indicates that the company used primary sources in the crafting of their narratives.

The content for the ghost tour was different from the other tours. While there were some stories that mentioned ghosts, this ghost tour mainly focused on the dark history of the city— murder, abuse, and even the city's past involvement in slavery. The guide was respectful of these more sensitive stories. The tour presentation was much different than the other tours in this case study. The guide was not overly theatrical— her presentation was more traditional. The most shocking aspect to this tour came during the end when the guide explained that many of the city's ghost stories are based in fiction, including some of the stories that she told. While these stories may not be entirely true, they are still part of Savannah's legends and lore.

The content for the Bonaventure Cemetery tour was much different than the ghost tour. It focused on the cemetery's more famous residents and their role in Savannah's history. The guide also educated the group about cemetery symbolism, architecture, and

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history. While this tour was marketed in a similar fashion to a ghost tour, it was far from it. The tour did talk about the deaths of a few individuals; however, the content mainly focused on their lives. The guide never mentioned ghosts or anything supernatural. This was a traditional history tour disguised as something much darker.

**Topics that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative**

- **Slavery**
- **Voodoo**
- **Yellow fever epidemic**
- **Native Americans**

**Old Town Trolley Tours**

**Comparison to Tilden's principles**

Did the tour align with each principle:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

   Like with many ghost tours, the tour did not connect to the everyday lives of the audience, but instead focused on the lives of the deceased. There was somewhat of a disconnect from the patrons.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

   This tour did not contain as much information as the other tours. This is likely due to the pace of the tour. There is a limited amount of information that a guide can present to patrons as they are driving past. While the tour was quite entertaining, it was not nearly as informative as the other tours.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

The trolley tour did combine several artistic mediums in their presentation. The guide was theatrical in both her vocabulary and dress. While this tour did not include the same sound clips and images as the other tours, it did have one educational component that the other tours lacked— an interactive performance. At the end of the tour, the group exited the trolley and was led through a door on River Street. During this time a costumed actress narrated several stories about local legends and sea lore. This performance was accompanied by many special effects. These effects were similar to the effects found in many Halloween haunted houses— fog, and eerie sound and light effects.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The tour did provoke the interest of the audience. They were fully engaged in the stories and even had follow-up questions. This tour was fun and the limited information that was presented was educational and informative.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

This tour did not sufficiently address the whole. The only unifying theme throughout the tour was the overall ghost theme. It was consistent in this theme throughout the tour.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

Like with many other ghost tours throughout the city, this company offered an alternate tour that was more age appropriate for children. The tour that we attended was

an "adults only" tour, however there were several older children and young teenagers on our trolley.

**Evaluation of educational qualities**

The tour was educational in that it educated the public about local legends. The tour was focused on the history of the city. While there were stories that discussed some events in history, the discussion was brief and did not contain an overabundance of educational material. For example, like with many other tours, the trolley tour spoke about the Siege of Savannah. Unfortunately, the narrative did not discuss much of the history behind the battle, but focused on the many deaths associated with it. Overall, while the tour did talk about some events in history, the majority of the tour focused on the more fictitious legends such as the Hag.

**Topic that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative**

- **Folklore**

**Sorrel-Weed House**

**Comparison to Tilden's principles**

Did the tour align with each principle:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

   Neither the ghost nor the day tour attempted to relate to the everyday lives of the audience. Although some guides attempted to connect to the patrons on an emotional level through the presentation of their narratives.

2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

Both tours were filled with information. They were both educational and entertaining. The ghost tour did reveal a main point through a unique ending. As previously mentioned, many ghost tour guides will use the term "evidence" to prove that an area is haunted. This tour used their "evidence" to reveal the main point of the story— that the house is haunted. After the guide had taken the group through the entire house, he led them into the courtyard. There told the infamous Molly and Matilda Sorrel narrative before leading them into the carriage house. This is where he played a video from a ghost hunting show. This video clip contained what they called an EVP or electronic voice phenomenon— a voice that they claimed belonged to Molly. This was their proof that the house was haunted. As for the day tour, it did not reveal a main point at the end of the tour.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

Both tours used different mediums to present their information. The ghost tour relied heavily on images and video. All of these things contributed to the message— that the house is haunted. These tools were also used to educate patrons about the history of the house and the history surrounding it. The day tour used limited images, but did strive for message unity through the guide's narrative.

4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The ghost and day tour did provoke the interests of the audience. In fact, during both tours, many guests would frequently ask the guides questions. These questions were not exclusively related to the house's haunted history, but the actual history of the house and its former occupants. The guests seemed genuinely interested in the history of the

property and surrounding neighborhood. Guests got the opportunity to learn whilst having fun.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

The main theme of the ghost tour focused on the Molly and Matilda narrative. Most of the stories from within the house connected to this main story. The day tour focused mainly on the history and architecture of the house. The theme remained constant throughout the tour.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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.

Like with other ghost tours in Savannah, the Sorrel-Weed House ghost tour offered an alternate tour for young patrons. However, almost none of the content differed between tours. The difference was in word choices. For example, during the portion of the tour that talks about adultery, the guide would typically change the words slightly to be more appropriate for a younger audience. The day tour remained the same for all ages.

**Evaluation of educational qualities**

While many aspects of the Sorrel-Weed House ghost narrative are true, there are some problems with the accuracy of the narrative. The biggest fallacy stems from the most famous story associated with the house— the Molly and Matilda murder/suicide. The story focused on Francis Sorrel's affair with an enslaved girl named Molly. There are countless problems with this portion of the story. For example, no record of Molly exists. Not only is she not listed in the slave census, but she is not mentioned in any historical record attached to the family. There is also an issue with the "affair" portion of the narrative. While it could have been possible that an enslaved woman and her enslaver

could have been in a relationship, it was very unlikely. The Francis/Molly narrative is painted as a consensual relationship between two adults. Unfortunately, these "relationships" were typically anything but consensual. Additionally, one of the largest mistakes in the popular murder/ suicide narrative is the actual murder/suicide. There are records that show that Matilda Sorrel fell to her death, likely by suicide. However, all of this occurred after the family had moved to the house next door.

The day tour was a traditional tour that focused on the architecture of the house, as well as the history of some of the individuals who lived on the property— mainly Francis Sorrel and his family. The architectural descriptions were accurate, as was the information about Francis Sorrel and his immediate family.

Overall, the stories that are told in the Sorrel-Weed ghost tours are deeply flawed and contain many inaccuracies. Despite the many negatives associated with the ghost tours, there are some positive aspects. The ghost tours do a good job educating the public about what it would have been like to be an upper class individual during the nineteenth century. Besides the fictitious story about Molly, the tour does talk about the practice of slavery, its depravity, and its role in Savannah's history. Additionally, while the inaccurate murder/suicide story may be made up, it has unfortunately cemented itself into Savannah's intangible culture. It is not a historically accurate story, but a legend— a ghost story that will likely remain popular for decades to come.

**Topics that could contribute to Savannah's historical narrative**

- **Slavery**
- **Mental Illness**
- **Legends/folktales**

| | Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. | Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information. | Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable. | The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. | Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase. | Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) 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. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Digital Walking Tour | ✗ The company could try to change words and phrases in the narrative to relate to patrons on an emotional level— to connect with them. | ✗ The company could try to make the tour less sterile by editing their narrative to create suspense and possibly build up to a unique or creative ending. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ The company could create a version specifically for children, though the existing one would be appropriate for most children. |
| Blue Orb | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sixth Sense World Ghost Tour | ✗ The narrative and word choice could be adjusted to connect with patrons. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ The company could choose a theme and sculpt their narratives around it. | ✓ |
| Bonaventure Cemetery Tour | ✗ The narrative and word choice could be adjusted to better connect with patrons. | ✗ The narrative could be changed to build suspense, to reveal something great at the end. | ✗ The guide could have used more images and digital media in his narrative. | ✓ | ✗ The cemetery was too big to talk about everyone. They should choose genres: i.e. actors, famous statues, etc. | ✗ The company could create a tour that educates children about the history of Bonaventure. Although the regular tour would have been appropriate for all ages. |
| Old Town Trolley Tour | ✗ Like other companies with this issue, a narrative word change could help. | ✗ The company could cut some of the less popular stops to give the more popular stops a better narrative. | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ They should choose a theme- haunted houses, cemeteries, haunted squares, etc. | ✓ |
| Sorrel-Weed House Day Tour | ✗ A simple update of the narrative would allow for a less sterile tour. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ A children's tour could be beneficial, although the day tour was appropriate for children. |
| Sorrel-Weed House Ghost Tour | ✗ All guides should be animated when telling their narratives to connect with guests. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 3. Summary Table Comparing Tours to Tilden's Principles of Interpretation
Table created by author

**Assessment of Findings**

**Can ghost tours act as a reputable tool to educate the public?**

Educating the public can be a difficult task, especially on tours. Each guest has their own perception and opinions. In my experience as a ghost tour guide, I witnessed a change in the perception and interests of the guests from the beginning of the tour to the end of the tour. Right before the tours would begin, guests would typically ask questions about the supernatural aspects of the tour: "is this place really haunted? Have you seen anything? Etc. They were initially interested in the ghosts. However, by the end of the tour these questions would change completely. Guests would be interested in the history of the location, of Savannah, and the stories of the individuals in the narratives. These guests learned about history and they wanted to know more. The hauntings, the ghosts, all of the supernatural content would tend to get pushed aside for the history.

It is impossible to suggest that every ghost tour has the ability to accurately educate the public; however, many of the samples from my research suggest that these tours can be an effective tool to educate the masses. The tour format and content were compared to Tilden's six principles to see if they employ proper site interpretation techniques. Overall, the results showed that most of these tours attempted to provoke the interest of the audience. Many tours seemed to pique the interest of the guests, causing them to ask questions about the different stops. While many of the tours did not relate to the everyday lives of the audience, some tours did try to connect with the audience on an emotional level. Several of the tours contained a plethora of educational information and some of these tours did reveal a main point of the narrative through a unique ending or viewpoint. Most of the tours attempted to address the whole, while all of the tours had an

overarching ghost theme and attempted to address this theme throughout the tours. Additionally, many of these tour companies offered tours that were designed for a younger audience. The content was not a watered-down version of the main narrative, but a version that had been altered slightly to make the wording more appropriate for younger patrons. Lastly, message unity was an important tool for these tours. While each tour was different, each used similar techniques to present their messages. Almost all of the tours used some kind of visual or auditory aid to help the listener to better understand the message of the tour. The tours that lacked in these areas could make some minor adjustments that would benefit them greatly. For example, tours that did not attempt to connect with their audience/were somewhat sterile could simply change the words and phrases within their narratives to make the content more relatable. Tours that had issues with revelation could also edit their narratives to be more suspenseful— to build up to a creative ending. Tours that had issues with their artistic presentation could add more auditory or visual media to their tours. Additionally, tours that had issues addressing the whole could try to incorporate a theme to their tours and build their narratives around that theme. Lastly, while many tours offered special tours for younger patrons, those who did not could simply create a more family-friendly tour alternative. The companies could create a new tour entirely or simply adjust an existing tour to be more appropriate for younger patrons.

Additionally, the majority of the ghost tours incorporated real history into their narratives. While aspects of the tour may be fictional or impossible to prove, there are real history lessons within these ghost stories. It should be noted that not all of the information presented on these tours was correct. This is likely due to human error, not

intentional deception. However, there was one tour that likely intentionally presented

incorrect information— the Sorrel-Weed House with the murder/suicide narrative.

**What can these tours contribute to Savannah's historical narrative?**

As previously mentioned, dark tourism, or in this case, ghost tourism, typically

covers topics that are not always talked about on traditional tours. These topics can

include more sensitive issues such as slavery, abuse, and mental illness. While these

issues are a part of history, they tend to be covered up by a more pleasant narrative.

Ghost tourism brings these issues to the forefront, instead of hiding them in darkness.

Additionally, these tours introduce the public to individuals in history who may have

been forgotten otherwise. These ghost stories focus on the lives and ultimately, the deaths

of Savannah's past citizens. These stories help the public to connect with more of the

city's history

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Branded images are created by cities and business to represent what the area or business has to offer. These branded images typically reflect important past experiences. Houses and sites have brands that are connected to their histories. Sometimes those histories are violent, gruesome, or spooky. Savannah's branded image is connected to the city's Antebellum past. This Antebellum image has brought tourists to the city for decades because visitors craved the authentic Southern experience. The tourism industry in Savannah used to exclusively focus on the history and architecture of the city, especially the history and architecture from the Antebellum period. These tours may have been the only exposure to Savannah's history for these visitors, thus perpetuating the association to the city's Antebellum history. The city's tourism industry has seen a shift over the past three decades due to the introduction of ghost tourism.

Ghost tourism is a unique form of site interpretation. It focuses on stories about average people; individuals who may have otherwise been lost to history. This form of tourism has become incredibly popular in Savannah because of the city's connection to its history. It has not only created a thriving night culture, full of spooky tours and drunken fun, but has brought to light the stories that were previously hidden. It connects the lives of these people with the larger scope of history. The tours take individuals through the history of Savannah from the colonial times to the present. It demonstrates that there were real people in Savannah that lived and suffered. Not only does dark

tourism highlight their lives, but it talks about real issues: murder, abuse, slavery, racism, and all of the unpleasant things about history. If anything, these stories are making Savannah's branded image more authentic, more truthful. Traditional history tours tend to focus on the pleasant side of history— the various accomplishments and successes of straight white men throughout history. Dark tourism recognizes that there are also deeper, darker issues throughout history. Instead of hiding or omitting them, dark tourism discusses and sometimes embraces these issues. They can appeal to tourists who not only want an adrenaline rush, but those who seek a grittier approach to history. Traditional tourism may appear to be more reliable and authentic, but these tours will sometimes omit important parts of history or sugarcoat the past. This does a great disservice to the community, as well as those people in history whom they chose to forget. Many of the tours in Savannah, as well as other places in the south, tend to sugarcoat the city's involvement in slavery. Guides will oftentimes focus on the owners of the many mansions in the historic districts, but withhold information about the enslaved people who lived and worked in those locations. Other guides may indirectly allude to slavery, but downplay the cruelty and depravity associated with it. These guides may briefly mention the "servants" as guests stroll through the carriage houses or kitchen areas. Dark tourism guides typically do not omit these stories. They shine a light on these things.

Unfortunately, the dark tourism industry is sometimes seen as inauthentic or a bastardisation of history. Ghost tourism may contribute to those feelings of disbelief and lack of authenticity due to its connection to the supernatural. These aspects seem to affect the perception of their validity and credibility as tours, even though these tours may include historically accurate information.

Individuals, like author Tiya Miles, feel that these ghost tours are disrespectful and that they exploit sensitive areas of history. However, according to my research, this is no longer the case. Miles initially attended these tours several years ago and tour content has changed significantly during that time. While there are exceptions, ghost tours do not aim to exploit, but they aim to educate and entertain. In my experience as a ghost tour guide, we were encouraged to approach these topics with great sensitivity. The goal for the tour was not to exploit these sensitive areas, but to discuss them. This created a much needed dialogue. Guests were incredibly receptive to these stories that included the sensitive areas in history. They had questions and wanted to learn more about topics such as slavery. They also had many questions about the individuals in the narrative. These ghost tours intensified their desire to learn more about history. These stories encouraged individuals to want to learn more.

There are some stories that have little basis in reality. However, sometimes legends are important to a location's branded image. For example, the Loch Ness Monster legend is important to Scotland's branded image. This story, along with countless other stories, is an important part of a location's intangible cultural heritage. Ghost tours can function in the same way.

Ghost tourism is contributing to Savannah's branded image by introducing the public to individuals and stories that they might not otherwise hear about on a traditional tour. While traditional tours introduce the public to broader topics, ghost tourism introduces new concepts, new ideas, and also the intangible side of history (legends). Ghost tourism introduces more of the past, more of Savannah, to the public, even if the stories are just that— stories. As people learn about these new stories, their perception of

the city may change because they are exposed to more of the city's past. The city may no longer be seen as the ideal Antebellum destination, but as a city that has a culturally diverse heritage.

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