

MEMORIALIZING THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT, 1991-2018

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Mark and Sherry Pollett

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
NHT	National Historic Trail
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
MLK	Martin Luther King, Jr.
NPS	National Park Service
EJI	Equal Justice Initiative
VVMF	Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
NCRM	National Civil Rights Museum
NPCA	National Parks Conservation Association
NTS	National Trails System
DCVL	Dallas County Voters League
OAH	Organization of American Historians

I. INTRODUCTION

Memorialization is a complex form of cultural memory-keeping. Erika Doss defines memorials as “cultural entities whose social, cultural, and political meanings are determined by the emotional states and needs of their audiences.” Memorialization in this sense represents the physical validation and display of a singular or communal understanding of history and memory. In whatever form, memorials function as an adaptation of the community’s emotions surrounding the historical narrative that is being represented. The analysis of current memorialization trends in the United States by scholars Kirk Savage and Doss suggest that memorials are increasingly “shaped by the affective conditions of public life in America today” instead of being a “product of shared national belief.” Doss coins this phenomenon, which is seen as an explosion of memorials on the American landscape throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as “memorial mania.” Doss and Savage note that growing American social diversity since the 1990s affects why and how people construct memorials. The growing rate of new memorials simultaneously signifies an increased diversity in American society and a direct connection between commemoration and the creator’s cultural identity. By analyzing memorials through this framework, one can better grasp how and why certain memorials become receptacles of intense emotion and controversy in the present day.¹

¹ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2, 46; Kirk Savage, "The Past in the Present: The Life of Memorials," *Harvard Design Magazine* 9 (Fall 1999): 14-16; Kirk Savage, "Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument," in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 104.

This thesis takes a case study approach to examining three place-based memorials that are dedicated to preserving and contextualizing the history of the black freedom struggles within their respective historical landscapes: the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (NHT), and the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial to Peace and Justice. An analysis of these three sites not only reveals the shifting trends in the practice of American commemoration towards abstract forms and community engagement, but also reflects how the increasingly complex historiographical trends of Black Freedom Studies influences localized, site-specific memorialization. Although all three sites memorialize and interpret histories of intense racial violence and subjugation, the way that each site interprets its history and commemorates the events that took place on their landscapes accommodate the different needs of the local, national, and international communities that they serve. Instead of relying solely on statuary monuments or place naming, these sites spotlight local and national landscapes, infrastructures, sites of vernacular historic preservation, and contemporary museums and interpretive centers alongside material monuments to create a dynamic, adaptable memorial experience. In analyzing the three case studies, I argue that not only can the built environment act as an anchor for underrepresented memories, particularly in terms of commemorating emotional memories like violence, loss, trauma, and resistance, but that there is a historical precedent of place-based, community-driven commemoration within African American communities. Physical representations of the memories of people of color can create a more inclusive and complete historical landscape where white memories and white supremacy dominated the physical historical narrative as a monolith. Lastly, the

localized, personal, and intimate aesthetics of the physical memorial landscape help to guide and shape the site's interpretative narrative, leading many sites that commemorate anti-black violence to become spaces for the affected communities to mourn, reflect, and heal.

To contextualize the origins of my research questions regarding African American memorial landscapes, and to best examine the onsite interpretation associated with each of my case studies, it is necessary to articulate the historiography and current trends of Black Freedom Studies. The civil rights movement was a complex period in American history and has spurred an equally complicated range of historical research to understand it. Civil rights as understood through general American history textbooks and popular media tends to emphasize what Bayard Rustin coined the “classical” period of the movement. This era begins with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, which overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling legalizing segregation via “separate but equal” spaces and opportunities. Although this court case is the first major legislative success of the “classical” movement, the Supreme Court did not mandate a process or deadline for desegregating public schools outside of the discretion of local and state oversight.² To exploit this ambiguity, most local justice systems chose not to enforce the ruling. However, with the ruling of the federal court on their side, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) coordinated a boycott of the segregated city transportation in Montgomery in 1955. Sparked by the arrest of NAACP activist Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man, the black

² *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, (May 17, 1954); and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, (May 18, 1896).

boycott of the Montgomery city bus system began. Although beginning as a single-day protest, the boycott stretched over a year before Montgomery desegregated its public transportation in 1956.

Historians within the classical tradition attribute the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the democratic, coordinated activism of black Montgomery residents due in part to the Montgomery Improvement Association and its leader—Martin Luther King, Jr. King helped implement locally the use of nonviolent protest strategies during the boycott, and with the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, he advocated for such tactics to expand regionally. The SCLC combined both nonviolent protest and the Christian faith to position its activism as a moral responsibility towards the success of the civil rights movement. Protestors and advocates trained to react nonviolently in the face of hostile opposition as a means of undermining the status quo of segregation and violent white supremacy while garnering sympathy from the broader American public. Practicing nonviolence during all protests linked to the emerging struggle for civil rights was pivotal in commanding media attention and forcing white Americans to reckon with the violence that African Americans faced throughout the South.³

The following years saw the continued struggle to desegregate all public spaces in the South, notably including restaurants with the Woolworth and Greensboro Sit-ins in 1960, the freedom of interstate travel with the “Freedom Rides” in 1961, and the

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Statement to the South and the Nation," *The Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration*, (Atlanta, GA: January 11, 1957), 103-106.

Birmingham desegregation protests of 1963.⁴ The creation of organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960 helped bolster and organize further protests and desegregation efforts among younger activists. The brutalization and imprisonment of nonviolent protesters achieved the goal of starkly illustrating the barbaric mistreatment of protestors simply for exercising their constitutional right to protest, most notably symbolized by Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that articulated the SNCC's protest philosophy.⁵ The media and federal uproar regarding the abuse of African Americans and their supporters as well as numerous terrorist attacks via church bombings and retaliatory murders helped persuade the reluctant President John F. Kennedy to consider signing a new federal bill banning public discrimination and enforcing desegregation nationally. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 led by labor organizers and civil rights leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin enabled the legislative momentum needed to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The "classical" period of the civil rights movement ended with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as the last piece of major civil rights legislation before the movement fractured and MLK met defeat in the North.⁶

The struggle for civil rights was not monolithic in values or methods. In the early 1960s, more distinct subgroups within the civil rights movement emerged, included those who followed Malcolm X and ideas of Black Nationalism. Following a precedent set by

⁴ Also, in 1957, President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 banning workplace discrimination on race and gender, although the law did not mandate a method for those protections. Civil Rights Act of 1957, Pub. L. No. 85-315, 71 Stat. 634-638 (Sept. 9, 1957).

⁵ Letter by Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963.

⁶ Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. (July 2, 1964); Voting Rights Act, Pub. L. No. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437 (Aug. 6, 1965 & Supp. 1965). For a comprehensive overview of the civil rights movement, see Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1990).

Marcus Garvey, such ideologies provided a different perspective to achieving civil rights for African Americans that favored organizing a separate black identity and national state that promoted self-sufficiency outside of white America. Instead of achieving equality through nonviolence, Black Nationalism and similar philosophies were more concerned with fighting for and protecting their rights with the coordination of large groups of armed black people. These groups intended to protect their rights through lawfully assembling and bearing arms but with the intent to intimidate police forces and white society. The movement was smaller than the larger nonviolence wing of the civil rights struggle yet produced the Black Panther Party in 1966 to advocate for and protect similar ideals and methods for change.⁷

Through this understanding of the black freedom struggle, the predominate conceptualization of civil rights focuses on federal legislation, political leaders or recognizable activists like President Lyndon B. Johnson, King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, keystone marches or protests, and a national focus on overt anti-black violence in the American South. Selective attention on these topics by mainstream national media at the time also played a critical role in simplifying or highlighting aspects of the movement in order to control the narrative for predominately white audiences. Many textbooks that summarize American history at length tend to focus on the national events, important organizations and movement leaders, and court rulings and new legislation to analyze the

⁷ Marcus Garvey, *September 1921-September 1922*, ed. Robert Abraham Hill, et al., vol. 4, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York, NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 3-17; Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation," *Massachusetts Review* 7 (Fall 1966): 639-51; and Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

importance of the civil rights movement. This liberal narrative is bolstered by the predominant use of institutional and organizational histories, including the NAACP, SCLC, and their legislative victories as well as the writings of important movement leaders, most notably King. Thus, instead of understanding the black freedom struggle as a living, complex, and contentious social movement, what often remains is a male-centered, legislation-driven political history that tends to lose analytical nuance or completeness.⁸

The black freedom struggle is much more than its stereotypical dichotomies. To focus only on Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X and their impact on the growing and changing black freedom struggle would be to ignore the impact of local movement leaders, everyday activists, and rural dissent. To privilege laws and sources from institutions over the individual experiences of those that shouldered the movement creates unnatural barriers in the movement's spatial and temporal narrative via a separation between the 1950s and 1960s, between the presidential legacies of Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson, and between the American South and North. While valid in creating a base chronology of the movement, these distinctions limit potential analyses regarding the causes and effects of the struggles, thus inhibiting a critical understanding of why certain protest tactics were successful in different places, at different times, and for different goals. Yet as the organized movement continued to fracture throughout the late-1960s and into the 1970s, institutions and organizations acted

⁸ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, vol. 2 4th ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2014): 754-784; Nancy A. Hewitt and Steven F. Lawson, *Since 1865*, vol. 2, *Exploring American Histories: A Brief Survey with Sources* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013), 802-06, 830-32; and James L. Roark et al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 787-807.

as the main archives for the historical resources associated with the civil rights struggles. It is from these resources that activists and historians begin piecing together the movement's complex origins and aftermath.⁹

In 1984, sociologist Aldon Morris challenged the accepted social and scholarly understanding of the civil rights movement's origins with his study *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. Building off of W.E.B. DuBois's research in *Black Reconstruction in America* from 1935 in which DuBois argued that black voter participation had a powerful influence on American politics, Morris argued that black organizing and community-driven activism, specifically in Southern black churches, experimented with protest strategies before 1954's *Brown* ruling and kick started the movement. Morris created the foundation of civil rights studies by placing the activism of black communities and leaders at the center of the movement's origins versus the previously accepted notion that legislation, court rulings, and primarily white politicians determined the direction of the movement. In 1981, former SNCC activist Clayborne Carson detailed an organizational history of SNCC that opened the historical conversation to the importance of grassroots organization, the inclusion of rural communities, and the understanding that Black Power grew out of the original Southern movement. Other historians who proposed an indigenous perspective of the movement—

⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 5-14. For concise histories of Black Freedom Studies, see Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (1991): 456-71; Charles E. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (2000): 815-48; Kevin Gaines, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality since 1945," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002): 211-33; Komozi Woodard and Jeanne F. Theoharis, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2003); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-63; and Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer, eds., *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

attentive to the movement's working-class, local base—alongside Morris and Carson included Steven F. Lawson and John Dittmer.¹⁰

The next phase of historians aimed to identify the long-term roots and effects of the modern civil rights era by specifically injecting a class analysis into their historical analysis. Historians Manning Marable, Michael K. Honey, Robin D. G. Kelley, Jack M. Bloom, and others would try to address this research question by prioritizing working-class African American agency and ever-changing labor and economic systems. As a result of the Cold War, historians in the 1950s and 1960s tended to disregard the left and the communist party when analyzing the roots of Civil Rights Era black resistance in the tradition of an organizing black working class in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ To push back on this historical tradition and by privileging the political agency of rural black workers, Kelley and others drew conclusions linking how black workers changed the left labor movement with their history and cultural practice of resisting a white supremacist society. Kelley also challenged the assumption that all African Americans struggled for civil rights in the same way by highlighting the unorganized actions taken by black workers to defy the respectability politics of the NAACP and black middle class. This cultural defiance, shaped by class distinctions combined with racial differences, created the culture that would produce Malcolm X and Black Power. Besides the key distinctions

¹⁰ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1984); W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1935); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1976); and John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹¹ Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1951); Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1967); and Gaines, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality since 1945," 217-218.

made by Kelley, historians in this phase tend to maintain earlier arguments that the “classical” civil rights movement occurred between 1954 and 1965.¹²

In 2005 historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall published her influential essay, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” which challenged the dominant periodization of the Civil Rights Movement as emerging in the 1950s and concluding with the Voting Rights Act. Hall posited that the modern Civil Rights Movement is best conceptualized and analyzed as a class-based movement that began with radical labor organizing in the 1930s and 1940s and stretching to the decline of Black Power organizing in the late-1970s. Hall’s insistence in reframing the Black Freedom Movement through labor and class distinctions emphasized the connections between labor, race, and economics during the New Deal and World War II as the “decisive first phase” of the long movement.¹³ Her interpretation contrasts from that of Robert Korstad and Nelson Liechtenstein who explored similar questions in 1988 regarding the intersection of race, labor, and unionizing in the 1940s. They argued that the union organizing born out of New Deal legislation that favored laborers was fundamentally different from organizing efforts after anti-communism fervor dominated American society. Similarly, historians in line with Hall championing the Long

¹² Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990*, 2nd ed. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1994); Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 267, 279. See also, James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). Kelly built much of his analysis around Scott's concepts of “infrapolitics” and “hidden transcripts.”

¹³ Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1239, 1245.

Movement periodization and argument utilized former historical arguments that placed significance on local organizing rather than on a nationalized movement. But Hall, in focusing on localized labor organizing in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as Civil Rights, and Black Power movements, forms an analysis showing one continuous thread of black dissent and activism instead of separate movements. Thus, through her temporal analysis, Hall undermines the idea of the South as distinct from other regions in the United States during the long civil rights movement, especially regarding the trends in national backlash to civil rights.¹⁴

Others have built on this changing view. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard not only complicated the narrative of the black freedom struggles with their publication *Freedom North*, but they also sought to shift the focus of civil rights and black freedom struggles out of the South. In doing so, Theoharis and Woodard aimed to highlight the similarities between working class and racial struggles in regions with *de facto* segregation and the South with *de jure* segregation. Instead of examining how national movements changed with time, this new analysis aimed to explore how localized black organizing existed in continuity across the United States throughout much of the twentieth century. Historians whose research also aimed to de-center a southern-focused narrative included Martha Biondi, Robert O. Self, and Matthew Countryman (researching New York City, Oakland, and Philadelphia respectively). Essentially, centering a spatial analysis outside of the South explored the previously-overlooked ways in which the

¹⁴ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988); and Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1239.

North and West were built around forms of racial discrimination that bolstered white supremacy in society, politics, and the workplace.¹⁵

The study of women and gender associated with the black freedom struggles, especially on the influence of African American women, grew alongside (and often intertwined with) scholarly research of the Long Movement. More scholarship emphasized the ways in which women were mitigating and instigating social changes in everyday life. Historians Paula Giddings and Glenda Gilmore both published innovative studies that centered the everyday activism of black women as the driving factor towards the organizing of local black communities. Working class black families and black women especially created networks forged through personal relationships in which information could be shared to foster community knowledge and build a community support system. Giddings, Gilmore, and Charles Payne all argue that the personal communities shaped by black women comprised the bulk of grassroots organizing before and during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Similarly, historian Darlene Clark Hine explored women's activism in influencing migration from the South in the decades before the Civil Rights Era. The everyday leadership and efforts by black women traced a tradition of activism extending back to the nineteenth century. Analyzing the black freedom struggles through the lens of women and gender studies fundamentally changed the way that historians understood the grassroots and everyday leadership of the

¹⁵ Woodard and Theoharis, *Freedom North*, 2-5; Cha-Jua and Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," 265; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

civil rights movement by uncovering the integral role of local and working-class women as pivotal to the movement's success.¹⁶

The Long Movement thesis became a mainstream interpretation of the black freedom struggles amongst scholars in the twenty-first century. However, this interpretation is not without its critiques. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang directly challenged the central framework of the long movement in their essay, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." They primarily argued that expanding the chronology of the black freedom struggles aimed to erase the necessary distinctions between its different waves. In addition to temporally reframing the movement, the long movement thesis sought to minimize the distinctions between "Civil Rights" and "Black Power" to bolster a narrative of continuous black resistance. However, when those concepts are stripped down to be understood as solely as period markers, the importance of their separate participants, objectives, ideologies, methods, and discourse is lost. Lastly, Cha-Jua and

¹⁶ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1984); Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); and Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter, Jr. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 127-46. For further examinations of women within and integral to the historical narrative of civil rights, see also, Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-black Power Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001); Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia," *Gender and History* 11 (April 1999): 113-44; Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1997); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

Lang argue that to deconstruct the spatial differences between “North” and “South” is to ignore “regional variations in political economy, frequency and modes of racial violence, levels of political incorporation, and the stark differentials in wages and wealth for African Americans.”¹⁷ Lang further expands on the spatial distinctions of the black freedom struggles in “Locating the Civil Rights Movement: An Essay on the Deep South, Midwest, and Border South in Black Freedom Studies.” Lang outlines the particularities of the black freedom struggles in the South by examining the Border South as a “transitional space” synthesizing southern and northern “race relations and forms of black agency and resistance.”¹⁸ He argues that examining the regional differences in racial subjugation, exploitation, and agency is important to understanding a balanced narrative of civil rights versus a nationalized approach that downplayed the idea of southern exceptionalism. In addition to Cha-Jua and Lang, established historians in Black Freedom Studies like Steven F. Lawson and Charles W. Eagles have also challenged the notion of a “long” civil rights by arguing that the approach undermines important previous historical analysis for the sake of drawing loose comparisons between different movements and regions as well as that the field should not overlook the scholarly work still needed to complete an analysis of the South and civil rights.¹⁹

Although the scholarship of black freedom struggles is deep, the emerging trends of civil rights historiography has shifted towards systems of mass incarceration to

¹⁷ Cha-Jua and Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire,” 281.

¹⁸ Clarence Lang, “Locating the Civil Rights Movement: An Essay on the Deep South, Midwest, and Border South in Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 374.

¹⁹ Lang, “Locating the Civil Rights Movement,” 384; Steven F. Lawson, “Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968,” in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 9-37; and Eagles, “Toward New Histories,” 815-48.

examine the effects of the civil rights movement as well as what has been done to undermine its gains. In her book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander argued that racial segregation is still prevalent in the U.S., though “redesigned” via the criminal justice system.²⁰ As a civil rights lawyer and legal scholar, Alexander traces the trend towards mass incarceration and racialized imprisonment by analyzing federal drug initiatives, judicial sentencing trends, court cases, U.S. Department of Justice reports, and academic studies. The various War on Drugs campaigns started by President Richard Nixon and strengthened under the Reagan administration further racialized and criminalized drug use in urban areas. By frequently targeting African American men as criminals and by denying those currently and formerly incarcerated their basic human and civil rights, she contended that the U.S. criminal justice system perpetuates racial control akin to *de jure* segregation during Jim Crow. Elizabeth Hinton pushes back the chronological narrative even further by arguing that President Johnson’s War on Poverty policies morphed with his War on Crime initiatives, leading to the direct federal involvement of militarizing local police forces. As the federal government weakened welfare programs during the growing social and political backlash to civil rights, the carceral state grew in its place as a means of addressing poverty and crime. Alexander also exemplifies a growing trend in lawyers and law organizations producing scholarly research investigating mass incarceration as a backlash towards the relative success of the black freedom struggles. These organizations include the Equal Justice Initiative, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and others who blend their law practice with scholarly

²⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 2.

research to influence social understandings of mass incarceration outside beyond just the justice system. The study of mass incarceration challenges the timeline of the black freedom struggles by exploring how the intersections between race, class, labor, and freedom continue to shift as a result of civil rights legislation and its backlash.²¹

The National Civil Rights Museum, the Selma to Montgomery NHT, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice ultimately further the national representation and interpretation of African American histories by encompassing previously ignored historical arguments and presenting varying practical applications of those arguments on their local landscape. First, the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel is a multi-building museum complex located in Memphis, Tennessee, and memorializes the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. Owned via partnership between the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation and the Tennessee State Museum, the museum uses a “classical” civil rights movement periodization and contextualizes the origins of African American civil rights, the events of the “classical” movement to the murder of King, and the movement’s legacy. The Second, the Selma to Montgomery NHT designates the importance of part of Alabama State Highway 80 and city streets from Selma to Montgomery as the original route of the Voting Rights March of 1965.

²¹ Elizabeth Hinton, "'A War within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 100-12; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Southern Poverty Law Center, "About Us," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/about>; Equal Justice Initiative, *The Legacy Museum* (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2018). Further notable works on the carceral state as it intersects with race and class include, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977); Vesla M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and Development on Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (Fall 2007): 235-60; Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016); Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); and Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Federally protected by the National Park Service (NPS) in 1996, the trail follows the same route that marchers travelled when they advocated for voting rights and protections for African Americans. The trail presents a layered memorial landscape that interprets a known civil rights narrative through the lenses of the local communities directly affected by the march. This landscape helps to connect historical memory with current local and national efforts to preserve civil rights for all people. Third, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (also referred to as the “lynching memorial”) is a memorial funded by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and aims to highlight the widespread history of lynchings from the end of Reconstruction to 1950. This memorial works in tandem with the EJI’s Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration and focuses on the pain that persists in American society because of the failure to acknowledge and mourn for the violence of lynchings and other racial violence tactics against African Americans on a national level.

This project grew out of my interest in the ways that people and cultures remember and present recent history on the landscape in which those events took place. I explicitly focus on place-based memorialization to examine how lived history interacts with memorial making. Guided by my study of visual representation and commemoration, my analysis utilizes an interdisciplinary approach that brings together art history, geography, and public history. Trends in public art, art history, and material culture inform my interpretation of the visual aspects of a memorial form. Also, understanding the spatial context of a memorial’s landscape allows one to better analyze the interpretation and impact of the memorial in its community. Training as a public historian helps to know which research questions to ask such as why someone erected the

memorial in the first place, how the memorial engages with certain topics, and what context surrounding the need to create the memorial. Such interrogation helps to understand the many layers and nuances of local, community, regional, or national memories. Therefore, understanding all the aspects that influence the creation of a memorial means one can better grasp what, how, and why communities remember history.

To compile my sources for each case study, I conducted site visits where I photographed and transcribed the interpretive methods used throughout the site to include affiliated and unaffiliated panel interpretation, exhibit interpretation, local material monuments, historical markers, historic preservation, and unofficial interviews. In conjunction with site visits, I derived sources from local and national newspaper archives, site-affiliated printed materials, and planning documents. Specifically, I found success in tracking press releases, construction updates, and public programming. I compared official and affiliated site interpretation with other interpretations offered on the landscape—and perhaps more importantly, those not offered. In addition to visiting the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel multiple times and photographing exhibit interpretation, I researched Dr. King’s leadership in the civil rights movement, his legacy, and the efforts to memorialize the site following his assassination. Along the fifty-four mile route of the Selma to Montgomery NHT, I documented roadside interpretive panels, historical markers, and any other public resources that addressed the topic of white supremacy, Jim Crow segregation, the Voting Rights Marches, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Additionally, I corresponded with the NPS National Headquarters and the Southeast Regional Office for access to archival materials for the

trail including the original trail study from 1993, congressional reports, management plans, environmental impact studies, strategic plans, and park history documents.

Alongside an extensive site visit and documentation of onsite interpretation at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, I examined the origins and goals of the Equal Justice Initiative and conducted informal interviews with staff regarding the expectations and plans for the site.

These three sites of memory provide excellent examples of how civil rights-focused memorials can be sites for ongoing engagement with local history. Each site presented a clear, historically-based narrative that was accessible to a range of visitors. The National Civil Rights Museum captures the flashpoint of King's assassination and uses it as a lens to contextualize African American history through the black freedom struggles. The Selma to Montgomery NHT grapples with the local struggles for voting rights through Southern rural and urban battlegrounds. Featuring a mix of public, private, and commercial property, the trail invites visitors to retrace the historic footsteps of marchers. The EJI's Memorial for Peace and Justice pushes the physical and ideological boundaries of memorialization with their plan to place monuments to lynching victims on the site of each racialized murder throughout the entire nation. Centralizing that goal for truth-telling in Montgomery, Alabama, allows for visitors to explore that history and to honor, and eventually reconcile, the memory of lynching in the United States through the interpretive spaces. Each site continues to engage the visitor with information as well as providing reflective spaces to preserve and present a history that is typically relegated to the margins of the American historical landscape.

Whereas commemoration may feature both static and active aspects of memorialization, each case study highlights the increased level of visitor engagement at sites that rely on active memorialization. Static commemoration includes statues and object-naming conventions that present a dormant history, without interpretation and without a way to easily address current communities' identities and historical concerns. A static memorial could become active depending on the actions taken by its audience towards interpreting the history depicted in the statue and the history of the statue itself. Static memorials may no longer best serve community memory or be relevant to the community as a result of their dormancy. Instead, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Selma to Montgomery trail, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice are active memorials. All three sites feature onsite, adaptable interpretation and updates to the physical commemoration, either through the addition of interpretation, changing an aspect of the memorial, or placing the memorial in new and community-engaging contexts.

My case study sites go beyond marking loss and sacrifice to actively remembering violence and trauma. The violence and murders, impulsive or pre-meditated, represent key aspects of each memorial's existence. Survivors, descendants, and historians drive the presentation of violence and history at these sites. Because of the violence and trauma associated with each commemorative site, they are less concerned with equally portraying "both sides" in their narrative. In the history of voting rights, civil rights, and human rights, the perspective of the oppressive system is already evident on the landscape through state historical markers, monuments to white supremacy, and the public education system. A dedication to memorializing, honoring, and telling the truth

about the violence at each site creates a space where visitors may begin to reconcile that history.

Alongside commemorating their respective historical event, each individual site represents and memorializes the personal legacies of their champions and creators. To memorialize the death of King at the Lorraine Motel, the rooms were preserved solely by owner Walter Bailey first and later as a national museum. King's family, civil rights leaders, and community members in Memphis continue to play a role in the memorialization of the event. Particularly, these groups were concerned about the presentation of King's memory and how the civil rights movement would be remembered at the assassination site of one of its prominent leaders. The expertise of historians and Smithsonian curators navigated these influences. By the time of the trail's creation in 1996, many of the participants of the Voting Rights March of 1965, including the march's leaders, were still alive to advocate and influence the creation of the trail's interpretation. Local community leaders such as J. L. Chestnut, Jr. and Frederick D. Reese continued to play a significant role in Selma long after the end of the Voting Rights March. In creating and installing their interpretive panels and exhibits, the NPS had to be careful in their representation of events and living community members. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is lawyer and EJI founder Bryan Stevenson's sole vision. Although the EJI consulted outside historians and museum professionals for the memorial and museum, the design and creation of the site was executed in Stevenson's vision. All three sites blur the line between interpreting recent history and current events as a result of these legacies.

In the first chapter, I further outline the historiography of memory studies and memorialization in the United States. I define memorialization while exploring how its definition and physical manifestations have changed over time in both white and black American spaces. Using the historical scholarship of memorial and museum scholars such as Doss, Savage, Andrea Burns, John Fleming, and others, I examine how my case studies fit in to the overall trends of memorializing the black freedom struggles.

In Chapter 2, I examine the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel. In a chronological narrative, I introduce Martin Luther King, Jr. as one of the main leaders of the Civil Rights Movement while also contextualizing the movement in Memphis, culminating in the Sanitation Worker's Strike in 1968. Walter Bailey, the owner of the Lorraine Motel where King was assassinated, preserved King's rooms (306 and 307) immediately as a shrine to the late leader. In the years after the assassination, community members were divided about whether to preserve the Lorraine Motel and by extension the memory of King and the movement, or to level the building to cleanse the stain of the assassination from the Memphis landscape. Throughout the 1980s, Black community and state efforts succeeded in preserving the Lorraine Motel as a civil rights museum, which officially opened in 1991. After undergoing expansions in 2002 and renovations in 2014, the museum complex now stands as an active memorial landscape not only to King and the civil rights movement but also to the long history of Black subjugation throughout the United States before civil rights. The interpretive narrative at the National Civil Rights Museum is much the same as the chronological narrative I outline in this chapter with the apex of the interpretation being King's former rooms, 306

and 307. The combination of interpretive spaces and memorialized, sacred spaces in the museum complex presents a multi-vocal memorial landscape.

In chapter 3, I analyze the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. Starting with an exploration of the history of federal conservation and historic preservation, the creation, consolidation, and expansion of the National Park Service throughout the twentieth century laid the foundation for this case study (as well as the discipline of public history). Nationalizing preservation methods and historic memories through the NPS influences which histories visitors engage with and remember and contributes to a nationalist and patriotic understanding of American history. Likewise, social and intellectual movements of the 1960s and 1970s affected the NPS by expanding what could be preserved as part of the national history to further include nationally marginalized, social histories through new mediums like the National Trails System. In 1996, the NPS dedicated the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail to commemorate the Voting Rights March of 1965. I discuss the events before, during, and after the voting rights march, as well as the geography of the march as it applies to the trail's impact on local memory. An examination of the site as a memorial landscape relies on reviewing what is included in both on-site NPS and local interpretations and on what is missing from the interpretation. The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is an essential memorial to the civil rights movement as it is preserved on the American landscape.

In Chapter 4, I study the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum. First, I contextualize the history of racial terror violence from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 to before the Civil Rights Movement, as well as how the legacy

of slavery and lynching led to contemporary rates of racialized incarceration in the United States. I introduce the Equal Justice Initiative, and their role in creating the memorial and museum as a result of their 2015 report, *Lynching in America*. The dedication of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in April 2018 created a national space for unapologetically representing histories that have been violently silenced in white American society. The memorial square, museum, and monument columns for each county with a recorded lynching redefine the geography of place-based memorials by being linked by violence and not a chronology of events. I explore the form and function of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and I analyze the exhibit interpretation in the Legacy Museum to see how the two sites complement each other despite their different geographic locations in Montgomery. The purpose of this memorial landscape is to tell the transparent truth about the history of lynching and racial violence in the United States and to empower local black communities to have a role in the memory-curating process. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice will only become more relevant in the coming years when the column reclamation process evolves.

My thesis will contribute to the scholarly discussions and understanding of memorial trends in the twenty-first century by expanding the research of memorial landscapes and spaces, especially as they exist with contextualized historical interpretation, and direct community engagement. Specifically, this thesis strengthens the existing analytical framework for researching place-based memorial landscapes as an active form of memorialization alongside static, singular, physical monuments. Following Doss's research, I examine memorialization as tied to the creator's need to display their

social identity. The combination of reimagining historical and interpretive features as commemoration with traditional forms of memorialization creates a rich memorial landscape. The implications of this thesis urges restructuring the way historians understand and use the broadened memorial landscape as a historical source.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING AND REPRESENTING MEMORY

Memory studies can serve as an important resource for guiding historical analysis, particularly regarding memorials and commemorations. Historian David Glassberg explains that researchers in the discipline of “memory” through the last decades of the twentieth century began to connect singular beliefs about the past with other versions of the past. Studying how different memories relate to each other influences “historical scholarship” because history is not only one thought “but one of several versions of the past competing for public influence in a particular place and time.”²² Similarly, historian Geoffrey Cubitt explores the theory of using memory in historical interpretation, meaning that using memory in historical discourse “posits a more intimate or continuous connection between past experience and present consciousness.”²³ The scholarship on memory and commemoration is well-researched and far-reaching, growing too as monuments and memorials became a more numerous and varied feature on the American landscape. When thinking about commemorations as tangible or intangible features that “prod collective memory in some conspicuous way,” it makes sense that as communities conceptualize and dedicate more memorials, there are more people involved in the surrounding discussion that influences what that memorial means for their identity and collective memory.²⁴ Commemoration is influenced by and influences both the collective and the personal memory of a person, group, or event.

²² David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 9.

²³ Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 30.

²⁴ Kirk Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration," National Park Service, last modified 2006, accessed October 18, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/resedu/savage.htm>.

Many academics cite the work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs as one of the originators of modern collective memory studies. Halbwachs argued that memory, collective or personal, is a product of a society's and community's shaping. He also defined the difference between history and collective memory as history being the "universal, objective truth" unencumbered by social influence and collective memory as being affected by society's influence at a given place or time.²⁵ Collective memory influences a society's understanding of the past more than objective history. Historian Michael Kammen defined this process as the construction of collective memory, arguing that societies "reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them...manipulating the past in order to mold the present."²⁶ One of the ways constructed memories are most visible on the landscape is through monuments and memorials "by affixing certain words and images to particular places meant to be distinctive and permanent." The process of commemoration serves the purpose of cultivating a national or community identity, rather than displaying historical accuracy.²⁷

The act of cultivating a social identity implies the propensity of a top-down method of commemoration, funded, organized, designed, and dedicated by society's

²⁵ Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments," National Park Service; and Maurice Halbwachs, "The Collective Memory," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142-145.

²⁶ Michael G. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 3.

²⁷ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 6; Some scholars, notably Pierre Nora, have argued that commemoration and sites of memory have replaced "living" memory. Although this theory has complicated important research questions for memory studies such as if commemoration actively shapes or merely reflects social and cultural collective memories, the argument that memorials are used as a replacement for lost local history is disputed by pre-modern and modern "spontaneous" commemorative practices. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 19-20; David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 376-377; and Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments," National Park Service.

leaders and elites. Social historian John Bodnar's research, however, challenged the assumption that memorials are always driven by the advocacy and historical narratives of elite members of society. Instead, successful commemorations, like that of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, feature both "official" or national, patriotic memories, and "vernacular" or local memories, highlighting the struggle for narrative control of a monument between various communities, advocates, and stakeholders. While local elites often drive official memories, local community members negotiate and shape the collective memory of community life. Perhaps most famous is the narrative battles over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) and politicians and sitting representatives. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund leaders imagined the monument as a healing, apolitical space, whereas members of Congress and other Vietnam War veterans—who expected a national military monument honoring the bravery and sacrifice of soldiers—worked to include more traditional memorial elements in the final design. The VVMF and Congress compromised on the form of the memorial by adding a figural statue of three soldiers and a flagpole to the original memorial site in addition to the memorial wall.²⁸

Memorial scholars who pay attention to the connections between form and memorial intent add another dimension to understanding how memorials articulate public memory. Art historian Melissa Dabakis's study of the monument form reveals that the struggle for narrative control of content is mirrored by the struggle for how to visually represent that content. Both decisions over narrative content and form are incredibly political and have the potential to become "especially contested arenas" given the high

²⁸ John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-20.

profile of the public work. Often, debates over form are intertwined with debates of content and messaging, reflecting the importance over how the monument looks as well as what it symbolizes.²⁹

Memory scholar James E. Young and historian Kirk Savage have both created influential analysis about the shifting meanings and transient memories of memorials. Young outlines that “monument building is a living process” in his research exploring how to commemorate the trauma of the Holocaust. Because commemorations to the Holocaust are not meant to be celebratory and are instead meant to be an introspective reminder of inarguably violent genocide, interpretations of the event that are reflected by a monument must grow and change as historical scholarship, interpretation, and communities change. Young’s notion of the active monument challenged the idea that commemoration must be fixed in meaning. Not only can memorials be active, but they should be adaptable to time, space, and community.³⁰ In his research on the National Mall, Savage stressed that change is an important part of the memory-curating and landscape-shaping process. Savage argued that the “unintended changes” of the Mall’s memorial sites is a natural use of the social space and a “measure of the continuing

²⁹ Perhaps the most famous American debate over commemorative form and messaging is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In this case, the debates over narrative meaning of the monument was directly intertwined with how the proposed memorial was supposed to look. While strikingly different than war monuments of earlier decades, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was abstract, lacked figural depictions of soldiers, and adopted a mournful tone through its material and interaction with the surrounding landscape. Whereas these functions conveyed the intended message the Memorial Fund had advertised for, a more traditional, figural statue and flag pole was placed on the memorial site to appease complaints about the monument’s form and symbolism. For further information on the politicization of the memorial during the Reagan presidential administration, especially in relation to the connection between therapeutic memory, politics, and memorial discourse, see Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). Savage, *Monument Wars*, 273-279; Melissa Dabakis, *Visualizing Labor in American Sculpture: Monuments, Manliness, and the Work Ethic, 1880-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-4; and Savage, “History, Memory, and Monuments,” National Park Service.

³⁰ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2-3; and Savage, “History, Memory, and Monuments,” National Park Service.

vitality” of the commemorative landscape. Through this lens, “the history of commemoration is ... a history of change and transformation.” Savage takes what is commonly understood as the most important part of a memorial landscape—its “permanence”—and invites the inevitable shifts in culture and community as a means to potentially shape monuments into an active, engaging, and relevant social experience.³¹ Both Young and Savage solidify the relationship between a monument and the built environment as important to the meanings of both.

Since the international events of the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, monuments to war in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are almost always linked with loss and trauma. This departs from earlier American war monument trends that tended to be celebratory and patriotic in nature. Historians Edward Linenthal, Marita Sturken, Kirk Savage, and Erika Doss’s work on the effects of trauma on commemoration signal the shift not only in historical scholarship but also in commemorative practices towards personal, introspective, and subjective memory experiences.³² The shift towards commemorating traumas on a public landscape calls into question how a community chooses which criteria by which to rank traumas in order to determine who and what gets memorialized. As visible in most scholarship about the commemoration of trauma, the type of victim that “deserves a monument is fundamentally political and the answer depends on the meanings that society assigns to their trauma.” However, the power of pain and trauma often influences a need for a collective, social response, speaking “to a

³¹ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 10-12.

³² Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 132-135; Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 3-5; and Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-3; and Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 2, 64-65.

deep need for attachment that can be met only in a real place.”³³ Although paradoxical, communities may continue to commemorate traumas on a case by case basis due to the power place has to connect people and help the healing process. Oral historian Martha Norkunas engenders this discussion by examining the internal and external memories present at Lowell National Historical Park in Lowell, Massachusetts. She found in this case that public memory—or external memory—tends to assume a masculine nature whereas private memory—or internal memory—relied on women passing along oral traditions. Masculine-coded memory is more visible through public monuments and historic sites whereas feminine-coded memory is less visible through the oral histories and traditions of the community, a physical representation of the difference in value placed on public and private memory. Her research highlights the “politics of commemoration” by interrogating what gets memorialized and how, concerns of which exist in some form at every site of memory.³⁴

In addition to outlining the history of memory and commemoration scholarship, an examination of historical memorial and commemorative trends in the United States is necessary to understand how they represent national or community historical memory and influence ongoing memory-curating processes. During its Early Republic period, individuals in the United States eschewed public memorialization based on the idea that physical monuments would be at odds with the democratic process and the strength of social memory. However, the debate between whether or not to construct monuments in

³³ Kirk Savage, "Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument," in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 109, 111-112; and Savage, *Monument Wars*, 4.

³⁴ Martha K. Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 179-180; and Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments," National Park Service.

practice did not subscribe to the ideals that democracy made commemoration obsolete. Memorials still had a place on the American landscape in the form of monuments dedicated to war and the heroic mythologizing of the state.³⁵

Savage documents how during the nineteenth century the public monument in its material form symbolized the permanent and unchanging “moral integrity” of the American democracy and the “honor” of the soldiers that fought (and died) to protect those ideals.³⁶ The commonplace public monuments of the nineteenth century are designed to present carefully manipulated and sanitized narratives dedicated towards the perpetuation of positive emotions within the national consciousness such as power, bravery, strength, and togetherness.³⁷ National pride, cemented on the landscape via stone or statue, aimed to write a shared, uncontested national history, but particularly a history consisting of the achievements and bravery of an upper class, white, male society. The understanding that memorials should commemorate the moral triumph of American victories and personal sacrifice in war remained unchallenged as the scale of American military involvement before the American Civil War had a low direct impact on daily American lives.

The period after the American Civil War from 1870 to 1920 reflects the continuation of physical commemoration trends that privileged white, male history; Confederate monuments and other war memorials all commemorated the heroics and sacrifice of soldiers. This period, which Doss refers to as “statue mania,” represented the need for communities to commemorate a form of nationalism after the cultural identity

³⁵ Savage, “Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument,” 103.

³⁶ Ibid., 105.

³⁷ Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 47.

shift during and after the war. Former supporters of the Confederacy honored their nationalism through memorials that aimed to rewrite a “lost cause” narrative into the official history of the American Civil War and to celebrate soldiers as a mask for celebrating confederate ideals. This rewriting of history on the landscape removed African American soldiers from public memory and effectively ignored the dream of racial equality from the war’s legacy.³⁸ During statue mania, statues displayed in public spaces predominated as the monument of choice to a historical person, thing, place, or event. Although commemoration methods and forms became more abstract After World War I, monuments still focused mostly on the same historical topics. Naming structures, artworks, parks, fountains, and even material objects like rocks became an alternative way to immortalize a person’s memory.³⁹

The new scale of trauma experienced during the Second World War for the average American cultivated a need to reshape the existing, one-dimensional commemorative practices that could not reconcile the impact of personal, civilian, and non-combative loss with the moral success of military victory. The loss and trauma of the Holocaust especially signaled a shift in national and community commemorative needs not only in the United States, but also internationally.⁴⁰ When understanding the purpose of memorials as representing a social identity, there exists a new struggle in solely creating monuments to an “official” or state mythologized memory. Whereas monuments that challenged the “official” history have certainly existed in the United States before the

³⁸ David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 171-173.

³⁹ Glassberg, *Sense of History*, 25, 31.

⁴⁰ Savage, "Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument," 105-106; Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 3-5, 11-13.

mid-twentieth century—particularly via the revising of history of the American Civil War with Confederate monuments, and the creation of community-based monuments and institutions for communities of color and varying ethnic groups—the incorporation of narratives countering the heroics of predominately white Americans generally did not find a national stage until after the social movements of the mid-twentieth century. Monuments to victims of trauma, be it from war or otherwise, was not conceptualized as such in America until after the contentious and disastrous American involvement in the Vietnam War.⁴¹

Americans did not see the creation of a national therapeutic monument until the dedications of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Washington, D.C.'s National Mall in 1982. Not only was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial created with the primary purpose of helping veterans and the American public to heal from the traumas of the Vietnam War, the memorial also directly challenged the historical tradition of a figural, heroic war memorial.⁴² Lin's memorial invites a personal experience with the memorial and a personal relationship with how to heal and how to define morality at the monument. The memorial's purpose as a therapeutic monument aims to place the curation of its significance and meaning directly on the viewer's personal reflections and feelings upon their visit to the site.

Erika Doss attributes this rise in memorializing to the fractured struggles over identity and politics in contemporary American society, as well as to the new focus in expressing collective, public grief, and the notion that such places can serve as

⁴¹ John E. Fleming, "The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums," *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (August 2018): 45; and Savage, *Monument Wars*, 6-7.

⁴² Savage, "Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument," 106.

psychologically healing places. Groups or individuals commemorate how they personally understand and remember history in a way that physically and publicly memorializes their experiences.⁴³ Doss's concept of "memorial mania" shows the shift away from the previous monument trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by discussing the increase in the number of memorials on the American landscape, especially those that lack a singular, clear presentation of the historical narrative as a group. "Memorial mania" points to the growth of conflicting ideologies and historical narratives on the American landscape as a result of the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. With the introduction of a successful national therapeutic monument—the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—an ideal commemorative method that emphasized therapeutic and healing monuments emerged. In part this responded to an increasingly interconnected society traumatized by the horrors of death, war, genocide, and terrorism.⁴⁴

One factor of American commemoration that remained relatively unexplored until recently, unlike memorialization to war, trauma, and community, was the racialized experiences of localized, community, and personal trauma within African American communities. The works of scholars like John E. Fleming, Andrea Burns, Owen J. Dwyer, and others have centered African American history, communities, and cultural landscapes in their research and interpretation of memory and American commemoration. Instead of traditional statuary monuments, African American commemorative trends saw the use of African American institutions—and eventually the creation of "alternative"

⁴³ Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 11, 19. Doss explains how these typically ahistorical interpretations and representations of history come from similar narratives throughout popular and mass media.

⁴⁴ Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

monuments—as the main form of curating a collective memory and taking up physical space on the American landscape.⁴⁵

The history of Black memory preservation and record-keeping has diverged from that of mainstream or white American commemorative trends since the period of African enslavement in the United States. Any forms of African culture that posed a perceived threat to the institution of slavery were regulated and restricted, such as the use of drums, African languages, and non-Christian religious rituals. Enslaved people preserved their identities through African traditions of singing and dance, influencing a new cultural music that persisted and thrived throughout and after enslavement. After emancipation, the creation and expansion of Black institutions like museums, universities, newspapers, and churches laid the foundation for the curation of a collective historical identity and memory. Fleming suggested that African Americans created institutions to preserve their “heritage knowledge” or group memory to “reclaim and retain their history and identity as a people” after being forcibly disconnected to homeland and cultural identity. Preserving heritage knowledge, therefore, grew out of and is shaped by the struggle for equality and freedom. These cultural institutions, the first being the Hampton Museum founded in 1868 at the Hampton Institute, took the form of libraries and archives associated with black universities that developed significant collections of African American material culture. Social organizations and movements would continue to

⁴⁵ Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 9.

solidify the need for African Americans to preserve their own past and values outside of the mainstream or white American perceptions of African American culture and history.⁴⁶

Libraries and archives attached to Black universities were the first institutions to collect Black records as they were curated by the local African American communities to combat the racist scholarship from white academics throughout all fields of higher education. The scientific racism of Social Darwinism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries not only influenced exclusion throughout academia and cultural institutions, but also influenced political and social exclusion throughout the United States. Similarly, white supremacist racism was cemented onto the U.S. landscape through Confederate monuments. A local community's open commitment to erecting and preserving Confederate memorials is meant to exert further dominance over African Americans through a manipulated historical narrative. Misrepresented history related to the statues, and the existence of such memorials in states outside of confederate states symbolizes that they stand to serve dual purposes: to rewrite in stone the national memory regarding the Civil War and to intimidate local Black communities.⁴⁷ Until the civil rights movements of the mid-twentieth century, educational institutions as well as African American social and political organizations (such as the emerging NAACP, the Negro Society of Historical Research, and the Committee of Colored Citizens of the

⁴⁶ Fleming, "The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums," 45. The concept of "heritage knowledge" comes from Joyce King, "Mis-education or the Development of Critical Race Consciousness? Curriculum as Heritage Knowledge," in *Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of Dispossession and Defiance from New Orleans*, by Kristen L. Buras, Jim Randels, and Kalamu Ya Salaam (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 126-131.

⁴⁷ Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 153-155; and Patricia G. Davis, *Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 9-11.

Grand Army of the Republic) remained the repositories of Black history and collective memory.⁴⁸

The black freedom struggles inspired the substantial change from creating higher education institutions and libraries as collections of community memory and centers of cultural heritage to creating interpretive museums and preserving local sites. The development of Black museums could act as “repositories for their material culture” and a way to educate local youth about African American history and the sociopolitical gains of the civil rights movement.⁴⁹ Black communities spearheaded the preservation of Black churches, Black organizing spaces, areas of historic lynchings and killings, and other spaces in the United States contributing to the curation of a collective memory of the movement. The martyrdom of King in 1968 sparked a need to physically preserve his memory and the memory of the civil rights movement on a national scale through the “alternative” practice of “(re)naming” places, streets, schools, and the presentation of historical markers.⁵⁰ Ultimately, the black museum movement—and the increasing effort to create physical representation of memory like statues or plaques—grew out of a need to represent African American history and civil rights in the museum landscape of the United States and in the conceptual landscape of the grand historical narrative.⁵¹

African American commemoration since the “classical” civil rights movement—be it institutional or in the form of a traditional monument—features many similarities to

⁴⁸ Fleming, “The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums,” 46-51.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 60; Derek H. Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas: The Reputational Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. in a Georgia County,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 69-70; and Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement,” 9.

⁵¹ Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 6-7, 16.

the national memorials with predominately white historical narratives throughout the United States. The trends in commemoration that seem universal between differing narratives may include similarities in subject matter, cultivating a sense of place within historical memory, memorializing heroism or success, or honoring sacrifice and pain. However, African American commemoration, which aims to memorialize narratives relegated to the margins of American history, interacts with historical memory differently. In relation to an oppressive, majority narrative, African American commemoration explores the connection between the past and the present, the memorial's authenticity and legitimacy, navigating the tensions between "great man" history and local history, and grappling with the inherent historical revisionism that comes from a sanitized, consensus history. These themes are evident in the collection of essays *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* edited by Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford.⁵²

Perhaps the most important feature of African American commemoration is the connection between the past and the present. Scholars such as geographers Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman center place and space as vital to the meaning, value, and legacy of historical memory, especially regarding the civil rights movement. These civil rights sites connect the past and the present by being places where "the meaning of "civil rights" – how they are achieved, their current status, and future promise—is currently undergoing active negotiation."⁵³ This negotiation is imperative to the life and meaning of the memorial site. Since a memorial cannot absolutely "fix" an unchanging meaning to a

⁵² Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), xxi.

⁵³ Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 7.

place, especially a meaning as active and contested as the historical narrative of the Black freedom struggles, commemorative spaces to the civil rights movement can become unclear about its “connections to the local present” despite condemning a racist past.⁵⁴ The creation of memorials are political, just as the interpretation and reinterpretation of memorials are political, and ultimately represent those who have the “power to determine how the landscape is represented and whose history will be told on that landscape.”⁵⁵ Memorials to the Black freedom struggles offer a significant spatial connection to the political activism, cultural identity, and historical memory of the movement in local and national contexts.⁵⁶

Commemorating African American history and the Black freedom struggles on the American landscape provides the opportunity to authenticate, legitimize, and nationalize that memory. Alderman’s work on mapping the renaming trends of streets to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. after his murder uncovered “race-based interpretations of King’s legacy” that “even those with great respect for [King] interpret and personally connect with his historical legacy in different and sometimes competing ways.”⁵⁷ Many Americans questioned the universal nature of African American memorials as well as what those memorials should look like to have a place in any given local community. Among non-black Americans, King’s historical relevance was seemingly limited to black communities, and “that the streets named for him represent only African Americans.”⁵⁸ Therefore, the struggle for Black freedom was not always a

⁵⁴ Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement,” 18, 20.

⁵⁵ Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas,” 70.

⁵⁶ Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement,” 20-21.

⁵⁷ Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas,” 69, 89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

legitimate subject for national commemoration in the opinions of non-black communities who understood the movement's disruption of the status quo as alienating instead of unifying. The renaming of streets is just one of many arenas "for people to actively define and debate the movement's legacy" as well as African American history in general. The battle over authenticating and making space for African American history on the national landscape occurs with the naming or renaming of any place or space and the creation of new institutions and organizations in order re-contextualize that history (and by extension those communities) as legitimate.⁵⁹

Finally, African American memorials—while often challenging exclusive "great man" narratives in favor of local histories—are at risk of increasingly revised and sanitized consensus narratives both within and outside of their own communities. Mass media has been influencing public memory of the Black freedom movement since the media began covering the movement (albeit, the lack of movement coverage also influences the lack of movement knowledge in public memory), and often contributes to and directly shapes the creation of a consensus history that "erodes public conversation, balkanizes the population in think-alike enclave, and undermines political action."⁶⁰ Thus, national African American monuments, built off of the collective memories of the Black freedom struggles, run the risk of cementing a detached or sanitized history to the American landscape versus a more complicated, complete, and inclusive history.

Although the freedom struggles relied on the media to some degree for its success, it also

⁵⁹ Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas," 90.

⁶⁰ Edward P. Morgan, "The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 158, 162; and Jennifer Fuller, "Debating the Present through the Past: Representations of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1990s," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 186.

“reflected their ultimate compatibility with capitalism’s marketplace.”⁶¹ After King’s death, the media worked to detach from King the radicalizing politics of his later years, while at the same time strengthening national myths and thus making the localized “base of southern civil rights activism” less integral to the success of the movement in the South.⁶² Although historians and movement activists have revised narratives of the movement in the last fifty years, their work still stands up against public memory that has and continues to be influenced by mass media and the observations of outsiders.⁶³

The struggle for Black freedom directly changed the practice of African American commemoration, particularly as it related to African American communities and African American memory. These sites, in turn, then work to influence and reshape their own historical memory the further time progresses away from the classical civil rights movement period, creating a continuous cycle of revising historical memory regardless of whether that is the site’s goal or not. These shifts are evident in the three sites this thesis will examine: the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, and the Equal Justice Initiative’s Memorial for Peace and Justice. The physical representation on the various landscapes of the three case studies foster the presentation of inclusive historical narratives, particularly narratives that commemorate emotion, like violence, loss, trauma, and resistance. These memorial landscapes act an anchor for underrepresented memories, creating space for local,

⁶¹ Morgan, "The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten," 159.

⁶² Ibid., 141.

⁶³ Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 273, 279; and Steve Estes, "Engendering Movement Memories: Remembering Race and Gender in the Mississippi Movement," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 290.

regional, and national communities to see their history as a relevant and worth preserving publically. Also, these sites, guided by the form and aesthetics of the physical memorial landscapes, welcome the potential for change in historical interpretation through programs, tours, museums, and other interpretive materials found on-site and online. Rather than exist as static monuments, these sites live as active memorial landscapes that shape and continue to shape the memory of the movement.

As a historian, studying memory is integral to interpreting the histories of people of color and other marginalized narratives. Because memory is often associated with the personal and the vernacular, memory has been utilized by local and community histories to expand upon largely uncontested narratives. The need to create memorials as well to remove them represents the shifting understandings of national identity and its relationship to cultural identities. A strong emotional connection to a memory is the main driving factor for the existence of a memorial mania, and civil rights memorials that tend to “focus on its most violent, brutish expressions” of racism uses those emotional memories to take up space for their histories.⁶⁴ The National Civil Rights Museum, the Selma to Montgomery NHT, and Memorial for Peace and Justice all grew out of the legacy of African American commemorative trends and the memorial mania that continues to grip the United States through the twenty-first century.

In the following chapter, I will examine the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee as an active memorial landscape. As a site of profound violence, the National Civil Rights Museum contends with the best way to commemorate King and his legacy while also contextualizing the social conditions of the

⁶⁴ Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 7.

civil rights movement. The museum draws its narrative from the historical chronology of the “classical” civil rights movement. Blending a top-down, leadership-driven history with local histories creates a visitor experience that engages with the complexities of the movement while at the same time preserving and honoring a murder site.

III. FROM ORDINARY TO ICONIC: PRESERVING THE ASSASSINATION OF A MOVEMENT

Introduction

The National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel is a physically symbolic space preserved due to its importance within the civil rights movement as the assassination site of Martin Luther King Jr. This site features the original motel rooms 306 and 307 and façade of the motel as it looked at the time of King's assassination intertwined with detailed exhibits interpreting civil rights. Rather than a figural statue to commemorate this event and King's legacy, the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation preserves the physical site within the city block surrounding where James Earl Ray allegedly assassinated King and thus serves to remember King, the movement he helped lead, and the violent context for civil rights in the United States. The combination of interpretive and historical spaces and the visitor's ability to bodily move through the space provide for a multi-vocal memorial site in that the interpretive presence of the museum memorializes King and the struggle of oppression and civil rights while the physical presence of the building preserves the historical culture of segregation in Memphis.⁶⁵

This case study argues that the Lorraine Motel is an active and engaging memorial landscape because the site includes both tangible and intangible commemorative methods to create a layered narrative. It painstakingly preserves the assassination site with a community museum to both interpret the context of the space and the social movement as well as traditional markers and sacred spaces of rooms 306

⁶⁵ The visitor's ability to physically move through the commemorative space can become a 'lived' memory and contribute to the cyclical process of re-inscribing meaning to the site.

and 307. The National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel is a memorial and a pilgrimage site. Visitors come to the site because of its relevance within the movement and because numerous exhibits contextualize the sites as sacred spaces in the memory of the movement and King. Visitors make the pilgrimage to the Lorraine Motel to learn African American history in a space created and occupied by African Americans for decades. Because it previously existed as a historically black serving institution during segregation, this site encompasses the black experience during Jim Crow and the civil rights movement. It possesses the capacity to look both forward past the movement and backwards to the movement from this vantage and thereby can foster a similar visitor experience. There is a national deficit in the recognition and preservation of vernacular African American sites because preservationists from outside of the community did not prioritize such sites to preserve. African American communities needed to champion the preservation of their own structures.⁶⁶ The Lorraine Motel provides an excellent example of the difficulty and community effort required to preserve sites of African American history, even sites as momentous, tragic, and upending as the assassination of King. At the same time, the National Civil Rights Museum created a multi-vocal memorial while also challenging the prevalence of institutional and political histories on the American landscape, many of which are focused on white, male politicians or movement leaders as the main drivers of change.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Vernacular African American sites were not typically architecturally impressive in any style because of economic factors. The systematic destruction of Black neighborhoods and structures to building infrastructure for growing cities also contributed to the lack of preserved Black historical sites. Brent Leggs, "Preserving African-American Historic Places: New Resource Available," National Trust for Historic Preservation, last modified February 4, 2013, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preserving-african-american-historic-places-new-resource-available/#.W62Vm-hKiUk>.

⁶⁷ Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 754-784; Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American*

MLK and Civil Rights

In order to understand the site, a brief biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. is in order. King was a pastor and a leader within the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and civil rights movement. Although he grew up in the segregated South, King came from an educated community of progressive Christian preachers. He pursued degrees in theology from Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, and Boston University before moving to Montgomery, Alabama to be a pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.⁶⁸ King's background in theology and racial equality laid the foundation for his social activism and leadership in 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Sparked by the boycott, King helped create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) where nonviolent protest gained widespread movement support to expose the extent of racial subjugation and secure the moral, Christian high ground for African Americans.⁶⁹

King's role in the civil rights movement as an organizer, orator, figurehead, and participant enabled him—as well as his nonviolence philosophy—to become incredibly influential to the movement. The importance of King as a leader and celebrity attracted more than just the attention of the media and the American public. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began the surveillance of King and the civil rights movement during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and carried out covert operations against him throughout the 1960s. The director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, incited further scrutiny

Memory, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 7-13.

⁶⁸ National Park Service, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Civil Rights, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/martin-luther-king.htm>.

⁶⁹ Letter by Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 76.

of King because he personally believed that King was a communist spreading communist propaganda with his planning and participation in the boycott. Due to the possible threat to national security from King and the civil rights movement, the FBI had jurisdiction not only to monitor both, but also to actively undermine both. Under the guise of curbing the ever-present threat of communism nationally and maintain global power abroad, the FBI wiretapped King and the SCLC, smeared King's reputation, and attempted to discredit King and organizations like the SCLC for the supposed potential to drift away from nonviolence to be more like communists and Black Nationalists.⁷⁰

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, other important achievements made because of the civil rights movement include Executive Order 11246 of 1965, which enacted federal enforcement of Affirmative Action, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which provided further protections for disenfranchised voters. Many contemporaries viewed the civil rights movement as a success because of the passage of multiple protective laws. The national conversation subsequently shifted away from nonviolence to other forms of Black resistance. King was also radicalizing in the mid-1960s, embarking on his Poor People's Campaign in 1967 to advocate for economic equality nationally and globally. King specifically challenged the minimum wage, "right to work" laws, and Vietnam War expenditures to inspire a redistribution of wealth that allowed poor people to afford the cost of living. The Poor People's Campaign intended to be King's largest and most radical project within the civil rights movement. In 1968, the Fair Housing Act

⁷⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 91; Stewart Burns, *To the Mountaintop: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Sacred Mission to save America, 1955-1968* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2004), 157; The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)," Stanford: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed August 22, 2018, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/federal-bureau-investigation-fbi>. Between the McCarthy Era (Mid-1950s) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975), any instance that a racial political leader might have communist sympathies would be under investigation.

introduced procedures against housing discrimination based on race, color, disability, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin.⁷¹ By 1968, the U.S. was a powder keg of compounding and overlapping civil rights, anti-war, student, feminist, and more movements and protests. American failure in Vietnam broadcast into American homes in early 1968, and King's leadership in a local labor movement in Memphis led to his shocking murder.

Memphis proved to be a unique case study in white southern politics and black organized dissent, with a nuanced history of labor, class, and desegregation movements. In the first half of the twentieth century, E. H. Crump personally ensured the entrenchment of segregation in Memphis. Elected as the mayor of Memphis in 1908, Crump stayed in office until 1954 where he effectively snuffed any union activity that grew in Memphis during the New Deal era and WWII, leaving black laborers as the group most disproportionately impoverished. However, during the 1950s, the fabric in which Memphis wove such subjugation was beginning to unravel at the seams. Crump's death in 1954 and the murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955 spurred black youths in Memphis towards civil rights activism. Memphis had a suit to end segregation on public transport before the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The Tennessee legislature repealed the poll tax in 1951, and African Americans quickly formed dozens of civic clubs to register black voters. By 1954, black voter registration was at 39,000, up four and a half times the numbers from three years earlier. King commented on the "magnificent unity" and "enthusiasm" of the black communities during his visits in 1959. Yet, while there

⁷¹ Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. (July 2, 1964); Exec. Order No. 11246, 3 C.F.R. 339 (1965); Voting Rights Act, Pub. L. No. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437 (Aug. 6, 1965 & Supp. 1965); and Civil Rights Act, Pub. L. No. 90-284, 82 Stat. 73 (Apr. 11, 1968). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 also required all federal buildings to be accessible to those with disabilities.

were thousands of registered black voters over a decade before the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the black vote alone could not win seats, chairs, or offices, and the former union-based, black-labor alliances were coming undone.⁷²

Elected to office in 1960, new Mayor and staunch segregationist Henry Loeb capitalized on this split by vilifying black voters to unify the white vote. Loeb was anti-union like Crump, a stance that he shrouded under the guise of the era's popular anti-communism rhetoric. Loeb ensured the white vote in the future by aggressively exploiting Black laborers by having them complete beautification and public works programs in white communities.⁷³ Whereas there were many instances of bombings, police brutality, and arrests in reaction to the ongoing civil rights movement, white newspapers edited out such events for white consumers in Memphis (and throughout the South). White people were disillusioned and willfully ignorant of the true extent of the civil rights movement, and they continued to vote for conservative, segregationist politicians like Loeb who further restricted the ability to demand better working, living, and social conditions for Black Memphians.⁷⁴

A younger generation of social activists led some of the civil rights movement's most successful nonviolent protests against segregation in businesses and schools. The success of nonviolent protests in Memphis made for good, marketable examples of the effectiveness and civility of nonviolence and in 1964, the Southern Regional Council declared that Memphis "began to shine as a beacon of reason and decency in the Deep

⁷² Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 258-259; Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 10.

⁷³ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 210; and Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 34-35.

⁷⁴ Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 36.

South.”⁷⁵ However, these sentiments represented a growing complacency within Memphis, as segregation in labor and the exploitation of black communities had yet to be resolved. Although the Black community in Memphis made significant gains to desegregate public accommodations, jobs in the city remained stubbornly segregated. Working class Black people were “stuck at the bottom of the economic order,” regardless of the industry they worked in. The working conditions of sanitation workers highlighted the systemic white supremacy in Memphis that dictated that black laborers be kept in the cycle of poverty and labor violations. Sanitation employees in Memphis gathered as a union in 1964 but could not garner enough support from the local middle class and religious community to lobby for higher safety standards and better wages. When Loeb renewed his tenure as Mayor in January 1968, he refused to replace decrepit service equipment, pay overtime wages, and recognize the sanitation workers’ union. Handling garbage “was the kind of work the city assigned to blacks only.” and white supervisors were not afflicted with the same wage shortages.⁷⁶ These policies and working conditions adversely affected the black community in Memphis by condemning affected families to welfare and increasing the possibility of serious injury or death on the job.⁷⁷

On February 1, 1968, union members’ worst fears came to life when a malfunctioning truck crushed and killed Echol Cole and Robert Walker, two garbage collectors in Memphis. In the face of neglect from the city, 1,300 workers from the

⁷⁵ Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 44; and Richard Lentz, “Sixty-Five Days in Memphis: The Commercial Appeal, the Press-Scimitar, and the 1968 Garbage Strike” (master’s thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1976), 2.

⁷⁶ Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 2-4, 44-45.

⁷⁷ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 224, 269; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 946; and Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 349.

Department of Public Works went on strike with the support of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the NAACP.⁷⁸ After staging a sit-in, Mayor Loeb rejected the City Council decision to end the strike by recognizing the union and increasing wages. Organizers scheduled a new, citywide march for March 22. Civil rights leaders including Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin, James Bevel, Ralph Abernathy, and King traveled to Memphis to further support the strike.⁷⁹ Due to delays in beginning the march as a result of poor weather, crowds and protesters were chaotic, and the demonstrations spiraled out of control and became violent along the march route. Unknown people looted stores, the police pursued people into the church with tear gas and clubs, and a police officer shot a black teenager to death in the aftermath.⁸⁰ By resorting to violent and deflection tactics, the movement in Memphis seemed broken and lost. White organizations, media, and law enforcement—all of whom were waiting for any opportunity to discredit him and undermine the movement—blamed King and his ineffectiveness as a leader for the violence. The violence during the march worked to jeopardize King's plans for the Poor People's Campaign. On April 3, King gave a speech to steadfast sanitation workers about the importance of seeing movements through to the end regardless of what the movement loses along the way. Everyone must help—especially laborers and the poor—to benefit from the strike because “either we go up

⁷⁸ Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1-4, 174-179. City-sanctioned brutality beginning on February 2, 1968 when police tear-gassed and arrested nonviolent protesters.

⁸⁰ Gerald L. Posner, *Killing the Dream: James Earl Ray and the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 1998), 10-11. Non-violent protestors accused a younger Black Power group known as the Invaders of inciting violence.

together or we go down together,” highlighting the commitment and sacrifice necessary to achieve the goals of the strike and larger labor movement.⁸¹

Events in Memphis reached a breaking point on April 4, 1968 when an unknown sniper assassinated King while he stood on the second-story balcony walkway of the Lorraine Motel. The national response to the assassination was staggering. Within hours of King’s murder, African Americans throughout the United States unleashed their rage at the news that someone gunned down King. Urban riots occurred in 125 cities in the following days with forty-three dead and over 20,000 arrested by April 11. The damages totaled more than \$100 million, and the days following King’s murder saw the “largest domestic deployment of military forces since the Civil War.”⁸² Memphis felt the shockwaves of King’s murder worst of all. White Memphians heralded the sniper as a hero, and openly celebrated King’s death with vulgar racism. White people throughout the South congratulated Memphis and white Memphians for King’s murder to celebrate the loss of a major public threat to white supremacy.⁸³ For black people, however, the murder of King sparked unbridled rage and mourning for King. The days after King’s death saw unprecedented union support for the Sanitation Worker’s Strike to show support for King. Many local black communities also felt that the murder of King in Memphis tainted the city and the Lorraine Motel in irreparable ways, and such sentiments

⁸¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," address, April 3, 1968, in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York, NY: IPM/Warner Books, 2001), accessed October 14, 2018, Clayborne Carson, ed., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Address Delivered at Bishop Charles Mason Temple," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>; and Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 409.

⁸² Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 446. 72,800 Army and National Guard Troops with 50,000 soldiers on standby.

⁸³ Posner, *Killing the Dream*, 36-41, 253-254.

persisted for decades. Memphis became the place where memorializing the polarized memory of King's murder was integral to the city's history and culture, whether the community wanted it to be or not.⁸⁴

Memphis and Loeb faced pressure from all angles to address the strike and wage deficits after Dr. King's death. Whereas Memphis used to be *Time* magazine's cleanest city in the country, it was now "a southern backwater" and "decaying town" in a clear attack on the city's character.⁸⁵ The Department of Public Works Union demanded an increase in wages, union recognition from the local government, and special consideration for the rights of the Union's most exploited workers in sanitation. Only on April 16, after continued protests and intervention from President Johnson, did Loeb agree to the union's needs to avoid further public scrutiny. Loeb finally acknowledged the union, and agreed to raise wages to the national minimum wage with two five percent raises if the city council could figure out the funding for the wage increase. Nonetheless, the Department of Public Works and unions in Memphis successfully lobbied their interests, and ensured, at least in one regard, that the memory of King's leadership influenced change despite his death.⁸⁶

The Lorraine Motel and the Post-King Era

The Lorraine Motel originally opened as the Windsor Hotel in 1925. It operated for twenty years before being renamed the Marquette Hotel in 1945. At the time, the

⁸⁴ Posner, *Killing the Dream*, 40-42, 71-73; Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 284-287; and Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 443. In Memphis alone, rioting caused multiple fires, damaged fifty-six public buses, and resulted in 245 arrests.

⁸⁵ Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 487.

⁸⁶ Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1990), 5-7; Burns, *To the Mountaintop*, 391; and Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 483, 490. Over the course of the Sanitation Worker's Strike, the mostly white Memphis police force arrested 897 people, almost all of them black people.

Marquette was one of the only hotels in segregated Memphis that catered to African American patrons. In the same year, black businessperson Walter Bailey purchased and renovated the hotel, renaming the property the Lorraine. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, Bailey added a second floor, drive up parking, a swimming pool, and thirty additional rooms, changing the hotel to a motel because of the new embellishments. The new design of the Lorraine was modeled in the Googie style with eye-catching colors and geometric shapes; a futurist, Atomic Age aesthetic that was popular in United States after World War II through to the 1960s.⁸⁷ The vertical, bright neon sign for the Lorraine, the colorful outdoor paint, and the drive up parking are lasting remnants of the style on site.

During the Post-World War II period, the national economic boom, growing national highway system, and relative peacetime conditions cultivated the ability for many (predominately white) Americans to take vacations.⁸⁸ With affordable prices, good food, and reputation for being clean and safe, black and white travelers alike frequented the establishment. The Lorraine appeared in the *Negro Motorists Green Book*, a guide for black travelers during the restrictions of Jim Crow, and was one of the only establishments in Downtown Memphis that provided African Americans a safe place to stay overnight.⁸⁹ The motel's location in downtown Memphis, blocks away from the

⁸⁷ Googie architecture developed in post-World War II Southern California. The name "Googie" came from a now-demolished coffee shop in West Hollywood, which opened in 1949. Googie style was particularly popular in California and Nevada for being commercial and eye-catching, like advertisements that provided a chic and fun experience to visitors. Matt Novak, "Googie: Architecture of the Space Age," *Smithsonian.com*, June 15, 2012, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/googie-architecture-of-the-space-age-122837470/>; and Beau Perego, "5 of the Best Googie Buildings in L.A.," *Architectural Digest*, December 19, 2016, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/googie-buildings-la>.

⁸⁸ For a more in depth look at the mid-twentieth century conditions that allowed more middle class families to take extended vacations, see Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

⁸⁹ Victor H. Green & Co., Publishers, comp., *The Negro Motorist Green Book: An International Travel Guide* (n.p., 1950), <https://digitalcollections.nysl.org/items/283a7180-87c6-0132-13e6-58d385a7b928>. Cities and regions not listed in the *Negro Motorists Green Book* provide insight to places where black

Mississippi, provided African Americans with easy and accessible lodging in the region. A successful black-owned and operated business that catered to black patrons challenged Jim Crow by offering African Americans more accessibility and autonomy for movement. The Lorraine was even Martin Luther King Jr's chosen lodging establishment whenever he stayed in Memphis. Room 306 (and the adjoining room, 307) was the preferred room for King and his companions. The rooms sat in the middle of the complex at an apex of the second story railing and they are now immortalized as the site of King's assassination.⁹⁰

King's murder signaled a significant shift in the Lorraine Motel's management and its place in community memory from an accessible, stylish motel and King sanctuary to a place of insurmountable pain, violence, and martyrdom. The assassination catapulted the Lorraine Motel alongside Memphis into infamy as the site where James Earl Ray murdered Martin Luther King, Jr. After the assassination, the physical structure of the Lorraine Motel would forever serve as a painful reminder of the violence that occurred there. Almost immediately, Bailey took rooms 306 and 307 off the books and converted them into makeshift memorials. He recognized the importance of memorializing the site despite the tragedy and disorder surrounding the city and the motel alike. With the help of the SCLC, Bailey covered the second-floor balcony space with glass and metal and decorated it with wreaths to create a shrine. The SCLC also erected a granite plaque on the motel wall behind the balcony. Both the commemorative plaque and the memorial

people could not safely travel or find services throughout United States. These cities and regions are known as "sundown towns" where it was not safe for African Americans to travel through or stop in after the sun went down. For more information about sundown towns, see James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York, NY: New Press, 2005).

⁹⁰ Cynthia Frabrizio Pelak, "Institutionalizing Counter-Memories of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement: The National Civil Rights Museum and an Application of the Interest-Convergence Principle," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. 2 (June 2015): 313.

space of the balcony in rooms were fashioned to help mitigate the interest of visitors and mourners to the site (Fig. 1, 2, 3). Paying respects to King was informal and public; such memorial procedures highlighted not only the “vernacular character” of the memorial, but also the attention to preserving African American history within the community.⁹¹

The Lorraine remained defined by one of American history’s most shocking and disruptive events of anti-black violence. The motel attracted tourists, but the number of visitors who booked overnight accommodations steadily decreased. The motel experienced decline throughout the 1970s, and rooms became extended stay apartments rented out by poor people. This trend mirrored the neighborhood’s decline as the area attracted more and more unsafe drug and prostitution activity.⁹² Although union activity maintained an important social and political presence through the 1970s, the post-Vietnam War economic crisis, inflation, and stagnant wages undermined industrial and organized labor and widened the gap between the black middle class and the black working poor. In addition, the rise of conservative, anti-union politics beginning with President Nixon and strengthening under President Reagan effectively gutted southern unions and devastated efforts to organize the working poor. Black communities in Southern cities like Memphis got poorer and upward mobility and movement became harder and harder to obtain. The Lorraine Motel was a business that felt the brunt of this near twenty-year shift.⁹³

⁹¹ Bernard J. Armada, "Place Politics: Material Transformation and Community Identity at the National Civil Rights Museum," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 5 (May 2010): 900.

⁹² Honey, *Going down Jericho Road*, 502-503.

⁹³ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 12-13.

In the late 1970s, Bailey, painfully aware of the decaying surrounding neighborhood, reached out to organizations and interested parties to maintain the property as a more permanent memorial to King. For several years, preserving the motel in King's memory was a one-man movement. The pain of the murder had lessened with time, and Memphis seemed content to forget about the agonizing history of the city and motel.⁹⁴ Rescuing the space and the memory of King and civil rights at the motel was not a priority until 1982 when Bailey faced bankruptcy and foreclosure. He reached out to the program director for Memphis' first black-oriented radio station, Charles Scruggs, to help organize a fundraiser to purchase the site at auction. They created the Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation and began the Save The Lorraine fundraiser. D'Army Bailey (no relation to Walter Bailey) acted as the Foundation's local attorney. Their fundraising goal to purchase the motel was \$240,000, targeted to come from the black community members. However, African American interest in the campaign was limited. Most of the donations were from black families with modest incomes donating whatever they had available only after Bailey lambasted the black community for their apathy in preserving King's memory. The AFSCME donated \$25,000 since their strike was the reason King came to Memphis. Jesse Tuner's Tri-State Bank contributed a \$50,000 loan to the fundraiser, bringing the total to \$144,000; still well below the Foundation's goal. However, the money was enough to purchase the Lorraine from a bank auction.⁹⁵

What to do with the motel next was highly contested among Memphians. Local white support was practically non-existent, as white Memphians were typically among those who believed that the murder of King was an unfortunate stain on Memphis'

⁹⁴ Armada, "Place Politics," 899-900.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 902-903.

history. White Memphians, in an effort to actively “forget” local African American history and their role in that violence, believed that a historical marker in front of the demolished or rebuilt site would be enough of a memorial.⁹⁶ Black Memphians, who financed most of the fundraiser, felt strongly about preserving the motel as a museum, something much more interactive and educational than a roadside historical marker. The Foundation changed its name to the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation, and hired Benjamin Lawless, a former Smithsonian Institution Curator, to draft a feasibility report for a potential museum. Lawless’s interpretive plan focused on the ordinary people of the civil rights movement alongside a focus on King. Total costs for creating the museum and exhibits was estimated at \$8.8 million.⁹⁷

Without enough local support to fundraise for the project, D’army Bailey enlisted the help of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators to garner state support. Archie Walter “A.W.” Willis, Jr., the first African American state legislator since Reconstruction, helped build unanimous support for the memorial museum among black legislators. After strong support at the state level, white legislators “compromised” with the Foundation to broaden their board of directors to include wealthier white Memphians. This compromise meant that the Foundation board “became more politically conservative,” but also that the museum secured full financial support from state and local governments. With the full support from black state officials, the Tennessee General Assembly financed the budding National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) with \$4.4 million. The more conservative Memphis City Council and Shelby County Commission

⁹⁶ Fleming, “The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums,” 72.

⁹⁷ Armada, “Place Politics,” 903-904.

provided \$2.2 million each in funding. Final costs for the museum totaled \$9.25 million, and each government entity donated an extra \$150,000 to meet the goal.⁹⁸

The Foundation and the community had to decide what types of history to present and how to best present those histories, and Black professionals led and advised all aspects of the museum's interpretive process. Lawless's report and exhibit design helped immensely, as well as the guidance of prominent African American historians Dr. Spencer Crew and Dr. James O. Horton. The oldest African American architectural firm in the U.S., McKissack and McKissack and Thompson Architects and Engineers Incorporated designed and built the museum's interior. The Foundation, with the help of the historians and museum professionals, decided that it was most important to show a nuanced history of the civil rights movement through black lived experiences. Such experiences, although extremely integral to the movement's creation and success, were not yet accessibly adapted for a national audience. Not only would the museum reimagine the assassination site of King through a more positive lens of the power and determination of the African American community, the site took on a new role in fostering a national African American identity regarding the events of the civil rights movement.⁹⁹ Construction began in 1988 and demolished much of the motel to create the new museum complex. The colorful façade of the motel was the only thing left of the original building so the Foundation could build the museum around rooms 306, 307, and the balcony.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Pelak, "Institutionalizing Counter-Memories of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement," 318-319.

⁹⁹ Armada, "Place Politics," 904.

¹⁰⁰ President John F. Kennedy's assassination site, Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, reflects a similar memorialization process to the Lorraine Motel. After the assassination, Dealey Plaza continued operation as the Texas School Book Depository for 7 years before moving out; an open sixth floor window is the building's only indication of memorial to the violent events. Some city officials wanted to level the building as a way to create distance between the event and the city, but the building remained standing

The NCRM was dedicated on July 4, 1991 and opened to the public on September 28, 1991. The museum's mission statement reads: "The National Civil Rights Museum, located at the Lorraine Motel, the assassination site of Martin Luther King Jr., chronicles key episodes of the American Civil Rights Movement, examines today's global civil and human rights issues, provokes thoughtful debate and serves as a catalyst for positive social change."¹⁰¹ The mission articulates how the memorial museum aims to serve its local and global audiences in a multitude of social, political, and healing ways. Museum-related tourism helped to revitalize the area of Memphis around Mulberry Street, as well as increasing support to local businesses from people travelling to see the museum. In addition to being an educational force for African American history and heritage, the museum and the museum foundation became influential political agents in Memphis. As the death site of King, the National Register of Historic Places memorializes Shelby County's South Main Street as a historic district, meaning that the site also bears special protections and tax breaks from the federal government. It is a focus of the NCRM to recognize and protect this African American vernacular site and landscape, demonstrated by its complete title: "the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel." The amalgamation of ways that the NCRM serves its various communities also displays the

because of heavy public visitation throughout the 1970s. Dallas County bought the building in 1977, and renovated it for reopening in 1981 as the Dallas County Administration Building, leaving the sixth floor unoccupied. The National Register for Historic Places recognized the site in 1978, and argued against the change in ownership and new building use. The sixth floor museum opened in 1989, immortalizing the tragic memory of Kennedy's assassination for visitors to see for themselves. The cycle of continued building use after a tragic event, the building's decline, and refurbishing the building for a new use, eventually as a museum, mirrors the same process as the Lorraine Motel in as many years. Jimmy Stamp, "The Architectural History of the JFK Assassination Site: How November 22, 1963, Changed Dallas' Dealey Plaza Forever," Smithsonian.com, last modified November 21, 2013, accessed September 27, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-architectural-history-of-the-jfk-assassination-site-180947802/>.

¹⁰¹ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "About the Museum," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/about>.

necessity of having both a healing memorial and interpretive space to discuss the histories entrenched on its landscape.¹⁰²

In 1999, an expansion project on the NCRM began, and the Foundation acquired the properties across Mulberry Street. This acquisition was primarily to obtain the former Canipe's Amusement store and room house, where alleged gunman James Earl Ray stayed, as it was a key part of the investigation into King's assassination. After obtaining the property, the museum also became the archives for all the "police and evidence files associated with the manhunt, indictment and confession of the assassin of King." The expansion project, titled "Exploring the Legacy" opened to the public on September 28, 2002. The expansion aimed at addressing questions such as "1) Did the Movement die with King? 2) Was James Earl Ray the assassin? and, 3) What is the legacy of the movement?"¹⁰³ The museum complex closed Mulberry Street between Huling and Butler Avenues to accommodate the foot traffic from visitors to both interpretive spaces.

The NCRM underwent its most recent renovation from 2013 to 2014 to update and modernize the exhibits with interactive media, and updated exhibits and artifact presentations. The museum added more than forty films, oral histories, and interactive media pieces for visitors to gain a better and more personal African American perspective on the civil rights movement. The renovation project included a national, twenty-four member scholarly review committee tasked with reviewing and creating a new

¹⁰² National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Freedom Award: One of the Nation's Most Prestigious Events," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/freedom-award>; and National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Community," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed October 4, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/community>.

¹⁰³ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "About Us: Fact Sheet," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, last modified December 28, 2008, accessed October 11, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081228150116/http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/factsheet.htm>.

interpretive plan. The review committee consisted of leading experts in topics for the exhibits, from Jim Crow, to sit-ins, to Dr. King's history.¹⁰⁴ Opening to the public on the weekend of the anniversary of King's murder in 2014, the NCRM remains an important contribution to African American history as an educational institution, and as an artifact of the civil rights movement, King's assassination, and the preservation of the Lorraine Motel.¹⁰⁵

The museum complex is comprised of multiple buildings and exhibits that follow a chronological narrative that examines the history of black resistance and rights in the United States. The museum discusses slavery and resistance in its first permanent exhibit, "A Culture of Resistance: Slavery in America 1619-1861." By starting the visitor with an exhibit about the Atlantic slave trade and enslaved peoples in the United States, the museum takes a sure stance that Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, and even current struggles for African Americans rights can be traced back to brutal, centuries' long subjugations of Africans. The museum makes it clear to the visitor that Civil Rights was (and remains) a clear fight against a history of forced servitude at the hands of Western European cultures.¹⁰⁶

Further exhibits trace the history of African American resistance after the American Civil War, from Jim Crow through the major protests, events, and moments of the civil rights movement. The museum begins the discussion of the civil rights movement with *Brown v. Board of Education*, placing the emphasis on the court case as a

¹⁰⁴ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Renovations," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed June 27, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/renovation>; and National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Exhibitions," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed September 3, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/exhibitions>.

¹⁰⁵ Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 186.

¹⁰⁶ Author site visit, "A Culture of Resistance: Slavery in America 1619–1861" permanent exhibit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, Memphis, TN, August 26, 2018.

catalyst for the historical movement. Visitors move through interactive and engaging spaces throughout all exhibits and learn about the “classical era” of the civil rights movement in the South through oral histories, video and audio recordings, and interactive touch screens.¹⁰⁷ The chronological layout of the museum helps the audience easily contextualize which events overlap and directly influence other events. Many sections have physical timelines, graphs, and trend charts that the visitor walks beside to better grasp the effort and commitment it took to enact change through protests, boycotts, and lawsuits. The focus of these museum exhibits is to outline black freedom struggles regionally rather than a focus on the local area of Memphis.

The shift towards a more localized, place-based interpretation of the black freedom struggles in relation to the Lorraine Motel comes near the culmination of the museum’s narrative with exhibits on the Memphis sanitation worker’s strike and rooms 306 and 307. These exhibits as the last two interpretive narratives of the main museum building solidifies the overall interpretive argument that King’s murder was a major turning point in the momentum and success of the civil rights movement. “I Am a Man: Memphis Sanitation Strike 1968” begins the exhibit experience by briefly contextualizing the strike with a description of the anti-union, racialized working conditions of African Americans within the city. Combined with an immediate discussion of the deaths of Echol Cole and Robert Walker, the exhibit narrative focuses on local black, working-poor Memphians. The combination of artifact analysis and a timeline description of events of the Sanitation Worker’s Strike echoes other interpretive choices throughout the museum

¹⁰⁷ The museum builds off the periodization of the “classical” civil rights era from historians, Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*; Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*; and Cha-Jua and Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire.”

and connects the visitor to the histories of communities versus a sole discussion of larger, institutional and organizational histories. Historians Michael K. Honey and Earnestine Jenkins led the research and narrative initiative for “I Am a Man,” and the exhibit reflects their focus on working class laborers within the Black Freedom Struggles.¹⁰⁸

After outlining the lack of success for the Strike to generate substantial change in Memphis, the exhibit shifts to King’s involvement in the strike. King’s status as a national civil rights leader aimed to increase media attention on the strike and to inspire the strikers to continue protesting. The Poor People’s Campaign is included in small part in the discussion of the Sanitation Worker’s Striker as a means of contextualizing King’s radicalization and current focus that was at stake because of his involvement in Memphis. The exhibit encompasses two rooms of the museum and the narrative shift between rooms hinges on King’s increased involvement towards the date of his assassination. The first room culminates with the I Am a Man march in Memphis on March 28, 1968 and a discussion of the breakdown of the march. The second room focuses completely on the hours leading up to King’s assassination with a sentimental shift towards humanizing his last public speech and last living minutes. Visitors listen to King’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address as they exit the exhibit.

The exhibits in the Lorraine Motel culminate in the preservation and re-creation of King’s hotel rooms during his last visit to Memphis. “King’s Last Hours: Rooms 306 and 307” presents a poignant and sacred space to the visitor as it details the leader’s last hours. The museum memorializes the rooms and the space, which King used before he passed away, but also the museum memorializes the violence on site. The rooms are

¹⁰⁸ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, “Renovations,” National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel.

original and presented behind glass to allow visitors to commemorate the space as well as to create a physical connection to the space. Interpretative panels in this exhibit detail the events of April 4, chronologically and loosely. The museum echoes how King had possibly “foreseen” his own death based on rising tensions in Memphis and the radicalization of King’s personal politics alongside the growing popularity of the Black Panther Party.¹⁰⁹ The museum does not use this space to interpret King’s daily life while visiting the Lorraine Motel, but relies on the recreated physical rooms to communicate their use. The setting supports the interpretation that King used the rooms as strategizing and planning sites for marches, but interpretive panels do not discuss this aspect of the rooms. This up close and personal experience humanizes an iconic public figure and helps the visitor see themselves and others as part of this ongoing struggle. These efforts underscore the museum’s goals to inspire its visitors towards change as well as to guide a better understanding for non-black visitors of the African American experience in the United States before and during civil rights as well as through present struggles and movements.¹¹⁰

After exiting the last exhibit and leaving the exact space of King’s murder and martyrdom, visitors may go to the second interpretative space in the “Legacy Building.” The Legacy Building acts as a transitional space away from the direct memorialization of Rooms 306 and 307 to a more generalized commemorative and analytical space. Instead of making clear arguments about the facts of the civil rights movement events and

¹⁰⁹ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, “King’s Last Hours: Room 306 and 307,” from a quote by Reverend Harold Middlebrook, C.O.M.E. strategist and local advisor to Dr. King. Author site visit, “Kings Last Hours: Rooms 306 and 307” permanent exhibit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, August 26, 2018.

¹¹⁰ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, “About Us: Fact Sheet,” National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel.

leaders, the following exhibits are less defined to represent the lack of historical consensus regarding the aftermath of King's death. Particularly, the Legacy Building articulates all the known (and public) evidence of the search to find King's assassin including the various intelligence agencies and suspects, but lets visitors draw their own conclusions about who murdered King and why.

The Legacy Building first explores King's final days, and the investigation into the assassination through timelines, artifacts, and recreating the rooms and vantage points that the assassin used. The museum examines the conspiracy theories surrounding King's death, including the prosecution of James Earl Ray as the murderer. The conspiracies, FBI involvement in surveilling and terrorizing King during his life, and FBI investigations into his death became part of the national memory of King and of the civil rights movement. The museum dedicates ample space for visitors to contemplate the world's "Lingering Questions" about King's murder and subsequent conspiracies, especially regarding James Earl Ray as the actual killer. The last part of the Legacy Building contextualizes the legacy of King and the civil rights movement through a timeline of progressive court case decisions and touch-screen video players. Through the lens of historical activism, the NCRM highlights important modern activists and movements inspired by King and the "classical" civil rights movement and intends to continue inspiring future movement leaders across the world through their educational initiatives.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "The Legacy Building," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed September 4, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/exhibit/legacy-building/>; and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 626.

The NCRM promotes several ways that community members can engage with the museum and its community history, including participating in the museum's governing body, free entry for Tennessee locals, and accessible transportation from other areas of downtown Memphis. Thirty-one people currently make up the museum's Board of Directors, and twenty-three members are prominent businesspeople throughout the United States.¹¹² Besides business people, there is one Tennessee Senator, one Rabbi, two education professionals, and four unaffiliated citizens that serve on the Board. Average museum-goers can join a yearly membership at various payment levels for free entry and extended access to the museum based on the payment level. The scale begins at the individual and family memberships (fifty and seventy-five dollars respectively), and end at the President's level (one thousand dollars). Higher cost fees secure free entries for more qualified groups.¹¹³ Whereas museum tickets typically range from thirteen to seventeen dollars, Tennessee residents and local school children may visit the museum for free. A trolley system connects the historic district where the museum is located to other cultural heritage sites in Memphis. The museum actively creates ways for local Memphians, black or white, to participate in the preservation of local history, despite the national and international significance of King's assassination.¹¹⁴

¹¹² According to the by-laws, the Board of Directors can be a group of no less than ten and no more than thirty-five people. Members do not have to be residents of the State of Tennessee. Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation Board of Directors, "Board Meetings and By-laws," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/board-meetings-by-laws>.

¹¹³ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Board of Directors," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/board-of-directors>; and National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Become a Member," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/membership>.

¹¹⁴ National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "About the Museum," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel; and National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, "Visit," National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, accessed June 12, 2018, <https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/visit>.

Claiming the Lorraine Motel as a memorial space was in practice since the immediate days after King's assassination in 1968. The preservation of rooms 306 and 307 by Bailey and the Foundation stood as a testament to the sacredness of King and the larger civil rights movement. The initial attempts to create the museum during the 1980s to its opening in 1991 added a new layer to the memorial space by interpreting the events of the civil rights movement through black perspectives and memories via multiple exhibits. With the National Civil Rights Museum existing as a simultaneously local and national memorial landscape, visitors could learn about the history of African Americans and the black freedom struggles at the same time and in the same space in which they honored the memory of King.¹¹⁵

Although the motel is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places—most likely because the original building is not intact—the Lorraine is designated a historical site by the Tennessee Historical Commission. However, the National Register of Historic Places does list the historic district in which the motel is located. Regardless of historic preservation and national register status, the museum preserved one of the only historically black-friendly hotels in Memphis as it existed before April 4, 1968: a lodging establishment safe for African Americans in the U.S. South during Jim Crow and through the civil rights movement. Not only does this site memorialize the nationally tragic event of King's assassination, but also it memorializes the cultural context surrounding the murder by utilizing the historic space and existing visitors' interest to tell the larger narrative of civil rights. The architecture of the site intertwines with the historical memory of the site in the ongoing work of memorialization. The combination of place-

¹¹⁵ Armada, "Place Politics," 900.

based commemoration and nebulous interpretive spaces culminated in the creation of a unique memorial landscape where visitors experience both national and local perspectives on movement and King's assassination.¹¹⁶

Black local and state community members organized the museum to present and interpret black voices to shape a contemporary black identity that does not forget their successes and sacrifices in the ongoing struggle for civil rights. In this complex fusion of memory and identity, the NCRM risks naturalizing the outcomes of the civil rights movement, linking the struggles and violence as inevitable up to and including King's attributed pre-vision of his death. The tension the organization embodies in this memorial is in taking the everyday (the Lorraine) and juxtaposing its extraordinary place in the transformation of a movement, without negating or minimizing the innumerable, grueling and uncertain steps along the way. Although, the apex of the museum's narrative is the tribute to King with rooms 306 and 307, the museum blends commemoration with nuanced exhibit interpretation to create a lasting impact with visitors.¹¹⁷

As a site of violence with an international impact, the creation of a museum to help interpret that violence allows for a more complex discussion and lasting engagement with that history versus what the placement of a memorial plaque or statue could accomplish. It continues the trend of inserting the local story into the older, "classical" civil rights success story; using the physical space of the site to help interpret the history of a segregated Memphis, King, and the civil rights movement to transform what could have been a static memorial space into an active and engaging memorial landscape. The

¹¹⁶ Victor H. Green & Co., Publishers, comp., *The Negro Motorist Green Book*.

¹¹⁷ King, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," address; and Author site visit, "Kings Last Hours: Rooms 306 and 307" permanent exhibit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, August 26, 2018.

NCRM has painstakingly created an interpretive and memorial space that does not discuss its subjects without a fair, historical understanding of the nuances of their decisions. The museum is integral for shaping collective memory of the physical space as well as the historical movement, building its multi-vocality in preserving and marking multiple memories at once. Preserving the Lorraine Motel and establishing a museum blended the memory of the site in such a way that visitors have a personalized, identity-shaping experience that at the same time replicates a national community experience that creates the collective memory of King and the struggle for civil rights. The site echoes sentiments of remembrance and activism within its visitors while also marking the site as sacred. Because of the tragedy of death and a need to pilgrimage to the site, visitors honor the memory of King as well as the civil rights movement, with all its ups and downs, through their consumption of history and their reflection on the past.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

As Fleming outlined, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements led to the creation of black museums as a means of preserving local memory and culture. This vein of community movement and activism spurred the creation of the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel. The NCRM was not born out of one person's idea or one person's effort. At all levels of success, the NCRM and the preservation of the Lorraine Motel was born out of the effort of the African American community in Memphis and in greater Tennessee. This community eventually recognized the importance of maintaining

¹¹⁸ Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 186; Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 20-23; Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 6; and Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas," 74-75.

the site for the preservation of their heritage and culture for future community members and visitors, no matter how painful or how strong the opposition would be.¹¹⁹

By preserving the Lorraine Motel, the local black community prevented the erasure of anti-black violence in the United States from the landscape. The motel stands as a receptacle for the memory and tragedy of King's assassination. The murder of a national leader occurred at a relatively unremarkable place with a vernacular community importance in Memphis and thereby the Lorraine Motel has come to represent the ordinary abuses against African American people throughout the country. While one might hope that those abuses would have ended after the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the National Civil Rights Museum recognizes that African Americans and other people of color continue to face exploitation and mistreatment in the fifty years since civil rights. The Lorraine Motel and Museum Foundation took one aspect of Memphis history that reshaped community identity and memory, not easily forgotten in the light of national and international attention, and turned King's assassination site into an honorific and educational space. The physical space of the motel, rooms 306 and 307, and the balcony, combined with the symbolic space of the museum, city block, and national memory of the assassination creates a complex, memorial landscape in Memphis where visitors and locals can engage all aspects of the sites' history as a form of active education and commemoration.

In the next chapter, I will examine the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail as an active memorial landscape. From inception to the current day, the trail continues to undergo negotiations with the local communities, friends groups, and state

¹¹⁹ Fleming, "The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums," 59-62.

and local government about whose memories will guide the histories presented at the trail. Like at the National Civil Rights Museum, the impact and visibility of racial violence throughout the trail's landscape drives the interpretive narrative on-site. The trail focuses on using localized histories to interpret the national movement, which fosters a visitor experience that is best understood as a place-specific experience by personally travelling along the route.

Chapter Picture Appendix:



Fig. 1: Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Plaque at Lorraine Motel¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Author site visit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, August 26, 2018.



Fig. 2: Memorial Wreath on Lorraine Motel Balcony¹²¹



Fig. 3: Lorraine Motel Room 306 on Exhibit¹²²

¹²¹ Author site visit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, August 26, 2018.

¹²² Author site visit, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, August 26, 2018.

IV. ESTABLISHING AND CURATING THE SELMA TO MONTGOMERY NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

Introduction

This chapter discusses the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail as an active and layered memorial landscape. Dedicated in 1996, the Selma to Montgomery NHT memorializes the fifty-four mile route marchers took during the Voting Rights March in 1965. The march, one of multiple national protests during the civil rights movement, aimed to draw attention to the failure of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to protect the voting rights of people of color, especially in the rural Southern United States. The landscape of Alabama presented a fierce battleground for activists protesting the lack of voting rights.¹²³ In the three counties comprising the distance between Selma to Montgomery (Dallas, Lowndes, and Montgomery counties) and deep into Alabama's "Black Belt," Black citizens were almost completely disenfranchised from voting despite the passage of federal civil rights protections.¹²⁴ To be successful in preserving and commemorating the stretch of Highway 80 that marchers used as their route, beginning at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, stopping at four makeshift campsites along the way, and ending at the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery, the National Park Service relied on the help of private, city, and state entities. Because of the local partnerships, the federal government—through the form of the National Trails System as a subset of the NPS—only directly controls a portion of the affiliated sites on the trail, including the two

¹²³ Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 209, 215; J. Morgan Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 13; and Brian K. Landsberg, *Free at Last to Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Voting Rights Act* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 6-7, 10.

¹²⁴ Author site visit, "Fifty-Four Miles to Freedom" permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, Hayneville, AL, January 4, 2018.

interpretive centers: one in Selma and one in Lowndes County. Other landmarks of the trail are either private or city owned and operated institutions, such as the affiliated churches, farmlands, and state government buildings. The amalgam of historic sites, monuments, interpretation, and bodies of oversight creates a complex, physical, memorial landscape that challenges a simple historical narrative regarding the Voting Rights March and the larger civil rights movement as having an obvious outcome and being confined to the 1950s and 1960s.

This case study argues that the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail actively challenges the static conventions of physical memorialization because the tangible memorial sites act in conversation with each other and the rest of the landscape in ways that continue to challenge the predominance of a single narrative. The types of tangible memorial sites throughout the trail includes historical markers, historic preservation, interpretive centers, roadside interpretation, and statuary monuments (either to the events of the march or other local histories). The predominance of static memorials in the form of statues and historical markers combined with components of active memory curating such as interpreted spaces and public programming contributes to the blended, nuanced narrative found throughout the trail's landscape. Visitors interact with the history and memory of the sites by physically moving through the trail space. The trail's layered memorial qualities and the way that visitors engage with the space create an active memory-curating experience that the mere existence of statuary monuments cannot replicate.

Federal Protection and the Facilitation of Public Memory

The United States implemented the concept of protecting national areas, landscapes, and resources for indefinite public use during the end of the nineteenth century. The social upheaval following the American Civil War helped precipitate the federal government's expansion of scientific roles to include "research, land management, and conservation," as a means of extracting resources for industry, inspiring interest in the American West as either a migratory or travel venture. These scientists would form the backbone of conservationism in the United States and came to staff the agencies that oversaw the protection of valued landscapes and artifacts.¹²⁵ During this preliminary period of conservation, the federal government reckoned with how to best manage, interpret, and study sites. The federal government initiated preservation of land for public parks with the Yosemite Grant Act of 1864.¹²⁶ This act created the precedent wherein American lawmakers could preserve parts of the landscape for study. Subsequently, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many American academic professionals called for the protection and management of research sites in order to control the looting and destruction of important cultural and historical heritage. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act, which granted the first legal and national protection for cultural and natural resources on federal lands. The act also allowed the office of the president to preserve sites as national monuments via executive order as a means of quickly protecting worthy sites. The Antiquities Act is the

¹²⁵ Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 33, 38.

¹²⁶ Yosemite Grant Act, Pub. L. No. 38-159, 13 Stat. 203 (June 30, 1864).

first of its kind in America to provide explicit protections to archeological and historical sites as well as environmental sites.¹²⁷

Preservation efforts continued through the early twentieth century, but remained unconsolidated, operated with inconsistent standards, and continued to emphasize scenic spaces, natural landscapes, or battlefields. In 1916, the National Park Service Organic Act created the agency with the jurisdiction to maintain and protect a range of important American landscapes. The National Park Service operates under the governing body of the Department of the Interior. The Organic Act was a means of shifting to a more centralized structure to regulate “national parks, monuments, and reservations” (as the Department of the Interior acted as the federal liaison with tribal lands). The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) organized in 1919 as a public voice advocating in the best interest of the national park system to “make sure they receive the funds they need to preserve [the] nation’s natural and cultural treasures, and protect them from outside threats.”¹²⁸ Due to the established work of scientists in conserving and researching natural areas, the federal government prioritized national environmental conservation before historic preservation. President Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order 6166, or the “Organization of Executive Agencies,” further centralized the standards of preservation and management in 1933 by placing all nationally protected lands under National Park Service jurisdiction. The order allowed for the transfer of 56 national monuments from the War Department, the Forest Service, and the Department of the Interior to the NPS as a means of consolidating the preservation of historical, cultural,

¹²⁷ National Park Service, “American Antiquities Act of 1906,” Legislative and Congressional Affairs, accessed October 5, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/legal/american-antiquities-act-of-1906.htm>.

¹²⁸ National Parks Conservation Association, *Common Ground: 2017 Annual Report* (Washington, DC: National Parks Conservation Association, 2017), 4-6.

and environmental sites. This transfer included national military parks, battlefields, national historic parks, national monuments, and various memorial sites.¹²⁹ The consolidation of sites under one agency changed the process and meaning of federal preservation. The field of preservation now featured a need to understand and maintain historical and cultural sites as well as natural and scenic areas.¹³⁰

In the 1920s, the growth in the number of protected environmental and state historical sites prompted professional researchers within the National Park Service to call for the creation of blanket specifications, rules, and regulations regarding the acquisition and management of new sites. This model posed a challenge in integrating locally significant places into the national historical narrative because the individual complexities of representing each site required specific and personalized attention. Historians simply did not have the expertise to execute systematic, localized historic preservation programs. The park service and associated historians, under the leadership of Dr. Verne Chatelain, had put tremendous effort towards creating a functioning park history that had national importance, or a national “historical mindedness,” as well as a set of standards for future site selection. Chatelain tried to fashion the preservation of historical sites “into a map of national identity that visitors might use to locate themselves inside the American past.” His work for the NPS allowed for the training of academic historians as Park Service historians or public historians. This created a schism between academic historians and Park Service historians based upon university-centered

¹²⁹ Exec. Order No. 6166, 5 Fed. Reg. 124 (July 10, 1933).

¹³⁰ An Act to Establish a National Park Service, and for Other Purposes, 39 Stat. 535 (Aug. 25, 1916); and Exec. Order No. 6166, 5 Fed. Reg. 124 (July 10, 1933). For an in-depth collection of legislation governing National Parks and the National Park Service, see Lary M. Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 1994).

perspectives that local and state histories lacked the objectivity required for the discipline. However, the focus on personal, community, and vernacular objects and histories allowed for an adaptive approach to preservation for each individual site.¹³¹

The 1930s through the 1960s saw not only the consolidation of site management systems, but also the consolidation of professional researchers and assimilation of altogether new sites. Although World War II affected park resources, the end of the war brought economic prosperity, infrastructure, and the ability for some American families to take leisurely vacations. Historian Susan Sessions Rugh suggests that park attendance in the 1950s grew higher than ever before as a result of the increased time and resources available to middle class, white families. The 1960s saw a rise in creating recreational parks, with legislation like the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the National Trails System Act of 1968 opening the door towards publicly protecting larger landscapes.¹³²

The National Trails System Act (NTS), most recently amended in 2009, outlines four categories of trails, which include scenic, historic, recreational, and connecting or side trails. The requirements for designation in each trail category are different. National scenic trails must be “continuous, primarily non-motorized routes” that feature extensive recreational prospects for visitors and are 100 miles or longer in length.¹³³ National historic trails must recognize the original trails or paths of travel for historically significant events in U.S. history. This type of trail may include important routes regarding exploration, migration, military actions, and social activism, and does not

¹³¹ Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 106, 108.

¹³² Rugh, *Are We There Yet?*, 2-4; Wilderness Act of 1964, S. 890 (1964); and National Trails System Act, Pub. L. No. 90-543, 82 Stat. 919 (Oct. 2, 1968). The New Social History perspective from the 1960s and 1970s criticized the history and policies of the NPS, drawing attention back to local and community levels.

¹³³ Steve Elkinton, *The National Trails System: A Grand Experiment* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2008), 10-11.

feature a strict mile limit for consideration. National recreation trails provide a federal recognition status to local and regional trails already in existence.¹³⁴

Most of the trails in this system only partially operate on federal land, and the federal government does not oversee the entire trail's operations. The National Trails System Act provides such routes and landscapes federal protection, but regional, state, local, and private management is important to maintaining protected areas that may span thousands of miles. Historic trails have very specific federal protections due to the often-limited amount of federally owned lands along the trail. Only land and water components of a historic trail that is on federally owned lands and meet the national historic trails requirements have federal protections. All other trail protections and administrations come from state and local governments as well as private entities "without expense to the United States."¹³⁵ Along with recognizing the importance of the contributions made by private citizens and organizations to the National Trails System, the act specifies that "volunteer citizen involvement" by way of planning, maintaining, managing, and developing trails is highly encouraged. Depending on the site, the only historical interpretation may be what the NPS provides, and the NPS may not have control over how private entities choose to incorporate their own interpretation. Because of the extended length and remote locations that encompasses many trails, private cooperation in helping run these trails is essential.¹³⁶

Regarding the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, local and state organizations employ interpretive formats and materials alongside the route, such as

¹³⁴ There are currently eleven national scenic trails, nineteen national historic trails, and nearly 1,300 national recreational trails. National Trails System Act, Pub. L. No. 90-543, 82 Stat. 919 (Oct. 2, 1968).

¹³⁵ National Trails System Act, Pub. L. No. 90-543, 82 Stat. 919 (Oct. 2, 1968). Section 3, article 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.; and Elkinton, *The National Trails System*, 13-18.

historical markers, audio walking tours, community gardens, and physical memorialization. These interpretive features that exist outside of the Park Service and are important to study in conjunction with the Trail because they preserve varying community perspectives about the march. State and organizational historical markers note places of flashpoint events during the march, or places where an original historic structure still exists or is still in use. Along the trail, most of these markers iterate the same information found on National Park Service roadside panels unless someone erected the marker to honor a person associated with the march. In Selma, there is an audio walking tour that visitors can access through calling a number on their cell phone. This is a city initiative that coincides with city-sponsored walking tours of sites associated with civil rights movement and is not affiliated with the NPS. There is a memorial park located on the south side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge that features outdoor artworks and murals representing the march and the civil rights movement. Although unaffiliated with the federally protected part of the trail, the memorial park is marked on the NPS trail map (Fig. 1). Without these perspectives, the only physical interpretation of the march would be from the Park Service and Park Service affiliated state and local entities.

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

Voting rights was an important battleground in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the remnants of a society governed by Jim Crow continued to block African Americans from voting in southern states. Political groups and politicians, particularly Alabama's Governor George Wallace, state and local police forces, and the Ku Klux Klan ensured voter suppression through

various forms of intimidation and a disregard to enforcing new national laws protecting civil rights. White society typically remained complacent to the systemic inequalities throughout the country as a result from targeted and biased media coverage.¹³⁷

Alabama was a state in which black voters faced arguably the strongest opposition. Despite constitutional amendments granting American citizens and eventually women the vote, Southern states continued to undermine those protections on a state and local level. Places with higher percentages of Black people featured near total disenfranchisement for potential Black voters. In 1964, only 335 African American were registered to vote in Selma (about 2.2 percent of the total African American population in the city) versus 9,542 registered white voters. Counties like the “neighboring Wilcox and Lowndes” had no African Americans registered to vote.¹³⁸ Selma, however, became a steady organizational center for educating and advocating towards voting rights as early as the 1930s. Amelia Platts Robinson formed the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) in 1933 and worked with her husband, Sam Boynton, through the 1950s to provide classes and voter registration drives with little success towards the enfranchisement of local residents. SNCC began organizing students and farmers in 1963, and consistently led movements in coordination with the DCVL to conduct voter registration drives and educational classes.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 328-330; Landsberg, *Free at Last to Vote*, 6-10; Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 17-18.

¹³⁸ Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, by National Park Service and United States Department of the Interior, 30, 1993, 10-11, archived October 15, 2018.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181015170021/http://www.npshistory.com/publications/semo/trail-study.pdf>

¹³⁹ U.S. Const. amend. XV (amended 1870); U.S. Const. amend. XIX (amended 1920); Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, 10-11; Theresa L. Hall, *A March for All: Selma's Voting Rights Movement* (Hatboro, PA: Eastern National, 2013), 6-7; and Author site visit, “Fifty-Four Miles to Freedom” permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018.

Because of the incredible white opposition to recognizing voter enfranchisement as a part of civil rights, the national movement's black voter registration campaign created their headquarters in Selma, Alabama. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, local Selma law enforcement and courts attempted to stifle assembling in groups of three or more to discuss civil rights to curtail the continued struggle for voting rights.¹⁴⁰ Members of the DCVL continued to mobilize into the beginning of 1965, enlisting the help of SCLC president Martin Luther King, Jr., and organizing local marches and displays to the Dallas County Courthouse. Children and students made up the bulk of the protestors during the early part of 1965, mostly in part because they did not have jobs to lose or a job market to be blacklisted from like local adult community members. However, at every instance, Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark continued to block protestors from entering the courthouse, gaining more attention from local and national media outlets at the lengths he would go to undermine and humiliate protesting individuals.¹⁴¹

As tensions escalated more than 200 young community members conducted a night march in the town of Marion, Alabama, on February 18, 1965 to protest rumors that "authorities planned to hang" student protestor and SCLC leader, James Orange, who had been arrested earlier that day. Under the cover of darkness, state troopers and segregationists beat many peaceful protestors in the attack, and shot one man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, to death. Jackson became a martyr for the local struggle for voting rights

¹⁴⁰ National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery: Brochures," National Park Service, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/brochures.htm>, and National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery: Basic Information," National Park Service, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/basicinfo.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Hall, *A March for All*, 9-10, 15.

and ignited the local community's support for a larger, state-wide organized protest for voting rights. Grown out of the original plan to march Jackson's casket to Governor George Wallace's office in Montgomery, movement leaders instead decided to embark on the fifty-four mile march in Jackson's memory.¹⁴²

Scheduled for Sunday, March 7, 1965, the planned march route began at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma and would eventually end at the State Capitol Building in Montgomery. Around 600 people from the local and surrounding communities, led by march organizers John Lewis from SNCC and Hosea Williams from SCLC, gathered at Brown Chapel AME Church to embark on their protest. The march proceeded without disruption through the George Washington Carver Homes and the African American neighborhoods of Selma. The Edmund Pettus Bridge, connecting the racially segregated parts of Selma, marked the first geographical roadblock that organizers anticipated, expecting to "be arrested once they crossed" into the predominately white part of Selma. Governor Wallace had prohibited the march citing a supposed threat to public safety and directed state troopers to "use whatever measures are necessary" to prevent the march.¹⁴³ Two hundred Alabama state troopers led by Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark and Major John Cloud awaited the marchers at the bottom of the bridge proclaiming that marchers were assembling unlawfully and needed to disperse. When marchers did not disperse, the troopers advanced with nightsticks, whips, tear gas canisters, and homemade weapons to attack and beat the marchers. Deputies on horseback chased and terrorized the group over

¹⁴² David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 67-69; Hall, *A March for All*, 17-18; and Southern Poverty Law Center, "Jimmie Lee Jackson," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/jimmie-lee-jackson>.

¹⁴³ Hall, *A March for All*, 19.

the bridge and back to Brown Chapel AME Church, continuing their assault there well into the following night.¹⁴⁴

National media, aware of Governor Wallace's public stance on the march and the threat of violence to quell the march by state troopers, captured photographs and video footage of beaten protestors and broadcast the beatings into American homes nationally. This day, known as "Bloody Sunday," sparked national outrage at the first amendment violations that local media could no longer minimize or ignore. In the aftermath of the failed march, students and other activists held demonstrations in Montgomery and across America to show solidarity to protestors in Selma. Concurrently, President Johnson helped to draft two national voting rights bills. On March 15, President Lyndon Johnson argued to a joint session of Congress that "it is ... deadly wrong to deny any of [their] fellow Americans the right to vote," and that to do so would perpetuate a "crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice."¹⁴⁵ On March 17, Martin Luther King and local protestors in Selma were permitted to reattempt the march to Montgomery. Governor Wallace denied providing the marchers protections from the Alabama National Guard, so President Johnson federally enacted National Guard troops to protect marchers.¹⁴⁶

On March 21, thousands of marchers restarted the march towards Montgomery from Brown Chapel AME Church, protected by 4,000 National Guard members, Army soldiers, FBI agents, and federal marshals. Since Highway 80 narrowed from four lanes to two lanes outside Selma, a court order stipulated that only 300 marchers could continue their protest to Montgomery for road traffic and the safety of protestors.

¹⁴⁴ Hall, *A March for All*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ Lyndon Baines Johnson, "Voting Rights Act Address" (address, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., DC, March 15, 1965).

¹⁴⁶ Hall, *A March for All*, 24.

Campsites and organizers needed to accommodate the 300 marchers with food, sleeping arrangements, and medical care at each nightly stop. Marchers camped at David Hall farm, Rosie Steele farm, and Robert Gardner farm on each respective night of the march. The City of St. Jude was the fourth and last campsite for marchers, and many marchers rejoined the group after the highway widened back to four lanes outside of Montgomery. Twenty-five thousand people participated in the final leg of the march from the City of St. Jude to the State Capitol.¹⁴⁷

Upon arrival at the Alabama State Capitol, movement and organizational leaders gave speeches in support of voting rights protections at the rally that followed, including A. Philip Randolph, King, John Lewis of SNCC, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Rosa Parks, and Whitney Young of the National Urban League. The rally and march concluded when Governor Wallace and state troopers denied the delivery of a petition asking for full voting rights for African Americans throughout the state. As march participants dispersed to return to their communities, supporters with cars like Viola Liuzzo coordinated transport to bring groups of marchers to their homes quickly and safely. However, the KKK targeted Liuzzo, a white housewife from Detroit with Michigan plates on her car, while she and passenger Leroy Moton travelled to pick up more march participants. The KKK chased Liuzzo down the highway, and eventually pulled up the side of her car and fired into her window. Although Liuzzo died instantly, Moton managed to stop the car and play dead to deceive Klan members before escaping to safety.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Hall, *A March for All*, 26, 30.

¹⁴⁸ For more information about the racial violence prevalent in Lowndes County and the birth of the Black Panther Party, see Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009). Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, 20-21.

Five months later, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965.¹⁴⁹ Participants of the Voting Rights March had achieved their goal of enacting national legislation enfranchising African Americans. Yet, even the passage of the Voting Rights Act did not provide universal protections for African Americans pursuing the vote. Particularly, the immediate ramifications of the Voting Rights March included the murder of Episcopal seminarian and activist Jonathan Daniels and the creation of “Tent City” in Lowndes County, Alabama. Daniels was among a group of activists in Hayneville organizing to desegregate local businesses. On August 20, after a group stint in a local jail for picketing a segregated store, Daniels and other released activists were blocked from entering a local African American store and shot at. Daniels died while protecting black, seventeen-year-old, Ruby Sales, allowing time for Sales, Joyce Bailey, and Father Richard F. Morrisroe to run away. Morrisroe was severely wounded by another shot but did not die.¹⁵⁰ The December following the march, angry, white local landowners evicted all African American tenant farmers who “registered, voted, or engaged in any voting rights activities.” The SNCC organized Tent City to help these families stay residents in Lowndes County and retain their newly empowered voter registration. Those who lived in Tent City throughout its two-year duration were often harassed or shot at while they attempted to find permanent housing and employment.¹⁵¹

Another way that local white people retaliated against the enfranchisement of black voters was to directly attack the businesses and organizations that aided marchers

¹⁴⁹ Voting Rights Act, Pub. L. No. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437 (Aug. 6, 1965 & Supp. 1965).

¹⁵⁰ Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 81-82.

¹⁵¹ Author site visit, “Tent City” permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018; and National Park Service, *Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail*, Pamphlet (n.p.: National Park Service, 2014).

during the Voting Rights March. Rosie Steele and Robert Gardner were forced to cut up their farmland or sell their farm entirely because of the local backlash to their involvement with the march. David Hall was an African American farmer, and his farm is the only one along the route to remain whole and in his family in 2018. The City of St. Jude faced multiple budget cuts and a decline of patrons leading to a fractured and rented-out use of the existing hospital buildings. The systems that perpetuated white supremacy and continued hostilities towards African Americans are deeply woven into the Alabama (and national) landscape and continue to undercut civil rights protections for African Americans.¹⁵²

In 1990, Congress authorized the study of the Voting Rights March for the potential authorization of national historic trail designation. The Southeast Regional Office of the National Park Service studied and created the report for the Selma to Montgomery NHT to determine the “eligibility,” “feasibility,” and “desirability” of its designation. This report, published in 1993, extensively outlined the historical background of the Civil Rights Movement as well as the Voting Rights March and provided an in-depth description of the natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources of the entire trail route. The national trail marks the roadside route traveled by voting rights advocates during their marches in 1965 and thus highlights the importance of protecting voting rights for people of color in the South. Management, administration, and protections of the trail would be a “cooperative city, county, state, and friends group project,” and there would be additional efforts to provide further protections to multiple

¹⁵² Lawson, *Black Ballots*, 345-346; Steven F. Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965-1982* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), 291; Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice*, 12-15; and Gary May, *Bending toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 239-240.

historically significant sites along the route. Designation as a national historic trail would also require visibly marking the trail with historical panels and introducing interpretive programs to commemorate the Voting Rights March.¹⁵³

In 1995, the stretch of road was designated both an Alabama State Scenic Highway and a National Scenic Highway, and in 1996, the route came under full NPS jurisdiction as a National Trail. The trail commemorates the national memory of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as well as the marches that led to the creation of that legislation. Through sites including the Edmund Pettus Bridge, four makeshift campsites where marchers stayed, multiple memorials, churches, and associated museums, interpretation along the route follows the temporal and spatial movement from marchers as one travels from Selma to Montgomery (Fig. 1).¹⁵⁴ Guiding commemoration of the Voting Rights Act means that the NPS helps curate a national history of the United States. In curating a history of the Voting Rights March for national audiences, the NPS helps lead how the public remembers and understands it. Most of the current on-site interpretation and programming stems from the 1993 trail report which adapted the contemporary trends of Black Freedom studies.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, 22-37.

¹⁵⁴ National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery," National Park Service; National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery: Brochures," National Park Service; and National Park Service, *Selma to Montgomery*, Pamphlet.

¹⁵⁵ For example, the trail study built upon the work of scholars Davis J. Garrow, Amelia Boynton, Aldon D. Morris, Steven F. Lawson, John Hope Franklin, Alfred A. Moss Jr. and others to articulate the significance of local organizing and activism as integral to the success of the movement and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Garrow, *Protest at Selma*; Amelia Platts Boynton, *Bridge across Jordan: The Story of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Selma, Alabama* (New York: Carlton Press, 1979); Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*; Lawson, *Black Ballots*; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 6th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1988); and Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, 10-21, 41.

To understand the Selma to Montgomery NHT, it is important to examine the socially constructed contexts and geographies encompassed by the trail. This site co-exists within the physical geography of the U.S. South, and specifically the state of Alabama. It also exists within the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement. Because this is a roadside route, the landscape of the trail features both urban and rural settings that contextualize how physically difficult and socially challenging this march was for participating voting rights advocates. Also necessary for understanding the interpretation of the Selma to Montgomery NHT site is the gap in time between the historical events of the march to the dedication of the site as a historic trail. The federal government dedicated the Selma to Montgomery NHT thirty-one years after the marches for voting rights and the landscape has changed significantly in that time. Whereas some of the structures and sites of the historic march were preserved and represented with historical markers, most of the protest campsites were broken up or lost local patronage in retaliation for the role they played in ensuring the success of the march. Boycotts of affiliated business and farms as well as the natural decay of infrastructure that disproportionately affected local African American communities represented an ongoing, targeted form of economic violence as a result of the march. The NPS must mitigate the physical changes with the landscape alongside the changes in collective memory about the march and civil rights.¹⁵⁶

Violence, both physical and economic, sits at the core of the trail's historical narrative. Those looking to uphold white supremacy, especially in Lowndes County, beat, harassed, and intimidated marchers at all points throughout the march and its planning.

¹⁵⁶ Lawson, *In Pursuit of Power*, 282; and Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice*, 192.

When methods of intimidation and harassment did not dissuade marchers, those opposed to equal rights resorted to murder. The murders of Jackson, Liuzzo, and Daniels before, during, and after the march reinforced the prevalence of local violence to try deterring marchers from organizing for voting rights and enforcing desegregation. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the use of economic violence as a means of retaliation drove registered African American voters in Lowndes County into a tent city and ruined family farms and businesses. The importance of violence (and securing voting rights despite that violence) to the narrative of the trail cannot be understated and is visible on the memorial landscape in both interpretative centers, historical markers, and wayside panels.¹⁵⁷

The construction of interpretive centers along the route have streamlined local and national understandings of the march's history. Two interpretive centers currently exist along the route: one in Selma and the other along Highway 80 in Lowndes County. Constructed in 2006, the Lowndes Interpretive Center featured exhibits for the entire trail as well as Tent City which was historically located on the site of the center. The NPS built the Selma Interpretive Center in 2011 although the original intentions were to construct both centers at the same time. Although plans have been made to create a third interpretive center in Montgomery, that process has stalled, and the public is unaware of its lack of progress. According to a park guide, April Baldwin, the interpretive goal for the trail is to tell different parts of the story chronologically as the visitor moves from Selma to Montgomery. Both the Selma and Lowndes County centers draw their historical

¹⁵⁷ Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes*, 1-2. Jeffries argues that the violence and resistance to civil rights in Lowndes County combined with Stokely Carmichael's activist organizing contributed to the creation of the first Black Panther political party in 1966.

narrative from local and community-driven histories to tell the story of the struggle for voting rights through the perspective of the communities that still lives along the trail.¹⁵⁸

The Selma Interpretive Center features three floors of exhibits focusing on the origins of the Voting Rights March and Bloody Sunday to coincide with its geographic location. The first floor of the Selma center features the museum's primary exhibit about the origins of the march and Bloody Sunday. This exhibit uses local oral histories from the Tuskegee University Civil Rights History Project and video touch screens to interpret the importance of local leadership and planning through the "Perspectives of Selma," reinforcing the significance of the organizing efforts of local community members found in contemporary Black Freedom Studies analyses.¹⁵⁹ The second floor displays a temporary exhibit with a small number of artifacts from the march, both from the police and the protestors. The Edmund Pettus Bridge is clearly visible from this room and inspires a constant reminder of the relevant historical landscape. As well as having a video viewing area, the third floor also functions as a photography gallery and exhibition space.¹⁶⁰ The oral histories presented in the film ties the relevance of voting rights in the twenty-first century to the historical discussion as a means of further engaging with visitors about the march's (and the trail's) significance.¹⁶¹ The Selma center is particularly powerful because it provides a relatively extensive interpretation of Bloody

¹⁵⁸ Theresa Hall, interview by the author, Selma Interpretive Center, Selma, AL, January 4, 2018. April Baldwin, interview by the author, Lowndes Interpretive Center, Hayneville, AL, January 4, 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now," 459.

¹⁶⁰ Author site visit, "Perspectives of Selma" permanent exhibit, Selma Interpretive Center, Selma, AL, January 4, 2018

¹⁶¹ "Never Lose Sight of Freedom" Film. The video is a twenty-five minute documentary production from Tuskegee University, and features a collection of interviews from 39 of the original marchers. This video recounts the story of society in the Southern United States after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and before equal voting rights was established in 1965, as well as the events in Marion, Alabama that led up to the march and Bloody Sunday. Author site visit, "Perspectives of Selma" permanent exhibit, Selma Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018.

Sunday, allowing visitors to spatially explore the actual historical landmark where the event happened while accessibly located in the middle of urbanized Selma. Such interpretation anchors visitors to the history of the landscape and space that they occupy. Therefore, one cannot separate or remove the history of the Selma center and the Edmund Pettus Bridge as civil rights landmarks (without significant effort or failure to generally upkeep the structures) because of the large interpretive presence from the National Park Service.

The Lowndes Interpretive Center is the main interpretive center for the trail. Unlike the Selma center, the Lowndes center is not located in a city and is instead located halfway between Selma and Montgomery on Highway 80 in the rural Lowndes County. Similarly, through the exhibits and the roadside panels, the National Park Service immortalizes the memories and realities of Voting Rights March on the Alabama landscape. The main exhibit, “Fifty-Four Miles to Freedom,” chronicles the march between Selma to Montgomery and the national and local context for voting rights. Like the Selma center, interpretation at the Lowndes center acknowledges the fight still underway to secure the ability to vote easily, safely, and without partisan interference for all American constituents. The explicit tone in the exhibit forces visitors to engage with the uncomfortable history of civil rights as well as a still uncomfortable reality. The Lowndes center is located at the historic site of Tent City and discusses the days of the Voting Rights March when protestors slept on campsites along the route. While visitors can walk around a designated path outside and read about Tent City on panels, the exhibit constructed a permanent tent for visitors to explore for an understanding of what families went through whilst living in tents for two years under threat of violence. The vernacular

experience of fighting for voting rights is on full display in this exhibit as well as the opposition that those exercising their rights faced.¹⁶² The outdoor and indoor interpretation of the march within the space of Highway 80, Lowndes County, and Tent City contextualizes the march's history through a sense of place in rural Alabama.

The full visitor experience cannot be found solely at the interpretive centers, but also in conjunction with the vernacular and public structures and spaces along the route. Because the Selma center focuses on Bloody Sunday and the Lowndes center focuses on the march and Tent City, all other events of the Voting Rights March must be understood through roadside interpretation and local constructed sites. These underrepresented sites include the Brown Chapel AME Church and George Washington Carver Homes where the march started, all four campsites as well as David Hall Farm and the City of Saint Jude, the Viola Liuzzo Memorial, Hayneville and the Lowndes County Courthouse, the Jonathan M. Daniels Monument, and the Alabama State Capitol. While these sites are represented on trail maps and with roadside interpretive panels, travelers can easily overlook their importance as sites within the landscape. While it may be fair to expect visitors to visit both interpretive centers in or out of order, it is unlikely that visitors will stop for all of the roadside interpretation. This type of narration centers place-based memories on their respective landscapes, but also runs the risk of being overlooked by the visitor. Visitors may also inadvertently disrupt the chronological narrative of the trail's historical interpretation if sites are visited out of order or missed completely.

¹⁶² Author site visit, "Fifty-Four Miles to Freedom" permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018; and Author site visit, "Tent City" permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018.

Visiting all affiliated sites along the route provides a nuanced understanding of the march and the culture that created the need for the march.¹⁶³

The trail's landscape features a variety of interpretive strategies employed by local, state, and NPS authorities. Firstly, one type of affiliated interpretation includes road sign demarcation. Road sign demarcation for the trail begins on Highway 80 several miles outside of Selma. The sign features the emblem of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail and a color-blocked image of marchers for easy differentiation from other road signs (Fig. 2). While the preserved national historic trail does not begin until Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, these road signs can be observed outside of the city and are most likely a result of fully promoting the road on which the march occurred. These road signs appear every one half to two miles apart depending on the density of roads and intersections.¹⁶⁴

Another type of affiliated interpretation on the trail related roads includes roadside panels. There are multiple interpretive panels along the trail. The greatest number of panels number are in Selma, fewer are in Lowndes County, and the smallest number are in Montgomery. NPS panels provide interpretation in the spaces where the march physically took place. The first panel is at Brown Chapel AME Church, which interprets the grassroots organization to coincide with the importance of the church and various community members in spearheading the march. The final panel is located at the City of St. Jude in Montgomery. There are no NPS interpretive panels in Downtown

¹⁶³ Those who do not have the capacity to travel to every site are limited in the information and interpretation they can access, impacting the way they may understand the history commemorated by the trail. Organizational oversight could combat these limitations by providing at least a broader overview of the overall trail at each interpretive center in the form of reading materials or audio guides. Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

¹⁶⁴ National Park Service, "Signs," in *North Country National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance* (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, 1996), 64.

Montgomery. Visitors cannot easily find roadside interpretive panels due to the lack of a map delineating panel locations. In addition, roadside panels are prone to graffiti and general wear and tear, which can affect the visitor experience (Fig. 3).¹⁶⁵

Along Highway 80, protestors slept at four campsites while en route to Montgomery. These campsites are located on the NPS trail map and are marked with a mural-sized road sign indicating the trail, the name and order of the campsites, and the day when marchers stayed at that site (Fig. 4). The first campsite is located on the David Hall Farm. The second and third campsite is located on the Rosie Steele Farm and the Robert Gardner Farm respectively. The fourth and final campsite is located at the City of Saint Jude in Montgomery. The first three campsites are located on private property, and visitors are required to pull over on to the side of the road if they wish to view the road signs. Besides the road signs (that do not interpret the history of the campsite spaces), interpretation for campsites can be found at the Lowndes Interpretive Center. These sites are only accessible to visitors travelling with cars or on foot.¹⁶⁶

Yet another interpretive technique is represented when local groups take on responsibility for erecting informational panels found at trail affiliated sites. There are panels placed both by the National Park Service and by private organizations or city and state entities. While most information panels were created and placed by the NPS, these panels typically discuss the landscape, history and social climate in which the Voting Rights March was necessary and took place. Panels that were not created by the NPS tend to feature a greater focus on important community leaders and organizers. In Montgomery, the city erected panels along the historic Voting Rights March route, but

¹⁶⁵ Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ National Park Service, *Selma to Montgomery*, Pamphlet.

these panels go beyond discussing only the events of the march. Instead, these panels depict African American history in the city and other historical efforts to preserve local Black history.¹⁶⁷ In Selma near the George Washington Carver Homes and in front of the Selma Police Department GWC Precinct, an unknown group bolted over city interpretive panels with privately printed materials (Fig. 5).¹⁶⁸ While one cannot see what the original NPS panel said without completely removing the covering material, the bolted interpretation depicts important local leaders in the Voting Rights March and civil rights movement including J. L. Chestnut Jr., Frederick D. Reese, and Amelia Boynton, and how their lives intersected with the movement in Selma.¹⁶⁹

There are multiple material memorials throughout the route which commemorate marchers and the movement. The memorial park south of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the Viola Liuzzo Memorial on Highway 80, the Johnathan Daniels Memorial in Hayneville, and the Civil Rights Memorial in front of the Alabama State Capitol building in Montgomery commemorate activists in stone. The Jimmie Lee Jackson Memorial in Marion is also significantly related to the Voting Rights March, but is not located on the protected national trail. These memorials fit within the traditional canon in that they are often figurative and made out of stone. Personal and “spontaneous” memorials by way of

¹⁶⁷ These city panels are titled “Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail,” and are numbered with a map delineating nearby panels, and panels along the entire route. These panels do not typically discuss just the Voting Rights March, although they follow the original route through Montgomery.

¹⁶⁸ The bolted-over panels could be National Park Service panels, but if so have not been updated to match the new NPS panels found throughout the route. This leads me to believe that the panels once featured some local interpretation of the Voting Rights March.

¹⁶⁹ One cannot be certain who bolted over these panels, and for how long they have been that way. However, all of new interpretation includes date of births and date of deaths. Amelia Boynton’s tarp poster does not have a death date even though she passed away in 2015. As I visited the site in 2018, I cannot be sure about how long they have been up. Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018

flowers, shrines, and other objects often accompany their stone counterparts, and present the individual ways that people remember and honor “sites of tragic death.”¹⁷⁰

Throughout the Selma to Montgomery trail, confederate monuments and markers occupy the same landscape. There are significantly more historic markers and monuments to the Confederacy and white supremacy than there are to civil rights within the counties that make up the national historic trail. In both the Selma and Lowndes interpretive centers, the Ku Klux Klan and other confederate sympathizers are discussed as one of the major groups in opposition to the Voting Rights March and the Civil Rights Movement. The overwhelming number of confederate memorials between Selma and Montgomery tangibly symbolizes the lopsided historical narrative portrayed on the landscape. Memorials do not need to be proportionate to a community’s diversity and background; however, the number of confederate memorials, which go un-updated or un-interpreted to discuss their context on the landscape, indicates an effort to privilege those histories at the expense of diminishing the histories of local African Americans and Civil Rights.¹⁷¹

Public and educational programs are non-tangible, non-material ways the National Park Service interprets the Voting Rights March and the Selma to Montgomery trail. Public programming typically revolves around scheduled tours of the Edmund Pettus Bridge or Tent City with Park Rangers, movie series, public lectures, and memorial celebrations. When considering the various tangible and non-tangible forms of

¹⁷⁰ Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 63. The creation of unofficial, spontaneous memorials is a well-documented human phenomenon that can be traced back throughout known human history. For further reading on spontaneous memorials, see Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 61-116. For further reading on confederate iconography, see John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁷¹ Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 172; and Davis, *Laying Claim*, 11.

interpretation—curated by the Park Service or not—the entire landscape of the trail acts as a physical and conceptual memorial to the march and to civil rights in America.

All national park service affiliated sites were created to preserve historical, cultural, and environmental spaces for future American generations. This implies that all sites have a national audience on top of the local audience that a site naturally attracts by location. However, visitor comment and sign in sheets note that the engaged audience for the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is a mix between international, national, and local visitors. Because of its affiliation with the National Park Service and the historical significance of the landscape to civil rights in the United States, many national and international visitors travel to the trail. The historical and cultural significance of the march proves to be relevant to people of all backgrounds and various levels of prior historical knowledge despite the in-depth focus into the local history of Alabama. While there is sensitive language and perspectives presented in the interpretation, the NPS aims the discussion in such a way that a visitor should clearly understand its context both historically and contemporarily. More people who travel internationally or nationally seem to sign in on the visitor logs in the interpretive centers, but this is not inherently an indication that more people are travelling great distances to experience the trail.¹⁷² Looking at tagged or location pinned content on social media can provide new and accessible ways that travelers could see how the NPS or affiliated groups interpret history on site. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and numerous other sites have viewable tags to find historical markers and museum panels regarding the site and

¹⁷² This is my observation from travelling to the site right after the 2018 New Year. I looked through several pages of the log for this observation. Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

its two interpretive sites.¹⁷³ The use of social media can foster a personal experience with visitors as well as a platform for discussion.

Conclusion

A site's interpretation often influences the memory of a place, person, or event. The Park Service expands upon the historical perspectives of marchers and activists, residents, and law enforcement by adding the perspectives of other black freedom struggles activists, and the legacy of voting rights on contemporary communities and visitors. The NPS and the trail's stakeholders must negotiate all these perspectives of the march to determine which memories are worth the space of interpretation. The NPS gives agency to survivors of the Voting Rights March by preserving their memories about the event. At the same time, the NPS presents a nuanced narrative for visitors, with or without a lived experience of the civil rights movement, by incorporating as many contextualized viewpoints of the march as possible. The politics of the region in which a site is located also influences the memory of that site. People or groups who have the power to sit at the decision-making table determine on-site interpretation and exhibits. As a result, the NPS must mitigate the different personal agendas of their stakeholders to compromise on the memory preserved and presented as part of the national trail.

The National Park Service creates and oversees how the public understands much of the American environmental, historical, and cultural landscape. However, the

¹⁷³ Tagged content refers to the use of hashtags on social media to categorize and search through other user's content. Location pinned content refers to the use of attached mapping locations from other user's content. Typically, users pin their own location to their post on social media either where that user posted from, or the location of the event, thing, or place that user is posting about: National Park Service, "Civil Rights in America," National Parks Service, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/index.htm>; Civil Rights Website, National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery Social Media," National Park Service, accessed November 13, 2017, https://www.nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/semo_social_media.htm; and National Park Service, "Selma to Montgomery," National Park Service.

NPS continues to face criticism and scrutiny for the white-washed historical narratives perpetuated at many sites, of which the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail is no exception. The Organization of American Historians (OAH) likened the lack of funding and visitors flowing to Park Service sites resulting from the stagnant history typically presented and interpreted on site in their 2011 report, “Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service.” The OAH argued that historical interpretation was the main problem with park sites and that the main solution would be to overhaul interpretation and preservation to be more engaging to the public. Although critical of park historians, this argument represents part of an important trend in challenging national historical narratives at national sites.¹⁷⁴ While at the trails and interacting with the public facing interpretive team, there exists a visible tension between the politics of NPS management and NPS interpretive employees. The federal historical standards, bureaucracy, and balance national and local partners and governments often challenges or limits what NPS employees can do, how memory gets preserved, and how history is told. It seems that NPS employees are doing the best they can to stretch the limitations of bureaucracy and politics to present and interpret the history of site according to current historical analysis. The Selma to Montgomery trail exemplified this tension and leaned into interpreting the local significance and memories associated with the Voting Rights March as a solution.

Through the overall interpretation of the Selma to Montgomery NHT, the trail acts as a memorial to the march, to the civil rights movement, and to those—like Jimmie Lee Jackson, Viola Liuzzo, and Jonathan Daniels—who died or faced violence while

¹⁷⁴ Anne Mitchell Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington, IN: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 6-8.

fighting for their rights. The NPS creates a powerful environment for visitors by creating a space in which one can walk or drive along the trail to retrace the same path that protestors took in 1965. The presentation and interpretation of the trail is integral in honoring the memory of the struggle for voting rights for African Americans. Due to bureaucratic constraints, competing public interpretations, and the presentation of contradictory historical narratives, on-site interpretation preserves a memory that localizes the national events of civil rights. Rooting a history and a memorial to a sense of place personalizes the visitor experience. Focusing primarily on the local scope of the march gives the visitor a chance to interrogate U.S. history and mainstream historical interpretation in the physical space in which history was made.¹⁷⁵

The preservation of the route by the NPS and other entities protects not only the physical structures relevant to the march, but also the historical memories of the march. The trail features various forms of interpretation, including tangible forms via panels, markers, architectural preservation, and intangible forms via public programming, and landscape preservation, which presents an intricately woven history of the march for visitors. A complete or nuanced history of the landscape cannot be achieved if any one part of that story is missing. To remove or separate the tangible sites from the federal trail designation that draws them together would be to cripple the interpretation of the history of the marches for voting rights. The trail helps create the connection between historical memory and current activist efforts to preserve the same rights by referencing the continued importance of exercising the right to vote in every election. The ability for the trail to interpret the past to advocate for the future needs of society alongside existing

¹⁷⁵ Department of the Interior, *Selma to Montgomery Historical Trail Study*, 31-35.

forms of commemoration creates a layered, active memory-curating experience that remains relevant to visitors.¹⁷⁶

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail serves as an integral memorial to African American Civil Rights on the American landscape. The national trail as it exists now acts as a simultaneously material and conceptual memorial site as a result of site interpretation engaging visitors in and beyond the spatial confines of the route. The NPS and other governing entities wove themes of struggle, violence, and triumph into the landscape, and they cannot be divorced from the site due to the inclusion of on-site interpretation. Without historical designation from the NPS and state of Alabama, no interpretation beyond historical markers, monuments, and local museums would exist. While the preservation and federal interpretation of the site is not very malleable, park rangers and other local organizations and individuals seem open and committed to including as many relevant perspectives—historical and public—from the movement as possible. The localized commitment towards preserving the historical landscape of the Voting Rights March re-contextualized the trail as a place of pilgrimage for all types of visitors as well as a memorial to civil rights.¹⁷⁷

In the next chapter, I will discuss the recently opened Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum by the Equal Justice Initiative. The EJI's Memorial for Peace and Justice (also vernacularly known as the Lynching Memorial) aims to challenge traditional physical memorialization by assuming a national scope as well as localized

¹⁷⁶ Author site visit, "Towards Equality" permanent exhibit, Lowndes Interpretive Center, January 4, 2018; Romano and Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 1-2, 118; Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict," *The Professional Geographer* 52, no. 4 (2000): 665; and Richard W. Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 15.

¹⁷⁷ Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 6-7, 13.

memorialization strategies to remember and honor people who the American landscape rarely represents, victims of lynching. The main memorial and museum complex are in Montgomery, Alabama, whereas the localized memorials will eventually be installed in each corresponding county in America where a lynching occurred during Jim Crow. This memorial process creates a tangible memorial network that connects the community histories of local lynchings and racialized violence with the historically ongoing national conversation about American society violently subjugating and disenfranchising people of color.

Chapter Picture Appendix:

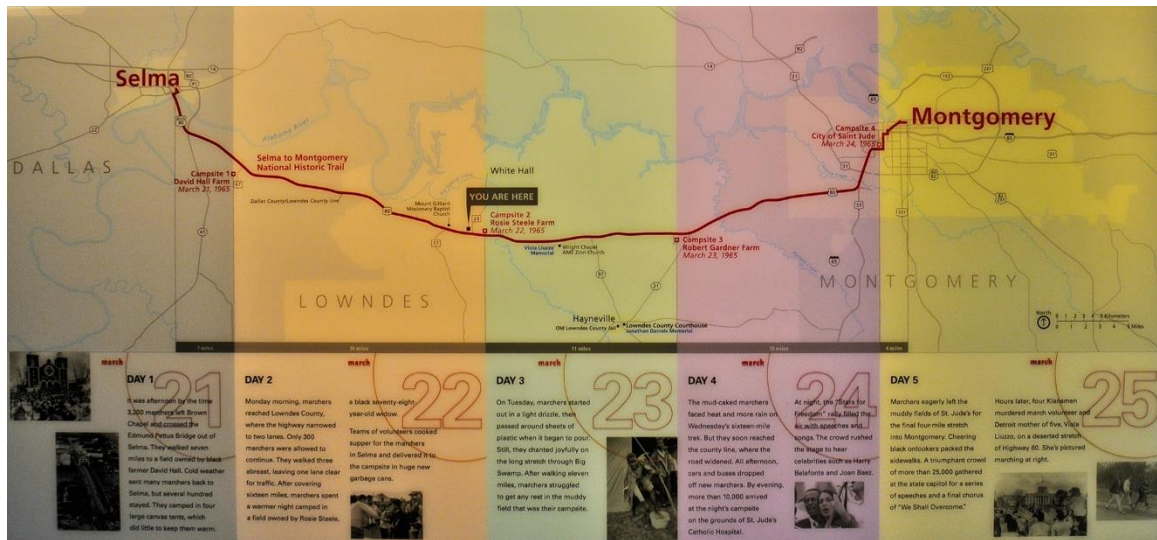


Fig. 1: Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail Map¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.



Fig. 2: Selma to Montgomery Trail Road Sign¹⁷⁹



Fig. 3: Selma to Montgomery Trail Defaced NPS Panel, Example 1¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

¹⁸⁰ Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.



Fig. 4: Selma to Montgomery Trail David Hall Farm Campsite Marker¹⁸¹



Fig. 5: Selma to Montgomery Trail Defaced NPS Panel, Example 2¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

¹⁸² Author site visit, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, January 4, 2018.

V. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: THE MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the related Legacy Museum located in Montgomery, Alabama. The EJI is a nonprofit organization and law firm dedicated to addressing the damages of capital punishment and mass incarceration in the United States both within the criminal justice system and in national public memory. In 2018, the EJI dedicated a memorial and museum remembering African American lynching victims and examining the sociopolitical conditions and ramifications of that form of racialized terrorism. Both the memorial and museum exist as research-based landmarks with a social justice perspective, drawing interpretation from current legal and historical scholarship on the origins and lasting effects of mass incarceration by Michelle Alexander, Amy Louise Wood, and others.¹⁸³ Compared to the previous case studies, the EJI's memorial and museum is the newest memorial landscape. Also contrary to the other case studies, this memorial was not created based solely on the history of a fixed landscape. Instead, the EJI created the memorial to supersede the existing history of the landscape.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy museum was created in response to the organization's 2015 report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*. The report comprehensively outlined anti-Black racism and the systematic subjugation of Black people in the United States as the root of current

¹⁸³ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 2; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1-3; and Hinton, *From the War on Poverty*, 5-6.

mass incarceration trends for people of color. This site challenges current understandings of memorialization and landscape preservation by explicitly creating space for representations of marginalized histories on the landscape in order to tell a more complete history of the space (or at the very least garner recognition alongside existing memorialized histories). The memorial and museum are expressly designed to be reconciliatory and healing for the national African American community while at the same time functioning as a broader educational site because it contextualizes the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow in the United States frankly and publically. In addition, the placement of memorial columns and historical markers in the communities and spaces where lynch mobs murdered black people redefines the geography of place-based memorials. These remote sites are not bound by a series of chronological events like a historical trail, but are instead linked as sites of brutal violence. This memorial simultaneously fosters a national and local conversation about the effects of injustice in those respective contexts. The EJI memorial site creates an unapologetic blended landscape of interpreted spaces and monuments that serves black and non-black communities in important and vital ways. The creation of tangible monuments highlights the value for some communities to commemorate history in a physical space whereas the historical research and interpretation found onsite and online highlights the accessibility of the memorial landscape as an educational tool.

The Legacy of Lynching and the Equal Justice Initiative

A period of racial violence followed the end of the Civil War and worsened by the end of Reconstruction in the South. Despite the passing of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments that outlawed slavery outside of prisons and granted citizenship

and voting rights to the formerly enslaved, white supremacy proved a tougher social barrier to dismantle. The collapse of Reconstruction with the compromise of 1877 ensured that the existing violence against Black people lost sparse protection from the U.S. military as well as legal protections from the Supreme Court and Congress.¹⁸⁴ The EJI argued that the practice of sharecropping and recharged racial intimidation solidified a “second slavery” in the South.¹⁸⁵

In the period following Reconstruction, “lawmakers empowered white-controlled governments to extract black labor in private lease contracts or on state-owned farms” because the thirteenth amendment permitted slavery “as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”¹⁸⁶ The practice of Jim Crow, or the racial segregation of Black people enforced by social custom and violence, rose to prominence after 1877, and anyone perceived to violate this social code was violently punished via lynching. A lynching is the killing of a person for a perceived offense, typically by hanging, by a mob that does not face prosecution by legal trial. While most common in the southern U.S. (especially former Confederate states), lynchings also occurred throughout multiple Union states. Lynchings “were violent and public acts of torture” carried out by white supremacists regardless of historical state affiliation to slavery.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Const. amend. XIII (amended 1865); U.S. Const. amend. XIV (amended 1868); U.S. Const. amend. XV (amended 1870); and Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, report no. 3 (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2017), 18-21.

¹⁸⁵ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 20-21; William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 132-133; and Brandon T. Jett, “The Bloody Red River: Lynching and Racial Violence in Northeast Texas, 1890-1930” (master’s thesis, Texas State University—San Marcos, 2012), 1-12.

¹⁸⁶ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 23; U.S. Const. amend. XIII (amended 1865).

¹⁸⁷ Cited quote from Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3-4. Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Patricia Hill Collins, *On Lynchings* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 25; Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 85-101; and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York, NY: NAACP, 1919), 39-41.

White supremacists lynched black people to uphold a status quo reminiscent of the hierarchical system of slavery. Lynchings served as a powerful and coercive reminder that Black people could not and should not participate in the freedoms of being a U.S. citizen throughout the South despite the fourteenth amendment granting them the right to do so.¹⁸⁸ The EJI argued that this type of extra-legal violence was different from other “hangings or mob violence that followed some criminal trial process or that were committed against [non-Black people of color] without the threat of terror” on the family or community. Local and state justice systems would not criminally prosecute “terror lynchings,” and the report findings classify the lack of impunity as the systematic terrorization of Black people in this period.¹⁸⁹

Although assumed to be a southern phenomenon, most U.S. states instituted some aspect of segregation or racial violence into the status quo.¹⁹⁰ “Fear of [i]nterracial [s]ex,” committing a “minor social transgression,” the “allegation of crime,” and a response to “Black people resisting mistreatment,” were among the many the justifications for lynching a Black person without judicial consequence. Sometimes Black people were lynched solely as a public spectacle and to serve as an example of targeted violence towards the entire local African American community. Most offenses were highly subjective and usually based on lies fabricated by the accuser. By the late nineteenth century, the national political narrative about lynching was to blame the violence on the

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Const. amend. XIV (amended 1868).

¹⁸⁹ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 4. The report claims that E.M. Beck, Stewart E. Tolnay, and Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama documented previous number estimations of lynchings. For further information on the numbers regarding lynchings in the U.S. by state and by county: Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 40-43.

¹⁹⁰ Equal Justice Initiative, “Racial Terror Lynchings,” *Lynching in America*, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore>; Equal Justice Initiative, “Iconography: The Lasting Legacy of Confederate Monuments,” *Segregation in America*, accessed January 26, 2019, <https://segregationinamerica.eji.org/iconography>; and Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 4-5.

victims. The popularization of lynching as a response to the supposed epidemic of black men raping white women proved to be enough political justification to further enable the practice.¹⁹¹

Black opposition to lynching often took the form of grassroots and community activism. The practice of boycotting businesses and refusing labor to participants of lynch mobs was a common effort to target mob violence. Black newspapers and Black anti-lynching activists like Ida B. Wells played a large role in disputing accusations of crimes and demanding accountability from lynch mobs. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed in direct response to racial violence in Illinois and helped to turn the tide of public opinion about lynchings.¹⁹² Republican Leonidas Dyer introduced the first anti-lynching bill in 1918, although the powerful Southern Democratic coalition controlling the senate filibustered to prevent voting on the bill into the 1920s. Despite the best efforts of anti-lynching activists, Congress could not pass a single federal anti-lynching law that criminalized the acts of lynch mobs due to the claim that lynching was a states' rights issue, thus further enabling white racial dominance in the South.¹⁹³

By the 1930s, lynching rates significantly declined because of Black activism and the Great Migration of Black people out of the South, and the election of President

¹⁹¹ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 27-33, 35, 38-39; George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 13; Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 12-14; Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 74; Wells-Barnett and Collins, *On Lynchings*, 77; and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*, 10.

¹⁹² Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1979), 129-158; Wells-Barnett and Collins, *On Lynchings*, 5-6; and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*, 39-41;

¹⁹³ Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*, 77.

Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 renewed hope in the NAACP and Congress to pass anti-lynching legislation. Roosevelt condemned lynching as an inexcusable and “vile form of collective murder” after the highly publicized lynching of George Armwood in Maryland. However, even with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s involvement with the bill, Southern Democrats effectively blocked the new anti-lynching bill by threatening to filibuster the entire voting schedule, including the Social Security Act. Roosevelt allowed the anti-lynching bill to die without a vote.¹⁹⁴ As of 2019, there is still no federal anti-lynching legislation, nor reparations for the families of lynching victims, though the Senate did pass federal legislation in December 2018.¹⁹⁵

Legal scholars like lawyer Bryan Stevenson and civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander argue that racial injustice persists in the U.S. justice system as continuation of Jim Crow Laws and policing of people of color. Although the Black Freedom Movement targeted the extra-legal, consequence-free killing of Black people, the white criminal justice system sustained white supremacy by legalized and de facto targeting Black people for crimes. By the early twentieth century, the death penalty replaced lynching as the racial violence of choice against Black people. African Americans constituted 75

¹⁹⁴ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 53-55; and Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, "Eleanor Roosevelt's Battle to End Lynching," Forward with Roosevelt, last modified February 12, 2016, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2016/02/12/eleanor-roosevelts-battle-to-end-lynching/>.

¹⁹⁵ Reparations for lynching victims have been introduced to the Senate in 2018. Kamala D. Harris, Corey Booker, and Tim Scott, "Harris, Booker, Scott Introduce Bill to Make Lynching a Federal Crime," news release, June 29, 2018, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.harris.senate.gov/news/press-releases/harris-booker-scott-introduce-bill-to-make-lynching-a-federal-crime>; and 115th Congress, "S.3178 - Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018," Congress.gov, last modified December 19, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/3178/all-actions?overview=closed#tabs>.

percent of executions in the U.S. South from 1910 to 1950, despite being only 22 percent of population.¹⁹⁶

Stevenson and Alexander's interpretations prompted the creation of new organizations dedicated to addressing the mass incarceration and disenfranchisement of people of color. Bryan Stevenson founded the nonprofit organization the Equal Justice Initiative in 1989. The mission of the Equal Justice Initiative is a commitment "to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society." The organization grounds its mission on the belief that combatting prevalent social issues hinges on understanding the history of these types of injustices. By assuming the responsibility of educating the public on mass incarceration and race in America, the EJI aims to highlight their inherent link as socially constructed by a white supremacist society and purposely racist to temporarily or permanently enslave and disenfranchise people of color.¹⁹⁷

The catalyst for building the Memorial for Peace and Justice and the additional Legacy Museum came from the findings of an EJI report entitled *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*. The EJI began this research project in 2010 and published the first edition of the report in 2015. The report sought to start a conversation about "the injustice" and pain that "racial terror and violence created."¹⁹⁸ The EJI argues

¹⁹⁶ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 12-15; John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line: Legacy for the Twenty-first Century* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 2; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty*, 5-6; and Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 63.

¹⁹⁷ Stevenson has also personally published papers and a book on his experience as a lawyer for marginalized peoples as a Black man. *Just Mercy* is his most well-known publication because it catered to a public audience. Equal Justice Initiative, "About EJI," EJI, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://eji.org/about-eji>.

¹⁹⁸ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3; and Equal Justice Initiative, *The National Memorial for Peace and Justice* (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2018).

that the period between Reconstruction and World War II supported an era of terrorism in the United States due to the practice of lynching. For this report, the EJI researched and crowdsourced information from local African American and white newspapers, court records and historical archives to find evidence of lynchings across the United States. After the first edition of the report, hundreds of people shared personal records and stories that helped the EJI's research.¹⁹⁹ Oral interviews with survivors, descendants of victims, and historians gathered information about the lasting social and personal implications of racial terror violence. The EJI originally focused the study on the twelve most active lynching states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. They soon expanded this study to encompass eight other non-Southern states where they recorded over 300 additional acts of violence against Black people: Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. The total number of racial terror lynchings documented across the U.S. from 1877 to 1950 is approximately 4075 individuals, 800 more killings than previous total academic estimations. The study aimed to identify these instances of racial violence as acts of domestic terrorism designed to subjugate and intimidate Black people.²⁰⁰

Stevenson claimed that the United States as a society cannot heal until it acknowledges the truth about racial terror and violence. The stark conclusions of the *Lynching in America* report motivated the EJI to publicly memorialize and remember the

¹⁹⁹ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3-5.

²⁰⁰ Since the creation of the memorial, further states have been studied for their role in racial terror lynchings and may possibly be included in future editions of the report. Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America: A Community Remembrance Project," EJI, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://eji.org/reports/community-remembrance-project>; and Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3-5.

African Americans lynched in the United States as an opportunity for healing for those whose history and present realities are marked by such violence. The EJI began conceptualizing the Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum as national spaces to address the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. Once there is that acknowledgement of the truth, then society should be ready to “meaningfully address contemporary problems that are lynching’s legacy.” In mediating this discussion in American society, the EJI hopes that communities can begin to target the systems that disproportionately advantage wealthy, white men at the direct expense of people of color, women, people in poverty, and other violently marginalized groups.²⁰¹

Other national institutions such as the National Museum of African American History and Culture have begun identifying reconciliation and healing as central to memorialization efforts, but research and analysis is yet to confirm that such actions will be culturally and socially healing (and to what degree). For example, the now federally protected Manzanar, one of dozens of camps where the U.S. interned thousands of Japanese-Americans during World War II, was established as a National Historic Site in 1992. This was part of a national effort to acknowledge and provide financial reparations to those whom the federal government violated their lawful rights.²⁰² The EJI also draws inspiration from international remembrance efforts including the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany and the Apartheid Museum in

²⁰¹ Equal Justice Initiative, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice," EJI, last modified 2016, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://eji.org/national-lynching-memorial>; and Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America," EJI.

²⁰² The Civil Liberties Act, Pub. L. No. 100-383, 102 Stat. (Aug. 10, 1988); National Park Service, "Japanese Americans at Manzanar," Manzanar National Historic Site California, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/historyculture/japanese-americans-at-manzanar.htm>; and Diana Meyers Bahr, *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 122-123.

Johannesburg, South Africa. Both sites commemorate victims of genocide on the relevant landscape with special attention paid to the remembrance of victims, the interpretation of a history that physically acknowledges the perpetrators' atrocities, and an understanding that memorializing that history is a step in each countries' reconciliation process.²⁰³

The EJI created this memorial as a public space for interpreting and reconciling the troubled history of enslavement, lynching, and incarceration in the United States. Previously, no site in America existed with the expressed goal to heal and educate about anti-black violence and terror. The systematic subjugation by lynching along with the dominance of white supremacy in society, politics, and education meant that it was difficult for African Americans to memorialize their history on the landscape in the same way that white society had. Black commemoration remained focused within their own communities as a measure of self-preservation.²⁰⁴ Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford outlined the precedent that the African American Memorials that did exist tended to focus on the triumphs of the Civil Rights Era. The "forgetting" of racial terror lynching prevents affected communities and the nation at large from healing that ugly history. The EJI understands that public commemoration effects community memory and can help start reconciliation processes by validating the representation of people of color and their histories on the landscape. Since its conception, the Memorial for Peace and Justice meant to inspire communities to actively participate in the creation and healing of

²⁰³ Such countries have conducted legal, systematic, racialized murders throughout their history, and whose memorialization efforts can provide a loose framework for acknowledging the legacy of lynching in the United States. Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 257-261; Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 38-41, 192-194, 199; Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2, 51-60; and Cambell Robertson, "A Lynching Memorial Is Opening. The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It.," *New York Times*, April 25, 2018, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/25/us/lynching-memorial-alabama.html>.

²⁰⁴ Fleming, "The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums," 45-46, 72.

memory by confronting and engaging in the truth of racial terror. Particularly, the memorial exists to challenge the dominant narrative of Confederate monuments throughout the South (and especially in Montgomery) in order to represent a more complete history of the Civil War and anti-black racism on the American landscape.²⁰⁵

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum

The Equal Justice Initiative's memorial to lynching and lynching's legacy is comprised of two sites: The Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum. Both sites are located in Montgomery, Alabama and opened to the public on April 26, 2018. While the two sites are geographically related, seven-tenths of a mile physically separate them. This distance signifies that the memorial and offsite interpretation operate as two distinct memorial spaces while at the same time as a single memorial landscape in Montgomery (Fig. 1). The Memorial for Peace and Justice sits on six acres of land in Montgomery and is the United States' first national memorial to victims of lynching.²⁰⁶ The Boston-based MASS Design Group developed a concept for the memorial that centers on a massive memorial square consisting of over 800 columns. Each column represents one county in the U.S. where the EJI documented evidence of racial terror lynchings in their report. Visitors descend into the square as they move through the memorial, forcing the visitor to look up at the suspended columns, hanging as if to physically evoke the bodies of lynching victims. Inscribed on each column are all of the known names of lynching victims from that corresponding county.²⁰⁷ Each of the

²⁰⁵ Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America," EJI.; Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 66-67; Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 7; and Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 172-173.

²⁰⁶ There are other memorials to lynchings such as the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial in Duluth, Minnesota. Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 253.

²⁰⁷ The MASS Design Group is a team of architects that specialize in designing buildings that "promote healing" such as hospitals, schools, and memorials. This group has also already designed reflective and

hundreds of columns has a twin that is currently located in the field surrounding the memorial. The EJI invites each county to take their column from the field and display it to memorialize publically the lynchings that took place in those communities. This will eventually exhibit which counties have confronted the truth regarding their history of violence and terror and which ones have not.²⁰⁸

As the pinnacle of the site, the memorial square presents the visitor with an intense, personal experience with racial violence in the United States. The memorial columns are presented in alphabetical order by county per state, which allows the visitor some opportunity in easily locating a specific county. Visitors enter the square on level height with the columns. The columns are anchored to the ceiling of the structure and the ground, and visitors must weave through pillars to move through the space. This tactic invites the visitor to closely and intimately interact with the memory of lynching victims. Upon turning the corner to the second side of the memorial square, the floor begins to slope down while the columns remain in their lifted position. Here is where the pillars begin to evoke the shape of lynchings. Even the rusting of the columns that looks like various shades of brown emulates the memory of lynched bodies. The columns remain stationary as the visitor undergoes a forced perspective change from looking at the columns on level ground to looking up at the columns as a person moves around the square (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). On the third side the memorial square, panels solemnly describe a sample of the reasons why victims were lynched. White groups lynched their victims for alleged illegal offenses like “alleged robbery,” mundane offenses like

healing memorials including the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda. Equal Justice Initiative, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice," EJI.

²⁰⁸ Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

“‘standing around’ in a white neighborhood,” “living with a white woman,” and for exercising their legal rights like “voting,” and “striking to protest low wages.” The frank display of names, places, dates, and reasons for lynchings is a powerful reminder of the subjectivity, illegality, and irrational mob mentality associated with extra-legal murders. At the last side in the memorial square, the columns are completely hanging above the visitors to create a space for a wall of water honoring unknown victims of lynching. Soil from the sites representing unknown victims of lynching are exhibited in a glass case in front of the wall of water.²⁰⁹

Visitors exit the memorial square en route to the Memorial Park. The Memorial Park displays duplicate columns to the pillars used for the memorial square. Like the memorial square, the columns in the memorial park are alphabetized by state and by county, and they are arranged in tight rows. Visitors travel through the rows, and can have a closer look at individual columns. When a county claims its respective column, visitors will be able to easily identify which communities have reckoned with their racial histories and which ones have not. The goal of the column reclamation process is that the park will eventually be empty of county columns, representing that all communities have completed the process to acknowledging their lynching history. Moving all of the county columns out of memorial park creates two significant metaphors on the landscape: physically emptying the memorial park landscape of the columns symbolically removes that violence from the Montgomery memorial landscape, and it signifies that violence has

²⁰⁹ Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; and Equal Justice Initiative, *The National Memorial for Peace and Justice*.

been acknowledged on the national landscape. One column depicting the memory of unknown lynching victims will forever remain in the memorial park.²¹⁰

Along with the main memorial square, the site also features the work of Black artists and the intellectual work of Black activists and historical figures to reflect the EJI's temporal argument of the ramifications of slavery. Visitors find guiding quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King, Toni Morrison, and Elizabeth Alexander arranged throughout the secondary sculptures in their timeline of racial injustice. The sculptures depict local Montgomery history from slavery to civil rights to the current day. Before the memorial square, visitors encounter Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's sculpture, *Nkyinkyim Installation* (2018). His artwork illustrates African men, women, and children in bondage. The various figures express fear, struggle, and resignation while the metal chains that bind their hands, feet, and necks rust on their life-sized bodies. Akoto-Bamfo's sculpture explicitly reminds the visitor that the Western world helped racialize slavery and that Montgomery derived its political and economic power as the center of the United States' domestic slave trade from these bodies.²¹¹ After the Memorial Square and Memorial Park, visitors experience the Ida B. Wells Memorial Grove and Dana King's sculpture, *Guided by Justice* (2018). The grove represents Wells' dedication towards anti-lynching activism through a collection of sculptural tree stumps. King depicts the women of the Montgomery bus boycott through a portrayal of three life-sized women walking against the flow of visitors and against the flow of historical opposition

²¹⁰ Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; and Equal Justice Initiative, *The National Memorial for Peace and Justice*.

²¹¹ Erica Ayisi, "Lynching Memorial: Ghanaian Artist Hopes Sculpture Captures Shared Pain between African Americans and the Motherland," *The Root*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.theroot.com/lynching-memorial-ghanian-artist-hopes-sculpture-captu-1825817044>; and Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018

to their boycott. The sculpture illustrates that the bus boycott was an extensive community effort driven by local Black women's leadership and diligence for success. Lastly, having circumambulated the Memorial Square, visitors end their journey with the work of Hank Willis Thomas and his sculpture, *Raise Up* (2014), depicting the contemporary criminal justice system. As citizens increasingly witness and come to understand the institutionalized relationship between law enforcement, power and race, the role of police in the murder of unarmed and innocent men, women and children of color based on a presumption of guilt and danger has become part of a national dialog. The sculpture depicts a line of Black figures with their hands up, their bodies bound by a block that cements them to a broken and racist system. Ending one's memorial journey with Thomas' piece ends the timeline of racial injustice in the America and exists as a physical reminder that the cycle will continue unless people acknowledge, upend, and correct the current justice system.²¹²

The memorial site aims to foster a reflective and informational space where visitors can learn and reflect upon the history of racial injustice, fitting within a larger trend towards reconciliatory and healing memorials. Where the EJI and the Memorial for Peace and Justice differ from institutions like the 9/11 Memorial Museum and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in scope, both the 9/11 Memorial Museum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum feature interpretation that is localized to the site where the museums are located. Although the 9/11 Memorial Museum is place-based to the site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does not affix memory to place given its location in Washington, D.C. rather than in

²¹² Equal Justice Initiative, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice," EJI, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>.

Europe.²¹³ Instead, those interested and involved in the Memorial for Peace and Justice can interact with the placed-based histories of trauma at sites throughout the United States. For on-site visitors of the memorial, panel interpretation, located before entry into the memorial square, contextualizes the memorial's form and function by historicizing lynching and the legacy of racial violence. The EJI argues that lynching is a continuation of anti-black racism in the post-Civil War United States, like arguments made by scholars Michelle Alexander, William D. Carrigan, and George C. Wright.²¹⁴

The Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration not only expands and complements the context for the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, it also provides the context for the EJI's organizational mission. Based on the historical research of Historians Sherrilyn A. Ifill and Charles Ogletree, and legal records of segregation in the U.S. South, the main thesis for the museum is that the systems of slavery and the resurgence of violent white supremacy after the Civil War led to an era of extra-legal racial violence terrorism that evolved into the criminal justice system and carceral state that we know today. Located on a section of the largest slave market site in the U.S. from 1851 to 1860, the Legacy Museum traces the same timeline of racial injustice as the memorial.²¹⁵ The museum prioritizes interpreting Montgomery's critical role in the trans-

²¹³ These sites also exist as tourist and travel destinations for national and international visitors, speaking partially to the industry of dark tourism, and also to the need to pay respects to victims of trauma. Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 157; and Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 260-262, 270.

²¹⁴ Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3-5; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 12-15; Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 12-14; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 22.

²¹⁵ The Montgomery Slave Trade market grew from 1820 to 1860, but became the largest market in the country after the construction of a direct rail line from Atlanta. Between 1848 and 1860, the Montgomery probate office issued 164 licenses to people engaged in human trafficking. Author site visit, "Montgomery: A City Shaped by Slavery" permanent exhibit, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; and Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 295, as cited in Equal Justice Initiative, *Slavery in America*, 34; Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-first Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 1-3; Charles J. Ogletree and Austin Sarat, "Introduction," in *From Lynch Mobs to the Killing State*:

Atlantic and domestic slave trade to anchor discussion in local history and local landscapes that remain influenced by an economy driven by enslaved labor. Montgomery, as the center of enslaved commerce and culture power before and during the Civil War, features multiple monuments to the Confederacy. Placing the museum in this space aims to supersede the well-documented and well-represented Confederate and slave trade history with a powerful, ideologically challenging exhibit. This analysis of racial injustice, especially in local Southern U.S. communities, drove the creation of the Memorial for Peace and Justice and continues to drive the EJI's legal practice and activism.²¹⁶

The exhibit starts with an examination of how the domestic slave trade affected the city of Montgomery. Since both the museum site and the Equal Justice Initiative are located in buildings that used to store enslaved people, it is a priority to discuss how the economy of the slave trade and the ramifications of emancipation shaped Montgomery. During the decades leading up to the Civil War, the domestic slave trade flourished, and increasing numbers of black people were brought to Commerce Street. By 1860, the surrounding area of downtown Montgomery from the Alabama River to the Alabama State Capitol accommodated over thirty sites involved with the slave trade.²¹⁷ The EJI headquarters superseded one historical warehouse. Starting the exhibition's narrative in Montgomery centers the discussion of racial injustice on local communities, and

Race and the Death Penalty in America (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1, 4; and Stuart Banner, "Traces of Slavery: Race and the Death Penalty in Historical Perspective," in *From Lynch Mobs to the Killing State: Race and the Death Penalty in America*, ed. Charles J. Ogletree and Austin Sarat (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 96-97.

²¹⁶ Equal Justice Initiative, "Iconography," Segregation in America; and Author site visit, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

²¹⁷ Including 17 slave auctioneers, traders, & investors, 11 slave depots, 4 banks & insurance co financing slavery, and 1 site complicit in the slave trade. Author site visit, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

especially on communities who gained the most from the subjugation of enslaved African Americans. Montgomery still features buildings, roads, spaces, and systems that originated from the slave trade, the most notable of which includes Commerce Street and the Rail Station. The ability to understand how slavery could continue to influence a community through the modern day allows visitors to take that same information and question how it may apply to their own communities.

The museum excels with exhibit design. After mapping how the slave trade shaped Montgomery, visitors enter a replica slave pen room that humanizes enslaved people with their own first-person stories.²¹⁸ The main exhibit hall of the Legacy Museum is split into four sections in chronological order from “Enslavement in America,” “Lynching and Racial Terrorism,” “Segregation Forever,” and “Mass Incarceration.” The main room of the museum provides visitors with a mixture of interactive touch-screens, interpretative panels, videos, and color-coded primary sources (the color white to denote sources by white people versus the color black to denote sources by Black people) to create a full picture of each historical period. As the EJI is not a collecting institution, the use of a document and interpretation-driven exhibit rather than an artifact driven exhibit is inevitable yet effective. The organization relies on legal documents, photographs, oral interviews, and film to interpret history in place of “survivor” artifacts. The combination of interpretation and documents contribute to the core themes, values, and arguments of both the museum and the EJI: racial bias exists in the current criminal justice system and targets African Americans based on the legacy of

²¹⁸ Although it is stated multiple times throughout the exhibit that the enslaved narratives are real accounts, I could not find concrete information in the museum or another resource that detailed who these people were, and where the EJI obtained their personal accounts of enslavement. Author site visit, “Enslavement in America” permanent exhibit, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

slavery, lynching, and the presumption of guilt. The criminal justice system continues to reflect a white supremacist society through white accusers, white prosecutors, white judges, and white juries to wrongfully convict and punish Black people and other subjugated groups.²¹⁹

The “Community Remembrance Project” is located in the “Lynching and Racial Terrorism” section. Further connecting the museum to the memorial and to local communities across America, the “Community Remembrance Project” houses the soil taken from dozens of lynching sites. The display of soil jars stretches from floor to ceiling and represents the tangible memory of each victim. For the “Community Remembrance Project” to take center stage in this section, the space around the soil display is relatively open. There is one large, multi-use interactive station in front of the display providing the interpretation for this section. The interpretive station displays the EJI’s *Lynching in America* interactive website, and visitors can click through the lynching map or watch videos created with living descendants of victims that further personalizes the violence of lynching.

Throughout the museum, the EJI is very conscious of how it depicts the black body. In an effort not to overload audiences already grappling with violent histories, the number of fully pictured lynchings is very limited. One digital touch-screen remains blurred with a graphic content warning located next to the Community Remembrance Project. Someone must go and touch the board to reveal the pictures of lynchings, and the slideshow re-blurs after ten seconds of inactivity. There are other representations of

²¹⁹ Author site visit, “Enslavement in America,” “Lynching and Racial Terrorism,” “Segregation Forever,” and “Mass Incarceration” permanent exhibits, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; and Equal Justice Initiative, *The Legacy Museum* (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2018).

lynchings throughout the exhibits, but they are restricted to cropped images of lynchings (typically cropping the head or entire body of the victim), images of trees or gallows to symbolize lynching, and the stylized outlines of bodies through art in the exhibit films. Although the main role of the museum is to uncover the systematic subjugation of and violence against Black people in the United States, the EJI has proven that they can be successful in that goal without constantly showing visitors actual representations of real disfigured Black bodies.²²⁰

The EJI dedicated the last portion of the museum space for visitors to ponder prompted questions about the criminal justice system and the history of justice in the United States. The EJI prompts visitors with three main questions, and thirteen secondary questions that allow one to critique the criminal justice system based on the museum exhibit. The EJI urges visitors to question if the United States should abolish slavery in prisons, what it means that the Alabama state constitution upholds racial segregation in education and if that should change, and if the U.S. Supreme Court should formally acknowledge its role in prolonging the enslavement and subjugation of black people through overtly racist rulings. The secondary questions revolve around other organizational focuses and goals of the EJI like child imprisonment, the death penalty, and police violence, among others. It is ingenious how the EJI has mobilized their museum space further to spur visitors to consider the history of U.S. society even after they leave the museum.²²¹

²²⁰ Paul Butler, *Chokehold: Policing Black Men* (New York, NY: New Press, 2017), 46.

²²¹ Author site visit, “Mass Incarceration” permanent exhibit, The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018; and Equal Justice Initiative, *The Legacy Museum*. The museum also creates a space for visitors to act towards justice on-site. With the use of multiple interactive touch-screens, the museum helps register people to vote (for anywhere in the United States), start the process for claiming a lynching monument, sign two petitions for the EJI, find organizations to volunteer for locally, and donate money to justice organizations.

The Creation of a Memorial Landscape and Meaningful Space

The Memorial for Peace and Justice is traditional in that it displays statuary, metal, and engraved names. However, the nature of the memorial actively compels audience interaction in a way that a static monument cannot accomplish. Static monuments rarely experience any change over time other than in conjunction with its surrounding landscape.²²² This memorial comprises the traditionally permanent steel materials, but relies on local communities to actively interact with its content to begin the long-overdue healing process regarding physically and publically representing racial injustice in the United States.²²³ Unclaimed columns are presently located on the memorial site in Montgomery with the intent to physically show how many counties in the U.S. have and have not confronted their racial history. The memorial landscape and the memorial itself will continue to change form with the passage of time through the reclamation of columns and the EJI's addition of new columns.²²⁴

In conjunction with the Memorial for Peace and Justice, the EJI intends to continue their ongoing efforts to erect historical markers at physical sites where specific lynchings occurred. These sites are often unmarked and unrecognized by the surrounding community due to the time elapsed between the event and the contemporary era. Erecting historical markers as close to the original lynching site as possible forces the community to acknowledge and reconcile with their violent history today. The EJI includes local high

²²² The Lincoln Memorial is a notable exception to this idea. Its meaning has been reshaped by generations of protestors, performers, activists, and politicians to allow an ongoing symbolic link to various causes such as Dr. King's March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and President Nixon's meeting with protestors about the Kent State Shooting. Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1, 160.

²²³ Equal Justice Initiative, "The Memorial," *The National Memorial for Peace and Justice*.

²²⁴ Kiara Boone, interview by the author, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL, August 24, 2018.

schools in the process of creating historical markers by sponsoring scholarships for the best marker descriptions. While they award multiple student scholarships per marker, the EJI ultimately chooses the first place award for the student who wrote the approved final marker description. The inclusion of local schools in this process creates an environment to discuss race and injustice in the classroom—an initiative deemed significant and necessary by the EJI to promote the knowledge of such events.²²⁵ In addition, the EJI will collect soil samples from each lynching site that they mark with a historical marker, and bring that in a jar back to the main memorial in Montgomery for housing. Historical marker installations and soil collection further connects every lynching site back to the main memorial site in Montgomery. Therefore, while the main memorial sits on two sites in Montgomery, Alabama, the entire memorial landscape encompasses much of the United States and expands beyond states associated with the Confederacy.²²⁶

As of 2018, communities and counties are responsible for reaching out to the EJI to begin the reclamation process for their column or historical markers. Designed to empower local Black communities to be stakeholders of commemorating their own history, the EJI insists that the process of acknowledging the history of lynching must come from within the community to be effective and is dedicated to creating a personalized process for each county to meet that goal. Interested communities are more likely to know how to navigate their local and state bureaucracies better than an outside organization, and typically include a diverse coalition of advocates, educators, leaders,

²²⁵ See also for more information about the erection of the Travis County marker: Equal Justice Initiative, "Historical Marker Dedicated to Lynching Victims in Austin, Texas," EJI, last modified December 18, 2017, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://eji.org/news/eji-dedicates-historical-marker-to-lynching-victims-in-austin-texas>.

²²⁶ Equal Justice Initiative, "Community Remembrance Project," EJI, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://eji.org/community-remembrance-project>; and Equal Justice Initiative, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice," EJI.

and politicians. Determining the place of the column is a discussion between the community and the EJI. However, according to the EJI, placing a column at the county seat to represent how lynchings typically took place “on the courthouse lawn” has the most spatial and cultural significance.²²⁷ The reminder and acknowledgement of a community’s history aims to reconcile the lasting effects that slavery, Jim Crow, racial violence, and mass incarceration continue to have in this country. This history is woven throughout the entire American landscape and the ramifications of racial violence persists throughout communities, governments, and criminal justice systems. Discussing these histories in more than one space and in more than one way represents a more complete historical landscape.

Spatial awareness and a physical presence on the American landscape are critical to the effective execution of the EJI’s memorial. By housing the museum on the site of the largest slave-trading warehouse in the U.S. in Montgomery, Alabama, the EJI intended to requisition the landscape from a space linked to slave trading to a space of healing, specifically for Black people. In this regard, visitors physically and personally construct new meaning and historical memory by going to the museum (and by extension, the memorial). Through the column reclamation and marker dedication process, the EJI intends to engage the legacy of lynching nationally through locally focused memorialization efforts. The effort to document the history of racial violence in its corresponding landscape highlights both the opportunity to represent complex historical landscapes as well as the need for public markers depicting histories of anti-

²²⁷ Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century*, 75; and Kiara Boone, interview by the author, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL, August 24, 2018.

black violence to exist in direct dialog with standing markers to white American history, and challenging white visitors to reckon with their internalized racism and white privilege. Historical markers exist as a mainstream tool of history “marking” and remembering, and the EJI’s process of placing their own markers subverts traditionally white historical structures and memorial processes—specifically challenging the white legacy and prevalence of Confederate monuments throughout the United States—by claiming space for the histories of people of color. The capacity to construct meaning and memory at the EJI’s memorial and museum is incredibly significant because it increases the visibility of lynching victims and forces white visitors and white society to reckon with white supremacy. Between the main memorial, future column reclamations, historical markers, and soil collection, the EJI has woven a national memorial landscape and initiated an international conversation about the strength of memorials to either represent or rewrite history. The way that people interact with the memorial and how the memorial interacts with people aims to create simultaneously personal and community experiences.²²⁸

EJI memorial uses and approaches place differently than the National Civil Rights Museum or the Selma to Montgomery trail. While the effort to commemorate the site of individual lynchings corresponds to the personalized violence that took place on the landscape, the main memorial in Montgomery does not have the same tie to place. There was no lynching massacre in Montgomery (like what occurred during the race riots in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921). Instead, the Memorial for Peace and Justice stands in Montgomery as an attempt to supersede the history of enslavement—a history still highly

²²⁸ Davis, *Laying Claim*, 6-13.

visible on the Montgomery landscape. The EJI's different use of place poses some challenges regarding the importance of community-driven commemoration. Whereas the claiming of county columns requires some level of local county organizing, the main memorial and museum was not a locally organized project. The Memorial for Peace and Justice was built using mostly funds from elite donors and founder, Bryan Stevenson, undermining the significance of engaging the local community. Also, the one-sized fits all approach to community remembrance streamlines the commemorative process in an inorganic way, fundamentally disrupting the meaning of the monument that wasn't designed to fit the needs or history of the given community.

The Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum attracted public attention since its earliest conception. National media reporting mostly praises the memorial's vision and commitment to amplifying the voices of communities terrorized by racial violence. *The New York Times* followed the construction and dedication of the memorial since 2016.²²⁹ *Time Magazine* named the site as one of the one hundred "World's Greatest Places 2018," because of its cultural significance and of its unique commemorative aspects.²³⁰ Most publications with a national reader base describe the memorial and museum at length as well as how the mission and location of the EJI progressed into a need to address the history of racial violence in a memorial. Reporters at *The Root*, a prominent African American publication, have followed the memorial through the lens of Black society. Historian and journalist Todd Steven Burroughs discussed how the memorial significantly affects the Black community by being able "to

²²⁹ Robertson, "A Lynching Memorial Is Opening."

²³⁰ Time Magazine, "World's Greatest Places 2018," *Time Magazine*, 2018, accessed September 25, 2018, <http://time.com/collection/worlds-greatest-places-2018/5359214/national-memorial-for-peace-and-justice-montgomery-alabama/>.

bring [lynching victims] back from the realm of the ancestors into our collective memory.”²³¹

Oprah’s *60 Minutes* segment on the memorial and EJI introduced the site to a wider national audience. This segment ran nearly three weeks before the grand opening of the memorial and museum on April 26, and catapulted Bryan Stevenson, the EJI, and the Memorial for Peace and Justice further onto the national stage. The segment is blunt in discussing and showing the trauma of African Americans during the period of racial terror lynchings. CBS broadcasted the photos of lynched black bodies into the homes of America and forced viewers to acknowledge the sheer brutality of historic lynchings. The EJI noted that it was not enough to murder Black people; victims also had to be “burned, shot, and then sometimes dragged to the heart of the black community,” for the white community lynch mob to feel like justice had been served. Oprah’s *60 Minutes* segment outlined the depth of the Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum for audiences who may have never learned about the scope of racial violence in the United States. The legacy of lynching burdens all people in the United States either as a painful community history or the stark indifference to the impacts of that history.²³²

Existing alongside national praise, local news in Montgomery and throughout Alabama report more conflicting feelings about the memorial. Todd Strange, the Mayor of Montgomery since 2009, supported the creation of the monument in 2016, although he was cited in the *New York Times* as saying there would undoubtedly be local citizens who

²³¹ Todd Steven Burroughs, "American Lynching: 4,000 Unpunished Crimes," *The Root*, August 22, 2016, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.theroot.com/american-lynching-4-000-unpunished-crimes-1790856483>.

²³² *60 Minutes*, "Inside the Memorial to Victims of Lynching," episode 30, CBS, first broadcast April 8, 2018, hosted by Oprah Winfrey, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/oprah-winfrey-inside-the-memorial-to-victims-of-lynching-60-minutes/>.

would question the relevance of the memorial. The memorial's relevance, Strange said, "is to tell the story, and to tell it in a fashion that people want to come and see it." Strange immediately highlighted the economic gain that tourists to the memorial and museum would bring to Montgomery, especially as Bryan Stevenson was building the memorial with private funding and grants.²³³ Local members of Montgomery's Black community expressed their gratitude for the memorial. Brittany Willie, a 19-year-old Alabama native, noted that visitors are going to come to the memorial and "realize that these people were innocent" and "killed for who they [were]," understanding that the memorial demands acknowledgement from its community and from the nation. Victoria Dunn, a Montgomery resident, stressed that the memorial "is going to be something embraced by everybody," because anyone will be able to sympathize with the pain wrought by violent history if they allow themselves to.²³⁴

Montgomery is a city of intense historical, political, and social dichotomy; the city seal identifies Montgomery as both the "Cradle of the Confederacy" and the "Birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement."²³⁵ Citizen opinions regarding the Memorial for Peace and Justice reflect this dichotomy clearly. After *New Yorker* and CNN Analyst Jeffry Toobin asked about the memorial's creation, Dick Brewbaker, State Senator for a district in Montgomery, who said he had not heard of the memorial until questioned, was unwilling to understand why such a memorial was necessary to the EJI and the

²³³ Campbell Robertson, "Memorial in Alabama Will Honor Victims of Lynching," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), August 15, 2016, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/us/memorial-alabama-victims-lynching.html>.

²³⁴ Sam Levin, "Lynching Memorial Leaves Some Quietly Seething: 'Let Sleeping Dogs Lie,'" *The Guardian US* (New York, NY), April 28, 2018, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/apr/28/lynching-memorial-backlash-montgomery-alabama>.

²³⁵ Angela Helm, "The New Lynching Memorial and Legacy Museum Force Us to Bear Witness to Our Whole American Truth," *The Root*, April 25, 2018, accessed October 5, 2018, <https://www.theroot.com/the-new-lynching-memorial-and-museum-forces-us-to-bear-1825529717>.

descendants of lynching victims. Brewbaker argued that “interjecting even more race talk into Alabama’s politics is not productive,” and that Montgomery already has several museums dedicated to the civil rights era. Despite the fact that the EJI’s memorial and museum do not focus explicitly or singularly on the civil rights era, Brewbaker believed that “the imbalance” regarding representative memorials and history in Montgomery “has been corrected pretty quickly.”²³⁶ Brewbaker was not the only person to minimize the importance of the memorial. Sam Levin, a reporter for *The Guardian*, interviewed upset white locals around the opening of the memorial in 2018. Montgomery resident, Mikki Keenan, had no reservations in detailing her opinion that the memorial is “a waste of money, a waste of space and it’s bringing up bullshit.” Tommy Rhodes, a white member of the Alabama Sons of Confederate Veterans, declared, “We have moved past it” and that “you don’t want to entice them and feed any fuel to the fire.” Others questioned the legitimacy of the memorial’s history, with local Montgomery radio station owner Randall Hughey stating that the high number of recorded lynchings seems suspect because “that was not the norm.” While praising voices typically overshadow these opinions, it is unknown how many people are “quietly seething” at the memorial’s existence.²³⁷

The *Montgomery Advertiser*, the main city newspaper, addressed its role in propagating local lynchings historically. The *Advertiser* published a series of stories around the opening of the Memorial to Peace and Justice titled “Legacy of Lynchings: America’s Shameful History of Racial Terror” about the paper’s history of reporting lynchings. Reporter Bryan Lyman discussed “how the *Advertiser* failed victims of racial

²³⁶ Jeffrey Toobin, “The Legacy of Lynching, on Death Row,” *The New Yorker*, August 15, 2016, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/bryan-stevenson-and-the-legacy-of-lynching>.

²³⁷ Levin, “Lynching Memorial Leaves Some Quietly Seething.”

terror” by outlining how the newspaper consistently opposed racially motivated murders but with “a detachment buoyed by racial stereotypes,” and propagated the inevitability of lynchings for crimes of murder and rape. The paper typically echoed local, court, and law enforcement sentimentalities that blamed the lynching victim often without any defensible evidence. Evidence, however, was unnecessary to lynch mobs.²³⁸ The *Advertiser* would later fail to fully cover the civil rights movement by not reporting on the racial tensions in the city to shroud readers from the realities of protest across the country, reflecting the trend in white media to be complacent towards lynch mobs, murders, and black freedom struggles historically. As a result of the “Legacy of Lynchings” series, the *Advertiser* takes “responsibility for [their] proliferation of a false narrative regarding the [mis]treatment of African Americans” in the “disgraceful days” of Jim Crow and throughout the twentieth century. Although the effort to acknowledge their history as a majority-white serving newspaper that downplayed and misrepresented anti-black violence does not absolve the *Advertiser* of their involvement, it does widen the local conversation about race and the legacy of lynching in Montgomery.²³⁹

²³⁸ Bryan Lyman, “There Will Be Lynchings’: How the Advertiser Failed Victims of Racial Terror,” *Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), April 20, 2018, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2018/04/20/there-lynchings-how-advertiser-failed-victims-racial-terror-eji-peace-justice-memorial-montgomery/499656002/>.

²³⁹ Montgomery Advertiser Editorial Board, “Our Shame: The Sins of Our Past Laid Bare for All to See,” *Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), April 26, 2018, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/opinion/editorials/2018/04/26/shame-us-sins-our-past-equal-justice-initiative-peace-memorial-lynching-montgomery-bryan-stevenson/551402002/>; John Eligon, “A Lynching Memorial Forces a Reckoning for a Nation, and a Newspaper,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 29, 2018, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/29/us/lynching-memorial-newspaper.html>; and Margaret A. Blanchard, ed., *History of the Mass Media in the United States: An Encyclopedia* (Hoboken, NY: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 373-376.

Conclusion

The EJI understands reconciliation as fixing racial injustice in the United States, and the creation of the Memorial for Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum intended to be a first step in that process. However, the EJI loosely defines reconciliation as an acknowledgement of the history of racial violence in America and a commitment to dismantling the lasting effects of racial injustice in the federal government and the justice system. As a legal organization, the EJI sees its efforts towards attempting to dismantle mass incarceration and racial bias in arrests and sentencing as part of the solution of achieving reconciliation for lynchings, slavery, racism, and inequality. Only time will tell whether the EJI's methods for reconciliation will work.

At the Memorial for Peace and Justice, public reconciliation meets twenty-first century social justice to understand and cope with the lasting effects of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, anti-black racism, and mass incarceration. This project directly challenges the lack of traditional African American memorials in the United States until the late-twentieth century. The creation of this memorial also relates to the state of contemporary politics and race relations in the United States. Again, the idea that other groups have reconciliatory memorials, but black people do not is a main reason that a private nonprofit organization like the EJI is taking the initiative to do what local, state, and national governments have failed to do for its citizens.

The museum and its interpretive capacities are integral to the educational and active part of this memorial landscape. While it is not ideal that the museum and the memorial are located a distance apart in Montgomery, the EJI carefully chose the specific locations for each site with concern for connecting the memory of racial violence to a

sense of place. While there have been accessibility concerns regarding the distance between the museum and memorial sites, the EJI has accommodated travelers with a regular shuttle bus. Both the museum and the memorial lack narrow walkways or stairs so people with wheelchairs or other accessibility concerns can navigate the spaces comfortably and independently. All videos and digital displays include captions for hearing impaired visitors. It is the EJI's priority that the memorial and the museum are accessible to as many people as possible.

As the EJI's memorial and museum are still new, one can only speculate what updates to the sites may look like in the future. The Legacy Museum is a singular exhibit space, and does not have the capacity for travelling exhibitions or smaller, more focused exhibition cases. The latter is also a result of the EJI not being a collecting institution. Like any other museum or exhibit space, the EJI will have to invest further time, effort, and staff towards any updates or exhibit changes, all of which take immense time and strategic planning. There is room for the memorial to grow. Besides the column reclamation process, the Memorial for Peace and Justice has the capability to be updated in the future. When discussing the memorial's longevity, the EJI is reviewing new sources for lynchings found in different states than originally represented on the memorial, such as Michigan and California. In addition, the original constraints of the memorial as only recording racial terror lynchings from 1877 to 1950 leaves out lynching victims from before or after these dates. Most notably, the lynching of Emmett Till occurred in 1954, and helped to kick start the Civil Rights Movement and launched a national discussion about racial terror violence. The construction of a community center is currently underway on the same site as the Memorial for Peace and Justice. The EJI

will run community programs, house archival materials for researchers, and organize tour groups in this center.²⁴⁰

The EJI and the Memorial for Peace and Justice are Bryan Stevenson's legacy. The EJI serves its various communities in uniquely individual ways that provides a different educational and healing experience based on which community a visitor comes from, be it a local, regional, national, or international community. The Memorial for Peace and Justice exists as an example of how to create memorial landscapes and community memories centering marginalized histories and traumas. Reconciling the history of racial violence in the United States will take a concerted and ongoing effort and the memorial, museum, historical markers, and community columns create a memorial landscape that becomes more connected and complete over time. Ultimately, the EJI has engineered an effective and engaging memorial landscape that seems like it will become more relevant in the coming years as more communities through the United States acknowledge and engage with the history of racial violence.

²⁴⁰ Kiara Boone, interview by the author, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL, August 24, 2018.

Chapter Picture Appendix:

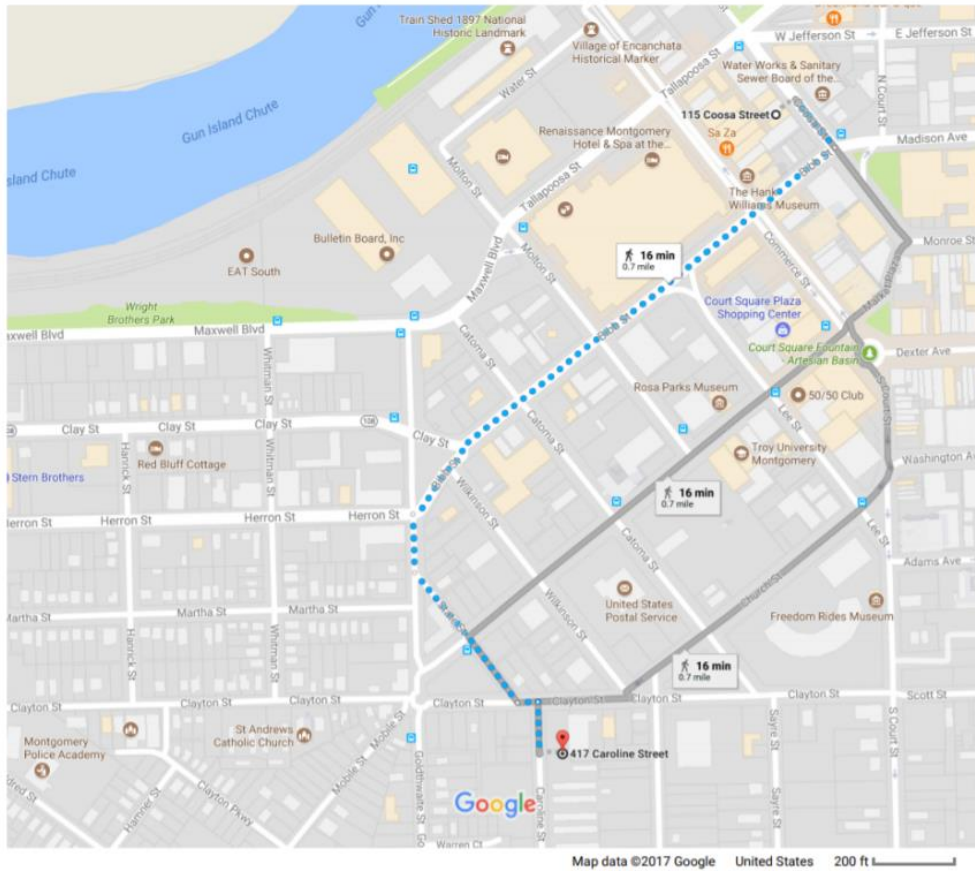


Fig. 1: Google Map via EJI of Walking Distance Between the Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Equal Justice Initiative, "From the Museum to the Memorial," map, EJI, 2017, accessed October 5, 2018, https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/sites/default/files/map/museum_to_memorial.pdf.



Fig. 2: First Side of EJI Memorial Square with Person for Scale²⁴²

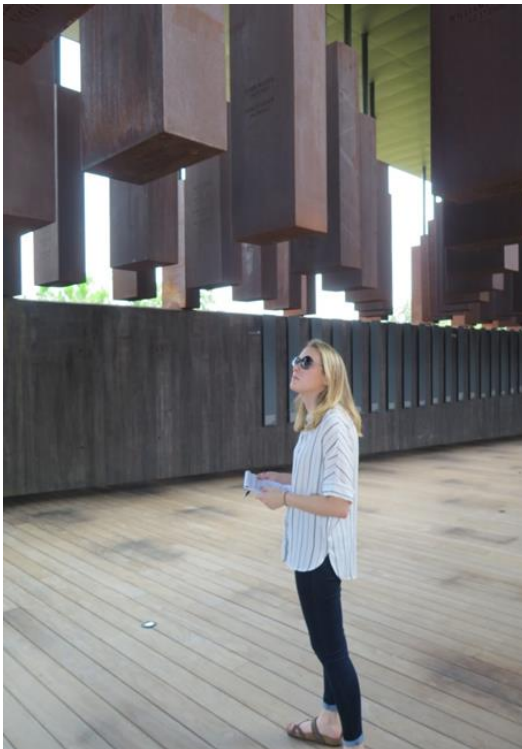


Fig. 3: Third Side of EJI Memorial Square with Person for Scale²⁴³

²⁴² Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

²⁴³ Author site visit, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL, August 23, 2018.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In March, 2019, I presented the preliminary findings of my work to the National Council of Public History Annual Meeting in Hartford, Connecticut as part of the panel “Beyond Granite: New Directions in Commemoration.” With panelists from across the United States, we discussed the power commemoration has to shape public opinions and national narratives of historical memory. Looking beyond the static, limited nature of traditional statuary monuments, we explored the ways that memorials could be dynamic, active, and accessible avenues for guiding memory-curating processes and presenting a public history that is actually for the public. Through this experience, the ways in which my project could improve and has room to grow became clear.

For the purpose of my master’s thesis, a sampling of one type of memorial landscape such as National Historic Trails or African American community museums might have been a better measure of my complex argument. However, as outlined in my work, memorial landscapes have the capacity to be a memory-making, memory-curating visitor experience primarily depending on how an individual interacts with the personal factoids of the memorial. Any way that a person interacts with the memorial site and comes away having gained or engaged with something (be it historical knowledge, visibility, the passion to create change, or any number of different things) creates a valid, active, and (often) place-based commemorative experience. As the panelists concluded in “Beyond Granite,” the physical space and the effort of pilgrimaging to a commemorative site is important and valuable for not only the perpetuation of collective memory, but also for its growth.

The ways one could expand upon this research in the future would be to create a spatial representation of the memorial landscapes using a map or a program. Looking at the geographic areas that comprise such memorial landscapes could bridge new connections and foster more analytical questions regarding the way my arguments could be used for other commemorations. Further, the collection of as many commemorative sites to the Black freedom struggles as is feasible for the purpose of visualizing spatially could reveal larger geographic, cultural, and community trends regarding how memorial landscapes engage American society at large—given that someone would be up to the no doubt arduous task. Future expansions to include the spatial analysis other civil rights movements may reveal patterns in memorials landscapes not yet fully realized. Along with the advent of completely digital memorials, it seems that only the mind can confine the limits of commemoration and memory-curating processes. Ultimately, this work could be used as a tool for pushing the boundaries of what commemoration can do and look like in the future. Memorial landscapes, historical institutions, and collections are not inherently neutral spaces or things, and looking at history through a neutral lens does an immense disservice to the marginalized and underrepresented histories of the United States. Active memorial landscapes are one way to understand collective memories as valid historical resources.

With the newly dedicated National Museum of African American History and Culture as perhaps the best example, we see the culmination of the latest trend in public history: the nationalization (or at least the widespread integration) of community histories via interpretive methods that seek to memorialize their place on the American landscape as well as contribute to a more complete national historical narrative. Even institutions

and organizations like the National Civil Rights Museum, the National Park Service, and the Equal Justice Initiative are moving towards this direction, as they continue to create new connections and networks of information. These sites engage the visitor in lasting, intangible ways using active interpretive spaces and transparent goals towards spurring further activism.

These memorial landscapes encapsulate an unfinished, living story. Many activists, participants, and agitators are still alive and live within the communities that commemorate the history of the struggle for Black freedom. Not only are the participants or descendants of history often living in the same local communities, those who opposed equal civil rights for African American communities and their descendants often continue to live in the same local communities. The tension between commemorating a shared, recent history ensures that the memory of civil rights is still unfolding.

In an age of an increasingly connected and digital world, debates surrounding the purpose of new and existing monuments becomes more and more polarized. Similar to one of the conclusions of the “Beyond Granite” panel, there is no one overarching solution for how to address the complex, layered historical narratives that already exist on the landscape as monuments. As important as listening to national perspectives and understanding historical precedents may be when interpreting the complicated history of the United States, the decision on what and what not to memorialize must be made by the locally affected communities for which any given monument represents.

Ultimately, there exists a historical precedent of place-based, community-driven commemoration within African American communities that creates an active, engaging memorial landscape for visitors that bronze, stone, or granite statue cannot generate

alone. Despite the differences in management and funding, the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, and the Equal Justice Initiative's Memorial for Peace and Justice all navigate violence and trauma to create a space for visitors and communities to learn, reflect, mourn, or heal. The creation of each case study site innovated a new way to cultivate and contextualize a memorial landscape both in the United States and in local, predominately African American communities. In identifying these trends, one can hope for the innovation of more inclusive commemorative landscape and collective historical memory that people see themselves within. The inclusion of social history—an activist social history—to the study of public history and memory was integral in uncovering commemorative trends throughout the past and can help to predict the trends of significant memorial landscapes in the future.

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