The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History’s Front Lines
By Amy M. Tyson

Tyson places her subjects among the large class of service workers whose job it is to deliver corporately scripted experiences to customers in a manner which the customers and the workers themselves can experience as authentically and pleasantly “personal.” Museum interpreters, like all teachers, must get their facts straight, but facts are often less important than critical analysis, and, by definition, the outcome of critical analysis cannot be controlled in advance, nor is there any guarantee that its results will be pleasing to students. In brief, a critical pedagogy can lead to unpleasant personal encounters, which is not good business for sites such as Historic Fort Snelling, which are competing with the likes of Disney (or, more proximately in this case, the Mall of America) for the public’s leisure-time dollars.

First-person interpreters face yet another complicating factor: when they meet the public, they are “in character,” and their professional ethics require them to be true to their character. Thus, as Tyson vividly shows, frontline workers at living-history museums find themselves torn between multiple selves: the self in search of meaningful employment, the self dedicated to excellent customer service, and the self giving voice to another self, that of a his-
Historical personage. The literal (if not always self-conscious) soul-searching required by their job plays out in a worksite that is also a stage. The stage requires historical accuracy, leading these workers to play “games of authenticity” (p. 117) in which they take the initiative in historical research that will allow them to deliver a better educational experience to their visitors. But the stage is also a workplace offering little chance for advancement; thus authenticity games can also become a means for workers to create invidious distinctions, which lower morale and do little, in Tyson’s opinion, to enhance the educational experience offered by the site.

While Tyson tells us little about the management structure of Historic Fort Snelling—the one shortcoming of an otherwise excellent book—she does provide an extensive analysis of workers’ efforts to improve their lot. The book ends with a plea for recognition of the social worth of the work of museum interpretation, a profession that offers meaningful work to its practitioners as well as an educational service to the public.

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Liminal Zones: Where Lakes End and Rivers Begin
By Kim Trevathan

One of the best ways to reflect actively on a past season’s paddling trips, as well as to plan for the upcoming season, is to read what other paddlers have written about where they have been. Kim Trevathan’s Liminal Zones: Where Lakes End and Rivers Begin gives the experienced and the novice paddler alike much to think about. The greater part of the book provides an extensive sampling of rivers in the southeastern United States, while a fast-moving series of chapters in the middle covers a wide swath of western rivers. Interspersed between discussions of paddling, camping, and travelling, one finds a number of wonderfully thoughtful musings, exquisite descriptions, and even a conversation with western river guru Ed Abbey. Trevathan reminds us of the value and often overlooked meditative qualities of our local rivers and streams. Paddling allows us the opportunity to become immersed in the life of the river and all that intersects with it. The author’s descriptions reveal how we are often struck by interactions, events, or sounds that heighten our attention to the natural world, on occasion giving rise to a sense of awe and the suspension of time.