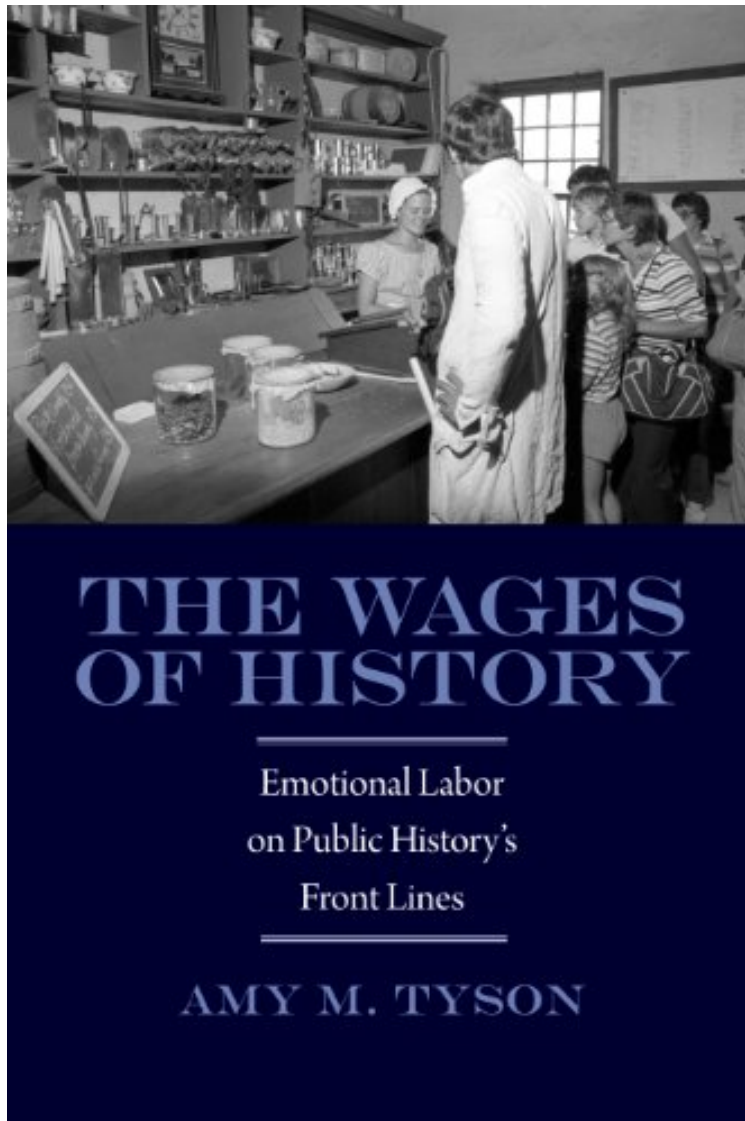


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## The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines (Public History in Historical Perspective)

*Amy M. Tyson*

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**Amy M. Tyson : The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines (Public History in Historical Perspective)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines (Public History in Historical Perspective):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Smart analysis of shared experiencesBy David GrabitskeHaving

worked at Historic Fort Snelling in the late 1990s, the descriptions here highlight a great deal of which I was entirely unaware (though I did have some of the pieces of these stories - I really had no clue as to the whole narrative), and the book recounts accurately incidents I have observed. My overlap with the author in employment was only one season. The book is edited from Dr. Tyson's dissertation, and as such the book appears to lack some critical contextual information that may have been in the original work. That is no fault of the author, but an issue with the editing. Suffice to say I believe the book fairly accurately places lead guides in the difficult situation that we were and brings to light many of the challenging (bewildering) issues that faced interpreters, and perhaps still do. The traumatic disconnect for those who considered themselves hired for our skill at engagement and yet put to thoroughly disheartening menial labor was something openly discussed after work. The sharp divides among staff who thought of themselves as professional as opposed to those there for a summer job and those there for their association with re-enacting are gently and firmly handled with much care. Nevertheless, the shared experiences of interpreters binds us all together in ways that cannot be completely understood by those outside the fellowship. Those with whom I worked are still among my closest friends. This book overall is a superlative contribution to the literature of historical interpretation for the "deep smarts" brought to the analysis of emotional work like this that we in the moment could not assess for ourselves. This book provides a good deal of meaning and context for someone like me who worked at this site.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *The Wages of History Explores Previously Unexamined Costs of Historical Interpretation on the Front Lines* By M. Shea I decided to put Amy Tyson's book on my syllabus because I really wanted to read it and also because I live and work in a community where historical interpretation is a huge part of our local economy and so many of my students do living history, serve as costumed tour guides and do various work in the cultural heritage sector. Some comments from my students illustrate why this is such a wonderful book to teach about tensions between site as a workplace and site as a platform for historical interpretation and the ways interpretation staff get caught in the middle: "It is so necessary to examine the museum as a workplace in order to provide a more trusting and supportive environment for staff, so they are able to deliver the best and most authentic experience for their guests" and "Tyson effectively highlights the challenges to working in the field of interpretive history and she also efficiently explain how these individuals are the 'lynchpins' of living history museums across the nation." Finally, "I've been a tour guide at \_\_\_\_\_ and I have experienced the low pay and the insecurity that comes with the reality that your job is only temporary. I've also experienced the emotional drain the interpreters talked about when Tyson interviewed them."

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *Excellent study of museum life* By Catharine Kennedy Having worked at a living history museum for 16 years, I found Ms Tyson's insights right on the money, and put into words situations I had felt but not been able to articulate on my own. Very well done book!

Anyone who has encountered costumed workers at a living history museum may well have wondered what their jobs are like, churning butter or firing muskets while dressed in period clothing. In *The Wages of History*, Amy Tyson enters the world of the public history interpreters at Minnesota's Historic Fort Snelling to investigate how they understand their roles and experience their daily work. Drawing on archival research, personal interviews, and participant observation, she reframes the current discourse on history museums by analyzing interpreters as laborers within the larger service and knowledge economies. Although many who are drawn to such work initially see it as a privilege—an opportunity to connect with the public in meaningful ways through the medium of history—the realities of the job almost inevitably alter that view. Not only do interpreters make considerable sacrifices, both emotional and financial, in order to pursue their work, but their sense of special status can lead them to avoid confronting troubling conditions on the job, at times fueling tensions in the workplace. This case study also offers insights—many drawn from the author's seven years of working as an interpreter at Fort Snelling—into the way gendered roles and behaviors from the past play out among the workers, the importance of creative autonomy to historical interpreters, and the ways those on public history's front lines both resist and embrace the site's more difficult and painful histories relating to slavery and American Indian genocide.

A sophisticated analysis that brings together the politics of gender with the aesthetics of historical performance and the materialist sensibilities of political economy truly a multifaceted approach that adds something quite new to the critical literature on public history. --Cathy Stanton, author of *The Lowell Experiment*  
About the Author Amy Tyson is assistant professor of history at DePaul University.