

becomes one among many, the question is one of generating an "active trust—trust in others or in institutions (including political institutions) that has to be actively produced and negotiated" rather than accepted (p. 92). Such negotiation exists in the genres that chronically reproduce those institutions and, in a broader sense, create communities as people confront social tasks. In our time, the fragility of cultural and technological innovations easily attracts attention; the contingent stability of rhetorical genres and political institutions often escapes notice. The genres of a community, as staid as this perspective seems to many, offers a promising approach for exploring the generation of an active trust in a posttraditional time.

## 7

## Memory as Social Action

### *Cultural Projection and Generic Form in Civil Rights Memorials*

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In my hometown paper, there was a story about a group of people embarking on a civil rights heritage tour. The tour was organized by the Raleigh Martin Luther King Resource Center and began on April 4, the 33rd anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (MLK) assassination at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee (now the site of the National Civil Rights Museum). The travelers on this tour were described as being on a "pilgrimage into the past" and "bonded by their hunger to see civil rights landmarks firsthand" (Starling, 2001, p. 1D). Although this story caught my attention because it involved civil rights-related memory sites, the linking of memory and tourism struck me as particularly interesting. If, as Danielle Rice (1992, p. 231) notes, "tourism in modern industrial societies helps people to define who they are and what matters in the world," the proliferation of museums, memorials, and sites of memory in the past two decades takes on added significance for scholars interested in examining how culture is communicated rhetorically.<sup>1</sup>



At the same time, the past decade has seen an increase in the scholarly attention devoted to, as Donna Graves (1992) notes, identifying and analyzing the "symbols and patterns that characterize attitudes toward race and difference in American culture" (pp. 215, 217). Graves argues that analyzing the built environment, including public memorials, monuments, and museums existing in the public spaces of urban America, is essential to understanding how cultural artifacts create, sustain, and reproduce racial ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between public memory and social action such as tourism and also the creation and reproduction of racial identities and ideologies are the motivating themes of this essay. It represents one piece of a larger project devoted to discovering and explaining the defining characteristics and social action inscribed in a genre of memorial discourse, which both honors the accomplishments and reminds us of the tragic losses accrued during the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. Due to the complexity and divisiveness of race relations in the United States—characteristics that translate into how space is allocated, who lives where, and the "good" and "bad" parts of cities—civil rights-related memorials and museums are essentially complicated, unfinished texts. At the same time, however, these material artifacts provide stability in response to the uncertainties and complexities of racial identity and a means for portraying a positive image of subordinate groups to the larger culture.

The goal of this essay is to "describe and theorize the patterns of regularities" (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p. 3) in the rhetorical discourse of four civil rights memorials and museums in the southeastern United States. Although not exclusively linguistic in nature, these artifacts combine layers of oral, written, visual, and spatial elements to form a complex whole, simultaneously symbolic and material in nature. As I will demonstrate, they reproduce and "quote" each other's forms even as they provide differentiated experiences to visitors. Drawing on theories of cultural projection, memory, and genre, my analysis illuminates the extent to which these particular sites of memory provide the linguistic and extralinguistic elements through which visitors perceive recurring situation types and are thereby instructed in how to interpret their own and others' identities, motivations, and goals in light of racial ideologies.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In his book, *Representing Black Culture: Racial Conflict and Cultural Politics in the United States*, Richard Merelman (1995) asserts that there is a growing debate about American (read United States) national identity due to changes in American (read United States) culture. These changes, in turn, are brought about by what Merelman refers to as cultural projection: "the conscious or unconscious effort by a social group and its allies to place new images of itself before other social groups, and before the general public" (p. 3). There are differences, however, in a group's cultural projection based on whether it is a dominant or subordinate social group. Also, according to Merelman, the relative economic status and degree of authority in social and political institutions that a given group possesses determine its dominant or subordinate status. To wit,

A politically, economically, and socially subordinated group engages in cultural projection when its allies put forth new, usually more positive pictures of itself beyond its own borders. By inviting respect, commendation, debate, and engagement, these new images contest the negative stereotypes that dominant groups typically apply to subordinates. For its part, a dominant group engages in cultural projection when it and its allies develop a newly positive set of self-images, and put forth such images to subordinate groups. These new images not only contend that dominant groups deserve the right to rule, but also ask subordinate groups to approve rather than resist or distrust rule by dominants. (p. 3)

Merelman (1995) argues that the past 30 years have witnessed a growth in black cultural projection, particularly with regard to entertainment media, schools, universities, periodicals, research foundations, and, to a lesser extent, government. Thus, according to him, "the scene is set for a struggle between a changing American culture—in which black cultural projection plays an increasing role—and white domination exerted through the normal processes of American politics" (p. 25). The key question for Merelman is



why this power struggle among a dominant white and subordinate non-white racial groups, especially blacks, should take on a *cultural* dimension, as opposed to traditional forms of economic struggle (over, say, the distribution of income) or political struggle (over, say, the distribution of elected representatives). (p. 26)

He addresses this question by describing five conditions that he believes "favor the transformation of dominant-subordinate racial group struggles into cultural forms" (p. 27): increased social contact between middle-class whites and blacks, the increasing place of cultural capital in the American economy, the persistence of racial domination despite the fact the tenets of liberal democracy were legally broadened to include blacks, divisions among white intellectuals over multiculturalism, and the growing impact of the mass media.

Merelman (1995) develops a template of the following four basic types of cultural projection and reads various events and artifacts, including the establishment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. national holiday, through this framework:

1. Syncretism occurs when "dominants accept some of the subordinate cultural projection, and subordinates accept some of the dominant projection. . . . Syncretism is thus a form of mutual projection. By incorporating subordinate imagery, syncretism may weaken the cultural foundations of political domination in a society."
2. Hegemony occurs when "dominant groups control the flow of cultural projection. . . . Dominants enjoy hegemony when their point of view becomes a 'common sense,' shared widely both within their own group and beyond. Hegemony thus undercuts the ability of subordinates to resist domination."
3. Polarization occurs when cultural projection fails and increases the opportunity for conflict. "Groups that experience the pain of having their own projections rejected by others, and who must simultaneously struggle to fight off the projections of these same others, will become angry and embittered."
4. Counterhegemony occurs when "subordinates and their allies convert dominants to subordinate versions of the world. The result of counterhegemony is that many dominants gradually become

more accepting of subordinates. In so doing, dominants adopt to some degree a worldview which immediately and definitively questions their right to hold power, and which demands they cede power to subordinates" (pp. 5-6).

The proliferation of civil rights-related museums and memorials in the past 15 years seems to support Merelman's (1995) contention that there is an increase in the number and type of images of blacks being put forward in the culture, which invite "respect, commendation, debate, and engagement" rather than negative stereotyping. Significantly, the images presented both visually and verbally at or in these sites are of black people engaging in political action in the face of great opposition and danger. This is in contrast to what Merelman claims are the areas in which black cultural projection has more typically been found, such as in entertainment media, sports, and music. Thus, one way to analyze these sites of memory is to determine, based on the previously discussed template, the type of cultural projection they offer or evoke. As Merelman suggests in his analysis of the King holiday, however, a particular cultural "text" often has elements of all four and thus can be read in multiple ways. Thus, for example, we might initially argue that civil rights-related museums and memorials do not seem to fit the description of polarization because they tend to be explicitly sanctioned or accepted by representatives of the dominant group (namely white persons in positions of political authority or social influence). My experience of who actually visits such sites—for example, the majority of visitors to the King Memorial in Atlanta during my four visits were African Americans and other people of color—suggests that there is still a tendency to understand these sites as by, about, and for black people rather than by, about, and for all citizens (Gallagher, 1995).

Whereas Merelman places cultural projection at the center of the debate on a changing American culture and thus a changing American identity, historian Michael Kammen (1993) views public memory as central to a nation's identity. He writes,

Public memory, which contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often contested. Although there have been a great many political conflicts concerning American traditions, ultimately there is a powerful tendency in the



United States to depoliticize traditions for the sake of "reconciliation." Consequently the politics of culture in this country has everything to do with the process of contestation *and* with the subsequent quest for reconciliation. (p. 13)

In the United States, a cultural commitment to progress provides the rhetorical means for moving from contestation to reconciliation. Local communities, such as the city of Birmingham, extol a "tradition of progress" that seems absolutely central to the community's evolution, in this case from Bombingham to the city of medicine (Gallagher, 1999, pp. 315, 317). According to Kammen (1993), members of social and political elites become "tourists of the past, seeking justification in history" and the "lucrative profits available to those who invest in the 'heritage industry'" (p. 691). Social and political elites are not the only tourists of the past, however. As Kammen points out, the dramatic increase in tourism since the 1960s and the lucrative nature of the tourism industry have led to the democratization of tradition by making it more accessible. The result is the creation of sites of memory that provide visions of a timeless past, "of stable evolutionary change, and of history with a minimum of conflict and a maximum of aesthetic and patriotic appeal" (p. 691).

The development of a shared vision of the past can be elusive, however. As Edward Linenthal (1995) suggests, "The more volatile the memory, the more difficult the task to reach a consensual vision of how the memory should be appropriately expressed, and the more intense become the struggles to shape, to 'own' the memory's public presence" (p. 52). Social diversity within the United States means that there are multiple memories rather than a monolithic, collective memory. How and to what extent do civil rights-related museums and memorials evoke memory and contestation, amnesia, and reconciliation? How do they account for, reconcile, represent, and construct multiple versions of the past? Can a coherent vision be presented without moving into a progress narrative of some kind?

Theories of genre provide one way to address the difficulties that confront creators, critics, and, ultimately, audiences of public discourses of memory. Although the explicit discussion of genre has been somewhat absent from communication journals in recent years, generic approaches are still evident.<sup>3</sup> One of the areas in which this is particularly true is in the criticism of material rhetorics, including memorials, history sites, and other places and artifacts of cultural memory. In her 1986 essay on



the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM), Sonja Foss argues that memorials and sites of memory are rhetorical artifacts deserving of examination by rhetorical critics at least in part because of the generic function(s) they perform. Her analysis of the VVM is based primarily on examining the extent to which it embodies epideictic form, function, and substance. Foss's analysis of the VVM is important because it was one of the first in what has become a growing tide of critical essays in communication journals devoted to analyses of memorials, monuments, and other public sites of memory. Interestingly, it also echoes the earlier work of Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson (1978a), who, in their efforts to establish generic criticism as a legitimate method, focused on how form, substance, and context both constrain and provide opportunities for particular rhetors. In recent analyses of memorials and sites of memory, however, the emphasis has changed from understanding the constraints and opportunities of form, context, and substance on rhetors to an emphasis on how audiences perceive, respond to, and understand these material forms of rhetoric (Gallagher, 1995). This shift marks a move from similarity in situation or occasion as a key characteristic of genre to shared social construction of meaning and public construal of situation types as indicators of genre.

Indeed, genres appear to be most serviceable in our attempts to categorize our experiences in day-to-day interactions with one another. In our discussions of films, speeches, television shows, novels, and even food, generic classification helps us to make claims about and to share with others our interpretations of and responses to all kinds of communicative experience. It helps us to define the situations we face by providing some level of predictability in our lives and the resources for modeling and inventing appropriate responses. This is important, given the contemporary concern with instability, indeterminacy, and the lack of stable categories. As Carolyn Miller (1984) points out, "It is possible to arrive at common determinations of material states of affairs that may have many possible interpretations because . . . our stock of knowledge is based upon types" (p. 156). This is true not because situations reoccur in any objective fashion, or even because perceptions reoccur, but, rather, because situations are social constructs that result from definition. Therefore, what recurs is "not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type" (p. 157). Thus, despite the fact that we are "in an age of 'marked instability' . . . [when] typical patterns are not widely shared . . . and motivation is 'liquid,' . . . and the whole matter of genre has become problematic" (p. 157), critics can and should pay attention to



how people rhetorically work together to define experiences and situations in ways that are shared and thus recurrent.

Critics have already begun the process of determining the kinds of conventionalized social motives that memorials and sites of memory may evoke. As indicated previously, claims have been made regarding the epideictic and deliberative functions of the VVM. In his account of the 15-year struggle to create the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., Linenthal (1995) argues for understanding the museum as therapeutic, a generic claim echoed in other work on Holocaust memorials, the VVM, and the Aids Memorial Quilt. Elsewhere, I have argued that civil rights-related memorials function at least in part as apologia, as a way of reclaiming moral high ground for a community or nation by providing a means for coming to terms with the wrongdoings of the past (Gallagher, 1995, 1999). Finally, critics and theorists have asserted an overarching social motive bound up in and evoked by narratives of progress (Kammen, 1993).

To develop a better understanding of how particular conventional social motives and racial ideologies come to prevail in the experience of audiences, a critic must also analyze the form, substance, and context of artifacts. In terms of museums and memorials, this means paying particular attention to the material nature of the artifacts. Because of their "assiduous materiality," the issue of context, including location, is particularly important. As Carole Blair (1999) suggests, unlike speeches or written texts, memorials "remain in our perceptual fields as long as we are nearby. They do not fall silent . . . nor are they put away" (p. 17). Instead, they have a recalcitrant presentness that, as Radley (1990) suggests, both impacts and is dependent on a physical setting or location. In the case of civil rights memorials and museums, location (or place) and form interact in particularly profound ways, such that even the most architecturally modernist, seemingly functional structure can never be taken at face value. Consider the National Civil Rights Museum, constructed within the remaining shell of the Lorraine Motel in an area of Memphis that is historically and politically charged. In and of itself, the museum is an unfinished text. It draws from outside its own structure to form the character of that structure.<sup>4</sup>

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Atlanta, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, and the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial are four artifacts that share features in common but enable the social construction of distinct experiences, definitions, and lessons. The following section provides a



brief comparative description of these four museums or memorials. An analysis of the four sites follows, which (based on the previous theoretical discussion) addresses the following questions:

1. What social action(s) is performed through the experience of these civil rights memorials? What are the consequences of their materiality, particularly in terms of cultural projection?
2. To what extent are the memorials and monuments as well as the responses to them shaped by generic elements embedded within the institutional discourse of which they are a product? How do these generic elements shape, particularly in terms of contestation and reconciliation, the re-creation and representation of multiple versions of the past?
3. What are the multiple contexts (economic, physical, and built environments) from which these memorials emerge, and how do they shape the re-creation and representation of racism and civil rights?

## DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACTS

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### **Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial and Center for Non-violent Social Change**

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial and Center for Non-violent Social Change is located in the Sweet Auburn district of Atlanta, a once thriving black middle-class community that is now a historic district and, curiously, a national park—an island of memory in a sea of urban decay. Visitors to the area can tour the birth home of Martin King, the Ebenezer Baptist Church where both MLK and his father pastored, and the memorial plaza with its modernist buildings surrounding a central courtyard. The courtyard is defined by three additional structures: the Chapel of All Faiths, the Freedom Walkway, and a reflecting pool. At one end of the rectangular pool, adjacent to the Chapel of All Faiths and easily accessible from the street, King's stone casket sits on a stone dais, elevated slightly above water level. Located directly across the sidewalk from it is an eternal flame set into the brick terrace. The Freedom Hall at the opposite end of the pool houses a display of artifacts associated with Martin and Coretta Scott King as well as a bookstore/gift shop and an auditorium.



Prior to 1996, the view across the street, looking out over the eternal flame and away from the casket, was of public housing apartment buildings and an empty lot. In preparation for the influx of visitors in conjunction with the 1996 Summer Olympics, the National Park Service constructed a new visitors' center and the Ebenezer congregation built a new sanctuary directly across the street from the original memorial and center. These structures and the plaza surrounding them reflect a different aesthetic. Compared to their built environment, they appear larger than life, very new and very lush. As a result, there is a kind of disconnect between the two sides of the street. The old sanctuary and the birth home, although carefully restored and maintained, appear old and a bit seedy, fraying around the edges as even the most tenderly cared for garment will do when it has been handed down several times. At the new visitors center, uniformed park rangers greet visitors. In the King Center, the birth home, and the original Ebenezer sanctuary, members of the community and the church serve as hosts. The new structures reflect the economic and political shifts as Atlanta has become the queen city of the New South.<sup>5</sup> The older structures are linked to the once thriving neighborhood of the past. There is another gift shop located in the visitors center as well as a display room with picture, text, and video displays recounting King's role in the movement. The centerpiece of this display is a freedom walkway with life-size statues marching together on a road that begins at ground level and angles upward toward a wall of tempered glass windows. Located by the entrances to the display room are memory books and writing implements. Visitors are invited to write comments, reactions, and reflections.

### **Birmingham Institute**

The Birmingham Institute was designed by the same architect who designed the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial and Center for Non-violent Social Change, but the two have different structural features. The institute takes up one fourth of a city block and faces Kelly Ingram Park, the unofficial boundary between the black and white sections of the city in the 1950s and 1960s. Its external architecture is red brick with some classical elements, including a rotunda entrance, with white concrete steps ascending up to it. Directly to the left of the entrance is a well-stocked bookstore/gift shop.

The museum part of the institute consists of 10 galleries that take visitors from the era of segregation in Birmingham through the events of the



Civil Rights movement, both in Birmingham and throughout the nation, and finally to current struggles for human rights throughout the world. The promotional video for the institute describes a visit to the museum as "a self-directed journey through the Civil Rights movement and the history of African American life in Birmingham." The journey begins with a film titled "Going up to Birmingham," which describes the origins of the city (the city was founded after the Civil War as a desirable place for industry due to vast mineral resources in the area), the contrast between the experiences of whites and blacks during the early years, and the self-contained culture that black people built in response to the strict color line that emerged in the city. After the film, the screen rises and visitors walk through galleries depicting life in segregated Birmingham prior to the movement. As a segue between these galleries and the ones devoted to the events of the movement, there is a room of hanging Plexiglas panels etched with representations of Birmingham citizens of the 1950s (e.g., a black woman in a nurse's uniform, a white man in a suit, a black man in a suit and hat, and a white farm worker). A tape of voices plays continuously as visitors walk among the images so that each of the figures appears to be talking about his or her beliefs or experiences regarding civil rights, segregation, and racism. At the end of the room, on a black wall, loom the figures of Ku Klux Klansmen dressed in white robes.

Displays in the next section of the museum include a statue of Rosa Parks on a bus, MLK's Birmingham jail cell, the charred remains of the Freedom Riders' burned-out bus, and newspaper clippings, photographs, film footage, filmed interviews, and other artifacts and texts. The visitors move through these sections of the exhibit until they find themselves in the midst of a group of marchers commemorating the march on Washington. The marchers have jubilant expressions, and for the first time since the beginning of the movie, visitors experience a flood of natural light as they celebrate the successes of the movement, moving, literally, out of the darkness of legal segregation into the light of legal equality.

The rest of the museum section of the institute marks specific milestones in achieving legal equality in Birmingham and ends in a gallery devoted to international human rights. It features life-size images and audio narratives of individuals throughout the world who have experienced oppression and racism due to their gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs and who are involved in movements to end such oppression.



## National Civil Rights Museum

The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis is located in the shell of the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. The external courtyard and part of the façade of the building have been carefully reproduced to look much as they did the day King died, including parking spaces with two 1950s era cars, external walkways, and the original motel sign. Exhibits begin on the ground floor, and as visitors move through them, they proceed along a path that gradually spirals upward and deposits them, ultimately, at the reproduced and restored second-floor rooms King and his friends were occupying on the fateful day.

The main exhibits in the museum are vignettes capturing key elements of the Civil Rights movement and are organized around the constitutional issues the movement sought to test. Photos, audio recordings, documentary footage, life-size statues, and artifacts help to create the look and the feel of the era and provide a more experiential, process-oriented (as opposed to static) perspective on history. The 16 exhibits include many of the same events reproduced in the Birmingham Institute, such as the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Montgomery bus boycott, student sit-ins, the freedom rides, King's Birmingham jail cell, the march on Washington, the march from Selma to Montgomery, and the Memphis janitors strike. The final galleries are quite different, however. The Memphis museum culminates at the rooms 306 and 307 displays, where visitors view the re-created hotel rooms through Plexiglas windows and look out onto the hotel's balcony where King stood before he was assassinated. The unmade beds, the dishes holding the remains of a meal, and the hotel façade suggest an attempt to put visitors into a moment in the past, to both evoke and instill memory.

As with the King Center in Atlanta and the Birmingham Institute, the Memphis museum is located in a neighborhood that, prior to the 1960s, was a center for black commerce and culture and is now a site of urban decay, targeted for urban renewal. In addition, when the building was purchased and reconstructed, inhabitants were displaced. One of those displaced was Jacqueline Smith, an African American woman who has staged a continuing protest, a sort of countermemorial, directly across the street. Her memorial is made up of an old couch on which she sits with her belongings, displaying hand-lettered signs. Ms. Smith's signs declare that, contrary to being honored and preserved by the museum, King's vision and legacy have, in fact, been betrayed by the museum. Visitors must pass by Ms. Smith to enter and exit the museum.



## Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial

The Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial is perhaps the most unique of the four, particularly in form and substance. Although its published literature indicates an intended educational function, similar to that of the museums previously described, it is symbolically more open and ambiguous. The memorial is located in downtown Montgomery on a plaza in front of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a modern concrete and mirrored glass structure with a resulting black-and-white appearance. Directly behind the memorial and center is a large green-and-mauve building, the Alabama Center for Commerce, which looms over the center and the memorial. Ironically (or, perhaps, significantly), most downtown buildings have a white exterior appearance, made all the stronger by the hot southern sun reflecting off white marble and white concrete. In fact, buildings that are "colored," such as the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where the Montgomery bus boycott was launched, with its red brick exterior and stained-glass windows, or the Commerce Center, which is money-green colored, stand out markedly from the surrounding built environment.

The memorial is composed of two structures: an inverted asymmetrical, conical pedestal of black granite (referred to by SPLC staff and the designer, Maya Lin, as a table) and a convex, curved wall of black granite with the inscription "Until Justice Rolls Down Like Waters and Righteousness Like a Mighty Stream." There are 53 inscriptions on the tabletop, the majority of which (32) name 40 individuals and the circumstances of their death (e.g., "15 Sep 1963. Addie Mae Collins. Denise McNair. Carole Robertson. Cynthia Wesley. Schoolgirls Killed in Bombing of 16th St. Baptist Church. Birmingham, AL"). The other 21 inscriptions, spread out in no particular pattern other than chronological, relate various civil rights activities (e.g., "5 Dec 1955. Montgomery Bus Boycott Begins"), legal decisions (e.g., "9 Jul 1965. Congress Passes Voting Rights Act of 1965"), and violent confrontations (e.g., "3 May 1963. Birmingham Police Attack Marching Children with Dogs and Fire Hoses").<sup>6</sup> In addition, both the table and the wall have a water element. On top of the table, water bubbles up from a well located in an off-center position and spreads over the full surface of the table so that every part is evenly coated in water. The water falls over the edge and disappears into a drain at the base of the cone. Water also rushes down the side of the wall, apparently from a pool above, and into a drain that runs along the entire base of the wall. Because of continual death and bomb threats



directed at the staff of the SPLC, who, often successfully, try legal cases against hate groups, the top portion of the memorial and the entrance plaza to the center are roped off and guarded. As a result, most people are not able to view the top part of the memorial, an absolutely still pool of water made of uninscribed black granite.

The memorial is situated in such a way that it interrupts the sidewalk; anyone walking on that particular part of the street must move around the memorial and if there is a breeze will feel the mist from the water flowing over the edge of the table. In addition, the surrounding built environment contains several sites commemorating Civil War and pre-Civil War life in Montgomery, including the preserved and restored White House of the Confederacy and the location of the auction block where slaves were bought and sold.

### ANALYSIS

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1. What social action(s) is performed through the experience of these civil rights memorials? What are the consequences of their materiality, particularly in terms of cultural projection?

As suggested previously, all four of these artifacts have a strong educational function, both in terms of their creators' goals and purposes and in terms of their audiences' experiences. Indeed, the notion of heritage tourism is based on an interest in learning about the past, not simply through reading history but also through "experiencing" it via multiple modes. As the previous descriptions indicate, all the sites appeal to multiple senses, particularly hearing and touch in addition to sight, and they seek to form emotional identification through physical layout, personalized narratives, and juxtaposition of symbols and artifacts. In addition, each of the sites distributes brochures that emphasize the educational function the museum or memorial is meant to serve. These printed materials suggest that learning about the past through visiting the sites can help visitors (and through them, society as a whole) to avoid repeating mistakes while promoting better understanding of the dynamics of racism and racial hatred. The educational function of these memory sites is considered particularly important by both staff and visitors because of the comparatively limited availability of information about civil rights history and the role of African Americans and people of color in American



history (Hacker, 1995). The bookstores at the King Center, the Birmingham Institute, and the Memphis museum work to fill a gap in availability of popular works and scholarship in these areas.

In addition to the educational function and related issues of form, these sites differ functionally and, as a result, provide somewhat different cultural projections. The MLK memorial has some of the formal elements of a mausoleum, housing the remains of the dead by an eternal flame and chapel of all faiths. Combined with the educational buildings and the visitors' center, these elements suggest that the memorial as a whole is highly functionalist in its materiality (Gallagher, 1995). In terms of cultural projection, the location of the memorial in the historic district, the designation as a national park, and the visitors' center run by the park service all suggest syncretism, a form of mutual projection by dominants and subordinates. The addition of the visitors' center after the fact, as it were, its invasiveness, and the newness and upscale look contrast markedly with the original memorial and Center for Non-violent Social Change, however. The coupling of the memorial with the center inscribed a relationship between the act of remembering King and the attitude of being committed to social change. The new visitors' center disrupts this, suggesting elements of hegemony and perhaps even polarization. A rejection of the old for the new, the wrong side of the street for the right side of the street, and local memory for nationally sanctioned memory may be read into the memorial as a result.

In the Birmingham Institute, educational, remembrance, and preservation functions are articulated in various ways (Gallagher, 1999). The materiality of the museum is imbued with visual argument, establishing the narrative of progress for Birmingham. In terms of cultural projection, the institute and its sponsors envision the museum as having a counterhegemonic function, and it does do a good job of presenting the world and the worldview of African Americans in Birmingham—but always in the past and always in terms of the progress narrative. This progress narrative is more consistent with hegemonic projections because it is central to white perspectives on civil rights, particularly regarding how and to what extent those rights have been achieved. For example, one such perspective suggests that the legal remedies of the 1960s effectively solved the problem of unequal opportunity, and therefore there is no longer a need for affirmative action or other reparative initiatives. Because of its interactivity and its visual and verbal depiction of history as a process rather than an entity made up of discrete moments, the institute may also be viewed as having a counterhegemonic effect on white visitors,



who are guided to an understanding of a subordinate group's experiences and viewpoints. Ultimately, the institute is strongly syncretic: Positive images of blacks are presented throughout the museum, and the strong emphasis on the successful accomplishment of legal integration yields an equally compelling set of positive images of the prevailing political system and its dominant group, namely, whites.

In addition to its educational function, the National Civil Rights Museum also evokes remembrance and preservation, but its shrine-like features make it distinctive. The materiality of the museum is characterized by a strong tension between the preservation of the shrine to King and the enactment of these other functions. Some scholars have argued that, given the physical layout of the building (ascending up through the history of the movement and ending at the assassination site), the museum creates a material inability to move beyond the assassination (Wilson, 1999). Interestingly, the museum is planning a full-scale addition that would include a gallery devoted to covering human rights on an international scale, similar to the final gallery of the Birmingham Institute. In terms of cultural projection, the narrative of progress is much less prevalent in the National Museum; thus, a counterhegemonic message, which questions the dominant political structure and its positive representations of whites, may tend to be experienced more strongly. The presence of Jacqueline Smith disrupts this, however. Her protest suggests a reading of the museum as hegemonic, as reinforcing the dominants' position that society is basically good and just needs some tweaking now and again (Armada, 1998). Ironically, the planned addition mentioned previously would most likely lead to the further displacement of Jacqueline Smith or, at the very least, provide a means for visitors to avoid having to experience her protest memorial (one set of plans calls for an enclosed walkway going from a parking area across the street directly into the museum).

Although the Montgomery memorial appears to be the most distinctive of the four discussed here, it serves and evokes some similar functions, including educational and remembrance. The inscriptions on the table draw attention to actions, tragedies, and people of the past as worthy of memory, but unlike the strong progress narrative in the institute or the shrine elements of the national museum, the memorial does not resolve the tensions indicated by the incomplete time line or the heavy security at the site. Compared to the functionalism of the other sites, the memorial's materiality is thus highly symbolic. In this sense, the memorial may be the most counterhegemonic of the artifacts, particularly in its



association with the SPLC. Indeed, Blair and Michel (2000) argue that the memorial creates "a clear discontinuity between past and present in terms of the 'solutions' it symbolizes" while suggesting "the continuity between past and present is racism" (p. 48). It may also be experienced as syncretic, however, given that the attorneys of the SPLC are mostly white, and that they work through existing political institutions even as they take some power (usually monetary) away from some whites and attempt to distribute it to individuals of various subordinate groups. The cultural projection of the memorial may also polarize, particularly if it is perceived as a threat to the status quo of Montgomery (and the nation as a whole), a possibility suggested by my interaction with two women at the city of Montgomery's visitors center who, when asked for directions to the civil rights memorial, were quick to assure me that there were other sites more worthy of my time and attention.

2. To what extent are the memorials and monuments as well as the responses to them shaped by generic elements embedded within the institutional discourse of which they are a product? How do these generic elements shape, particularly in terms of contestation and reconciliation, the re-creation and representation of multiple versions of the past?

As indicated previously, the MLK memorial draws on modernist sensibilities of function over form more clearly than any of the others. The continued preservation of the Sweet Auburn district, the "birth home," and the old Ebenezer church mimics other restored neighborhoods and homes. These features, coupled with the National Park designation and trappings, indicate tourism as a likely shared social motive for visitors. The displays in the new visitors' center quote the conventions and forms found in both the Birmingham Institute and the national museum: In all three, there are statues of marchers with which the visitor is invited or obliged (to continue passage through the museum or site) to join. In addition, all three use similar videotape footage, labels, and news coverage to tell the stories of the movement.

Another common aspect (to all four sites) is the rhetorical and material "presence" of King in the narratives of public memory. Each site features him in a slightly different way, with the first three highlighting his participation in the events of the movement, especially events that occurred in their respective cities. In the Montgomery memorial, King's words are engraved on the water-covered wall, and the inscriptions on the



table end with the record of his assassination. The King memorial emphasizes the life story of King and his family to a much greater extent than any of the others, and there is a display devoted to his wife, Coretta Scott King, that provides a time line of her active involvement. Her voice and participation are nearly, if not completely, absent in the other sites. The inclusion of spaces where people may sit and write their comments and reactions in the new visitors' center at the King memorial allows individuals to enter their own voices into the story, a marked change from memorials of the past, which both materially and symbolically were set in stone, unchangeable. Some critics trace this type of participatory element in contemporary memorial sites to the traditions that developed at the VVM, such as visitors leaving personal artifacts or making pencil rubbings of names on the wall.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the Birmingham Institute appears to draw on the recent popularity of highly interactive, "hands on," contemporary museums in which history is represented as a process rather than as a collection of static objects and events. The institute's displays stimulate multiple senses and allow for a more active visitor role, particularly in creating identification and a type of multivocality. The national museum also mimics some of these interactive museum-like functions, particularly in its coverage of the freedom riders (the burned-out bus is re-created in both museums) and King's Birmingham jail cell (again, both have a re-creation of the cell). As previously indicated, however, it is most strongly influenced by the shrine: King's room and that of his colleagues and friends are left exactly as they were, funeral wreaths stand outside and in, and visitors are materially and symbolically enjoined to experience what it was like on that day and to consider what the assassination meant and still means today. Whereas in the Birmingham Institute visitors start in the dark and journey to the light, in the national museum, visitors start at ground-floor level and spiral upward through the history of the fight for freedom for black Americans, culminating at the two rooms. Although the museum experience ends here, the planned addition, which will continue the experience with a focus on international human rights, conceptually mimics the gallery devoted to these issues in the Birmingham Institute.

In fact, all four of the memorials and museums examined for this study contain strong symbolic and material elements that suggest, even prescribe, a journey or pilgrimage. At the Birmingham Institute, as indicated in the description, visitors are explicitly instructed that their visit to the galleries constitutes a journey from the very origins of Birmingham



as a segregated city through the events of the movement and to the "bright" present and future of a legally integrated southern city. At the King memorial, the freedom walkway in the original memorial complex begins at the tomb and chapel of all faiths and continues up the side of the reflecting pool to the Freedom Hall complex, where educational programs take place. In the new visitors' center, the display hall is dominated by the marchers on the road leading to the wall of windows and the lush landscaping outdoors. In the Memphis museum, visitors begin at the lower level of the museum and spiral upward, following the path of the movement, reaching the shrine at the end of their pilgrimage. The placement of the Montgomery memorial in the path of the sidewalk and the three ascending elements of the site (the table at ground level, the wall looming above, and the still pool at the top) also suggest a journey upward to a future that is, as yet, uninscribed.

The prescribed ending of the journey at each of the sites symbolically and materially indicates four somewhat different visions of the tools, tactics, and goals for civil rights in the present and future. The journey or pilgrimage at the MLK memorial (the original side of the street), ending as it does at the Freedom Hall, points to education as the essential tool or goal. The road in the visitors' center has a less clearly defined end and, thus, may suggest that the journey is the important lesson or goal. The Birmingham Institute, through the use of space and lighting cues and the manner in which the story is told, suggests that legal and political integration combined with the rehabilitation of a city as it moves toward economic viability are essential goals for the present and future. As currently configured, the pilgrimage evoked at the national museum seems to offer memory of past wrongs as the guide for future action, culminating in what might be viewed as an admonishment to never forget. Regarding the Montgomery memorial, Blair and Michel (2000) argue convincingly that the unscripted pool at the top of the memorial represents the future, and that its materiality suggests a break with tactics and strategies, as well as results, of the past. Accordingly, they suggest that the memorial "harbors as part of its rhetoric moves toward a coalitional politics of diversity and what bell hooks has named a 'deconstruction of the category of whiteness'" (p. 48).

The generic aspects discussed here provide evidence for the argument that each of these sites possesses rhetorical elements through which history and tradition are democratized by being made more accessible. Whether they also provide visions of a history with, as Kammen (1993) suggests, a "minimum of conflict and a maximum of aesthetic and patriotic



appeal" is less clear. All the sites stress conflict, but they do so in a manner that leads to reconciliation of conflicts and that seems to argue for evolutionary rather than revolutionary change as the desired norm. Certainly, there is irony in the fact that none of these sites explicitly examines current issues of race and racism within the cities in which they are located. The physical coupling of the Montgomery memorial with the SPLC, the coupling of the MLK memorial with the Center for Non-violent Social Change, and the protest of Jacqueline Smith at the national museum, however, make it difficult for conflicts to be completely hidden and thus reveal a potential for overcoming the public amnesia that reconciliation narratives tend to create.

3. What are the multiple contexts (including the economic, physical, and built environments) from which these memorials emerge, and how do they shape the re-creation and representation of racism and civil rights?

Particularly in light of the recent successful efforts to site a memorial to Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Mall in Washington, D.C.,<sup>8</sup> it is interesting to note that all four of these sites are located in southern cities, in areas that were and are largely populated by black citizens and that have been, in at least three of the four cases, targeted for urban renewal. As indicated previously, the complexity of racial issues in the United States and the resulting impact on allocation and use of space, particularly in urban areas, make these civil rights commemorative sites particularly, even radically, contextual. These factors give added weight to Dell Upton's (1999) arguments regarding the goals of civil rights-related commemorative efforts. In his essay comparing the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial and the commemorative sculptures located in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park, he writes,

the creators of civil rights memorials seek to define the nature of southern society at the end of the twentieth century and the South's place in the twenty-first. These monuments, set in landscapes devastated by urban renewal, depict a South purged of its troubled past and ready to compete in a new global economy. (p. 23)

Just as the Sweet Auburn district in Atlanta is no longer sweet, at least in terms of the economic realities of its neighbors, so, too, the neighborhoods surrounding the national museum and the Birmingham Institute



contain empty lots and shop windows even as they are touted as the means for revitalizing their communities. As Upton (1999) notes,

In ways the black middle class may not have envisioned, their world was destroyed by the Civil Rights movement. . . . As downtown services and accommodations were opened up to African Americans, black merchants could not compete, the black banks and insurance companies that financed urban development declined and collapsed, and the former black business district was transformed into a "blighted" landscape ripe for redevelopment. The devastation of the landscape that was so painstakingly built through the efforts of the black middle class is shocking. The few churches and commercial structures that survive among the open fields and parking lots—and even more appropriate, the fields and parking lots themselves—constitute another kind of monument to the movement, for it is commemorated at the site of its significant events, but in a setting that bears virtually no resemblance to its historical self. (p. 31)

The urban landscapes and the economic realities of these communities return us to the role that tourism (and the lucrative nature of the heritage industry) plays in these sites and, ultimately, to how we understand race and racial identities as a result. These memorials and museums may provide a place where conflict is remembered and brought to the fore, but they do so in spaces whose forms and functions are consistent with the consumerism of tourism, engaging us in social but not necessarily political action.

Again, the Montgomery memorial is an exception. Although the urban landscape in which it is located has changed much since the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was built on the street next to the capitol in 1885, the memorial's neighbors are mostly public buildings that, during the expansion of state governments in the 1960s and 1970s, according to Upton (1999), "spilled out of Goat Hill [the location of the state capitol] and consumed the residential neighborhoods near the capitol" (p. 25). In addition, the fact that the SPLC, and thus the memorial, is heavily guarded—that most visitors and passersby never get to see the full memorial (they are unable to ascend to the top of the stairs to view the still pool)—means that the experience of the memorial is charged with a heightened sense of conflict. Indeed, Blair and Michel conclude that the memorial is an example of critical public art "that is frank about the contradictions and violence encoded in its own situation, one that dares



to awaken a public sphere of resistance, struggle, and dialogue" (Mitchell, 1994, as cited in Blair & Michel, 2000, p. 31).

## CONCLUSION

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What role do these sites of memory play in our understanding of our identities both as individuals who are "raced" and as a nation whose identity is tied to its cultural discourse? We are instructed by each of these museums and memorials to experience the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s vicariously—to reflect on its impact in and for our own lives within established cultural generic forms, narratives, and places. In terms of cultural projection, the Birmingham Institute, with its strong narrative of progress, and the MLK memorial, with the addition of the new visitors' center, are perhaps best defined as syncretic: Dominants are provided the rhetorical means for identification and are thus led to accept some of the subordinate cultural projection, and subordinates accept some of the dominant projection that change is evolutionary, that progress occurs over time, sanctioned by the dominant culture, and, as a result, that reconciliation is important and necessary. In turn, the national museum, with its focus on the assassination and the ongoing protest by Jacqueline Smith outside its walls, and the Montgomery memorial are more likely to evoke contestation and memory rather than reconciliation and amnesia.

Thus, civil rights-related memorials and monuments inspire, educate, encourage, and even provoke us. Do they also provide the intentional resources necessary for dealing with our own issues of race and racism? Certainly, they make us more aware that current discourses related to who has political power, who lives where, who goes to what school, and who has what job are permutations of past arguments that were joined but never fully resolved. In providing the space, the material, and symbolic resources for confronting these issues, civil rights commemorative sites are places that instruct us in "the mutual, cultural knowledge that enables individuals" to "communicate as competent participants" in our culture (Miller, 1994, p. 72). This includes understanding that as individuals, we are distinct from one another but able to identify with each other, that we define experiences similarly but experience different realities, and that we can be moved to share power in certain ways and instances but have a strong tendency to leave the status quo intact and



entrenched in others. Together, however, these sites provide us with more. In their varied depictions of the civil rights journey and its ends, they provide a composite vision of the ongoing nature of racial identity development: education, remembrance, self-reflection, participation, and, paradoxically, a break with the past.

## NOTES

1. Rice's (1992) examination of the Rocky statue in Philadelphia provides an excellent sense of how tourist sites symbolize key cultural values, such as the rights of an individual defined more broadly as the pursuit of liberty.
2. Graves's (1992) analysis of the monument to Joe Louis in downtown Detroit demonstrates how visual, material images "become especially charged when applied to the public spaces of urban America" (p. 217).
3. The lack of attention paid to genre and genre analysis in communication journals is particularly noticeable when compared to the number of articles and books dedicated to genre authored by scholars in composition and rhetoric. See the journal *Written Communication* and edited collections such as Freedman and Medway (1994) and Duff (2000).
4. For additional discussion of this notion, namely that a material artifact may function as an unfinished text drawing from outside itself to determine its character, see Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci (1991).
5. In his excellent comparative discussion of the memorial sculptures in Kelly Ingram Park and the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial, Dell Upton (1999) argues that the commemorative activity surrounding the Civil Rights movement of the twentieth century promotes a rehabilitation agenda similar to the creation of the "New South" at the end of the Civil War period. He writes, "A century later, southern leaders frame the Civil Rights movement as a second painful rebirth—'the payments our history required,' in the words of one tourist publication—that transformed the New South into a New New South. Its memorials are tombstones of racial strife and heralds of a new order. Taking their cues from the spectacular economic success of Atlanta, which billed itself during the Civil Rights movement as 'The City Too Busy to Hate,' southern urban leaders herald the birth of a (non)racial order that fulfills the 'nations commitment to liberty and justice for all' and forms the social basis for a reinvigorated, globalized regional economy" (p. 32).
6. For an excellent, thorough description and analysis of the Montgomery memorial, including pictures and additional examples of inscriptions, see Blair and Michel (2000).
7. There is also a tradition of visitors inscribing themselves onto a memorial space in European antimemorials (Young, 1992).
8. For additional information about the approval of the site and the winning design, see Tuttle (2000) and Fogerty (2000).